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THE FIGURE OF THE NĀŠĪ’ IN EZEKIEL’S VISION OF THE NEW TEMPLE (EZEKIEL 40–48)¹

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ABSTRACT

In Ezekiel’s tour of the new Temple of the Lord three individuals are identified: the prophet himself, the heavenly guide and the nāšī’ figure. This article focuses on the role, function and privileges of the nāšī’ in the Temple vision text. Previous research on the nāšī’ in Ezekiel has tended to focus on issues about the meaning and use of the term and the relationship between the two terms melek and nāšī’ in the text, used either antithetically or in complementary fashion. The focus here is on a close reading of the text in terms of his privileges and role. The text in Chapters 40–48 deals with the nāšī’ in two related areas: his role in the sanctuary compound as patron and provider for the cult, and the extensive lands assigned to him in the allotment around the sanctuary precinct. The text clearly presents the nāšī’ as a central figure in Ezekiel’s plan of the restored sphere of the sacred. He is the principal lay worshipper and cult patron in this theocratic vision of society.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTERS 40–48 OF THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL CONTAIN THE MAGNIFICENT VISION of the restored house or temple of the Lord.² These chapters present in an orderly and schematic fashion a plan of the new house of the Lord as the location of the divine presence abiding now forever among the people. What Ezekiel sees is not the blueprint or design for a building to be constructed but the design and layout of the new temple already built by God. The key issue of these chapters is the determination and preservation of sacral space. The plan seeks to identify and protect the realm of the holy from invasion by the realm of the profane. This clear focus raises associated issues of who has access to the realm of the holy, who are the guardians of the holy, and what gradations of

¹ The Presidential Address delivered to the Fellowship for Biblical Studies in Melbourne, 5 November 2009.
² The reader may gain some benefit from my earlier article on this same text: “‘Holiness has a shape’: the place of the altar in Ezekiel’s visionary plan of sacral space (Ezekiel 43:1–12, 13–17, 18–27),” ABR 57 (2009) 1–21.
access to the holy are permitted and to whom. In many respects Chapters 40–48 represent a detailed and considered response to the earlier vision in Chapters 8–11 of the profanation of the Jerusalem Temple prior to 587 BCE and the departure of the divine presence from that Temple, described so graphically in 10:18–11:25. Chapter 43:1–5 describes the return of the divine presence in radiant splendour to the new sanctuary. This return is made possible by the elaborate precautions taken to protect the realm of the holy and to prevent any further profanation. It is the Zadokite priests in Chapters 40–48 who are identified as the ultimate guardians of the realm of the holy, the doorkeepers who regulate access to the sacred. The plan reveals in elaborate (even obsessive) detail not only the nature of God (the quintessence of holiness) but also the nature of the holy community organised around the holy God.3 Jonathan Smith describes Chapters 40–48 as "an endeavour in mapping the social configurations of an ideal cultic place."4 The vision essentially makes a number of fundamental statements about divine holiness: the realm of the holy, like the realm of the profane, is contagious; holiness is a dynamic not a static function; the realm of the divine makes holy all that falls within the ambit of its sanctifying power. The key focus of the plan is the determination and preservation of the holy.

Ezekiel and the heavenly guide, carrying his measuring apparatus, undertake a guided tour of the new temple or sanctuary of the Lord (40:3–4). We could almost describe Chapters 40–48 as a virtual tour of the site. The temple Ezekiel sees is not necessarily a restored version of the Jerusalem Temple nor is the city identified in the plan as Jerusalem itself (48:35). Besides Ezekiel and the guide, the only other individual identified in the plan is the mysterious nāši’ figure who makes his first appearance at 44:3. This paper seeks to focus on the role, function and privileges of this nāši’ figure in Ezekiel’s vision of the new house of the Lord. Previous research on the nāši’ figure has focused on a number of key areas: redaction critical study of the text and, more particularly, Gese’s identification of a nāši’ stratum in these chapters;5 the historical

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3 Kalinda Rose Stevenson comments: “Changing the spatial organisation of the society changes the society. Ezekiel 40–48 is a vision of a new society organised according to a new set of spatial rules. It is a temple society with controlled access to sacred space, based on a spatial theology of holiness.” Vision of Transformation: the Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40–48 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996) XVIII. See also her comments on pp. 37–48 on the centrality of the holy in the text.


