

# THE SIGN-ACTS OF EZEKIEL 3:22-5:17

## FORMATIVE RITUALS OF PRIESTLY IDENTITY

by R. Andrew Compton

### 1.1 Thesis

Priestly themes have long been recognized as a distinctive feature of the Book of Ezekiel. Hence it has often been utilized as a primary source in reconstructions of the history of the priesthood in the exilic and post-exilic periods. In light of recent debates centering on the nature of Ezekiel's priestly identity relative to the priestly themes of the book, this study utilizes the insights of vocational psychology and occupational identity to move the discussion forward. Focusing on the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17, this paper makes a foray into the debate and argues that in addition to their communicative value, the details point towards these initial sign-acts as serving as formative-rituals in Ezekiel's commission as a *priest*-prophet. As such, they fashion Ezekiel's priestly identity as it is practiced away from the traditional locus of priestly praxis, the Jerusalem temple and its altar, enabling him to embark on a distinctively *priestly* prophetic ministry to the exiles in Babylonia.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2 Introduction

In the year 597 BC, the priest, Ezekiel ben Buzi, was deported, along with many of the elite in Jerusalem, to the heartland of Babylonia.<sup>2</sup> The time reference which opens

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1. One might object to the decision to consider the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 in isolation from other sign-acts in Ezekiel or in other prophetic books (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Zechariah). Note that on the one hand, however, the integration of these sign-acts as literary building-blocks in the textual unit surveying Ezekiel's commission gives them a unique role not shared by other sign-acts in the book of Ezekiel. And on the other hand, a priestly character is not as evident in the other prophetic books with sign-acts, not even in Jeremiah and Zechariah where such a character might be expected. Additionally, some of the sign-acts appear to serve merely as aural and visual enhancements to the delivery of a message (e.g., clapping hands and crying "Ah!" [Ezek. 6:11-12]; groaning [Ezek. 21:6-7]), and others as a dramatic, analogic performance of an action that will be undertaken by the prophet's audience at a future time (e.g., taking a bag and going into exile [Ezek. 12:1-16]; eating food in an anxious manner [Ezek. 12:17-18]; etc.). There is some overlap with the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17, but this overlap does not preclude making finer distinctions.

2. While the syntax of *יְהוֹאֲזָבָב בֶּן־בִּזְיָה הַכֹּהֵן* is ambiguous, with the title *הַכֹּהֵן* either in apposition to Ezekiel or his father Buzi, the profile of the book of Ezekiel leads me to see *הַכֹּהֵן* as a title for

the book – “in the thirtieth year” – has been debated, but is recognized by many as a reference to Ezekiel’s age. At age thirty, had he not been exiled, Ezekiel would have entered officially into the work of the priesthood.<sup>3</sup> While a priestly orientation has been widely ascribed to the book of Ezekiel, the nature of and impetus for this orientation has been debated.

Recent studies have focused on the question of Ezekiel’s priestly identity. At the 2000 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Nashville, TN, a number of papers were presented on the topic.<sup>4</sup> The papers of Friedrich Fechter, Iain M. Duguid, and Corrine L. Patton were later published in 2004, and Marvin A. Sweeney’s contribution was modified and later published in an anthology in 2005.<sup>5</sup> To these can be added a response paper, included in the 2004 SBL Symposium Series volume just noted, by Baruch J. Schwartz, and an independently researched and published chapter by Andrew Mein in 2001.<sup>6</sup> This wave of publications was followed by two additional studies of note. The first, the 2005 published dissertation of T. J. Betts, and the second, in 2011, an article by Hayyim Angel.<sup>7</sup> Interest in Ezekiel’s contribution to the history of the priesthood is not wholly absent from these studies; herein the groundwork has been laid for focusing on Ezekiel’s priestly identity insofar as this is available to us from the book bearing his name.<sup>8</sup>

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Ezekiel himself. Numerous occasions of the phrase “PN1 +  $\text{בן}$  + PN2 + Title” show the title as referring to PN1. Constructions of this kind using the title  $\text{בן־בן}$  indicate that the father *and the son* both hold that title (e.g., Aaron and Eleazer; Eleazer and Phinehas).

3. See the compelling case for this in Margaret S. Odell, “You Are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 117, no. 2 (1998): 238-239.

4. See *Society of Biblical Literature 2000 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 39 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 673-751.

5. See Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton, eds., *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, SBLSymS 31 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 27-41, 43-59, 73-89; Marvin A. Sweeney, “Ezekiel: Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet of the Exile,” in *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 125-43.

6. Baruch J. Schwartz, “A Priest Out of Place: Reconsidering Ezekiel’s Role in the History of the Israelite Priesthood,” in *Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton, SBLSymS 31 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 61-71; Andrew Mein “Ezekiel as a Priest in Exile,” in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary, Character, and Anonymous Artist*, ed. J.C. De Moor (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 199-213. Mein laments the fact that the SBL papers from the 2000 Nashville meeting were not available to him when he wrote his paper.

7. T. J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of Tôrâ*, StBibLit 74 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Hayyim Angel, “Ezekiel: Priest-Prophet,” *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2011): 35-45.

8. More interdisciplinary studies, combining literary, intertextual, historical, and theological interests, have proved to be a welcome addition to the literature as well. Noteworthy examples are Nathan MacDonald, *Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44*, BZAW 476 (Berlin, Germany/Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter, 2015); and Benjamin Kilchör, “The Meaning of Ezekiel 44,6-14 in Light of Ezekiel 1-39,” *Biblica* 98, no. 2 (2017): 191-207. Some of this work was preceded by J. Gordon McConville, “Priests and Levites in Ezekiel: A Crux in the Interpretation of Israel’s History,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 3-31.

Two general positions on Ezekiel's priestly identity have been adopted by scholars. One argues that Ezekiel has retained his priestly identity and approached his prophetic call through it.<sup>9</sup> The other argues that Ezekiel has relinquished his priestly identity and has taken on a prophetic identity in its place.<sup>10</sup> The former recognizes that necessary adaptations have been made to Ezekiel's priesthood due to his exilic locale apart from the Jerusalem temple and its altar, but asserts that Ezekiel is a priest and sees himself as such. The latter recognizes Ezekiel's priestly pedigree, but does not view it as operative in his prophetic work. Schwartz summarizes this as follows:

[E]verything the prophet says is determined by [his priestly pedigree]. He explains what went wrong, depicts the results of what went wrong, and predicts the eventual rectification of everything that went wrong, from a thoroughly priestly standpoint. The issue in question is: what is the significance of this fact? Is stating the fact that Ezekiel was a *priest* in exile the same as asserting that there was an exilic *priesthood*? My view is that it is not, and that the priestly influences on Ezekiel have nothing at all to do with any exilic priestly activity.<sup>11</sup>

The two positions have arrived at an impasse and attention to the topic has waned of late. Yet social-psychology provides a sub-discipline that has promise for moving beyond the impasse, tilting the available textual evidence in favor of the former position.<sup>12</sup>

Vocational psychology and its correlate, occupational identity, has been unexplored (or at least, underexplored) in biblical studies. Judiciously utilized, however, it can provide a mechanism for understanding why Ezekiel's priestly identity played the role it did, and how various features of the book, his sign-acts in particular, are manifestations of this identity.<sup>13</sup> Scholars generally sense tensions in the approach

9. As proposed by Iain Duguid, Corrine Patton, Marvin Sweeney, Andrew Mein, T. J. Betts, and Hayim Angel.

10. As proposed by Baruch Schwartz and Margaret Odell.

11. Schwartz, "A Priest Out of Place," 62.

12. Note, however, that this is not promoting a psychoanalytical approach to Ezekiel as an individual, humorously described as "putting Ezekiel on the couch" (Ned H. Cassem, "Ezekiel's Psychotic Personality: Reservations on the Use of the Couch for Biblical Personalities," in *Word in the World*, ed. R. Clifford [Cambridge, MA: Weston College Press, 1973], 59-68; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Ezekiel on Fanon's Couch: A Postcolonialist Dialogue with David Halperin's *Seeking Ezekiel*," in *Peace and Justice Shall Embrace: Power and Theopolitics in the Bible, Essays in Honor of Millard Lind*, eds. Ted Grimsrud and Loren L. Johns [Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 1999], 108-44.). Criticism of this approach has been roundly leveled. For cogent examples, see chapters 10-12 in J. Harold Ellens and Wayne G. Rollins, eds., *From Genesis to Apocalyptic Vision*, vol. 2 of *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Westport, CT: Greenwood-Paeger, 2004).

13. For a brief history of the discipline, see Mark L. Savickas and David B. Baker, "The History of Vocational Psychology: Antecedents, Origin, and Early Developments," in *Handbook of Vocational Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice*, eds. W. Bruce Walsh and Mark L. Savickas, 3rd ed., Contemporary Topics in Vocational Psychology (Mahwah, NJ:

of various biblical texts to the priesthood and have analyzed these as evidence of conflict between different schools of priesthood using source- or redaction-critical tools. But studies in vocational psychology have demonstrated the complexity of humans in relation to their occupational callings; polyvalence does not necessarily indicate opposing traditions.<sup>14</sup>

Granted, speaking of Ezekiel's priestly identity using terms like "calling," "career," and the like may strike some as anachronistic. The distinctions between "career" and "job" are articulated by modern scholars in their study of modern people.<sup>15</sup> And the term "calling" is itself interpreted in different ways with some rooting it in Martin Luther's criticism of Roman Catholic limitation of vocation to priests, monks, and nuns, and others defining it with no reference to spiritual agency at all.<sup>16</sup> Yet as this study assumes that "calling," in particular "vocational calling," is an essential aspect of human nature (i.e., humans were created to work), these studies do indeed have much explanatory power, even for the ancient world and for the ideas of work preserved in the biblical text.<sup>17</sup>

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Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2005), 15-50. Note that the updated edition of this volume does not contain this chapter. For an introduction to the contours of occupational identity, see Vladimir B. Skorikov and Fred W. Vondracek, "Occupational Identity," in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, eds. Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles (New York: Springer, 2012), 2:693-714. For general introductions to the use of sociology in biblical studies, see Russel Heddendorf and Matthew Vos, *Hidden Threads: A Christian Critique of Sociological Theory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010); Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Sociology: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

14. For a critical evaluation of modern approaches rooted in Wellhausenian categories, see Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 635-36; idem, "In Search of Theological Meaning: Ezekiel Scholarship at the Turn of the Millennium," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine L. Patton, SBLSymS 31 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 229-30.

15. See Justin M. Berg, Adam M. Grant, and Victoria Johnson, "When Callings are Calling: Crafting Work and Leisure in Pursuit of Unanswered Occupational Callings," *Organizational Science* 21, no. 5 (2010): 974; Ryan D. Duffy, Bryan J. Dik, Richard P. Douglass, Jessica W. England, and Brandon L. Velez, "Work as a Calling: A Theoretical Model," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* (forthcoming).

16. Berg et al, "When Callings are Calling," 974; Ryan D. Duffy, Elizabeth M. Bott, Blake A. Allan, and Kelsey L. Autin, "Calling among the unemployed: Examining prevalence and links to coping with job loss," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 10, no. 4 (2015): 332-33. For a more emic approach to calling as it is understood without religious underpinnings, see examples in Duffy et al "Work as a Calling"; though cf. Ryan D. Duffy, "Spirituality, Religion, and Career Development: Current Status and Future Directions," *The Career Development Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2006): 52-63.

