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EZEKIEL'S BOILING CAULDRON:  
A FORM-CRITICAL SOLUTION TO EZEKIEL XXIV  
1-14<sup>1</sup>

by

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*Introduction*

Since the appearance of Claus Westermann's work on the basic forms of prophetic speech more than two decades ago,<sup>2</sup> form-critical considerations have become an indispensable part of the study of Old Testament prophecy. Although one type of prophetic utterance, the disputation speech, received brief mention in this volume (pp. 144-5; E. tr., p. 201), in another work he questioned the existence of such a genre because of the lack of a clear common structure.<sup>3</sup> This skepticism has been challenged recently by Adrian Graffy, who claims that the reason for the apparent lack of structure is created by an imprecise definition of the genre. Once it is realized that "The name 'disputation speech' can worthily be given to those texts where an opinion of the speakers is explicitly reported by the prophet and refuted by him,"<sup>4</sup> a clear pattern emerges. He finds that the texts of this genre typically consist of an introductory quotation of a popular saying, followed by a deliberately constructed refutation. In some instances the latter bifurcates into a double refutation; occasionally a programmatic refutation precedes a rejoinder and reply.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revision of a paper presented to the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago, November 1988. Appreciation is expressed to Kelvin Friebel of the University of Michigan, my colleague Gary V. Smith, and Marvin A. Sweeney of the University of Miami, for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the paper.

<sup>2</sup> *Grundformen prophetischer Rede* (5th edn, München, 1978), E. tr. *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (of 2nd German edn, Philadelphia, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> "Sprache und Struktur der Prophetie Deuterocesajas", in *Forschungen am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien* (Göttingen, 1964), pp. 124-34.

<sup>4</sup> *A Prophet Confronts His People* (Rome, 1984), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. pp. 107-18, for a discussion of the parts of the disputation speech.

Some have found Graffy's definition of a disputation speech too restrictive. In the most recent essay on the subject, D. F. Murray argues that Graffy's perspective reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of disputation in general.<sup>6</sup> What is determinative for the disputation genre is not the quotation-refutation rhetorical surface structure (though these elements will naturally frequently be present), but the tripartite logical deep structure involving thesis, counter-thesis, dispute (not necessarily in this order). He recognizes that the opponent's position need not be quoted verbatim; it may be inferred from other devices used by the disputant.

Naturally, if a disputation speech is defined as one which opens with some comment like "Do you hear what they are saying?" followed by a direct quotation, which in turn is succeeded by the refutation, the field of potential candidates from the Old Testament prophets is limited. But our preoccupation with the opening signal may have prevented us from recognizing oracles which function similarly but appear unannounced. D. J. McCarthy has rightly distinguished a genre from a schema with his observation that "A genre may use formulae, but it need not. It can be made up of elements, that is, parts which regularly enter into its composition though not expressed in a fixed set of words."<sup>7</sup> J. S. Ackerman criticizes W. Richter for overlooking Deborah's commissioning of Barak in his examination of pre-prophetic call narratives "because his methodology demands that a given set of formulae appear before a passage can be said to contain a 'schema'".<sup>8</sup> Graffy and others may have made the same mistake in their identification of "disputation speeches".

It will be proposed in this article that in Ezek. xxiv 1-14 we are faced with one such unannounced disputation address. This oracle of the boiling cauldron remains one of many in Ezekiel that continue to defy clear understanding. The preserved record presents

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<sup>6</sup> "The Rhetoric of Disputation: Re-examination of a Prophetic Genre", *JSOT* 38 (1987), pp. 95-121, particularly pp. 96-9, for his response to Graffy and his own theoretical position. There is no need to mention the numerous other studies that have appeared on the subject of disputation speeches. The reader is referred to the bibliographies provided by Murray and Graffy.

<sup>7</sup> "An Installation Genre?", *JBL* 90 (1971), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> J. S. Ackerman, "Prophecy and Warfare in Early Israel: A Study of the Deborah-Barak Story", *BASOR* 220 (1975), p. 7. Cf. Wolfgang Richter, *Die sogenannte vorprophetischen Berufsberichte* (Göttingen, 1970), pp. 142-3.

the interpreter with problems at every level: textual, grammatical, lexical, formal, theological. Not surprisingly, the solutions offered vary greatly and generally depend upon the hermeneutical stance of the commentator. It will be suggested here that, when the disputational nature of the prophecy is recognized, some of the perplexing interpretative problems are resolved. Specifically, by looking at the passage from this perspective we may have stumbled upon the solution to one of the key cruxes, the enigmatic *hl<sup>h</sup>h*, commonly interpreted as “rust”.

The investigation will consist of three parts: (1) an examination of the unity and style of the account; (2) a discussion of its form and structure; (3) a summary interpretation.

#### *The Unity and Style of Ezekiel xxiv 1-14*

The borders of the major textual unit comprising xxiv 1-27 are clearly defined. It opens with the word event formula, *wyhy dbr yhw h* *ly ... l<sup>h</sup>mr*, “And the word of Yahweh came to me as follows”, followed by a date notice (*v.* 1), and concludes with the recognition formula *wydc<sup>w</sup> ky ny yhw h* in *v.* 27, which in turn is followed by a new word-event formula in xxv 1. However, this apparent unity is purely literary. The text subdivides into two halves, almost equal in length, *vv.* 1-14 and 15-27. This division is indicated formally by the presence in *v.* 14 of the common Ezekielian formula, *ny yhw h dbrty*, “I am Yahweh; I have spoken”, and the concluding signatory formula, *n<sup>m</sup> dny yhw h*, “the declaration of the Lord Yahweh”, followed by a new word-event formula in *v.* 15. This demarcation is confirmed by the nature and style of the two segments. *Vv.* 1-14 consist of a formal oracle, an extended *māšāl*, and *vv.* 15-27 revolve around a sign-act. Both were delivered immediately prior to the fall of Jerusalem. In fact, they could both have been presented on the same day, in which case the date notice in *v.* 1 would apply to the entire chapter.

Scholars have tended to view the oracle proper in xxiv 3b-14 as a conflation of two separate oracles, consisting of the cooking song and its interpretation (*vv.* 3b-5, 9-10), and the figure of the corroded pot (*vv.* 6-8, 11-14), respectively.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Hans F.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (London, 1969), pp. 188-92; Kenneth Freedy, “The glosses in Ezekiel i-xxiv”, *VT* 20 (1970), p. 139, n. 2; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969), pp. 559-67, E. tr. *Ezekiel 1* (Philadelphia, 1979), pp. 496-501.

Fuhs<sup>10</sup> has argued that stylistically and kerygmatically vv. 1, 3-5, 10b form a closed unit that possesses its own word-event formula, charge to the messenger, and messenger formula, followed by an adaptation of a popular work song and its interpretation. It therefore represents a *bona fida māšāl*. This oracle may be reconstructed as follows:

- 1 (*wyhy dbr yhw h ʔly ...*) (Now the word of Yahweh came to me  
*lʔmr*) (saying)?
- 3 (*w)mšl ʔl byt hmry mšl*) Utter a parable to the rebellious house,  
*wʔmrt ʔlyhm* And say to them:  
*kh ʔmr ʔdny yhw h* Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared:  
*špt hsy r špt* Put on the cauldron, put it on.  
*wgm ysq bw mym* And pour in the water as well.
- 4 *ʔsp nth y(m) ʔlyh* Put into it the pieces of meat—  
*kl nth ʔwb yrk wktp* every good piece, thigh and shoulder.  
*mbhr ʕsmym mlʔ* Fill it with choice bones.
- 5 *mbhr hšʔn lqw h* Take the choicest one of the flock.  
*wgm dw r (hʕsym) (m)thtyh* Also pile the logs under it.  
*rth (nt)hyh* Boil its pieces.  
*gm (bšl) ʕmyh btwkh* Also seethe its bones in it.
- 10b (*ʔtm hbšr*) I am boiling the flesh well,  
*w(hrq hmrq)* Cooking up the broth,  
*whʕsmwt yhrw* So that the bones are burned up.

