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Introduction

The Ezekiel passages describing the instructions for, and dramatization of, divine messages (Ezekiel 3–5; 12; 24; 37) are among the most bizarre and overlooked in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet is commanded to embody his message of judgment to Jerusalem, and these actions complement and clarify the oracles they surround. The literary presentation of these sign-acts often emphasizes the divine command and an interpretation of the action as if the actual performance of the action is either a given or unimportant. In addition, the acts frequently involve peculiar, and even impossible, actions. Yet, these sign-acts are frequently ignored within Ezekiel studies, which tend to focus on the book's strange visions and controversial oracles. This volume addresses this lacuna by inviting international senior and junior scholars to focus on the texts concerning Ezekiel's sign-acts through diverse methodological approaches. It aims to redirect scholarly attention to these often-unnoticed texts, which stand so central to understanding the nature of ancient prophecy as well as the overall book of Ezekiel.

The volume opens with an essay related to sign acts in general as it asks a central interpretive question in the field. Steven S. Tuell's "Show or Tell? Literary Sign-Acts in Ezekiel" explores the interpretive issues surrounding the observation that some of the prophet's sign-acts could not have been performed. He notes in fact that only two of the sign-acts in the book of Ezekiel claim to be performed by the prophet. Thus, Tuell suggests ways we can think of these acts as more literary and rhetorical. For example, the use of these sign-acts as a literary device highlights the literary nature of Ezekiel as a book, as a deliberately shaped piece of literature and not merely a haphazard collection.

The next two studies in the volume address the timely topic of trauma as it relates to prophetic sign-acts. C. L. Crouch focuses on sign-acts in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel – the biblical books most associated with these actions – while Brad E. Kelle reads a specific sign-act in Ezekiel 3 from the perspective of trauma hermeneutics.

"Jeremiah and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts through the Lens of Trauma" by Crouch argues that the prevalence of sign acts in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel when compared to other biblical books is linked to the traumatic aftermath of Judah's downfall in the sixth century BCE. The use of explicitly bodily forms of communication is explained by the "language difficulties characteristic of trauma survivors." What cannot be put into words is expressed therefore through the body.

Kelle explores the developing concept of moral injury as it relates to an individual sign-act in his "Ezekiel 3:24–27 and Prophetic Moral Injury: Trauma and

the Interdisciplinary Study of Ezekiel's Sign-Acts." Kelle notes that the theoretical framework of moral injury helps to foreground the textual elements of isolation, loss of social trust, and the prophet's inability to speak within the historical reality of destruction, war, and exile. These elements point to a sense of the prophet's "moral disjunction, distress, and despair." This essay along with the following three studies address sign-acts in Ezekiel 3–5.

"Ezekiel's Confinement: From the Sublime to the Conspicuous" by Rosanne Liebermann examines Ezekiel 3:22–27, a passage in which the prophet is commanded to shut himself in his house, to bind himself with cords, and to not speak. Liebermann argues that the prophet's isolation secludes him from the impurity of his foreign environs and mirrors the Deity's isolation in the temple's deepest part. Ezekiel becomes a "high priest for the migration" with God's presence understood as with the Judeans outside of Judah.

Karin Schöpflin's essay "Predicting Jerusalem's Siege and Fall through Sign-Acts – Actual Performance or Literary Fiction in Ezekiel 4:1–5:4?" investigates the series of sign acts in Ezek 4 and 5. Schöpflin argues that they were intended to predict the siege and fall of Jerusalem and the consequences thereof with the later form of the text also looking toward conditions in exile. Alongside a historical-critical analysis, she discusses the likelihood of these sign-acts having actually been performed, using Jeremiah 13 and 19 as background.

Kelvin G. Friebel, whose 1999 monograph *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* remains a key study of this volume's topic, explores the significance and function of the iron wall created by placing an iron griddle between the prophet and the city in his essay "The Enigma of Ezekiel's Iron Wall (Ezek 4:3)." Is the wall representational or figurative? Does the wall signify protection or attack or separation? Is iron mentioned to represent strength and impenetrability? Does Ezekiel represent God, the Babylonians, or himself? Friebel ultimately argues that the wall is a "figurative protective wall shielding the prophet from the reactant opposition of the people that is evoked by his contrary prophetic messages of judgment."