17. For some representative examples of biblical and theological reflection on this, see Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of this World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Gary D. Badcock, *The Way of Life: A Theology of Christian Vocation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); James M. Hamilton Jr., *Work and our Labor in the Lord*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New

### 1.3 Program for this Study

In defending the above stated thesis, the following program is pursued. First, I describe the relationship between prophetic sign-acts, ritual, and theater, and the interface this provides for understanding Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 in terms of a distinctively priestly character to Ezekiel's prophetic commission. Second, I analyze the individual sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 and note the role they play as initiation rituals designed to form Ezekiel's priestly identity. While this analysis necessarily highlights elements of the sign-acts that exhibit a priestly and ritual hue, it is these very details that give the sign-acts their ritual identity.<sup>18</sup> Third, I summarize the implications of this study and chart a way forward for further research.

## 2 Prophetic Sign-Acts

### 2.1 As a General Phenomenon in the Prophets

Symbolic gestures or actions have long been associated with the OT prophets.<sup>19</sup> As a general phenomenon, there have been numerous interpretations proposed. Kelvin Friebel surveys five paradigms traditionally used to explain the purpose of prophetic sign-acts:

1. Sign-acts as inherently efficacious, creating a reality either due to magical overtones or to the power of the spoken word.
2. Sign-acts as prophetic drama which *express* reality (rather than create reality as paradigm 1 suggests).
3. Sign-acts as a sociological phenomenon, "acts of power" used to legitimate and authenticate a prophet's status.
4. Sign-acts as a form of street theater, a way to attract attention through vivid actions.

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York: Dutton, 2012); Benjamin T. Quinn and Walter R. Strickland II, *Every Waking Hour: An Introduction to Work and Vocation for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

18. Other elements in the sign-acts may not be narrowly concerned with priestly formation. They do not, however, diminish the formative ritual role of the sign acts either. Additionally, while elements in other sign-acts (especially those outside of Ezekiel) might seem to echo priestly themes, these need to be considered within the broader, non-priestly shape of those prophetic books. I have not found in the secondary literature a full analysis of all the sign-acts in the OT *with an eye to this narrow question* of priestly themes. Such a study would no doubt be illuminating.

19. For a survey and bibliography, see K.G. Friebel, "Sign Acts," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 707-13. For shorter surveys, see Paul A. Kruger, "Sign and Symbol: Theology of," in *NIDOTTE* 4:1224-28; V.H. Kooy, "Symbol," in *IDB* 4:474; Shalom M. Paul and S. David Sperling, "Prophets and Prophecy: In the Bible," *EncJud* 16:566-581; Edward Lipinski, "Signs and Symbols," *EncJud* 18:568-70.

5. Sign-acts as a type of rhetorical nonverbal communication used to persuade an audience of the prophet's message.<sup>20</sup>

Though Friebel does discuss ritual, he does not engage with more recent developments in ritual studies, thus his analysis is understandably narrow. In his critique of paradigm 1, he focuses on what he calls "sympathetic magic ritual," an approach that limits ritual to an action intended to manipulate reality. In his explication of paradigm 5, he contrasts ritual with idiosyncratic actions: "Ritual (both religious and secular) action is often emblematic, stylized in performance, standardized in meaning, with that meaning being clearly understood by the participating culture-group, and performed only within the contexts of particular circumstances...."<sup>21</sup> Since sign-acts are individualistic, non-stereotypical, and frequently arising "out of particular exigencies of the moment to communicate messages," he deems ritual to be an improper category due to ritual's concern for stereotypical, communal, and repeated action.<sup>22</sup>

It is true that the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 are individual and idiosyncratic, but this does not preclude them from being ritual actions. On the one hand, these actions are repeatable. But on the other hand, their individual and idiosyncratic nature still serve a type of communicative goal, although to appreciate this we must recognize that the knowledge gained by ritual is not quite of the same order as non-verbal communication. Communication is not an inappropriate term to describe what happens with ritual, although we need to properly qualify the parameters of this communication.

## 2.2 Sign-Acts, Theater, Ritual, and Knowledge

### 2.2.1 Priests vs. Prophets? Ritual vs. Communication?

At least since the time of Wellhausen, biblical interpreters have frequently pitted the priests against the prophets. The priests were thought to be traditionalists and legalists, content to reduce biblical religion to externals of law and ritual observance, whereas the prophets were preachers of an internal religion of the heart, not encumbered by externals and empty rituals.<sup>23</sup> This antagonism is unsupported by the Scriptures and has been ably rejected in recent years, even by Protestant interpreters.<sup>24</sup> Yet a skeptical

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20. Kelvin Friebel, "A Hermeneutical Paradigm for Interpreting Prophetic Sign-Actions," *Didaskalia* 12, no. 2 (2001): 29-38; idem, "Sign Acts," 711-12. Note that Friebel ultimately espouses paradigm 5.

21. Kelvin G. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication*, JSOTSup 283 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 59.

22. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 59.

23. For a discussion of the history of this approach, see Ziony Zevit, "The Prophet versus Priest Antagonism Hypothesis: Its History and Origin," in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, eds. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis, JSOTSup 408 (London, England: T&T Clark, 2004), 189-217.

24. For specifically Protestant rejections of this antagonism, see Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1961),

view of the priesthood and priestly ritual in particular still hovers in the thought of many.

Assuming a tension between priestly ritual and prophetic teaching, sign-acts in the prophets have often been distanced from ritual. Sign-acts are recurrently treated as a “visual aid” used to illustrate prophetic preaching in an effort to push back against viewing them as either a form of sympathetic magic or of a Roman Catholic-esque *ex opera operato* view of their efficacy. Horace Hummel, for example, prefers the label “action prophecies,” which he describes as “a prophecy that is not verbalized (at least not initially), but rather is acted out, yet with the same predictive force as the prophet’s verbalized sermons.”<sup>25</sup> Latent in this approach, however, is a dichotomy between thought and action, one that has been challenged by recent ritual theorists and epistemologists (see below).

### 2.2.2 Definition(s) of Ritual

One significant problem for interpreters is the underappreciated difficulty of defining the term “ritual.” Most people believe they know what ritual is, yet falter when trying to describe its constituent features. There are a number of reasons for this. First, from an emic (insider) perspective, positing equivalences to the word ritual in other languages (whether modern or ancient) is fraught with difficulty, thus we see that ritual is itself a scholarly construct.<sup>26</sup> Second, from an etic (outsider) perspective, definitions among theorists abound because ritual definitions are not the same as ritual theories.<sup>27</sup> There are larger taxonomical and familial issues at play in the analysis of rituals than can be settled with a single definition. Ronald Grimes explains:

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1:392-436; William R. Millar, *Priesthood in Ancient Israel*, Understanding Biblical Themes (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001); Andrew S. Malone, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 43 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017). Cf. Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 75-100.

25. Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 149. Iain Duguid rightly notes that the term “visual aid” is too weak a description of this phenomenon and takes some tentative steps toward a more holistic approach by calling them “affective aids.” See Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 93.

26. Michael Strausberg et al, “‘Ritual’: A Lexicographic Survey of Some Related Terms from an Emic Perspective,” in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, eds. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Strausberg, SHR 114/1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 51-98.

27. Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), 189. Grimes has catalogued dozens of definitions of ritual in an appendix to this volume available electronically at <http://oxrit.twohornedbull.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/grimes-craft-appendixes.pdf> (accessed 7/16/2018). See too Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, BBRSup 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 14-18; Barry Stephenson, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2015), 70-85.

Events cannot be usefully understood using only two options: “ritual” or “not ritual.” Rather, actions display *degrees* of ritualization. Actions are not binary, either ritual or not-ritual. Instead, there is a continuum, and events are more or less ritualized, depending on the qualities that appear in them.... You may wish to argue that only one or two (for instance, prescription and repetition or repetition and sacredness) are definitive of ritual. To do so would be to argue, at least implicitly, with other scholars who choose to treat other qualities as definitive. These are choices, not inevitabilities, so determining which is the definitive quality is neither a moral nor a metaphysical matter, only a practical one.<sup>28</sup>

Thus when analyzing Ezekiel’s sign-acts, readers must be aware of the complexity of defining ritual before excising the sign-acts from its conceptual domain.

Though it may seem as though this paper banters with defining *everything* as ritual (thereby viewing *nothing* as ritual), a broader phenomenological approach seems to hold the most merit for proffering the definition of ritual used here. In my estimation, the following two definitions of ritual are most suitable. An especially concise definition of ritual is offered by Grimes: “Ritual is embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment.”<sup>29</sup> A complimentary, though more descriptive, definition is posed by Jan Platvoet (followed by Gerald Klingbeil):

[Ritual is] that ordered sequence of stylized social behavior that may be distinguished from ordinary interaction by its alerting qualities which enable it to focus the attention of its audiences – its congregation as well as the wider public – onto itself and cause them to perceive it as a special event, performed at a special place and/or time, for a special occasion and/or with a special message.<sup>30</sup>

Admittedly the Platvoet/Klingbeil definition is difficult to test (a criticism leveled by Grimes himself<sup>31</sup>), and the Grimes definition is a bit open-ended (as noted by Klingbeil<sup>32</sup>). Nevertheless, these definitions accommodate ritual analysis of the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 without ignoring any *rhetorical and non-verbal communicative* elements the sign-acts also contain.<sup>33</sup>

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28. Grimes, *Craft of Ritual Studies*, 193-94.

29. Grimes, *Craft of Ritual Studies*, 195.

30. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 18.

31. Grimes, *Craft of Ritual Studies*, 190.

32. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 16.

33. The italicized phrase is from Friebel, although note that he posits a binary approach: either the sign-acts are ritual, or they are rhetorical non-verbal communication. His definition of ritual, however, unnecessarily bifurcates between conventional and individualistic actions. Since the sign-acts are individualistic or idiosyncratic, he asserts that they cannot be ritualistic. See Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 57-61.

### 2.2.3 Ritual and Communicative/Formative Function

Even if one wishes to label sign-acts as illustrations or dramatizations of an underlying prophetic message, recent work in performance criticism has shown that performance itself is not far removed from ritual. In his analysis of the relationship between theatrical performances (drama) and rituals observed by anthropologists, Richard Schechner breaks down the divide by positing a perspectival approach: “No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment. The matter is complicated because one can look at specific performances from several vantages; changing perspectives changes classification.”<sup>34</sup> What is more, there is a continuum upon which both efficacy/ritual and entertainment/theater fall, a continuum which Schechner labels “performance.” Along this continuum, movement happens in every act of ritual or performance of a theatrically scripted-message:

The move from ritual to theater happens when a participating audience fragments into a collection of people who attend because the show is advertised, who pay admission, who evaluate what they are going to see before, during, and after seeing it. The move from theater to ritual happens when the audience is transformed from a collection of separate individuals into a group or congregation of participants. These polar tendencies are present in all performances.<sup>35</sup>

Thus it should be noted that a decision to read Ezekiel’s sign-acts as rituals does not undermine the role sign-acts play in communicating prophetic preaching. Ritual transforms participants, as does preaching. How thought and action fit together, however, is not always fully understood or appreciated.

One reason for suspicion of ritual among theologians has to do with the way in which ritual has been studied and described. Catherine Bell has noted that “[t]heoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths.”<sup>36</sup> This being the case, it is no surprise that those who believe in truth as something objective, something of which we are to have knowledge, assent, and trust<sup>37</sup>(ideas that traffic in cognition), recurrently view ritual as somehow *less than* communication.