A second figure concerns the rusty cauldron, also with its own messenger formula in v. 6a, which is followed by the announcement of woe, and ended by the concluding formula in v. 14a. The basic text of this oracle is reconstructed as follows:

- 6 *kh ʔmr ʔdny yhw h* Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared:  
*ʔwy syr ʔš r hlʔth bh* Woe, O Cauldron, on which rust is found!
- 9b *ʔny ʔgdyl hmdwrh* I will make the pyre large.
- 10a *hrbh hʕsym* Pile on the logs,  
*hdlq hʔš* Kindle the fire,
- 11 *whʕmydh ʕl ghlyh* And set it upon its coals,  
*lmʕn thm* To heat it up,  
*wħrh nhšth* And make its copper glow,

<sup>10</sup> "Ez 24 — Überlegungen zu Tradition und Redaktion des Ezechielbuches", in J. Lust (ed.), *Ezekiel and His Book* (Leuven, 1986), pp. 266-82.

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| <p><i>wntkh btwkh tm<sup>2</sup>th</i><br/> <i>ttm hl<sup>2</sup>th</i></p>  | <p>And melt away its filthiness inside it;<br/>         And remove its rust.</p>   |
| <p>12 <i>wl<sup>2</sup> ts<sup>2</sup> mmmnh rbt hl<sup>2</sup>th</i></p>  | <p>But its abundance of rust will not<br/>         depart...</p>   |
| <p>13 <i>b<sup>2</sup>tm<sup>2</sup>tk zmh</i><br/> <i>l<sup>2</sup> t<sup>2</sup>hry <sup>c</sup>wd</i><br/> <i><sup>c</sup>d hnyhy <sup>2</sup>t hmty bk</i></p> | <p>On account of your lewd filthiness...<br/>         You shall never be cleansed again,<br/>         Until I have satisfied my fury against<br/>         you.</p> |
| <p>14a <i><sup>2</sup>ny yhw<sup>2</sup>h dbrty</i><br/> <i>w<sup>c</sup>syty</i></p>  | <p>I, Yahweh, have spoken,<br/>         And I will carry it out.</p>   |

The omitted segments, particularly the allusions to the blood-guilt of Jerusalem (*vv.* 6, 7-8, 9a), and fragments of varying lengths in *vv.* 12-14, are deleted as secondary. Fuhs maintains that both oracles serve as announcements of judgement, undoubtedly derived from before 587, probably even from Ezekiel himself (pp. 271, 273).

In response it must be admitted that it is possible that the prophet issued two separate oracles, involving the work song and the woe against the cauldron respectively. However, as Allen has demonstrated, in its present form the text exhibits numerous indications of coherence that cut across these divisions.<sup>11</sup> The passage is framed by a punning *inclusio* involving *špt* ... *špt*, "set on [the cauldron], set on", and *šp<sup>2</sup>tyk*, "I will judge you".<sup>12</sup> Effective use is made of repetition, particularly the messenger formula (*vv.* 3, 6, 9) which resounds like drum beats of inescapable doom. The two-fold "Woe to the bloody city!" keeps the audience's or reader's attention focussed on the fundamental causes of Jerusalem's demise. To postulate a secondary *Wiederaufnahme* for *v.* 9a, as some have done,<sup>13</sup> destroys this rhetorical effect. *V.* 6 should not be divorced from *vv.* 7-8, since the latter verses not only expand on the blood-

<sup>11</sup> Leslie C. Allen, "Ezekiel 24:3-14: A Rhetorical Perspective", *CBQ* 49 (1987), pp. 404-14.

<sup>12</sup> Following the versions and many manuscripts instead of the MT *šptwk*. It seems unlikely that the versions have altered the text to harmonize with xi 10, 11. Only in xxiii 24 and 45 is someone other than Yahweh or the prophet the subject of the verb *špt*. More serious is the absence of any plural antecedent in this text that might serve as the subject. The first person is much more appropriate after the emphatic *w<sup>2</sup>ny yhw<sup>2</sup>h* in the opening line of the verse. Cf. vii 3, 8, xvi 38, xxxvi 19; etc. The MT may be explained as an erroneous copying of a *waw* for a *yodh*.

<sup>13</sup> Fuhs, p. 268, following Bernhard Lang, "A neglected method in Ezekiel research: editorial criticism", *VT* 29 (1979), pp. 39-40.

stains of Jerusalem; they also provide an explanation of the corruption introduced in *v.* 6. Similarly, *vv.* 9-13 are to be interpreted as a unit. These verses describe the second stage of the judgement of the city. The first half (*vv.* 9-10) emphasizes Yahweh's direct involvement, and the second half (*vv.* 11-13) his motivation. These halves are also tied together by common vocabulary (*hrbh/rbt*, "abundance", *ʔš*, "fire") and assonance (*htm/ttm*, *whrhq/rqh*, *yhrw/whrh*).

In addition to these internal connections, by reintroducing many of the themes that have been dealt with in earlier oracles, the prophet's messages of judgement are brought to a fitting climax. Familiar from previous prophecies are: the rebellious house (*byt hmry*),<sup>14</sup> Jerusalem as the bloody city (*ʕyr hdmym*),<sup>15</sup> her uncleanness (*tmʔh*),<sup>16</sup> and need of cleansing (*thr*),<sup>17</sup> her lewdness (*zmh*),<sup>18</sup> burning coals of judgement (*ghlt*),<sup>19</sup> smelting/pouring out (*ntk*),<sup>20</sup> Yahweh's wrath (*hnh*),<sup>21</sup> the refusal to show pity (*lʔ ʔhws* and *lʔ ʔnhm*).<sup>22</sup> Even the charge to the prophet, *mšōl māšāl*, "Issue a literary figure" (*v.* 3), recalls xvii 2. The command in the preamble to record the message "this day" emphasizes explicitly that what follows represents the fulfillment and culmination of the prophecies of judgement preserved in chs iv-xxiii.

The unity of xxiv 3b-14 may also be defended on form-critical grounds, a subject we now address in greater detail.

### *Form and Structure*

Inadequate attention has been given to the form of this unit as a literary whole. Fohrer interpreted the passage as a report of a symbolic action and its explanation,<sup>23</sup> but this seems forced, and not many have followed suit. Because the introduction fails to state specifically that a popular quotation is involved in the oracle, the

<sup>14</sup> *V.* 3; cf. ii 3, 6, 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Vv.* 6, 9; cf. xxii 2, 3, 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Vv.* 11, 13; cf. xxii 15.

<sup>17</sup> *V.* 13 (3x); cf. xxii 24.

<sup>18</sup> *V.* 13; cf. xvi 27, 43, 58, xxii 9, 11, xxiii 21, 27, 29, 35, 44, 48a, 48b, 49.

<sup>19</sup> *V.* 11; cf. i 13, x 2.

<sup>20</sup> *V.* 11; cf. xxii 21.

<sup>21</sup> *V.* 8; cf. *v.* 13 + 27 times in Ezekiel.

<sup>22</sup> *V.* 14; cf. *v.* 11, viii 18, ix 10.

<sup>23</sup> Georg Fohrer, *Ezekiel* (Tübingen, 1955), pp. 138-40.

disputational qualities of this prophecy have been overlooked. However, the moment this possibility is suggested, features shared with other disputation addresses become apparent.

First, like many disputation speeches, the opening lines, which appear to reflect popular opinion, have a metaphorical quality. From the relatively small sample of Graffy's narrowly defined disputation speeches (pp. 21-3) found in the Old Testament, the quotation that is to be refuted often had a *māšāl*-like quality. Twice in Ezekiel a quotation is formally introduced as a *māšāl* (xii 22, xviii 2), and on at least two other occasions the quotation sounds like a *māšāl* even if it is not identified as such (xi 3, xxxvii 11b, perhaps also xxxiii 24). Although Jeremiah does not announce it as a proverb, one of his three disputation addresses opens with what is known from Ezek. xviii 2 to have been a widely circulated proverb (Jer. xxxi 29). The only certain speech of this type in Isaiah (xxviii 14-19) opens with a *māšāl*-like metaphor:

We have made a covenant with Death,  
And with Sheol we have made a pact...

In fact, those who are charged with circulating this comment are identified as *nšy lšwn mšly h'm hzh*, which may be rendered, "scuffers, composers of taunt verses for this people."<sup>24</sup> Although *mšlym* may be translated as "rulers", *lšwn*, from *lyš*, "to scoff", suggests strong wisdom influence.<sup>25</sup> It is perhaps in the nature of the case that the types of comments that appeal to the people, circulate widely, and catch the prophet's ear, should have a picturesque quality.