identity of the nāši' and, more particularly, whether the person in the vision might have been governor in Persian-period Yehud; 6 Ezekiel's use of the term nāši' in preference to the term melek; and, most especially and certainly with more contention, the meaning of the term nāši' in Chapters 40–48. As indicated here, there has been significant research on all these areas. Scholarly interest in the Book of Ezekiel in general continues to grow, as well as specific interest in Chapters 40–48. 7 This paper will not address all of these issues again specifically. We will need to address, however, the meaning of the term nāši' in Chapters 40–48. Our focus will be on the function and privileges of the nāši' as described in the text. The vision indicates that the nāši' figure is a layman, even a chieftain or perhaps prince, who enjoys privileged access to the sanctuary, performs certain functions within the cult as a representative of the people, and who has certain responsibilities regarding provision for the cult. Broadly speaking the nāši' figure appears in two key and related areas of the visionary plan: the sanctuary precinct (Chapters 45–46) and the allotment of land around the sanctuary (Chapter 48). The contribution this present study seeks to make to nāši' research in Ezekiel is on the role, function and privileges of the nāši' figure in these two sections of the vision, considering his role in each part and making some comment on its significance for the general theme of holiness. We will read the text in final form (NRSV). We turn first to the meaning of this key term nāši' in Ezekiel's vision text.

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6 Gese, Der Verfassungsentwurf 116–23, discusses the possibility of an historic individual. Tuell, The Law of the Temple 103–20, argues for the nāši' figure as the governor of Persian-period Yehud. His wider claim is to date Ezekiel 40–48 in final form to the reign of the Persian king Darius and so this reading serves that theory.

EZEKIEL’S USE OF THE TERM Nāši’

There has been a range of scholarly opinion and research on Ezekiel’s use of the term nāši’, generally around three areas: the use of the term outside the Book of Ezekiel and how this use may have influenced the prophet himself, the use of the term in Chapters 1–39 of Ezekiel, and the use of the term in the vision text in Chapters 40–48. We can now offer an overview of the scholarly research on this key term, attempt then to find some of the common points among commentators, and subsequently bring these insights to the texts of the role of the nāši’ in cult and land allotment. The most comprehensive study of Ezekiel’s use of the term is that of Iain Duguid.8 Duguid says his intention is to present “a consistent picture of Ezekiel’s attitude towards the monarchy,” both former and present kings.9 He addresses all three areas of research on the term outlined above. He summarises the use of the term in the First Testament outside the Book of Ezekiel in the following terms: in pre-monarchic Israel the nāši’ was either elected or designated to represent his tribe or group in religious, military and political affairs and, as such, was an important figure. With the emergence of the monarchy the role of these tribal chieftains became less prominent.10 Duguid then discusses the use of the term nāši’ in Ezek 1–39, specifically with reference to the related term melek.11 One of the key issues here is whether Ezekiel has a preference for the term nāši’ rather than melek to designate the ruler because of his disillusionment with the monarchy. Duguid draws the important conclusion with respect to the use of the term nāši’ in Ezek 1–39 that no pejorative sense is intended, that the terms melek and nāši’ can be used interchangeably, but that Ezekiel has a preference for the term nāši’. He writes: “We may therefore properly speak of a preference for the term nāši’ to describe the reigning and future Davidic ruler, but we should not absolutise it: Ezekiel was free to use whichever term best fitted the context.”12 However, in his examination of the terms melek and nāši’ in Ezek 40–48 (our key concern here) Duguid makes three observations: the term melek appears in only one text (43:7–9) and then in a critical sense; all other references to past and future rulers of Israel in the vision text use the term nāši’; and this term is used consistently, unlike Chapters 1–39, to describe the future ruler.13 Duguid’s research suggests two things: first, there is a preference in Chapters 40–48 for the title nāši’ for a future ruler, a preference which indicates an ideological

9 Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 11.
10 Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 18.
11 Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 18–25.
12 Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 25.
13 Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 25–27.
choice, critical of the kings of Israel; and second, the focus of these chapters is on the positive role the nāšī’ plays in the cult and the commonwealth.14

Steven Tuell also examines the use of the term nāšī’ both inside and outside the Book of Ezekiel.15 He also notes its use in the First Testament and its more complex use in Ezek 1–39. He says the vision text in Chapters 40–48 emphasises the primary role of the nāšī’ as the provider for the cult. In these terms he is generally in agreement with Duguid. However, Tuell’s key interest is to argue that the nāšī’ of Ezekiel’s vision text is an historic political figure: the governor of Persian-period Yehud.16 He makes this assertion on the basis of an elaborate argument that the system of weights and measures used in the text to indicate the provisions for the cult are based on those of the Persian Empire. This is a contentious reading, given the paucity of the evidence. Tuell does suggest, however, that the term nāšī’ is a politically correct one in the text: lacking royal overtones (and therefore of no threat to the Persian Empire) and yet carrying connotations of Israel’s past.17 Jon Douglas Levenson also offers a valuable overview of the scholarly debate on Ezekiel’s use of the terms melek and nāšī’.18 He does not see the terms melek and nāšī’ in Ezekiel as antithetical, that is, the use of the term nāšī’ does not imply rejection of the Davidic ruler. The issue for Ezekiel is not an ideological judgement of the institution of Davidic kingship but rather a critical evaluation of recent kings. Levenson writes: “The designation (nāšī’) does not imply a low estimation of human kingship within the scope of theology, but only within the scope of history …”19 It would appear then that Duguid would disagree with Levenson on the ideological choices of the two terms in our text but would be in agreement with him on the positive focus/role the text wishes to give to the nāšī’ figure. Levenson says that the role of the ruler in Israel has been reinterpreted rather than simply discarded.20