Yet there are two problems with this approach to ritual. First, many thinkers – especially those who are conservative in their approach to Scripture and who have a robust view of systematized doctrine – have unwittingly adopted a modernistic approach to knowledge. Rightly pushing back against relativism, these thinkers have embraced a rationalism that is actually at odds with a biblical view of truth and

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34. Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, rev. and enl. ed., Routledge Classics (London, England: Routledge, 2003), 130.

35. Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 157.

36. Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

37. Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21.

knowledge, denying the creator/creature distinction by failing to recognize the difference between archetypal knowledge (God's knowledge of himself and all things) and ectypal knowledge (creaturely knowledge of God and his creation).<sup>38</sup> While these two kinds of knowledge are indeed related, they are not related univocally but analogically.<sup>39</sup> What is more, true knowledge is propositional, *but not merely propositional*. Kevin Vanhoozer explains:

The gospel *does* inform: "He is risen." Without this propositional core, the church would be evacuated of its *raison d'être*, leaving only programs and potlucks. To deny a propositional component to theology is in effect "an attack on the notion of revealed religion." It does not follow, however, that the task of theology is to abstract propositional content from the concrete uses to which speakers and authors put them. The notion that only assertions are propositional has been distinctly unhelpful for communication studies and theology alike. In sum: apart from its role as an ingredient in communicative action, a proposition has no communicative function; it has been *dedramatized*.<sup>40</sup>

Not only is it naïve to think that only speaking can convey true theological propositions, it is also misguided to think that propositions are the entirety of revelation. Vanhoozer continues:

It is tempting to reduce the communicative act to its propositional content alone. Yet such an identification of divine discourse with propositional content is too hasty and reductionist, for it omits two other important aspects of the communicative action, namely, the illocutionary (what is done) and the perlocutionary (what is effected)... The ministry of the Word involves more than communicating a few truths; it involves transmitting a whole way of thinking and experiencing.<sup>41</sup>

Second, knowledge and bodily action cannot be starkly divided. The idea that ritual merely encodes or illustrates belief is more Durkheimian than biblical. It was Descartes who claimed "*cogito, ergo sum*" – I think, therefore I am (cf. the Gnostic

38. Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology*, vol. 1 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 225-38; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1:4-5; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 212.

39. Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), 16-17; idem, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing, 2007), 31-36.

40. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 91.

41. Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 68, 74.

privileging of spirit over body).<sup>42</sup> In reality, humans – created body *and* soul – know things not simply through mental processes, but through bodily activity. John Calvin, reflecting on the use of hyssop in OT rituals as described in Psalm 51:7, explained this relationship well:

He speaks of hyssop, in allusion to the ceremonies of the law; and though he was far from putting his trust in the mere outward symbol of purification, he knew that, like every other legal rite, it was instituted for an important end. The sacrifices were seals of the grace of God. In them, therefore, he was anxious to find assurance of his reconciliation; and it is highly proper that, when our faith is disposed at any time to waver, we should confirm it by improving such means of divine support. All which David here prays for is, that God would effectually accomplish, in his experience, what he had signified to his Church and people by these outward rites; and in this he has set us a good example for our imitation. It is no doubt to the blood of Christ alone that we must look for the atonement of our sins; *but we are creatures of sense, who must see with our eyes, and handle with our hands; and it is only by improving the outward symbols of propitiation that we can arrive at a full and assured persuasion of it* (emphasis added).<sup>43</sup>

Thus a more appropriate approach asks not simply what a given ritual teaches, but also (if not primarily) how that ritual forms a knower.

An important feature that accompanies some ritual instructions in the OT is the concluding tag: “And/thus you will know that...” Of note are the directions for Sukkot. The account, found in Leviticus 23:33-43, ends as follows:

You shall dwell in booths for seven days. Every native in Israel shall dwell in booths. So that your generations might know [וַיֵּדְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל] that in booths I made the sons of Israel dwell when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am YHWH your God (Lev. 23:42-43).<sup>44</sup>

Dru Johnson rightly identifies the import of this tag in this context: “The plain meaning of this passage presents modern readers with a problem: “Why can the generations *not* know that ‘Israel lived in booths’ merely by telling them?”<sup>45</sup> It is significant that the

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42. For discussion of this, see James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 41-43; idem, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 3-5.

43. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 2:294.

44. All translations are my own.

45. Dru Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomena to Sacramental Theology*, Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement 13 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 152.

telic particle לְמַעַן is used here, providing the apodosis to the contingency: “thus” or “in order that.”<sup>46</sup> Johnson continues:

Does not the reading of the command itself give them the very knowledge being described? If we take a strictly propositional view of knowing, we could say that Israel is meant to know an historical fact (e.g., “The table is brown,” “Israel lived in booths,” etc.). The epistemological goal is then to show what Israel knew (i.e., the fact) and how she could justify that knowledge. Knowledge – under a very common philosophical view – is knowing the fact itself (“Israel lived in booths”) and showing how this could be true, or at least, coherent... Nevertheless, for Leviticus the logical gap between what Israel’s generations know and what they need to discern is not bridged by schemes of propositional justification or even the testimony of elders. That logical gap is bridged by ritualized practice that shapes the knower to recognize and subsequently discern what is significant about the historical reality....<sup>47</sup>

Thus Johnson concludes: “Israel does not need to know a fact; rather, she must embody the practice of Sukkot to discern the significance of her own historical realities (i.e., ‘Israel was made to live in booths.’).”<sup>48</sup>

While not every ritual instruction in the OT is marked with such an explicit epistemological tag, Johnson is certainly on the right track. Drawing Bell’s theoretical-anthropological analysis into biblical-theological discourse, Johnson has enabled us to see the role that ritual plays in forming knowers. Thus the “priests vs. prophets” mentality, and especially the “ritual vs. teaching” dichotomy, both of which have already been questioned by biblical scholars as noted above, is shown to be wrong-headed. With this now in mind, we are able to turn to the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 and consider how they might play an important role not simply of illustrating the coming fate of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, but of forming Ezekiel as a *priest-prophet* of the exile and enabling him to see “his prophetic role [as] an extension of his priestly identity under the influence of the very radically changed circumstances of Ezekiel’s life in the Babylonian exile.”<sup>49</sup> Ezekiel’s prophetic commission does not minimize his interest in ritual concerns, but employs those very concerns in his work as a watchman.

### 3 Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts as Formative Rituals of Priestly Identity

#### 3.1 Unit Delimitation

Discussion of the initial series of sign-acts in Ezekiel is often limited to 4:1-5:17. This delineation is due to content, not formal structural concerns. In reality, the sign-acts

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46. *IBHS*, 511.

47. Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual*, 153.

48. Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual*, 153.

49. Sweeney, “Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet,” 127.

serve as part of Ezekiel's commission, the beginning of which is marked by the divine word formula (וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לְאמֹר) "The word of the Lord came to me, saying" which initiates the oracle in 3:16. The next oracle begins with the divine word formula in 6:1, thereby delineating 3:16-5:17 as a formal unit of text.<sup>50</sup>

Having said this, 3:16-5:17 should not be read as detached from the preceding material. Form- and redaction-critical approaches tend to distinguish 1:1-3:15 from 3:16-5:17 due to the perception that each was crafted from a different genre. But Odell has argued for the unity of these two blocks of text on the grounds that prophetic *literature* regularly combines genres into single, coherent accounts. Building on the work of Marvin Sweeney and Ellen Davis, she concludes: "In the case of Ezek 1:1-3:15 and 3:16-5:17, I would suggest that the genres of call narrative and report of symbolic action have been combined into an extended, coherent composition that focuses on Ezekiel's inaugural experience."<sup>51</sup> Thus what we find in 3:16-5:17 is dependent upon 1:1-3:15 for its literary context and interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

Within the textual block of 3:16-5:17, sub-units are delineated using both form and content<sup>53</sup>:

- A. 3:16-21
  1. Form: Divine word formula.
  2. Content: Watchman commission.
- B. 3:22-27
  1. Form: Narrative alternation between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> person deixis (3:22-24) introduces the subunit.
  2. Content: New location, "the valley" (הַבְּקִיעָה); theophany; introduction of muteness motif.
- C. 4:1-8
  1. Form: Sign-act introduced with וְאַתָּה ("and you").
  2. Content: Creation of Jerusalem siege model; actions performed with regard to the model.<sup>54</sup>
- D. 4:9-17
  1. Form: Sign-act introduced with וְאַתָּה ("and you").
  2. Content: Preparation of siege rations and purity concern.
- E. 5:1-17
  1. Form: Sign-act introduced with וְאַתָּה ("and you"); sign-act proper found in verses 1-4; explanation of sign-act delineated

50. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the Old Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 35.

51. Odell, "You Are What You Eat," 230.

52. For a full discussion of this delineation, see Odell, "You Are What You Eat," 229-34.

53. For discussion and delineation, see Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel*, 35-42; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, FOTL 19 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 22-36; Henry Van Dyke Parunak, "Structural Studies in Ezekiel" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1978), 139, 175.

54. Note that וְאַתָּה occurs again in 4:3, but content precludes this from formally delineating a separate sign-act. The term מְצוֹר ("siege") unifies this sub-unit, occurring in verses 2, 3, 7, and 8.

by the initial messenger formula (כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה) “thus says the LORD”) in 5:5.<sup>55</sup>

## 2. Content: Hair manipulation.

While commentators debate about finer delineation of units (e.g., Daniel Block distinguishes 4:12-15 as a separate sign-act due to its focus on the experience of exile vis-à-vis the experience of siege<sup>56</sup>), such analysis does not invalidate the outline proposed above. Rather than viewing this kind of distinction as a wholly separate sign-act, they seem to function as individual rites in the larger sign-act ritual. What is more, as this paper is concerned with the sign-acts, our analysis concerns sections B-E only, although reference to section A will be made due to its overtone of priestly ordination.

### 3.2 An Audience for the Sign-Acts?

Having delineated the units of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17, a word needs to be said about the audience. Interpreters who read the sign-acts as primarily communicative or illustrative in nature believe these acts to have been witnessed by an audience of Ezekiel’s peers. Fundamental to their position is the public nature and intention of the performance. While an observability and public nature of the sign-acts is not irreconcilable with a ritual reading of these acts, it is worth considering to what degree they are actually presented as public.<sup>57</sup>

On the one hand, there are some indicators that seem to refer to witnesses or other participants and might thereby present 3:22-5:17 as more public in nature. In 3:25, 3pl forms/suffixes are used for the act of binding Ezekiel: “And you, O son of man, look – *they* will place (נָתַן) cords upon you and *they* will bind you (וַאֲצָרֶיךָ) with them, so that you will not go out in *their* midst (בְּתוֹכָם).” These are conceivably references to the audience observing and participating in these acts. In 4:3, Ezekiel’s work of besieging the model of Jerusalem is said to be “a sign for the house of Israel” (אוֹת הָיְאָ לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל), suggesting that the house of Israel would be present in this besieging sign-act. Finally, in 4:12, Ezekiel is told to bake the loaf of barley in their sight (lit: before their eyes, תִּשְׁעֶנְנָה לְעֵינֵיהֶם). Friebel cites these examples as proof of the publically witnessed nature of these acts.<sup>58</sup>

55. Subsequent messenger formulae in verses 7 and 8 are marked as syntactically subordinate to verse 5 via לָכֵן (“therefore”) and thus do not constitute new sub-units.

56. Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 185. So too Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 162.