This is certainly the case with our text. In fact, this one is identified as a *māšāl*. According to most interpretations, in *v.* 3 Yahweh commands the prophet to speak a parable to the rebellious house. However, one wonders if *mšl ʔl byt hmry mšl*, should not be rendered, "Quote a proverb to the rebellious house". To be sure, the same

<sup>24</sup> NJPS (i.e. the new translation published by the Jewish Publication Society of America), note.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1965-1982), pp. 1064, 1072; Otto Kaiser, *Der Prophet Jesaja Kapitel 13-39* (Göttingen, 1973), p. 197, "Ihr Sprüchemacher", E. tr. *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (London and Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 248, 250-1, "You proverb-makers"; John D. W. Watts *Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, 1985), pp. 365-6, 369, "speech-makers". W. H. Irwin's, "reigning wits" (*Isaiah 28-33: Translation with Philological Notes* [Rome, 1977], p. 25), combines the two meanings of *mšl*, "ruler", and "wit".



idiom occurs in xvii 2, but there its meaning is determined by the preceding parallel command, *hwd hydh*, "Propound a riddle". Although the eagle and vine motifs developed in the parable that follows there have antecedents elsewhere, few would deny that the core of that text at least is authentically Ezekielian, and that the poem gives evidence of his own literary genius. Even as radical a scholar as G. Hölscher, who credits the prophet with fewer than 170 of the 1,273 verses, allowed the prophet most of xvii 1-9.<sup>26</sup>

But the poem preserved in xxiv 3b-5 is quite different. To be sure, the verse is presented as the words of Yahweh, but its secular tone gives it the ring of a popular work-song (*Arbeitslied*), such as would be sung in houses throughout Israel while performing routine household chores,<sup>27</sup> analogous to "Polly Put the Kettle On".<sup>28</sup> Comparable well-digging (Num. xxi 17-18) and vintage (Judg. ix 27, xxi 21; Isa. xvi 10; cf. ix 2) songs have been proposed.<sup>29</sup> However, the fact that this one is identified as a *māšāl* suggests that the residents of Jerusalem may have been using it as a figure of speech as well.

Second, the classification of this oracle as a disputation speech is not excluded by any of the disclaimers that Graffy suggests rule out this genre (pp. 22-3):

(1) The popular saying is quoted to be refuted, not to illustrate guilt. Spiritually and theologically the parable of the boiling cauldron is neutral, and the nearest accusatory element is the reference to the addressees as *byt hmry*, "the rebellious house". Some would see the prophet to be responding to this quality (Allen [n. 11], p. 406), but the distance between *vv.* 3 and 6 renders this position unlikely.

(2) If *vv.* 3b-5 preserve a popular work song, this qualifies them an actual quotation, not simply an implied opinion.

(3) The oracle has a pronounced argumentative tone, but it cannot be classified as a normal judgement speech, or woe oracle, etc.

(4) The refutation clearly answers the quotation. The two domi-

<sup>26</sup> *Hesekiel: Der Dichter und das Buch* (Giessen, 1924), pp. 97-102.

<sup>27</sup> So A. van den Born, *Ezechiël* (Roermond en Maaseik, 1954), p. 154.

<sup>28</sup> Suggested by John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, 1969), p. 178.

<sup>29</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3rd edn, Tübingen, 1964), pp. 118-19, E. tr. *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford and New York, 1965), pp. 88-9.

nant motifs in the song are the pot and the piled up wood for the fire. The rebuttals occur in this order, with the first paying special attention to the pot and its contents, and the second to the wood and the fire. In fact the refutations themselves scarcely leave the figure.

(5) The text does not reflect any dialogic interchange. Yahweh (through his messenger) alone speaks.

(6) The interchange is provoked by the people's comments, not Yahweh's, as in Malachi. The aim is not to clarify points introduced in the beginning, but to dispute their opinions.

(7) Although the refutations open with *hōy*, "Woe!", this "woe" does not determine the structure or style.

(8) The opening and concluding formulae confirm this oracle as a self-contained unit, rather than part of a larger speech.

Third, in spite of the absence of a formal identification of a quotation to be rebutted, the text displays all of the structural and stylistic features which Graffy has observed to be characteristic of disputation oracles (pp. 107-18). According to his scheme, the oracle divides structurally as follows:

Introduction	(1-3a)
The Popular Saying	(3b-5)
The Refutation	(6-13)
The First Rejoinder	(6-8)
The Second Rejoinder	(9-13)
Conclusion	(14)

Once *vv.* 3b-5 have been identified as a *māšāl* that is being widely quoted among the people, the refutational style of *vv.* 6-13 becomes apparent. In fact, the rejoinders display close formal links with the rebuttals found in disputation addresses found elsewhere in Ezekiel. First, the refutation is divided into two parts, clearly set apart by identical introductions (*vv.* 6, 9):

*lkn kh ʾmr ʾdny yhw  
ʾwy ʾyr hdmym*

Therefore, thus has the Lord Yahweh declared:

Woe to the bloody city!

Rather than this redundancy being treated as a sign of secondary editorial involvement, as is commonly done, these lines should be recognized as rhetorical signals announcing the two parts of a geminated rejoinder to a popular saying. Similar double refutations are found in Ezekiel in xxi 2-12, xxi 14-17, xxxiii 23-9 (also Isa. xlix

14-25; Hag. i 2-11); xviii 3-20 and xx 34-44 contain three-part refutations.

The ways in which xxiv 6-8 and 9-13 are introduced also resemble the openings to Ezekiel's refutations. It seems to have been characteristic for him to open his rejoinders with the particle *lkn*, "Therefore", followed by the messenger formula, *kh ʾmr ʾdny yhw*, "Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared".<sup>30</sup> The same phenomenon occurs here.

Fourth, the oracle has close ties with another disputation speech, xxi 1-12. Structurally, both have twinned refutations. Rhetorically, in both the rebuttals open with *lkn* plus *kh ʾmr ʾdny yhw*, "Therefore, thus has the Lord Yahweh declared". Thematically, even if the vessel has a different significance in each oracle, the most obvious link is the common motif, the pot, referred to by *syr*. The expression occurs nowhere else in Ezekiel. Furthermore, theologically the notion of election and special status, vaguely hinted at in the two-fold reference to *mbhr*, "choice", in xxiv 4-5, finds its analogue in the implied claim of the people of Jerusalem to divine protection, as represented by the flesh safely stored in the pot (xi 3), and their overt declaration in the disputation speech immediately following (xi 15) that they are the special objects of Yahweh's favour. Finally, the announcement, "I will judge you", which occurs twice in the earlier oracle (xi 10, 11), finds an echo in *špyk* in xxiv 14 (cf. n. 12).

Although scholars have noted some of these connections, it is surprising that the ties with xi 1-12 have not had a greater bearing on the interpretation of xxiv 1-14. Is it not possible that both preserve a popular slogan that was being parroted by the people in Jerusalem to celebrate their special status as the truly elect people of God? In this instance an everyday cooking song is being illegitimately exploited to buttress an illusory sense of security and privilege. In order to destroy these illusions the use of the song must be refuted directly.

In view of all these considerations it is tempting to identify Ezek. xxiv 1-14 as another hitherto unrecognized disputation speech. The principal difficulty with this conclusion is the absence of a specific identification of the song as a quotation.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps some comment

<sup>30</sup> xi 7, xi 16, 17, xii 23, xii 28, xxxiii 25, xxxvii 12. Isa. xxviii 14 is similar but not identical.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. xi 3, xi 15, xii 22, xxii 27, xviii 2, xx 32, xxxiii 10, xxxvii 11.

like “Do you hear what they are saying?” was originally included between the messenger formula and the song in *v.* 3, but in the course of transmission it has inadvertently fallen out. On the other hand, if the prophet is actually quoting a well-known figure, it would have been immediately recognized as such, and an ellipsis at this point would have been tolerable. In fact, it would connect stylistically with the sequel, in which the relationship between announced statements of having spoken and the actual speech is not entirely clear (cf. xxiv 18). The presence of the messenger formula in *v.* 3 may suggest that even the prophet’s quotation of the proverb is directed by Yahweh.