One of the central issues addressed thus far in the volume by Tuell, Schöpflin, and Friebel concerns the extent to which these biblical texts concerning sign-acts should be understood as purely textual phenomena. In "Ezekiel's Dark Tunnel to Exile", Stephen L. Cook explores the richly symbolic sign-act in Ezekiel 12, arguing that the text is not historical recollection, but an invitation into an intertextual world. Cook shifts scholarly attention from the redactional reconstructions of Ezekiel 12 to a discussion of the inner-biblical allusions and underworld imagery found in this sign act. Cook explores the intertextual connections between Ezekiel 12 and another priestly text, Genesis 15:7–21, including their anticipation of exile and use of symbols of darkness and death.

Next, the volume moves from the symbolism of exile in Ezekiel 12 to the symbolism of Ezekiel's loss of his wife as three contributions turn our attention to Ezekiel 24, each exploring the death of the prophet's wife as a symbol of the loss of Jerusalem from a different perspective.

"Where is Ezekiel's Wife? An Examination of Ezek 24:15–27 through the Lens of Performance Art" by John T. Strong examines the features that prophetic sign-acts share with performance art. Strong's contribution addresses not only issues of documentation and curation of time-based performance, but also the nature of the response to these performances. Just as Ana Mendieta's performance art elicited shock and revulsion, so Ezekiel's sign-act succeeds in its communication through the audience's emotional experience. By drawing useful comparisons between the performance art of Ana Mendieta and the sign-act in Ezek 24:15–27, Strong sheds new light on the theological significance of the forcible removal of Jerusalem – YHWH's consort and home to the temple – for both the prophet and his immediate audience.

Stefano Salemi's contribution, "Ezekiel's Wife's Death: Femicide, 'Divine Election,' Metaphor, or Mimic?", explores the loss of Ezekiel's wife as it points to the destruction of the beloved city of Jerusalem and the temple. The death of Ezekiel's wife is emphasized alongside his love for her, which lends itself well to visualizing the loss of Jerusalem, so loved by the people. The unusual behaviour of the prophet at his wife's death plays a role in the comparative framework of YHWH's relationship with his people and the people with the city and the temple. How can the death of a woman constitute a pivotal element in the experience of the exilic community within the theology of the book of Ezekiel? Is it an act of 'divine election'? A metaphorical element of a traumatic narrative? An essential characteristic of a bizarre sign-act of Ezekiel as YHWH's מזנָה?

"Misogyny or Sign Act? Ezekiel's Embodiment of YHWH in Ezekiel 24" by Marvin Sweeney explores Ezekiel's Zadokite priestly identity as the reason the prophet was unable to mourn his wife's death. As an alternative, Ezekiel represented God in a sign-act meant to symbolically demonstrate God's refusal to mourn Jerusalem. The prophet is not an uncaring misogynist then but observes the proper priestly actions in the face of his wife's tragedy.

The volume turns next away from the prophet's symbolic refusal to mourn the city of Jerusalem to the promise of restoration found in the latter part of Ezekiel.

Penny Barter's contribution "Unity and (Compositional) Disunity" examines the role of the formulas in Ezekiel 37:15–28. While their role in determining the literary structure of the final form of the text is widely acknowledged, the relatively dense use of formulas in the sign-act and its interpretation(s) can also offer insight into the transformation of the text in its successive compositional layers.

The volume concludes by stepping back to explore how these sign-acts relate to each other and the role they play in the book. William Tooman in his essay, “Is he not a Riddle Monger?” – הֲלֹא מִשְׁלֵי מִשְׁלִים הוּא – Ezekiel’s Sign-acts as a Coordinated Sequence” begins with an examination of Ezekiel 12:1–20, focusing on its relationship to the book’s other sign-acts. He argues that Ezekiel 12:1–20 is linked to chapters 2–5(6) and 24, and that it has been crafted to sit strategically between them. Then, he considers the whole sequence of sign-acts in Ezekiel and argues that they are a coordinated sequence, as signaled by the verbal, topical, temporal, and argumentative links between them. The result of this coordination is that the sign-acts present a progressive line of argumentation that speaks about the fate of five historical populations.