57. As an important methodological note, Richard Benton draws attention to the problem of the word “audience” as it is used in regard to the sign-acts. Audience is often limited to the live audience of Ezekiel’s day with insufficient attention paid to the literary audience assumed by the textualized form of Ezekiel as a book. See Richard Benton, “Narrator, Audience, and the Sign-Acts of Ezekiel 3-5,” in *Studies in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 of *Festschrift in Honor of Professor Paul Nadim Tarazi*, ed. Nicolae Roddy, Bible in the Christian Orthodox Tradition (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 135-40, 162-64.

58. Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 26. Friebel makes consistent reference to what the audience would have thought about the sign-acts, devoting considerable attention to them in his rhetorical analysis and conclusion sections (cf. pp. 227-32, 243-47, 250-54).

On the other hand, these features do not demand a *public* communicative nature to these acts. The 3pl forms in 3:25, though active Qals, are quite naturally translated as passive forms, as is regularly observed by grammarians, thereby leaving the subject of the verbs undisclosed.<sup>59</sup> Even if one assumes that this binding action is done (whether literally or figuratively) by “the people” (Representatives of the exiles? A mob of exiles?), this does not require positing them as an “audience” of his bound state. Though the 3pl suffixed preposition בְּתוֹכָם does lend credence to retaining the active voice of the verbs, Hummel overstates things when he claims that passive translations constitute a “clash.”<sup>60</sup> The identity of the subjects has been left ambiguous because *they* are not the focus of the event, the *bound state itself* is. Stating that the binding prevents Ezekiel from going out בְּתוֹכָם does not equate the “them” with the subjects of the binding act. Ezekiel has already been בְּתוֹכָם in 2:5 (referring to “the sons/descendants” [הַבְּנִים] in 2:4) and in 3:15 (referring to “the exiles” [הַגּוֹלָה, interestingly a feminine noun, collectively understood by the 3mp suffix on בְּתוֹכָם]). What is in view is Ezekiel’s inability to be בְּתוֹכָם which hardly posits *them* as an audience to this bound state.

Concerning 4:3, that the siege model is called an *אֵת הַבַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל* does not require that the house of Israel literally observe the model and Ezekiel’s attending actions. After all, the ל prefix regularly functions as a specifying particle. Thus it can be translated as “a sign *concerning* the house of Israel.”<sup>61</sup> The one who observes and processes this sign would then be Ezekiel himself.

With regard to 4:12, the baking of the barley loaf over human dung “in their sight” (תִּעֲגָגָה לְעֵינֵיהֶם) does indicate a public exhibition of this action, yet it is striking that it is only the baking that is done publicly, not any of the other actions connected to the siege diet, especially not the eating of this loaf which is done in connection with his acts of laying on his side (4:9b; cf. vv. 4-8). Though YHWH’s word in 4:13 does interpret the significance of this unclean fuel to those living in exile, two things stand out. First, 4:13 introduces YHWH’s speech simply with *וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה* (“And YHWH said”). This is not a full messenger formula and thus, as noted by Hummel, “gives the verse more the character of a solemn pronouncement *than of another communication*

59. *IBHS*, 376 (what Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor label “pseudo-passive”); *GKC*, 460; *Joiion*, 543-44 (admittedly rare in biblical Hebrew, though common in Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic; see 543, n.6). The feature is also present in Modern Hebrew; see Ruth A. Berman, “The Case of an (S)V O Language: Subjectless Constructions in Modern Hebrew,” *Language* 56, no. 4 (1980): 775. The ESV translates these verbs as passive, though this is not common among English translations. Note too the passive translations of Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 147; and of Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, LHBOTS 482 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 82.

60. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 108.

61. Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113; *IBHS*, 206-7, cf. 210-11. Unfortunately, *אֵת* + ל constructions do not occur with sufficient regularity to be dogmatic, and there are no cases where *אֵת* + ל *must* be translated as a ל of specification, although Psalm 86:17, which reads *אֵת* לְטוֹבָה “a sign of goodness” comes closest. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 163, translates in this way.

to the prophet *which he*, in turn, *should pass on to the people*” (emphasis added).<sup>62</sup> Any implications of this sign-act for the exiles are not actually said to them. Second, as 4:14-15 indicate, Ezekiel never did use human dung to cook the loaf; God honored Ezekiel’s request to avoid the impurity causing fuel. Thus the supposed audience of this sign-act never actually witnessed anything that related to its purported message to them. Ezekiel simply baked bread in public over cow dung with the implication that the sons of Israel would eat their bread by weight and with anxiety, and that YHWH would cut off their supply of food. Moshe Greenberg seeks to preserve the intent of 4:12-13 even in 4:15, stating: “If even after God’s allowance, the prophet’s act was to carry its original meaning, it must be supposed that – for ritual reasons? – priests were known not to use animal dung as fuel.”<sup>63</sup> But this is exactly what is in question. In reality, we know very little about cooking praxis in ancient Israel and Judah.<sup>64</sup> What is more, the shift in fuel appears to mark a changed intention for the sign-act. The text describes an aborted sign-act about consuming impure food that is then replaced by a sign-act describing the lack of food for those in Jerusalem. (Note: This conclusion undergirds the full analysis of section D below.) And if the meaning of the sign-act pivots with the move toward a new fuel, then the supposed communication of information to an audience of exiles via this act is further weakened. In sum: the practice of one aspect of this sign-act לְעֵינֵיהֶם (‘‘in their sight’’) is not a compelling ground for viewing the essence of this act as public and communicative to Ezekiel’s contemporaries.

To conclude this section, two points bear emphasizing. First, since there is no overwhelming evidence that the sign-acts in 3:22-5:17 were public performances whose practice was aimed at communication to Ezekiel’s peers, utilization of the category ‘‘formative rituals of priestly identity’’ is well within the bounds of the textual evidence. Second, even if the preceding argument has not convinced readers to view these sign-acts as privately practiced, it does not follow that visible performance of these acts equals an exclusively public, strictly communicative intent. Regardless of whether anyone was witnessing his sign-acts or not, this does not necessitate that the sign-acts of 3:22-5:17 were intended (primarily) for them.<sup>65</sup> Not every ritual is performed completely hidden from those who are not ritual participants. The mere observance of a ritual does not make the observer a true participant.

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62. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 144.

63. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel, 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 108.

64. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, LAI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 64. Cf. Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?: Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 21; Robert I. Curtis, *Ancient Food Technology*, *Technology and Change in History* 5 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 205-10.

65. Seeing as how these were most likely performed entirely in the privacy of his house, it would seem that at least his wife and any other members of his household might have witnessed them. Others *may* also have visited him, though this is not explicitly stated.

## 3.3 Ezekiel 3:22-27 (Section B)

After having stood in the presence of the glory of YHWH (קְבוֹד־יְהוָה), a formal call describing Ezekiel's impending ministry is issued in 2:3-3:11. The theophanic manifestation of the Glory of YHWH is primarily associated with priestly tradition which, when coupled with the reference to Ezekiel's "thirtieth year" in 1:1, buttresses an interpretation of what follows through priestly vocational categories.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the textual block in 3:16-5:17 falls on the heels of Ezekiel's seven days of silence in 3:15, a period paralleling the seven-day waiting period during the priestly ordination ritual of Leviticus 8-9 (specifically Lev. 8:33).<sup>67</sup> His awestruck/appalled (from שָׁמַם) silence is fitting for a priest and prepares for the "silence" of his dumbness that will be instituted in 3:26.

In 3:22, Ezekiel is sent out to the valley (הַבְּקָעָה) where he again stands before the glory-theophany of YHWH. In Ezekiel 8:4, the prophet will refer to the theophany of 8-11 as "just like" the vision he saw in 3:22-23 (כַּמֵּרְאֵהָ אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי בַּבְּקָעָה), and in Ezekiel 37:1-2, the Spirit of YHWH will meet him again in the famous "valley of dry bones."<sup>68</sup> In both of these later encounters, priestly concerns (the temple, purity) will dominate the scenes.<sup>69</sup>

The chief characteristics of section B are Ezekiel's bondage with cords (עֲבוּתִים) and his dumbness. Interpreters are quick to connect Ezekiel's bondage with the captivity of the exiles, and yet the use of עֲבוּתִים is important. Odell explains:

Except in the Samson narratives, such cords are not associated with imprisonment. . . . In fact, the predominant usage of this noun is in the Priestly literature, where עֲבוּתִים are the gold cords that are used to bind the ephod and breastplate of judgment on the high priest (Exod 28:14, 22, 24, 25; 39:15, 17, 18). Since the breastplate of judgment contains stones of remembrance on which are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes, then it is conceivable that these cords symbolically bind the people to the priest and keep them in his memory as he performs his duties.<sup>70</sup>

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66. See John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, BJSUCSD 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 79-93; Pieter de Vries, *The Kābôd of YHWH in the Old Testament: With Particular Reference to the Book of Ezekiel*, SSN 65 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 118-36; Elizabeth Keck, "The Glory of Yahweh in Ezekiel and the Pre-Tabernacle Wilderness," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 2 (2012): 201-218.

67. Odell, "Ezekiel and the Scroll," 236, 238.

68. For the relationship between the Spirit of YHWH and the Glory of YHWH, see Pieter de Vries, "The Relationship between the Glory of YHWH and the Spirit of YHWH in the Book of Ezekiel – Part One," *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 5 (2013): 109-27.

69. Sweeney, "Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet," 139; idem, "The Destruction of Jerusalem as Purification in Ezekiel 8-11," in *Form and Intertextuality in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 144-55.

70. Odell, "Ezekiel and the Scroll," 246.

Thus what is in view is not simply the fact of captivity, but that Ezekiel *as a priest* is “captive” – i.e., symbolically and representationally linked – to the people. The specific mention of עֲבוֹדָתִים as the agents of his binding echoes priestly literature and forges this connection. The title Ezekiel possesses throughout the book, Son of Man (בְּרִי-אָדָם), bolsters this priestly/representational image. This title rightly identifies Ezekiel as a member of the human race, but does more: it marks him out as a representative man, a title that perfectly captures the station of the priest.<sup>71</sup>

Concerning Ezekiel’s dumbness/silence, we find further echoes with priestly concerns, especially with the general practice of ritual in the sanctuary. Though the lexeme שָׁמָּה (“silence”) is not found here, the concept of silence is latent throughout. When שָׁמָּה is used in Scripture in association with God, it is a significant posture of respecting God’s holiness. Habakkuk 2:20 is noteworthy: “As for YHWH, he is in his holy temple; silence [שָׁמָּה] before him, O totality of the earth [כָּל-הָאָרֶץ]!” (cf. Neh. 8:11; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:17). Yehezkel Kaufmann has noted especially that sacral priestly duties in the temple were marked by the silence of the temple cult:

The priestly temple is the kingdom of silence.... P makes no reference to the spoken word in describing temple rites. All the various acts of the priest are performed in silence.... This silence is an intuitive expression of the priestly desire to fashion a non-pagan cult.... The silence of the temple cult also served to heighten the awe of holiness.<sup>72</sup>

Though Kaufmann’s suggestion that this silence is an intentional effort to “fashion a non-pagan cult” has been criticized, he has shown the tight connection that lies between silence and the priestly vocation. Though silence may seem uncharacteristic for a prophet, silence is a standard and easily recognized characteristic for an altar priest.<sup>73</sup>

Though in 3:26 YHWH makes Ezekiel’s tongue cleave to his palate (וְלִשְׁוֹנָךְ אֶדְבִיקי (אֶל-הַחֵךְ) specifically so that he will be dumb (וְנִאֲלַמְתָּ) and unable to reprove them as an אִישׁ מוֹכִיחַ (legal intercessor<sup>74</sup>), this does not limit the silence to this (non) communicative function. Gregory Yuri Glazov explains:

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71. For support of this representational aspect, see C. Hassell Bullock, “Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (1982): 28; Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 739-40. Sweeney focuses on this representational aspect as a distinctively *priestly* feature. See Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel*, 31.

72. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. Moshe Greenberg (Jerusalem: Sefer Ve Sefel Publishing, 2003), 303-4.

73. See Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 148-152; idem, “Between Voice and Silence: The Relationship Between Prayer and Temple Cult,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 1 (1996): 17-30.

74. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 156-7.

As the watchman incurs bloodguilt by failure to reprove, Ezekiel's silence with regard to being an *'iš mōkīah* against the people entails that he should come to bear their sins and suffer on their account. This is of course the meaning of his suffering in 24.16-24 as well as in 4.4-8 which explicitly links the immobilization announced in 3.25 to a 'sin bearing' and thereby 'atoning' confinement reminiscent of the one worked once by Moses (cf. Deut. 9.13-21, 22-29).<sup>75</sup>

We will say more about the language of atonement with regard to section C (4:1-8) below, but suffice it to say, 3:26 invokes a broader set of implications than merely withholding intercessory speech.

In sum, section B, the first sign-act, begins the ritual formation of Ezekiel for his distinctively *priestly*-prophetic work by addressing him as a representative for humanity (אָדָם), binding him with materials (עֲבוֹתִים) used elsewhere in priestly literature to symbolically bind the people to their priest via the breastplate of judgment (חֹשֶׁן מִשְׁפָּט; Exod. 28:13-29, 39:8-21), and causing him to observe silence as would the priests when entering the sanctuary to mediate between God and his people. Ezekiel is a prophet, but begins his prophetic work with a priestly-like ordination ritual that forms him into a unique kind of prophet, a *priest*-prophet.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.4 Ezekiel 4:1-8 (Section C)

As noted above, this unit is often delineated into separate sign-acts. First, besieging the siege model (4:1-3), and second, Ezekiel's laying on his side (4:4-8). Yet viewing this as a single ritual complex with two separate rites makes the best sense of the repetition of מְצוֹר ("siege") in verses 2, 3, 7, and 8. Two features of this sign-act reverberate with priestly, ritual concerns and will be considered in turn.

First, Ezekiel is to construct a model of Jerusalem in his house (where he is currently bound and mute; so 3:25b) and surround it with model siege implements. Ezekiel 4:2 lists several items: a קִיָּץ (a siege wall for observing the siege and preventing people in the city from escaping), a סִלְקָה (a mound or ramp piled against the city wall that would enable siege engines better access for undermining the walls), מַחֲנֵוֹת (camps for the soldiers besieging the city), and כְּרִים (battering rams which would climb the ramp and strike the walls with a heavy, blunt ram, and also serve as a platform for archers).<sup>77</sup> Ezekiel himself is to set his face (וְהָכִינְתָה אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ אֵלָיָהּ) toward

75. Gregory Yuri Glazov, *The Bridling of the Tongue and the Opening of the Mouth in Biblical Prophecy*, JSOTSup 311 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 273.

76. See Pieter de Vries, "Ezekiel: Prophet of the Name and Glory of YHWH – the Character of His Book and Several of Its Main Themes," *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 4 (2012), 100.

77. For surveys, see Mark J. Fretz, "Weapons and Implements of Warfare," *ABD* 6:894; Michael G. Hasel, "War, Methods, Tactics, Weapons of (Bronze Age Through Persian Period)," *NIDB* 5:808-10; Kyle H. Keimer, "Siege," *The Encyclopedia of Material Culture in the Biblical World* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, Forthcoming); Boyd SeEVERS, *Warfare in the Old Testament: The Organization, Weapons, and Tactics of Ancient Near Eastern Armies* (Grand

“it.”<sup>78</sup> Ezekiel hereby plays the role of YHWH, besieging the city through the Babylonians, the human agent of his punishment.

What is peculiar, however, is the instruction in 4:3, “And as for you, take an iron griddle [מַחְבֵּת בְּרֹזֶל] and set it [וַיִּתְּתָהּ אֵינָהּ] as a wall of iron [קִיֵּית בְּרֹזֶל] between you and between the city.” A מַחְבֵּת is a type of iron plate used in cooking, attested only five times in the OT. The four occurrences outside Ezekiel fall exclusively in the domain of the sacrificial system of the tabernacle/temple. The three occurrences in Leviticus describe regulations for preparing the מִנְחָה (“grain-offering”) using a מַחְבֵּת (“griddle”). In 2:5, the type of flour to be used on the מַחְבֵּת is specified. In 6:21 [MT 6:14], the priests are instructed to use a מַחְבֵּת in preparing their own grain-offerings. And in 7:9, grain offerings baked on a מַחְבֵּת belong to the priests who offer them up.

In 1 Chronicles 23:29, the word מַחְבֵּת occurs in a list of duties belonging to the Levites. Since it appears to fall in the middle of a list of food-stuffs, the word מַחְבֵּת is frequently translated as a metonymy for the goods baked on it: “baked offering” or “griddle cakes.”<sup>79</sup> It is possible, however, to view this as a reference to the griddle itself, thereby identifying this particular vessel as peculiar to the temple. In 1 Chronicles 23:29, the following items are certainly food stuffs: לֶחֶם הַמֵּעֲרֹכֶת (“showbread”), סֶלֶת לַמִּנְחָה (“flour for the grain offering”), and רִקְיָי הַמִּצּוֹת (“wafers of the unleavened bread”). It is almost certain that מִרְבֵּכָת, a Hophal participle from רָבַח (“to mix”) is also a food item, although one might be able to construe this as a mixing utensil or bowl. (Admittedly, the passive stem makes this an unlikely reading.) But the final term, כָּל-מִשׁוֹרָה וּמְדָה “every measure of quantity or size” (ESV, cf. Ralph Kline<sup>80</sup>) refers to utensils. If the מַחְבֵּת refers to the griddle itself, then the Chronicler notes that the Levites pay special attention to this item as a cooking implement. If it is a metonymy for the baked goods themselves, it still demonstrates that the מַחְבֵּת is known primarily for its role in sacrificial food preparation. In sum, the term מַחְבֵּת should be understood as an item unique to the temple and thereby wielded exclusively or at least primarily by the priests as part of their professional duties.

Scholars have debated the metaphorical reference for the מַחְבֵּת. William Brownlee views the מַחְבֵּת as Jerusalem itself being besieged.<sup>81</sup> Leslie Allen, Odell, Hummel, and Greenberg all view it as a metaphor for the barrier that was now erected between

Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 234, 266. For a treatment of Bronze Age siege warfare, still useful for studying the Iron Age, see Aaron A. Burke, *Walled Up to Heaven: The Evolution of Middle Bronze Age Fortification Strategies in the Levant*, Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 31-41

78. The 3fs object suffix (אֵינָהּ) likely refers to the city model itself (cf. 4:7).

79. E.g., the following translate מַחְבֵּת as “baked offering”: Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 444, 457; Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 405, 420. Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, WBC 14 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 229-30, translates מַחְבֵּת as “griddle cakes.”

80. Kline, *1 Chronicles*, 444.

81. William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, WBC 28 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 64.

YHWH and the city.<sup>82</sup> Zimmerli and Eichrodt see the מִקְרֶבֶת, being itself impenetrable and unbreakable, as a metaphor for the nature of YHWH's unrelenting siege against the city.<sup>83</sup> Paul Joyce and Block, however, take a different interpretation. For Joyce, "the iron plate is an external expression of Ezekiel's personal demonstration."<sup>84</sup> Though he does not specify the nature of this demonstration, he does identify the מִקְרֶבֶת with Ezekiel himself. Block shares the view that the מִקְרֶבֶת is a *type* of wall, but he specifically says that Ezekiel *is* that wall. But what kind of a wall does Ezekiel represent between the besiegers and the besieged?

I contend that in the action of *placing* the griddle (נָתַן + מִקְרֶבֶת), Ezekiel plays the role of a priest, performing the role of an intermediary in an effort to mitigate YHWH's wrath. The מִקְרֶבֶת draws attention to the placating and reconciling work of temple sacrifice and by his act of placing it between the two parties in conflict, Ezekiel is playing the role of an intermediary.<sup>85</sup> Though there is no hint at any mitigation of YHWH's wrath at this point – and in fact, the next action of Ezekiel "setting his face" against the griddle shows him as immediately switching the role of YHWH in judgment – mitigation will come in following verses, particularly in 5:3 where the preserved remnant first appears (cf. Ezek. 9:1-6, 11 for continuation of the remnant theme). True, Jerusalem functions primarily as a personification of rebellion against YHWH, but Jerusalem herself will eventually be restored and purified (see Ezek. 16:50-63), and will receive a stunning new name, הַיְהוָה שָׁמָּה ("YHWH is there"; 48:35).<sup>86</sup>

A second feature of this sign-act lends credence to viewing it in ritual categories. In 4:4, Ezekiel is to lay on his side for a prescribed period of time and "place the sin of the house of Israel" on it (וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת-עוֹן בֵּית-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָלָיו) and is told that thus "you shall bear their sin" (תִּשָּׂא אֶת-עוֹנָם). The collocation נָשָׂא + עוֹן is a predominantly priestly one. While it can function as an expression of forgiveness (e.g., Exod. 34:7; Numb. 14:18; Pss. 32:5, 85:2; Isa. 33:24; Mic. 7:18) its most common meaning is to bear the burden

82. Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, WBC 28 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 65; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 59; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 150; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 104.

83. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 162-63; Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, OTL (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), 83.

84. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 84.

85. Though the מִנְחָה ("grain-offering") is a gift-offering used in a variety of ways, Jacob Milgrom points out that "The most likely definition for biblical *minhâ* is 'a present made to secure or retain good will' .... The emphasis, then, is clearly propitiatory ...." (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 196; cf. Willis J. Beecher, "Should *minhâ* be translated 'meal-offering'?" *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature And Exegesis* 5 [1885]: 73). For a full discussion of the range of uses for the מִנְחָה, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 195-202; Richard E. Averbeck, "מִנְחָה," in *NIDOTTE* 2:978-90.