On the other hand, our fascination with the resemblances between this text and Ezekiel’s other disputation speeches may have led us up the proverbial garden path. The absence of an introductory announcement of a quotation may not have been accidental. The cooking song need not have been a popular verse that was circulating among the people. It may just as well have been an *ad hoc* composition by the prophet,<sup>32</sup> reflecting the viewpoint of the audience, and functioning as the thesis in this disputation oracle. The imagery of cooking meat over a hot fire may derive from Ezekiel’s pre-exilic experience in preparing sacrificial meals in the temple.<sup>33</sup> However, by referring to the pot as a *syf*, the prophet deliberately alludes to the popular saying dealt with earlier in xi 1-12, thereby capturing their attention. The rhetorical strategy finds an analogue in Isaiah’s “Song of the Vinedresser and his Vineyard” (v 1b-2a). Undoubtedly the opening lines of this “love song” will have been greeted with applause from the audience. Similarly, if Ezekiel’s song ever managed to reach Jerusalem prior to the fall of the city, the residents will have cheered at the prophet’s apparent celebration of their special status before Yahweh.

Ezekiel’s verse has its theological origin in one of the fundamental pillars upon which the security of the citizens of Jerusalem was being defended in official circles: the inviolability of the city. But, like Isaiah, this prophet is a clever rhetorician and his strategy is deliberate. Having gained the attention of his hearers, and having caught their imagination with a song that feeds their perverted

<sup>32</sup> So also Marvin A. Sweeney in private communication.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. ii 12-28, which describes the abuses of Phinehas and Hophni in the preparation of sacrificial meals at the temple in Shiloh.

manner of thinking, he proceeds immediately to destroy such false notions by systematically refuting the validity of his own composition. Since Ezekiel's purpose here is so similar to the oracles in which popular opinion is explicitly quoted, it is not surprising that he finds in the form of the disputation address an effective vehicle for refuting false notions of any kind, whether they are expressed in popular sayings, or captured in his own literary compositions. Furthermore, the refutation, which appears on the surface to conform to Graffy's pattern of bifurcated rejoinders, actually follows Murray's dispute (*vv.* 6-8), counter-thesis (*vv.* 9-14) structure. Once this is recognized it becomes even more apparent that Graffy's definition of a "disputation speech" should be expanded to include any oracle that attacks prevailing opinion, whether that opinion is quoted or not.

### *Interpretation*

#### *Introduction*

- 1 Now the word of Yahweh came to me  
     in the ninth year,  
     in the tenth month,  
     on the tenth [day] of the month,  
     as follows:
- 2 Human being,  
     Record<sup>34</sup> the date, this very day—<sup>35</sup>  
     The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem on this very  
     day—  
     Compose a parable concerning<sup>36</sup> the rebellious house,  
     and declare to them:

The oracle begins with Ezekiel's regular word-event formula, followed by a date notice.<sup>37</sup> On the basis of an early Nisan 597 date

<sup>34</sup> Kethib *ktwb*, a rare occurrence of plene orthography in the imperative. Cf. Quere *ktb*, conforming with the defectively written imperatives in *vv.* 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> BHS deletes  $\gamma$  *šm hzh*, following Syr. and Vg. But cf. LXX and Tg.

<sup>36</sup>  $\gamma$  in the sense of  $\zeta$ .

<sup>37</sup> Most scholars contend that it has been secondarily inserted under the influence of 2 Kgs xxv 1. Cf. Ernst Kutsch, *Die chronologischen Daten des Ezechielbuches* (Göttingen, 1985), pp. 62-3; Wevers (n. 9), p. 189; Zimmerli (n. 9), pp. 562-3, E. tr., pp. 498-9; Bernhard Lang, *Ezechiel: Der Prophet und das Buch* (Darmstadt, 1981), p. 35; Walther Eichrodt, *Der Prophet Hesekiel* (Göttingen, 1966), p. 225-6, E. tr. *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (London and Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 336-7. How-

for Jehoiachin's deportation, the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year would fix the date of the oracle (and the commencement of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem) at 15 January 588 B.C.<sup>38</sup> The charge to the prophet in *v.* 2 consists of three commands. First, he is ordered to put a matter in writing. The urgency of the situation is highlighted by the repetition of "this very day" (*šm hywm hzh*), which creates an envelope effect around the actual announcement of the event. Although the term *šm* is used demonstratively,<sup>39</sup> it provides an assonantal foreshadowing of the cooking of *šmym/šmwł*, "bones", to follow. The "day of bones", i.e., death (cf. xxxvii 1-14), is signalled by the arrival at Jerusalem of the king of Babylon. Coinciding with this momentous event, Ezekiel is charged to *mšōl māšāl*, "compose a proverb". Like the disputation oracles in ch. xi, this message, although intended primarily for the exiles, finds its point of departure in popular opinion in the homeland. However, while the residents of this city continue to cling tenaciously to their illusions of special favour with Yahweh, the reference to the exilic addressees as *byt hmry*, "the rebellious house" (cf. ii 5, 6, 8, iii 9) attests their own continued intransigent resistance of Yahweh's divine lordship.

### *The Thesis*

3 Thus has the Lord<sup>40</sup> Yahweh declared:

Put on the cauldron, put [it] on;<sup>41</sup>

Then pour water into it.<sup>42</sup>

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ever, as we hope to demonstrate in another context, this explanation is not entirely convincing.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Providence, 1956), pp. 27-8; Kutsch, p. 83; Zimmerli, p. 15\*, E. tr., pp. 15, 498; Abraham Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem: An Historical—Chronological Study", *IEJ* 18 (1968), pp. 150-1; idem, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom", *SVT* 28 (1974), p. 145. Cf. John H. Hayes and Paul K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature* (Atlanta, 1988), p. 97, who date the event one year later.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hébreu biblique* (Rome, 1923) § 143k.

<sup>40</sup> *šny* is missing in the LXX.

<sup>41</sup> *BHS* suggests deletion of the second *špt*, after LXX, Syr. But Ezekiel displays a fondness for duplication in such contexts. Cf. xx 4, xxi 14, xxii 2, xxxvii 9.

<sup>42</sup> Since *syr* is usually feminine (cf. *v.* 4; 2 Kgs iv 38; etc.), the masculine suffix on *bw* looks like a scribal error for *bh*. But cf. the masculine form in Jer. i 13, which seems to underlie the present oracle.

- 4 Gather into it the pieces<sup>43</sup> [of meat]—  
 Every good piece, thigh and shoulder.  
 Fill it<sup>44</sup> with the choicest cuts.<sup>45</sup>
- 5 Take<sup>46</sup> the choicest<sup>47</sup> of the flock.  
 Furthermore, heap up the logs under it.<sup>48</sup>  
 Bring it to a brisk boil.<sup>49</sup>  
 Indeed boil<sup>50</sup> its cuts in it.

By means of a series of imperatives the artistically composed opening poem traces the of actions of a cook in preparing a special meat dish: (1) Set up the apparatus.<sup>51</sup> The duplication of the verb reflects the cook's enthusiasm for the task. (2) Pour in the water.<sup>52</sup> (3) Put in the meat. While "flesh" (*bšr*) will be used in the refutation (*v.* 10), the song uses a rare term *nṯh* for a cut of meat. *šmym*, literally "bones", in *v.* 4c is to be interpreted broadly to include the meat attached to the bones. (4) Pile on the logs under the pot. The verb *dwr*, "to heap up," hints at the strength of the fire to be lit.

<sup>43</sup> *nṯyh* looks like an error for *nṯym*, perhaps under the influence of the following *šyh*. The suffix is lacking in the LXX and Syr.

<sup>44</sup> *mlʔ* is omitted in the LXX.

<sup>45</sup> MT *šmym*, literally, "bones", but the context suggests the large bones with their meat. The LXX ἐκσεσαρκισμένα ἀπὸ τῶν ὀστέων "fleshed off from the bones", and Syr. *dšmyt grmh* are interpretations.

<sup>46</sup> *lqwḥ*, vocalized in the MT like an infinitive absolute, functions as an imperative within the sequence of imperatives, casting doubt on the correctness of the reading.

<sup>47</sup> *mbhr* appears to be a haplographic error for *mmbhr*. Cf. LXX, Syr.

<sup>48</sup> Read *hšym* with the LXX and *v.* 10 in place of MT *hšmym*, "the bones", which is meaningless. The extra *m* seems to have been mistakenly taken from the original *mṯyḥ* which followed. Cf. G. R. Driver, "Linguistic and Textual Problems: Ezekiel", *Bib* 19 (1938), p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> The redundancy of the MT *nṯh nṯyh*, "boil its boilings", is preserved in the LXX. But *BHS* and many commentators follow 2 mss<sup>Ken</sup> and emend the second word to *nṯyh*, "its pieces". Cf. Fuhs (*n.* 10), p. 272, n. 21, who anticipates the pair *šmym* // *nṯyh* as in *v.* 4. But the Kennicott manuscripts may have followed the same reasoning and intentionally changed the reading.

<sup>50</sup> The plural perfect form *bšlw* disturbs the sequence of imperatives and should probably be revocalized as a piel imperative. The *qal* occurs only in Joel iv 13 [iii 13], where the meaning, "to become ripe", is quite different. Allen (*n.* 11), pp. 405, 412, n. 27, emends to the *qal* jussive form, *ybšlw*. Cf. Tg.

<sup>51</sup> Usually *syr* refers to a large wide-mouthed clay vessel. For an illustration see *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Leicester and Wheaton, 1980), III, p. 1251 §42; cf. James L. Kelso, *The Ceramic Vocabulary of the Old Testament* (New Haven, Conn., 1948), p. 27 and fig. 16. The present usage is illustrated in 2 Kgs iv 38-41 (cf. Job xli 31), where *syr* also occurs in conjunction with *špt*, "to set (on the fire)", presumably on a three-stone tripod.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. the Israelite prohibition, Exod. xxiii 19, xxxiv 26; Deut. xiv 21.

(5) Boil the meat. The verb *ṛṭh*, which occurs elsewhere only in Job xli 23 and xxx 27, speaks of the turbulence of cooking water. The last line summarizes the entire process.

Earlier it was suggested that the poem could have derived from an everyday activity of preparing a meal. But the cook does not appear to be fixing an ordinary dinner. An extra-ordinarily sumptuous meal seems to be implied by the quality and amount of meat being prepared. Not only is the slaughtered animal to be the choicest (*mbḥr*) of the flock; the cauldron is to be filled (*ml<sup>2</sup>*) with "every good piece" (*kl nṭḥ ṭwb*), with particular reference to the thigh and shoulder, and its choice cuts (*mbḥr ṣmym*). The vividness of the verbs creates an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation.

The fact that this is no ordinary meal seems to be confirmed in the prophet's rebuttal. In the first place, the vessel is described as a bronze (*nḥšt*) cauldron (*v.* 11). Since the average household cooked with clay pots, this would suggest that either a court banquet or a cultic meal underlies the song. The prophet's concern with issues relating to purity and defilement in *vv.* 11-12 may tip the scales in favour of the latter.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the preparation of a *zebah* meal is in view. Given the prophet's priestly heritage and interests, this cultic derivation would not be surprising. Nevertheless, the song itself is secular in tone.

It was also noted earlier that this is not the first time the motif of a cooking pot has been employed in Ezekiel's prophecy. According to xi 2-12, three years earlier the prophet had been called upon to reinterpret a popular saying in which the pot (*syr*) had figured as a sign of the security of the residents of Jerusalem. This song should probably be interpreted similarly. On the surface, the song has been composed to bolster the people's sense of well-being before Yahweh. For the Israelite, participation in the *zebah* meal signified acceptance by and fellowship with Yahweh (cf. xx 41, xliii 25-7).<sup>54</sup> The doctrine of election seems to be implicit in this poem. The flock (*ṣ<sup>2</sup>n*) represents the nation, the people of Yahweh.<sup>55</sup> To have been selected (*mbḥr*) as the fare for this banquet is viewed as a privilege.

<sup>53</sup> For proponents of a cultic interpretation of the pot see Fuhs (n. 10), p. 269-71, following Fohrer (n. 23), p. 140; James L. Kelso, "Ezekiel's Parable of the Corroded Copper Caldron", *JBL* 64 (1945), pp. 391-3.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Bernhard Lang, "zbt", *TWAT* 2 (1977), cols 520-31, E. tr. *TDOT* 4 (1980), pp. 17-29.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. ch. xxxiv, which expands on Jer. xxiii 1-8, xxv 34-8.



In keeping with ch. xi, in which the pot had represented Jerusalem and the elect were those inside the city, the choice cuts refer to those who remain behind after the deportation of 597 B.C. Undoubtedly, a Jerusalem audience would have received this song with great enthusiasm, and interpreted it in a positive sense<sup>56</sup> to celebrate their claims to special divine favour.

*The Dispute*

- 6 Therefore, thus has the Lord<sup>57</sup> Yahweh declared:  
 Woe to the city of bloodshed—  
 The cauldron whose corruption<sup>58</sup> is inside it;  
 Whose corruption has not been removed!<sup>59</sup>  
 Remove<sup>60</sup> it piece by piece;<sup>61</sup>  
 Not lot has fallen on it.
- 7 For her blood is within her;  
 On the exposed rock she has put it;<sup>62</sup>  
 She did not pour it out on the ground,  
 To cover it with dust.
- 8 In order to rouse wrath,  
 To take vengeance,  
 I have<sup>63</sup> placed her blood upon the bare rock,  
 that it might not be covered.

<sup>56</sup> This is not the case in Mic. iii 2-3, where the prophet speaks of the rulers of Israel's cannibalistic exploitation of their subjects.

<sup>57</sup> *ʾdny* is missing in the LXX.

<sup>58</sup> Read *hl<sup>2</sup>th* with *mappiq* in the final *h*, or without the *taw*. Cf. *BHS*.

<sup>59</sup> *l<sup>2</sup> ys<sup>2</sup>h*, literally, "has not gone out from it."

<sup>60</sup> MT *hw<sup>2</sup>sy<sup>2</sup>h* is probably a perfect (used impersonally) with the third feminine suffix referring to *hl<sup>2</sup>th*. Allen (n. 11), p. 408, n. 11, follows A. B. Davidson, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Cambridge, 1900), p. 175, and G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book Ezekiel* (Edinburgh, 1936), p. 274, in removing the *mappiq* and treating the form as an emphatic imperative. In view of the difficulty of v. 6b and the fact that v. 7 joins smoothly to v. 6a, Zimmerli (n. 9), p. 557, E. tr. p. 494, deletes these two lines as secondary.

<sup>61</sup> The distributive sense is emphasized by the duplication and the use of the distributive *lamedh*. On the latter see GKC §§ 134g, 123a. Cf. iv 6.

<sup>62</sup> Influenced by v. 8, the LXX renders *smthw* and *spkthw* in the following line with the first person.

<sup>63</sup> William H. Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Copper Caldron and Blood on the Rock (Chapter 24:1-14)", in R. A. Coughenour (ed.), *For Me to Live: Essays in Honor of James Leon Kelso* (Cleveland, 1972), p. 31, n. 28, takes the ending of *ntty* as a second feminine. This compels him also to emend *dmh*, "her blood", to *dmk*, "your blood". But, as Allen (n. 11), p. 408, n. 14, observes, this destroys the inclusio of *dmh*. Cf. v. 7a.

The transition from song to dispute is formally marked by *lākēn*, followed by the messenger formula. The prophet's disposition toward popular opinion is reflected in his opening scathing pronouncement of woe upon the city. However, instead of following the form of a woe oracle, with its typical participial accusation (cf. xxxiii 2), Ezekiel simply characterizes the object of the woe as "the city of bloodshed" (*Syr hdmym*), that is, Jerusalem.<sup>64</sup> At issue is simply the fact of her guilt, not the manner in which it was incurred. For information on the latter, knowledge of previous charges involving bloodshed, such as those found in vii 23, ix 9, and xxii 1-12, is assumed.

The actual dispute that follows consists of a shocking reinterpretation of the status of the meat and its significance within the cauldron. The appositional comment, *syr ʔsr ḥlʔ th bh*, usually rendered "a pot whose corruption is inside it", is a crux. Most modern versions and interpreters follow LXX *λόζ* and interpret *ḥlʔh* as "rust",<sup>65</sup> assuming a derivation from a root, *ḥlʔ*, "to be rusty".<sup>66</sup> Although the image of oxidized iron, with its reddish appearance, would be an appropriate representation of a bloody city, this interpretation is questionable on several counts.