86. For reference to Ezekiel 16:50-63, see Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife*, SBLDS 130 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 107-9; although Galambush seems to downplay the positive implications of this passage. Concerning Ezekiel 48:35, see Soo J. Kim, "YHWH Shammah: The City as Gateway to the Presence of YHWH," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 39, no. 2 (2014): 187-207.

and guilt of sin and suffer any of its consequences.<sup>87</sup> It is noteworthy that this collocation is connected with priestly rituals of expiation. In Leviticus 16:22, the sins of the people are transferred to the so-called scapegoat who is sent away into the wilderness where it bears their sins (וְרָשָׁע הַשְּׂעִיר עָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־עֲוֹנוֹתָם). In Exodus 28:38, via the *צִיץ זָהָב טָהוֹר* (“blossom/plate of pure gold”) fastened to his turban, Aaron will bear the sin of the holy things consecrated by the people. And in Leviticus 10:17, Eleazar and Ithamar are excoriated for failing to eat the sin- (or purification-) offering (הַטָּאָה) which had been given so that they might bear the sin of the congregation (אֶת־הַחַטָּאָה וְנָתַן לָכֶם).<sup>88</sup> Thus for Ezekiel to set and bear the sin “recalls the actions of the priest on the Day of Atonement” and thereby shows him as fulfilling “a normal priestly function....”<sup>89</sup>

The nature of this act has caused some unease and interpreters have quibbled over the nature of this as an expiatory act. Since Israel and Judah *are* both punished for their sin via exile (i.e., they bear their own sin; cf. Ezek. 18:19-20), Ezekiel’s own bearing of their sin must refer to something other than the priestly rituals cited above. Some have argued that Ezekiel is a substitution for the people, but this is not common.<sup>90</sup> But in an effort to distance Ezekiel 4:4-6 from a priestly act of substitution, some have minimized the ritual nature of this action. Though Hummel recognizes that priestly themes and language flood this account, he believes that connecting it too tightly to Leviticus 16:22, Exodus 28:38, and Leviticus 10:17 causes problems. To mitigate these purported problems, he downplays the very thing we are arguing for in this paper: Ezekiel’s priestly identity. Hummel argues:

[I]t should be noted that while Ezekiel had a priestly lineage (1:3), he had *not* assumed the office of priest, which happened at age 30; he was in exile in his thirtieth year, according to 1:1. Hence he could not officiate in any temple ceremony, even though he probably had been schooled in how to do so. *That alone renders any simple equation of Ezekiel’s singular action prophecies with priestly rituals impossible, despite the fact that his frequent use of priestly language, as here, clearly reflects that background* (emphasis added).<sup>91</sup>

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87. Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 8. Cf. Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 15-26; Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphut 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 57-58.

88. Cf. Numbers 18:1, though here the priests and Levites bear their own sin, albeit sin committed against the sanctuary (עֲוֹן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ) and the priesthood (עֲוֹן כֹּהֲנֵיכֶם).

89. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 176-77, 79.

90. E.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 164; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 66-67. Hummel incorrectly attributes this view to Greenburg; Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 152, n.21.

91. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 152.

And yet despite his protestations, Hummel proceeds to describe Ezekiel's action in a ritual way: "Ezekiel's 'bearing sin' must be taken as *representative*, not expiatory."<sup>92</sup> Because Hummel has so equated priestly ritual activity with expiation achieved "mechanically or magically," citing the Latin phrase *ex opera operato*, he is unable to see that his own description shows Ezekiel to be engaged in *ritual action*!<sup>93</sup> What is more, Hummel's denial of Ezekiel's priestly identity is exactly the issue that is in question. Should the first group of scholars noted in section 1.2 above be correct (as I believe they are), Hummel's other ground for denying the ritual implications of this sign-act is removed.

In this very act, Ezekiel does what priests have always done: he identifies with the people in the context of bearing their sin. Friebel writes: "In the enactment of 'bearing the iniquity', Ezekiel was performing that which was a part of his function as a priest, for within the priestly tradition, the culpability for the desecration of the Temple resided upon the priests as the people's representatives before God..."<sup>94</sup> The fact that a confessional and dogmatic understanding of substitutionary atonement cannot have a sinner actually bearing the sins of another sinner should not cause interpreters to miss a sacramental aspect to this ritual act.<sup>95</sup> Like innumerable priests before him, Ezekiel is ritually forged as a representative of the people: "He gathers together in his symbolic connection Israel's guilt as a burden on his own life."<sup>96</sup> But again, this is not a ritual of sin-bearing per se, it is *a ritual of priestly formation*. Thus to interpret the nature of this action by minimizing its ritual implications and echoes to other passages of priestly sin-bearing answers a question that is not being asked.

Before concluding this section, one final point must be observed. In some of these actions, Ezekiel represents YHWH in the performance, and in others Ezekiel represents the people. This causes some trouble for interpreters who do not have recourse to a meaningful priestly identity operative in Ezekiel's performance of the sign-acts. For example, because Ezekiel is acting in the role of YHWH by besieging the model city in 4:1-2, 3b, interpreters are quick to identify the placement of the iron griddle as also an act symbolizing YHWH's anger against Jerusalem. And since the sin-bearing sign-act places Ezekiel in the role of the people, interpreters are quick to delineate 4:4-8 as a distinct sign-act.<sup>97</sup> As 4:7-8 return to the idea of laying siege from 4:3 (i.e., Ezekiel performing the role of YHWH), literary-critical explanations have been proffered as well.<sup>98</sup>

By positing a meaningful priestly-vocational identity for Ezekiel, this rapid variation of roles is explained. Andrew Malone describes priestly representation/role-playing as follows:

92. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 153.

93. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 153.

94. Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 221.

95. E.g., Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 12-15, 17; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 38.

96. K. Koch, "רָצוּ," *TDOT* 10:558.

97. Although Hayyim Angel makes the suggestion that in bearing Israel's sin, "Ezekiel represents God Who had patiently borne Israel's sins for many years but now is prepared to destroy them" (Angel, "Ezekiel: Priest Prophet," 39-40).

98. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 154-55, 165-68; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 118.

There are hints that the priests represent the people before God, especially when the high priest ‘bears’ in his breastpiece the twelve inscribed gemstones “as a continual reminder before Yahweh” (Exod. 28:29). More frequently, we find the priests representing God to the people, especially in instructing them about God’s expectations (esp. Lev. 10:10-11).<sup>99</sup>

The reason for this is due to the liminal status of the priest: the priest stands on the threshold between the realm of the people and the realm of God. Richard Nelson has labeled priests as “boundary-crossers” and “intermediaries.”<sup>100</sup> Not only did this place significant restrictions upon the priests which are not placed upon the people, it made the priest a type of “Janus” figure, looking at God from the people’s perspective and looking at the people from God’s perspective. Ritual was an important venue for performing this intermediary role:

Ritual, and sacrificial ritual in particular, thus involves the crossing of boundaries.... In Israel it was the priest who facilitated these ritual “line breaking” movements across barriers. In order to do so, the priest himself had to pass routinely between profane space and holy space and handle holy things and hazardous substances, especially blood. Therefore the priest lived out an “in-between” existence in a sort of permanent liminal state.<sup>101</sup>

In light of this liminality, and especially in light of the role of ritual within the liminal state, the role-variation Ezekiel plays between YHWH, the people, and the priestly intermediary himself is expected and appropriate. Thus one need not posit a redaction in 4:3 to explain the iron griddle, nor interpret the griddle as another symbol of YHWH’s judgment.<sup>102</sup> Likewise it is not warranted to divide out the transition to human-representative in 4:4 as a separate sign-act or suggest that the sin-bearing action of 4:4-6 places Ezekiel in the role of God himself.<sup>103</sup> Neither are literary-critical solutions necessary for 4:4-6.

In Sum, section C carries on the ritual initiation of Ezekiel into his priestly-prophetic ministry. That it concludes with cords (עֲבוֹתָיִם) being placed upon Ezekiel (now by God himself, cf. 3:25) continues the theme introduced in section B: Ezekiel, being installed as a priest, is bound to the people he represents.<sup>104</sup> Though the first part of Ezekiel’s ministry will be one of prophetic rebuke, he is nevertheless a priest and the placing of a symbol of his priesthood (the iron griddle) between YHWH and

99. Malone, *God’s Mediators*, 46.

100. Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 83-88.

101. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest*, 59.

102. See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 162, and Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 208, respectively.

103. Pace Angel, “Ezekiel: Priest-Prophet,” 39-40.

104. Pace Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 180-81; and Friebe, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 224. Both bifurcate between these two binding events by overplaying the role of the subjects of נתן.

Jerusalem hints of the ministry of restoration and mercy that he will begin after the fall of Jerusalem (Ezek. 34ff.).

### 3.5 Ezekiel 4:9-17 (Section D)

In section D, Ezekiel is commanded to prepare bread using a mixture of grains, and eat portions that resemble siege (or better, starvation) rations.<sup>105</sup> Ezekiel is also given the command to cook a barley cake over human dung, though after objecting to this, YHWH relents and allows him to use cow dung as fuel. The grammatical ambiguity in 5:12 has led to delineating section D into two separate sign-acts: 5:9-11 as a sign-act about scraping together remaining bits of grain into a single loaf, and 5:12 describing the separate act of cooking a barley cake. It is important to note that the food in 5:9-11 is *לֶחֶם* (bread) or *מִאֲכָל* (general word for food), whereas in 5:12 it is called an *עֲגַת שְׂעִירִים* (cake of barley). Most translations identify the two in verse 12: “You shall eat it *as* a barley cake” (ESV; cf. NIV, NAU, KJV, CSB<sup>106</sup>), supplying the word “as” by translating this as an adverbial accusative. The suffix in 4:12 (*תֹּאכַלְהָ*), “you shall eat *it*”, however, is feminine which does not find its antecedent in either of the terms for food mentioned prior (both of which are masculine).<sup>107</sup> There is some merit to this proposal, however by doing so the matter of the barley loaf and its fuel in 5:12-15 is intrusive since 5:16-17 return to the matter of bread (*לֶחֶם*, cf. v. 9) and water (*מַיִם*, cf. v. 11). Indeed, the distinctiveness of 5:12-15 seems to mark these verses as central to this larger section.

Purity and holiness are dominant concerns in Ezekiel, more so than in other prophetic books. Mein observes:

The most significant feature is [Ezekiel’s] use of language drawn from the cult to describe the actions of the people, and the state into which they have put themselves. This language is present in Ezekiel to a degree unparalleled outside the priestly legislation, and it is fair to say that the book is saturated with defilement and profanity.<sup>108</sup>

Priestly purity is of special concern, especially as we come upon section D, such that some have even treated the passage as a halakhic discourse on food purity.<sup>109</sup> In 4:14

105. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel*, 39.

106. Allen translates this very freely: “The form in which you are to eat it is to be that of a barley cake” (Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 47; following Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 149.).

107. Most commentaries note this grammatical feature.

108. Mein, “Ezekiel as a Priest in Exile,” 205-6. See too Mein’s analysis of ritual language in Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001), 137-76. Cf. De Vries, “Ezekiel: Prophet of the Name and Glory of YHWH,” 101-3. For general remarks, see Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest*, 61-63; Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel*, OTG (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 86-89; Michael A. Lyons, *An Introduction to the Study of Ezekiel*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies (London, England: Bloomsbury, 2015), 19-20, 36.

109. Meindert Dijkstra, “The Valley of Dry Bones: Coping with the Reality of the Exile in the Book of Ezekiel,” in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition*

we find the only objection to YHWH's instructions in the book, highlighting the importance Ezekiel places on his purity.<sup>110</sup> The expression *בְּהֵאֵלָי צֹאֵת* (with heaps of dung) only occurs here in the OT, though there are several important uses of *צֹאֵת* (dung) that may inform us as to the import of this instruction. It is used for describing the conditions of siege in 2 Kings 18:27 (and the Qere reading in Isaiah 36:12) where the Rabshakeh tells the men standing on the wall that those in the besieged city of Jerusalem are doomed to consume their own dung and urine. And yet Ezekiel 4:12 does not describe consuming dung. Furthermore, Ezekiel's response to the instruction is specifically concerned with purity: "Aha, Lord GOD – Look, my soul/life has (never) been defiled/made unclean [*לֹא־נִטְמָאָה*]" (4:14).