First, *v.* 11 notes that the pot is made of copper or bronze (*nhšt*). Copper does not rust; when it oxidizes it turns green, suggesting a verdigrised condition for this vessel.<sup>67</sup> "Rust" can be retained only if the term is generalized to metallic corrosion in a broad sense.<sup>68</sup>

Second, it assumes that *ḥlʔth* is primarily a metallurgical term, and refers to a defect in the metal of which the pot is made.<sup>69</sup> How-

<sup>64</sup> Cf. ch. xxiii, where Oholibah is expressly equated with Jerusalem.

<sup>65</sup> *Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible, New International Version.*

<sup>66</sup> Cf. G. R. Driver, "Ancient Lore and Modern Knowledge", in A. Caquot (ed.), *Hommages a André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris, 1971), pp. 283-4; idem (n. 48), p. 176; K. Seybold, "ḥlh". *TWAT* 2 (1977), col. 962, E. tr. *TDOT* 4 (1980), p. 401.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Kelso (n. 53), pp. 391-3; Driver, "Ancient Lore", p. 283. The latter's influence is apparent in the *NEB* (*New English Bible*), "a pot green with corrosion".

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Greek *λόζ* which may refer to the corrosion of iron or brass, LSJ, *s.v.* In the New Testament *λόζ* also refers to the corrosion of gold and silver. *Jas.* v 2-3; cf. *Matt.* vi 19-20.

<sup>69</sup> Kelso (n. 53), pp. 391-3, has explained how this could occur. If the vessel was made of hammered copper, the corrosion might have occurred in a dent or a scratch that was inaccessible to scouring. On the other hand, if cast copper was used, the quality of the metal may have suffered from countless tiny air bubbles

ever, etymologically, it is doubtful that *hl<sup>2</sup>h* should be treated as a technical metallurgical term. Although the root is relatively rare, *hl<sup>2</sup>* is never used of metal in the Old Testament.<sup>70</sup> In 2 Chr. xvi 12 the verb denotes “to be diseased”, which answers to *hllh*, in the parallel text, 1 Kgs xv 23. The noun from the same root, *thl<sup>2</sup>ym*, “diseases”, is attested five times.<sup>71</sup> For some of these Driver proposed the sense “to be gangrenous”, alluding to the greening of the flesh ([n. 66], pp. 283-4). *hl<sup>2</sup>* should therefore probably be viewed as an Aramaized by-form of *hllh*, and interpreted according to its normal usage, “to be sick”.<sup>72</sup> At best one might speak of a kind of “copper disease” (Kelso [n. 53], p. 392).

But the question of what is spoiled in the present context remains. Any interpretation which finds here a “rusty cauldron” would see the corruption in the metal itself. Zimmerli speaks of “a serious ‘sickness’ of the metal” which cannot be removed by cleansing ([n. 9], p. 565; E. tr., p. 500). But this interpretation of “a pot whose corruption is inside it” is awkward. It is more natural to view *hl<sup>2</sup>h bh* as the contents of the pot, that is, the meat. The statement then represents a challenge to the people’s mistaken perception of their status. Far from being Yahweh’s choice cuts, the residents of Jerusalem are nothing more than putrid flesh, fit only to be discarded as refuse.

This interpretation helps to clarify the difficulties posed by the last line of *v.* 6. In everyday life impartial decisions were often arrived at by casting the lot (*gwrl*). Although to the modern mind this appears to have the character of luck or chance, to the ancients, even in secular affairs, the way a dice fell was divinely determined (Prov. xvi 33). The notion of casting lots “before Yahweh”

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which appear when it is cast at too high a temperature. These holes give the metal a porous quality, and allow corrosion to set in “under the skin”. To speak of the corrosion being “inside it” (*bh*) suggests an internal corruption of the metal rendering the pot worthless and fit only to be melted down into scrap.

<sup>70</sup> But cf. Sir. xii 10, which employs the *hiphil* of *hl<sup>2</sup>* in connection with bronze. Apart from Ezek xxiv 6, 11, this is the only occurrence of the metallurgical usage of the root cited by KB<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> Deut. xxix 21 (22); Jer. xiv 18, xvi 4; 2 Chr. xxi 19; Ps. ciii 3.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the same alternation of *hl<sup>2</sup>* and *hllh/hly* in rabbinic writings. M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London and New York, 1903), pp. 464, 467. On analogous Aramaized forms with *aleph* replacing *hē* see M. Wagner, *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramäismen im Alttestamentlichen Hebräisch* (Berlin, 1966), p. 128, § 10; GKC § 75hh.

highlighted the sacral nature of the act.<sup>73</sup> The best known use of the lot in the Old Testament involved the allocation of land among the tribes and families of Israel (Num. xxvi 55-6; Josh. xiii 6; etc.), but it was also employed in cultic contexts. In the first-temple era the religious functionaries were assigned by lot (1 Chr. xxiv-xxvi). On the day of atonement the lot was used to determine which goats Yahweh had chosen for the sin offering and the scapegoat (Lev. xvi 7-10). When Ezekiel declares that no lot has fallen on this piece of meat he is repudiating the people's claim to special status before Yahweh.<sup>74</sup>

In *vv.* 7-8 the prophet elaborates on the reasons why Jerusalem has been rejected. In the process he seems to be mixing his metaphors. The thought of cooking a meat dish reminds him of Lev. xvii 10-16, in which instructions for the preparation of kosher food are spelled out. The statement that Jerusalem's blood is within her alludes to the prescription of bleeding an animal that has been slain for food. Since the blood was viewed as sacred, and represented the life of the victim, the consumption of meat with the blood still in it was strictly prohibited. The people of Jerusalem may have thought they were choice cuts, but as far as Ezekiel was concerned they were unfit for consumption; no lot would fall on their city.

However, the figure changes in the remainder of the verse. Now Jerusalem is described as the offender, not the victim. At issue in *vv.* 7b-8 is the violation of a second taboo cited in Lev. xvii 13, namely, leaving the blood of a slain animal exposed. It seems best, therefore, to understand *dmh*, "her blood", as "the blood she has shed", or "her blood-guilt". The Levitical prescription required that, whenever a game animal or bird was slain, the blood was to be poured out and covered with earth. To leave it exposed was to provoke the wrath of God, the source and guarantor of all life. In the case of the murder of a fellow human being in particular, the blood of the victim cried out for vengeance (Gen. iv 10). But the crime of the residents of Jerusalem was not merely one of neglect. Instead of covering the blood with dust, they had willfully poured it out on the smooth bare rock (*shyh sl'*), where there was no soil,

<sup>73</sup> Josh. xviii 6-10, xix 51. Cf. W. Dommershausen, "gwr", *TWAT* 1 (1973), cols 991-8, E. tr. *TDOT* 3 (1975), pp. 450-6.

<sup>74</sup> Allen's interpretation of the idiom *gwr npl 'l*, "a lot has fallen upon", as "retribution" ([n. 11] p. 409), is not convincing.

as if to advertise their deeds. The allusion may be either to the sacrificial slaughter of children on the high places,<sup>75</sup> or to the blatant criminal activity, the judicial murder by the leaders in the city. The unatoned for blood of innocent victims in the city calls out for vengeance.

In a surprising turn, the purpose clause of *v.* 8 introduces the hearers to Yahweh's response to this blatant impiety. With pointed irony he declares in effect, "If you want to pour out the blood of your victims on the exposed rock [as an act of sacrilege], I shall see to it that it remains there." His motive is clear. In a way reminiscent of Job, who requested that his blood not be covered so that God might forever be reminded not to allow the offences committed against him to be forgotten (Job xvi 18), Yahweh determines to take vengeance on the city. He will ensure that the blood on the rock remains exposed as a perpetual witness to their crimes and a reminder to him to visit the criminal city with his judgement. For the first time in this oracle the prophet announces Yahweh's personal response to the sins of Jerusalem. In so doing, he paves the way for the counter-thesis, where the stress will be placed on the fury of Yahweh's judgement.

### *The Counter-Thesis*

9 Therefore, thus has the Lord<sup>76</sup> Yahweh declared:

Woe to the city of bloodshed!<sup>77</sup>

Indeed I myself will make the pyre huge.

10 Pile<sup>78</sup> on the logs.

Kindle the fire.

Cook the meat thoroughly.

Pour out the broth.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Cf. xvi 20-1, xx 26, 31, particularly if the meal being prepared was intended for some cultic celebration. So Brownlee (n. 63), p. 32. Cf. the wrath provoked when the king of Moab sacrificed his son on the wall, 2 Kgs iii 27.

<sup>76</sup> <sup>ʔ</sup>*dny* is missing in the LXX.

<sup>77</sup> *BHS* follows the LXX in deleting this line. However, emphatic repetition is characteristic of Ezekielian style. Cf. *špt* in *v.* 3.

<sup>78</sup> Wevers (n. 9), p. 191, follows the LXX, Tg., in interpreting *hrbh*, *hdlq*, *htm*, and *hrqh* (MT) as infinitives absolute. <sup>ʔ</sup>*gdyl* in *v.* 9 points to Yahweh as the subject. But the series continues in *v.* 11 with a clear imperative, *wh<sup>ʕ</sup>mydh*.

<sup>79</sup> *whrqh hmrqhh*, literally, "season with seasoning", is ill-suited to the progress of thought. On the assumption that *t* has been confused with *q*, Driver (n. 48), p. 175, emends to *whrth hmrthh*, "and stew the stew". So also NJPS. *BHS*, *RSV*,

- Let the bones be charred.<sup>80</sup>
- 11 Then let it stand<sup>81</sup> empty<sup>82</sup> on the coals,<sup>83</sup>  
 So that it becomes hot,  
 And its copper glows,  
 And its filthiness inside it is poured out.  
 Its corruption shall be consumed.<sup>84</sup>
- 12 Its corruption is troublesome,<sup>85</sup>  
 And the magnitude of its corruption will not leave.  
 Into the fire with its corruption.<sup>86</sup>
- 13 On account of your lewd filthiness—<sup>87</sup>  
 Because I tried to cleanse you,

*NEB*, and many commentators since R. Kraetzschmar, *Das Buch Ezechiel* (Göttingen, 1900), p. 196, have emended to *whrhq hmrq*, or *whrq hmrq*, “and pour out the broth”, which finds support in the LXX: *καὶ ἐλαττωθῆ ὁ ζωμὸς* “and the broth becomes little”.

<sup>80</sup> *wh<sup>s</sup>mw<sup>t</sup> yhrw* is suspicious. (1) It is missing in the LXX. (2) The imperfect replaces the previous imperatives. (3) The feminine *mw<sup>t</sup>* is used elsewhere in Ezekiel only of “dead bones” (vi 5, xxxii 27, xxxvii 1, 3-5, 7, 11), while “pieces of bone” is rendered by the masculine, *mw<sup>m</sup>*. Cf. *vv.* 4-5, (4) In the context *hrh* relates more correctly to the scorching of the pot, not the burning of bones. Cf. *v.* 11. Freedy (n. 9), p. 151, suggests the phrase was “probably inserted as a scruple to establish correctly the relevance of the figure of the pot song to the fate of Jerusalem”. However, the charring of the bones is not out of place if the pot is allowed to cook until all the liquid has evaporated. Cf. the reference to the empty cauldron in *v.* 11. Nor is the jussive out of place in the context of imperatives. Cf. Tg.

<sup>81</sup> MT imperatival *wh<sup>s</sup>mydh* is rendered as an infinitive absolute in the LXX. *BHS* reads *w<sup>s</sup>mydh* or *wh<sup>s</sup>mdtyh<sup>s</sup>*, following Tg and Syr.

<sup>82</sup> *rqh*, missing in the LXX, is deleted by Zimmerli (n. 9), p. 558, E. tr., p. 495, on metric grounds. Freedy (n. 9), p. 139, argues the word was added after the two separate segments comprising *vv.* 3-11 had become disjointed and interwoven to emphasize that the pot was “empty”. Allen (n. 11), p. 412, notes the word play with *whrhq* in the previous verse along with *yhrw* and *whrh* here.

<sup>83</sup> As with *nthyh* in *v.* 4 above, the suffix *on qhlyh* appears superfluous.

<sup>84</sup> *tittum* is an Aramaized imperfect form of *tmm*, “to be perfect, finished”. Cf. GKC § 67g, q; Bauer-Leander § 58.

<sup>85</sup> *t<sup>s</sup>nym hl<sup>t</sup>* is missing in the LXX and usually deleted as a dittographic gloss after *t<sup>m</sup> hl<sup>t</sup>h* in the previous verse. But Allen (n. 11), p. 410, n. 23, suggests this results in too short a “line”. Driver (n. 48), p. 176, transposes the consonants of the second word to read *l<sup>t</sup>h*, i.e., “you shall weary yourself with great toil”. The flow of thought is retained, however, if *hl<sup>t</sup>* is read as *hl<sup>t</sup>*, and the vocalization reflected by a final *h* is assumed. This interpretation is supported by *v.* 6, which follows the same word with a reference to the removal of the putrid meat.

<sup>86</sup> LXX *καταωχυνθήσεται ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῆς* “she who had rust was ashamed”, misread *b<sup>s</sup>* as *bw<sup>s</sup>*. Most delete the entire last part of the verse.

<sup>87</sup> As in xvi 27, in the phrase *b<sup>t</sup>m<sup>t</sup>h<sup>t</sup> zmh* an epexegetical substantive follows a substantive with a suffix. Cf. GKC § 131r. The LXX *ἀνθ' ὧν ἐμιαίνου σύ. Καὶ τί* reflects an underlying *b<sup>t</sup>m<sup>s</sup> <sup>t</sup>h<sup>t</sup> wmh*.

But you would not be cleansed of your filthiness—<sup>88</sup>  
 You shall never be cleansed again,  
 Until I have satisfied my fury against you.

14 I am Yahweh.

I have spoken.

It is coming.<sup>89</sup>

And I will carry [itu] out;

I will not hold back;

And I will not spare;

And I will not relent.<sup>90</sup>

According to your conduct  
 and your wanton behavior

I will judge you.<sup>91</sup>

The declaration of the Lord<sup>92</sup> Yahweh.<sup>93</sup>

The number and nature of the textual notes reflect the textual difficulties involved in the counter-thesis. Nevertheless, the thrust of the argument seems clear enough. The opening of the counter-thesis is identical with that of the foregoing dispute, consisting of *lākēn*, followed by the messenger formula, which in turn is succeeded by a pronouncement of woe. However, thereafter the prophet's change in strategy becomes immediately apparent. The emphatic construction in the first line, *gm ʔny ʔgdyl hmdwrh*, serves notice that the focus will now be on Yahweh's direct intervention and reaction to those who would find in the prophet's *māšāl* an affirmation of their own privileged status.

The refutation divides into two parts, the first of which deals with the manner in which Yahweh's wrath will be vented (*vv.* 9b-12), and the second with a justification of his vengeance (*vv.* 13-14).<sup>94</sup>

<sup>88</sup> The LXX smooths out the MT by omitting the intrusive *yʿn ... bʿtmʔtk*.

<sup>89</sup> *BHS* and most commentators delete *bʿh* as disruptive to the stereotypical formulation, *dbryt wʿšyty*. Cf. Brownlee (n. 63), p. 39, n. 10a.

<sup>90</sup> Most delete *wlʔ ʔnhm* with the LXX as a variant gloss.

<sup>91</sup> On *špʔtyk*, ‘I judge you’, for *špʔwk*, ‘They judge you’, see n. 12 above.

<sup>92</sup> *ʔdny* is missing in the LXX.

<sup>93</sup> The LXX assumes a long addition to the verse: *διὰ τοῦτου ἐγὼ κρινῶ σε κατὰ τὰ αἵματα σου καὶ κατὰ τὰ ἐνθυμήματά σου κρινῶ σε, ἡ ἀκάθαρτος ἡ ὀνομαστή καὶ πολλὴ τοῦ παραπί κρᾶίνειν*, reflecting *lkn ʔny ʔšpʔk kdmyk wkʿlylwtyk ʔmʔt hšm wrbt hmry*, ‘Therefore I will judge you according to your bloodshed and your wanton behavior, the defilement of the name and the greatness of rebellion.’

<sup>94</sup> On the stylistic relationship between these parts see Allen (n. 11), pp. 410-13.

The first segment sub-divides further into two halves, *vv.* 9-10 dealing with the destruction of the tainted meat, and *vv.* 11-12 with the purifying of the pot which has been rendered unclean by its contents.