Most noteworthy are the occurrences of *צֹאֵת* (dung) that occur in contexts of purity. Deuteronomy 23:9-14 deals with holiness in the Israelite camp. Verses 10-11 depict a man who is not clean/pure (*לֹא־יָהֳיֶה טָהוֹר*) on account of a nocturnal emission (*מִקְרָה־לַלַּיְלָה* – literally "from an accident of the night"). Then in verse 12, instructions are given for toileting, requiring that there be a place outside the camp where dung (*צֹאֵת*) shall be passed into a hole and then covered. The reason for this is in verse 13: "For YHWH your God walks back and forth in the midst of your camp in order to deliver you and to give your enemies before you. And thus your camp shall be holy [*קֹדֶשׁ*]." Though the remainder of the verse stresses that YHWH should not see nakedness (*עֶרְוָה*) in the camp, not explicitly that dung in the camp renders it unholy or is impure, the use of purity/impurity language in verse 10 (*טָהוֹר*) does not warrant detaching the dung from this context. After all, it is instructive that Proverbs 30:12 pairs dung with a purity term: "A generation is clean [*טָהוֹר*] it its own eyes; but its dung [*צֹאֵת*] has not been washed (away)."

It seems to be along these lines that Ezekiel objects to the use of dung for cooking. Though this is the only passage in the OT explicitly stating that cooking over human dung renders one impure, the inference that this was a long-held position is reasonable.<sup>111</sup> Ezekiel's response to YHWH's instruction involves citing several other well-known taboos. Zimmerli explains:

Ezekiel's complaint ... contains a confession of his previous manner of life in which he had avoided all such crass uncleanness. The Book of the Covenant already forbade the eating of the flesh of mutilated animals (*טְרֵפָה*) with a reference to the holy character of the people (Ex 22:30). The flesh of dead animals (*נְבֵלָה*) is mentioned in Dtn 14:21; Lev 17:15 and other passages. Ezekiel 44:31 forbids the eating of both categories of meat, especially to the priests. The flesh of a sacrificial animal which had not been eaten by the third

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*in Exilic and Post-Exilic Times*, eds. Bob Becking and Marjo C.A. Korpel, *OtSt* 42 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1999), 126-32.

110. Duguid, "Putting Priests in their Place," 55.

111. Jodi Magness notes that the Rabbi's did not consider human dung to be impure because of the fact that it is not explicitly stated as such, especially in the Torah. See Jodi Magness, "What's the Poop on Ancient Toilets and Toilet Habits?" *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75, no. 2 (2012): 85. Magness notes, however, that the Qumran sect appears to have followed Ezekiel 4:14 as taking the opposite position of the Rabbis.

day, the holiness of which had become a dangerous uncleanness, is described as פגול in Lev 7:18; 19:7.<sup>112</sup>

Ezekiel's objection, then, makes most sense if cooking over human dung is also a well-known taboo, silence in the OT notwithstanding.<sup>113</sup>

Odell recognizes the implications of this: "Ezekiel's interjection here, the only such interjection in the book, is filled with pathos, and not merely because Yahweh's command forces him to abandon yet another aspect of his priestly identity."<sup>114</sup> She continues:

Commentators regularly note Ezekiel's evident desire to maintain purity, but more may be at stake. Since Ezekiel's protest is that he has never come into contact with death, he is concerned with much more than ritual purity. Or perhaps purity signified far more to Ezekiel than we have yet understood. Maintaining ritual purity involved separating oneself from death, with the larger goal of delivering the community from death.<sup>115</sup>

To tease this out, even if Ezekiel is not merely exercised over the prospect of abandoning another aspect of his priesthood, he is exercised over no less than that. Also, even if Ezekiel is concerned with more than ritual impurity, he is concerned with no less than ritual impurity either. Ezekiel sees that death itself renders impure. This seems to stand behind the prohibition against his mourning for his wife in Ezekiel 24:15-27 (cf. Lev. 21:1-13 where priests may only come into contact with the dead for certain blood relatives, wives being excluded).<sup>116</sup> Likewise, in the Gog/Magog oracle of Ezekiel 38-39, the bones of Gog and his multitudes who were killed in battle will be flagged and buried so as to cleanse (טהר) the land (Ezek. 39:12, 14, 16).<sup>117</sup> Not only do dead bodies cause impurity, so do bones (see Numb. 19:16-18). Thus we see Ezekiel responding in accordance with priestly legislation concerning purity and impurity, especially here in Ezekiel 4:14.

One might object to this analysis which emphasizes the importance of the initial instruction pertaining to human dung. After all, an historical audience would not have witnessed the switch from human to cow dung, thus the former would possess no communicative import. In line with this, Friebel makes no reference to the substitution. Of course Ezekiel might have informed an audience of what happened,

112. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 171.

113. Anthropological and ritual approaches to feces ("scatology") has shown that human dung is considered impure in a wide range of cultures. See James J. Preston, "Purification: An Overview," *ER* 11:7504.

114. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 65. Though note that this paper parts ways with Odell over her contention that the sign-acts constitute a relinquishment of his priestly identity. Cf. Duguid's critique, "Putting Priests in their Place," 56, n. 44.

115. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 65.

116. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel*, 124.

117. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel*, 187. Cf. Wojciech Pikor, *The Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel*, LHBOTS 667 (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 164.

as suggested by Allen, although this is strictly hypothetical and driven by an inability to explain the substitution in communicative categories without an announcement of the substitution by the prophet.<sup>118</sup> But this causes no difficulty for a ritual interpretation of the account. In a ritual reading, attention is shifted to what the substitution might have communicated to Ezekiel himself and how this encounter thereby functions ritually in forming Ezekiel's priestly identity.

One further objection might be raised, viz. 4:13 says explicitly that the sons of Israel shall eat their bread unclean, therefore this sign-act still shows Ezekiel consuming impurity-causing food. This objection would indeed cause a difficulty to this analysis were it not for the fact, as argued above, that the change in fuel also marks a change in the intention of the sign-act. To repeat from section 3.2 above, the text describes an aborted sign-act about consuming impure food that is then replaced by a sign-act describing the lack of food for those in Jerusalem. That is to say, Ezekiel no longer performed a sign-act demonstrating worry about impurity, and in its place performed one demonstrating worry about the *ability* to eat and *dismay* in eating in 4:16.

In sum, in section D Ezekiel is presented with a scenario that will undermine his ability to function as a priest, and yet is not forced to proceed accordingly. He is instead enabled to follow a scenario that causes no such relinquishment of his priestly identity. His concern for his vocational identity is thereby preserved.

### 3.6 Ezekiel 5:1-17 (Section E)

The sign-act in section E is unique among the sign-acts of Ezekiel due to its lengthy explanatory section (the sign-act proper is in 5:1-4 whereas the exposition comprises the whole of 5:5-17). Within this sign-act, there are two main rites: a shaving rite and a hair manipulation rite. Though it is easy to collapse the former into the latter, the two should be distinguished for their import since the former relates to Ezekiel himself in his priestly role and the latter relates to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The emphasis of the entire sign-act and its explanation is on the hair manipulation and its representation of the destruction of Jerusalem, hence the statement in 5:5: "This is Jerusalem" (זאת ירושלים). The feminine demonstrative pronoun זאת does not have an antecedent in the immediately surrounding verses, but does seem to be a reference back to the siege model of 4:1, the brick (לִבְנָה) which is a feminine noun. We will proceed to consider what, if any, elements of this sign-act fit the model of the sign-acts as ritual formation of Ezekiel's priestly identity.

Scholars have generally suggested that this act falls in the intertextual orbit of Isaiah 7:20<sup>119</sup>:

In that day the Lord will shave [יְגַלֵּחַ]  
with a razor [בְּתַעֲרָר]  
one hired in the region across the river

118. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 70.

119. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 172; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 192; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 108.

with the king of Assyria  
 the head [ראש]  
 and the pubic hair [שער הרגלים]  
 and also the beard [הזקן] it will sweep away [תספה].

This connection is not wholly illegitimate. The shaving described in Ezekiel 5:1-4 does describe the same type of situation we see in Isaiah 7:20 where a foreign monarch defeats the people of the city. Yet there are some noteworthy differences. Ezekiel 5:1 reads:

And as for you, O son of man, take for yourself a sharp sword [חרב חדה] – a barber’s razor [תער הגלבים] you shall take it for yourself. And pass it over [והעברת] your head [ראשך] and over your beard [זקנך]. And take for yourself balances of weight and divide them [i.e., the shaved hairs].

When comparing the two, the only words shared are razor (תער), head (ראש) and beard (זקן). The verbs describing the razor’s action differ, and 5:1 specifies that this is a barber’s razor (תער הגלבים). Thus there are some distinctives in Ezekiel 5:1 that should give us pause. It should not be missed that the word “hair” is not attested in Ezekiel 5:1 (or anywhere in the passage). Certainly it is implied by the 3mp suffix on וְהִלַּקְתָּם (“and you shall divide them”), but *its absence places initial focus on the shaving instrument and action itself*.

There are two collocations of interest in Ezekiel 5:1 worth noting that orient us towards the distinctiveness of this sign-act. First, the collocation “head and beard” occurs only 11 times. Five of these are in Leviticus, all of which have references to priestly prescribed or proscribed activity for themselves or others. Psalm 133:2 refers to the anointing oil that runs down Aaron’s head and beard. In Isaiah 7:20, 15:2 and Jeremiah 48:37, the collocation is in a mourning context, as is Ezra 9:3 which in this case records the mourning of Ezra *the priest*. It is noteworthy that this collocation occurs so frequently in priestly contexts. Second, the collocation “razor and sword” (in this case, placed in apposition to one another) is not elsewhere attested, preventing us from simplistically assimilating this sign-act to judgment passages involving the sword.<sup>120</sup> The sword will function as an instrument of YHWH’s wrath throughout the remainder of Ezekiel, beginning already in 5:2, but the sword in 5:1 is depicted principally as a barber’s razor (תער הגלבים), something that needs investigation.

Mention of the word “barber” (גַּלֵּב) suggests a connection between the sign-act and ritual activity. Since גַּלֵּב is a hapax legomenon, we cannot find clarification within the OT canon as to its import. Lexicographers generally see גַּלֵּב as a loanword from the Akkadian noun *gallābu*, “barber.”<sup>121</sup> Barbers in the post-Sumerian period had three main venues of work: (1) slave administration, (2) sanctuary/temple maintenance, and

120. The only occurrences of תער in the OT that do *not* refer to a sheath are Numbers 6:5, 8:7; Psalm 52:4; Isaiah 7:20; Jeremiah 36:23; and Ezekiel 5:1.

121. HALOT, s.v. “גַּלֵּב”; cf. CAD, s.v. “gallābu.”

(3) cosmetic and medical/surgical treatments.<sup>122</sup> A cultic setting for certain barbers is especially noteworthy. At Mari, a location with close west Semitic connections, the *gallābu* placed his razor before the goddess Ištar.<sup>123</sup> The root is also attested in Phoenician, thus it is not necessarily a direct loan from Akkadian. *KAI 37*, a Phoenician text from Cyprus dated variously from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, contains a list of the expenses (תכלת) paid during a month of operations of the large temple located in modern-day Larnaca. Line 12 lists the expenses paid to the temple barbers:

לגלבם פעלם על מלאכת קפא 2  
For the barbers, workers of the festival observances, 2 QP'

Thus we see several attentions of cognates of גלב placing barbers firmly within cultic circles (and thereby in close proximity to priests).<sup>124</sup>

Though the OT does not mention any barbers associated with the Jerusalem temple, the fact that there is concern with hair in ritual contexts in the OT provides at minimum a connection between barbers and priests.<sup>125</sup> Hair has long been utilized in ritual in a range of geographical, cultural, and historical contexts.<sup>126</sup> Hair manipulation in ritual in the OT is quite limited comparatively. In the *sota* ritual of Numbers 5:11-31, the hair of the suspected adulteress is unbound (פרע; 5:11) which may be a sign of disgrace (as in mourning or leprosy rites) or symbol of being laid open to the

122. CAD, s.v. “gallābu.” Cf. Hayim ben Yosef Tawil, *An Akkadian Lexical Companion for Biblical Hebrew: Etymological-Semantic and Idiomatic Equivalents with Supplement on Biblical Aramaic* (Brooklyn, NY: KTAV Publishing House, 2009), 65.

123. For general references to Mari and the Bible, see Daniel E. Fleming, “Mari and the Possibilities of Biblical Memory,” *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale* 92, no.1 (1998): 41-78; idem, “History in Genesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65, no. 2 (2003): 251-62; Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1998).

124. Another Phoenician inscription makes reference to a person titled גלב אלם, “barber of divinity” (*CIS I 257:4*). For references to this text, see John C.L. Gibson, *Phoenician Inscriptions: Including Inscriptions in the Mixed Dialect of Arslan Tash*, vol. 3 of *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1982), 129, n.12; Charles R. Krahmalkov, *Phoenician-Punic Dictionary*, *Studia Phoenicia* XV (Leuven/Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 139; idem, *A Phoenician-Punic Grammar*, HDO 1.54 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 201; George A. Barton, “A peculiar use of *ilani* in the tablets from El-Amarna,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1890): cxcviii. A general survey of the Phoenician cult, including reference to temple barbers, can be found in Charles R. Krahmalkov, “Phoenicia,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1053-56.

125. Some of the references to hair relate to pagan practices in the OT, but not all. For a survey of hair in the OT, see Heinrich L.E. Luering and Ralph W. Vunderink, “Hair,” *ISBE* 2:596-99. Cf. James G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion Legend and Law*, abridged ed. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1923), 272-73, 377-97; William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 323-35.

126. For surveys, see Christopher R. Hallpike, “Hair,” *ER* 6:3738-41; E.E. Sikes and Louis H. Gray, “Hair and Nails,” *ERE* 6:474-77.

community.<sup>127</sup> Deuteronomy 21:10-14 legislates how a female captive can be taken as a wife by an Israelite man. She is to shave her hair, cut her nails, and discard the clothes she wore when captured, before entering a time of mourning for her father and mother, after which time she will become his wife. Hair cutting thereby serves as a transitional ritual.<sup>128</sup> Hair plays a role in determining impurity causing ailments in several passages in Leviticus, the remedy of which involves shaving.<sup>129</sup> Shaving rites also occur with the commissioning of Levites in Numbers 8:7 and with the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:1-18.<sup>130</sup> During the Nazirite's time of separation he is not to shave his hair (v. 5), but when the time comes for him to rejoin the community, he is to shave his "consecrated head" (ראש נָרוֹ) and offer the hair as a type of offering, placing it in the fire under the peace-offering (הַשְּׁלָמִים) (v. 18).<sup>131</sup> And though shaving is an acceptable aspect of mourning for most people, the priests were forbidden from doing so (Lev. 21:5; cf. Ezek. 44:20).<sup>132</sup> In sum, hair and shaving played a role in the Israelite cult and thus one should not interpret the shaving act in Ezekiel 5:1 without recourse to the meaning of such rituals.

Israel may not have had individuals bearing a specific title who were tasked exclusively with this work (it may have been a general priestly task), but there was an analogous, though still distinctively Yahwistic role for priests in Israel to that of the *gallābu*/גַּלְבָּם in other Semitic contexts. Both the role of hair and shaving known generally in priestly circles and the presence of a hapax legomenon גָּלַב (barber) with ritual and priestly connotations in neighboring cultures give a compelling priestly context to this act, strengthened by the presence of the priestly and ritual themes we have explored in the preceding sign-acts. We miss a significant aspect to this sign-act if we tie this shaving act solely to the military imagery of the הָרֶבֶץ (sword).

In light of Babylonian ritual texts, a few scholars have also noted ritual overtones to Ezekiel's use of scales (מִשְׁקָל) to weigh the hair, and his placement of some of the hair in his hem (בְּכַנְיָהוּ).<sup>133</sup> Echoes to Babylonian literature and customs have been noted throughout the book of Ezekiel.<sup>134</sup> Block writes:

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127. For the former interpretation, see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* 22722, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 40; for the later, see Marvin R. Wilson and Seth M. Rodriguez, "Hair," in *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 2:382.

128. Saul Olyan, "What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 4 (1998): 617-19.

129. Olyan, "Shaving Rites," 619-20.

130. Note the relevant texts in Judges 13:1-16:31 which include various aspects of the Nazirite vow.

131. That the Nazirite is also to avoid contact with the dead ties in with the same concerns in Ezekiel mentioned above.

132. For shaving and the mourning of non-priests, see Olyan, "Shaving Rites," 616-17.

133. Wilfred G.E. Watson, "Splitting Hairs in Israel and Babylon," *Irish Biblical Studies* 4, no. 4 (1982): 193-97.

134. Brian Neil Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context: Ezekiel's Message Understood in its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

A Babylonian magical ritual text provides an interesting analogue, particularly the following excerpt: “You hold a balance high, place the hair of his [the patient’s] head in the hem of his garment and weigh them.” Even if Ezekiel’s operation lacks the magical significance of this text, at the very least the passage suggests that such activity was known in Ezekiel’s Babylonian environment.<sup>135</sup>

We might suggest that this sign-act is peppered then with references to ritual, even if the act itself is explained exclusively in the language of warfare and city destruction. Furthermore, in keeping with the private nature of the sign-acts, as argued above, our concern need not be with whether Ezekiel’s audience might have perceived a ritual aspect to this sign-act, but whether Ezekiel himself would have.

In sum, regardless of the presence of broader themes of YHWH’s judgment and the impending fate of Jerusalem in section E, there is a ritual thread that runs through this sign-act. The sign-act serves as yet another initiatory ritual forming Ezekiel’s priestly identity in correlation with his prophetic work. Even the accompanying oracle/explanation of the sign-act in 5:5-17 makes specific reference to the defilement of the sanctuary (v. 11, *וַיִּשְׁדָּדֵנִי אֶת־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ*, “my sanctuary you have defiled”), and draws heavily on the curses from Leviticus 26:14-46 (cf. Ezek. 5:2, 6, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17), keeping the explanatory content firmly in the realm of priestly literature.<sup>136</sup>

## 4 Conclusion

### 4.1 Summary of Ritual Elements

Our analysis of the sign-acts of Ezekiel 3:22-5:17 cohere with the definitions above proffered in section 2.2.2 above. Grimes’ short definition contained several elements, all of which are exhibited in the sign-acts analyzed:

- Embodied: Ezekiel’s body is bound with cords (3:25, 4:8); he is silenced (3:26); he builds a model (4:1-2); he places a griddle (4:3); he lays on his side (4:4, 6, 9); he prepares food (4:9-12); he shaves (5:1a); he manipulates hair (5:1b-4).
- Condensed: Though Ezekiel’s activity overlaps with non-ritual behavior, it is selective and representative of broader ritual concerns. One can lay on one’s side, build a model, prepare food, and etc., with no ritual implications, but in Ezekiel’s case, these actions take place within a symbolic matrix that dramatizes ordinary life.

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135. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 193.

136. Sustained allusions to Leviticus 26 extend from Ezekiel 4-6 and are peppered through the remainder of the book. For a list of comparisons, see Michael A. Lyons, “From Law to Prophecy: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code,” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), 199-201; idem, “Marking Innerbiblical Allusion in the Book of Ezekiel,” *Biblica* 88, no. 2 (2007): 245-50.

- Prescribed: YHWH instructs Ezekiel as to the actions he is to perform in the order he is to perform them.
- Enacted: Though we read no narrative accounts recording the execution of these actions, FriebeI has made an impressive case for their actual performance.<sup>137</sup>

The same can be said of the definition of Platvoet and Klingbeil:

- Ordered sequence: observed in the divinely prescribed instructions for the sign-acts, particularly in sections C, D, and E.
- Stylized social behavior: this category is in tandem with the comments just made about the sign-acts' "condensed" nature.
- Distinguished by alerting qualities: seen in the unexpected (from a prophetic perspective) turn to silence (3:26); the lengthy period of laying on his side (4:5-6); the jarring command (from a priestly perspective) to eat defiled food (4:12); and the manipulation of shaved hair (5:1b-4).

Platvoet's and Klingbeil's reference to a ritual's goal of "focusing the attention" of the audience, causing them "to perceive" the special nature of the symbolic action is likewise exhibited herein, provided one does not view an audience of one (Ezekiel himself) as not being an audience or congregation properly speaking. Thus it is clear that Ezekiel's actions are readily explained by the category of ritual.

#### 4.2 Future Prospects

Though Odell argued that the sign-acts of Ezekiel constituted a relinquishment of priestly identity and a replacement by a prophetic identity, a ritual analysis of the sign-acts has shown this to be an inaccurate assessment. Indeed, that the account of Ezekiel's commission is shot-through with ritual elements bolsters Sweeney's conclusion that "Ezekiel did not give up his priestly identity for a prophetic role; instead, his prophetic role is an extension of his priestly identity under the influence of the very radically changed circumstances of Ezekiel's life in the Babylonian exile."<sup>138</sup> Future study of the question of Ezekiel's priestly identity must proceed with a keener eye toward the details of his prophetic book which reflect intentional priestly concerns.

By utilizing the categories provided by vocational psychology and occupational identity, this study has shown that a priestly reading of this prophetic book is not an over-reading of Ezekiel's priestly pedigree (as claimed by Schwartz) or an unwarranted move toward positing a meaningful *priesthood* in exile. Future work will be able to seek organic connections between priestly themes and praxes found in Ezekiel and those found in other post-exilic books. Even if it is granted that Ezekiel provides a singular portrait of a priest in exile rather than a norm universally practiced

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137. FriebeI, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 20-34.

138. Sweeney, "Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet," 127.

by the many priests who did depart to Babylon in the exile, “job crafting” or “work adjustment” has been observed and classified by vocational psychologists in a wide range of settings.<sup>139</sup> As extant biblical instructions for the priesthood assume life in the land and in proximity to the Jerusalem temple and its altar, it is reasonable to expect that creative adjustments were made by priests to accommodate their roles and responsibilities in an exilic context while ensuring sufficient continuity with those who preceded them in the priesthood.<sup>140</sup>

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139. See David B. Hershenson, “Work Adjustment: A Neglected Area in Career Counseling,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 74, no. 5 (1996): 442-46; Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane E. Dutton, “Crafting a Job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of their Work,” *The Academy of Management Review* 26, no. 2 (2001): 179-201; Maria Tims, Arnold B. Baker, and Daantje Derks, “Job Crafting and Job Performance: A Longitudinal Study,” *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 24, no. 6 (2015): 914-28; Justin M. Berg, Adam M. Grant, and Victoria Johnson, “When Callings Are Calling: Crafting Work and Leisure in Pursuit of Unanswered Occupational Callings,” *Organization Science* 21, no. 5 (2010): 973-94. The literature on this subject is vast and remains unexplored (or at least underexplored) by biblical scholars.

140. I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Esias Meyer and Dr. Kelvin Friebel who generously read an early draft and dialogued with me about the contents of this study. Any mistakes are wholly mine, and conclusions reached herein are not necessarily theirs. Nevertheless, their incisive comments and critiques offered in private correspondence have been indispensable.