The imagery in *vv.* 9b-12 derives directly from the *māšāl* of the cooking pot. However, the opening statement announces in emphatic terms that Yahweh has now taken charge and assumed the role of cook. His first task is to make a huge fire. The term, *mdwrh*, “pyre”, derives from *dwr*, which had been used in *v.* 5 of “heaping up a pile of firewood”. The present punitive usage recalls the only other Old Testament occurrence of the noun in Isa. xxx 33:

Topheth has long been ready;  
It has been prepared for the king.  
Its fire pit has been made deep and wide,  
Its pyre (*mdwrth*), a fire with plenty of wood;  
The breath of Yahweh—  
    like a stream of burning sulfur—  
    sets it ablaze.

A second link with this verse is found in the call to pile on the logs in *v.* 10.<sup>95</sup> The switch to imperatives poses no difficulty inasmuch as Yahweh may be either talking to himself, or calling on his assistant or servant. The first three actions in the series seem innocent enough: the logs are piled on, they are lit, and the meat is cooked. Even the choice of *bśr* for meat is natural. Both the special *mbhr* *šmym*, “choice cuts”, of *v.* 4, and the pejorative *hlʿh*, “corruption”, are avoided. Nevertheless, the audience might have become suspicious that the prophet has in mind something more than the mere cooking of meat. Why is there such a stress on the size of the pile of logs? Why does the prophet use the word *htm*?<sup>96</sup>

The following lines are textually difficult, but a progression may be recognized. The liquid broth is to be poured out, leaving the bones (with their meat) to be charred into a useless mass of carbon. Since the feminine plural form, *šmwłt*, is used elsewhere in Ezekiel only of human bones, an element of interpretation has already been

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *hrbh* *šym* here and *wšym hrbh* in Isaiah.

<sup>96</sup> The phrase *htm bśr* may indeed be interpreted as “Finish [the job of cooking] the meat”, but it may also signify “Finish off (i.e., do away with) the meat”.



introduced: the contents of the pot about to be destroyed are not animal bones; they are human.

But the process is not finished. In *v.* 11 it becomes apparent that the putrid flesh has had its effect on the vessel; it has been defiled and must now be cleansed before it can be used again. But this cannot be accomplished by superficial washing. The pot is to be heated red hot so that every remnant of the defiled meat may be destroyed. The use of the verb *ntk* in the following line is striking. Usually, it is interpreted as a metallurgical term for melting down metal, as in *xxii* 15, the subject being the pot. However, it is preferable to treat the verb in its usual sense of “to pour out”, the subject being *tmʿth*, “its filthiness”. Since the verb is used in connection with divine wrath elsewhere, a motif that appears in *v.* 13, its use in the present context is rendered all the more appropriate.<sup>97</sup> It has become clear that the prophet holds out no hope at all for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The only solution is to pour them out into the fire (*v.* 10), and then to stoke up the flame so hot that every remnant of the stew inside the vessel is burned up.

To make explicit the refutation of the Jerusalemites’ false claims of security and privilege, in *v.* 12 the prophet highlights again that Yahweh’s basic complaint is with the meat. The word *tʿnym* is a *hapax legomenon*, derived from a root *ʿwn* meaning “trouble, sorrow”. In *xi* 2 the phrase *hšb ʿwn* had been used of “wicked/troublesome thoughts”.<sup>98</sup> The magnitude (*rbt*) of the corruption prevented any solution other than “from the frying pan into the fire”.

The oracle reaches its climax in *vv.* 13-14. Now the prophet abandons the figure and concentrates on its theological significance. The third-person references to the meat and the city are replaced by the second person of direct address, the second-person feminine forms confirming that the judgement announced applies to “the bloody city” itself.

*V.* 13 opens with a purpose clause that is never completed. The description of the city’s corruption as “lewd filthiness” (*bṯmʿtk zmh*) recalls *xvi* 27. However, the prophet moves quickly to a justification of Yahweh’s harsh treatment of Jerusalem. All his past efforts

<sup>97</sup> Cf. the references to Yahweh pouring out his wrath (*ntk hmh*) in *Jer.* *xlii* 18, *xliv* 6; etc. Cf. BDB, p. 677.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. the phrase *mhšbt ʿwn* in *Isa.* *lix* 7; *Jer.* *iv* 14; *Prov.* *vi* 18.

at purifying the city had failed.<sup>99</sup> Which historical events are being alluded to can only be surmised. Most likely, Josiah's most recent attempts at reformation are in view (2 Kgs xxii-xxiii), but Hezekiah's earlier efforts may also be included (2 Kgs xviii 4, 22; 2 Chr. xxxi). The people's intransigence justified Yahweh's resolve not to hold out another opportunity for cleansing and renewal until his wrath against the city has been satisfied.<sup>100</sup>

### *Postscript (14)*

The oracle concludes with the longest affirmation of Yahweh's resolve in the book. The familiar parts of the verse stress that it is in Yahweh's nature to fulfill his pronouncements. He who issues the word guarantees its fulfillment. The tri-partite form of his self-identification, *ny yhw dbrty wšyty*, is characteristically Ezekielian.<sup>101</sup> The interruptive *bʔh*, "It is coming", inserts an aminos reference to Nebuchadnezzar, who is even now poised for attack. Yahweh's refusal to reconsider is announced with three negative statements, whose reverberations sound the death knell of the city. The first, *lʔ ʔprʕ*, literally, "I will not refrain, leave alone", occurs only here in Ezekiel and stresses that there will be no restraint to Yahweh's judgement, nor his fulfillment of his word. The second, *lʔ ʔhws*, "I will not spare", is familiar from previous passages.<sup>102</sup> The third, *lʔ ʔnhm*, which means "I will not be sorry, be moved to pity", emphasizes that his mind has been irrevocably made up.<sup>103</sup>

The justification of Yahweh's action toward Jerusalem concludes with a final statement of principle: the judgement pronounced corresponds to the wanton behavior (*ʕlylwʔ*) of the city. The sentence is sealed with the customary signatory formula.

### *Conclusion*

The official theology on which the security of the Judaeans was based was deeply entrenched. So long as temple and city remained

<sup>99</sup> The new key word, *thr*, occurs three times in this verse.

<sup>100</sup> On *hynh hmh*, cf. v 13, xvi 42, xxi 22 [17].

<sup>101</sup> Cf. xii 25, xvii 24, xxii 14, xxxvi 36, xxxvii 14.

<sup>102</sup> v. 11, vii 4, 9, viii 18, ix 5, 10, xvi 5, xx 17.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. the positive counterpart in Exod. xxxii 12, 14; Jer. xviii 8; Joel ii 13; Jonah iii 10, iv 2.

these convictions would not be abandoned. After the deportation in 597 B.C. those who were left behind in Jerusalem interpreted their lot as a special mark of divine favour. The fact that many of their number had been exiled to Babylon was interpreted as a sign that these had been rejected by Yahweh, and that only those residents who remained were his chosen remnant, entitled to all the privileges that went with this status, including the right to confiscate the property of those who had been removed (xi 15). Ezekiel struggled hard to destroy such illusions, using a variety of rhetorical strategies to achieve this goal: sign-actions, parabolic speech, pronouncements of woe, judgement oracles, etc. However, in his disputation speeches he attacked prevailing opinions head-on.

Ezekiel's parable of the boiling cauldron challenges Jerusalemite illusions of security. The residents of the city (the pot) viewed themselves to be the choice portions of meat specially selected for a sumptuous banquet. The exiles in Babylon by implication represented the discarded offal. In refutation of this illusion, what will have been greeted as a favourable figure is turned into a frightening literary caricature. Yahweh assumes the role of the cook who calls for the wood to be piled on and the fire to be stoked as hot as possible. But he is not interested in preparing a meal; his mind is only on destruction. In his rage he pours the contents of the pot on to the fire. Lest any shred of hope remain, the fire is stoked so hot that every vestige of meat or broth in the pot is burned and the vessel is purified of its defiling contents. Residence in Jerusalem offers no security; it guarantees only destruction and judgement. Even as he speaks (xxiv 2) the fire is being stoked. Nebuchadnezzar has arrived and has begun to lay siege to the city. Her fate and that of her inhabitants is sealed. They may compose clever proverbs and relish songs that celebrate their special privilege, but they are deluded. Yahweh has spoken. He will have the last word.