Kalinda Rose Stevenson has written an excellent study of Ezek 40–48.21 She too reviews the argument on the use of melek and nāšī’ by Ezekiel and what might be inferred from that usage.22 She is interested in the access rights accorded to the nāšī’ figure in the vision of the new Temple as a criticism of pre-exilic monarchy. She notes his limited access in the Temple precincts and

14 See Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 31–33.
20 Levenson, Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48 68.
also the strictures placed on his land allotment. Stevenson says the nāšî’ has a much more limited role in temple and land than did the Davidic kings. This observation is in conformity with the overall thesis of her work. She maintains that the vision text fundamentally asserts YHWH’s kingship: “My thesis is that the Vision of Transformation is territorial rhetoric produced in the context of the Babylonian exile to restructure the society of Israel by asserting YHWH’S territorial claim as the only King of Israel” (author’s emphasis). The nāšî’ figure then will necessarily play a secondary role. In an earlier article of the debate on the meaning of the term nāšî’ in Ezekiel, Speiser argued that the term could vary according to context: as ‘chieftain’ for clans, ‘leader’ or ‘president’ for political states, but never as ‘prince.’ We note this is precisely the translation of the term in the NRSV! Other contributors to the debate include C. R. Biggs who offers an overview of interpretations of the text and Michael Konkel who argues that the nāšî’ figure in Chapters 40–48 is “der Davidide der Heilszeit.”

This overview of the scholarship and interpretation of Ezekiel’s use of the term nāšî’ reveals some common ground but also some divergence, especially on how the terms melek and nāšî’ are to be understood comparatively in Ezekiel. We can identify what appears to be common in three key points. First, the term nāšî’ is a pre-monarchical descriptor for a chieftain type figure who had a representative role for his clan. Second, Ezekiel’s use of the term nāšî’ is complex, its usage in Chapters 40–48 being more particular and exclusive with regard to the term melek than in Chapters 1–39. While the titles may be interchangeable in Chapters 1–39 without necessarily negative connotations for the term melek, Ezekiel has a preference for the term nāšî’ in the vision text. Third, Chapters 40–48 present the nāšî’ figure in a positive light as provider for the cult and as representative of the people as worshipping community. The emphasis here is on the role and contribution of this figure to the new Temple cult. We turn now to the texts proper on the nāšî’ in Chapters 40–48 as a way of testing out the scholarly interpretation of this figure. It has been necessary to establish something of the parameters of the research on the nāšî’ figure before turning to the text proper. Again, our focus here in this article is on the role, function and privileges of the nāšî’ figure in these chapters. The nāšî’ appears in the vision text in three broad contexts: as worshipper (44:3),

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23 Stevenson, Vision of Transformation 123.  
24 Stevenson, Vision of Transformation 3.  

**Enter the Nāšī’ (44:3)**

The nāšī’ figure makes his first appearance in the narrative at 44:3. The text reads:

> Only the prince, because he is a prince, may sit in it to eat food before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gate and shall go out by the same way.

This verse indicates a number of key things about the nāšī’ in the Temple sanctuary. First, he has privileged access to the sanctuary.28 He sits in the vestibule of the eastern gate, which remains permanently closed. The Lord has entered the sanctuary through the eastern gate and so this gate is now closed to human traffic (44:2; 43:2–3). The nāšī’ enters the vestibule and exits the vestibule from the inner court. His privilege comes not only from his access route but also from the associations of his place in the vestibule with the gate of the Lord. Second, he performs a cultic function of eating in the presence of the Lord.29 Third, the nāšī’ is not a priest. His privileged access is only to eat and to observe the liturgies in the inner sanctuary. He does not perform any ministerial or priestly function. Zimmerli comments: “The prince, as the most distinguished member of the lay congregation, is accorded the privilege of eating his meal in the gate structure which has been sanctified by Yahweh’s entry.”30

**Nāšī’ as Cult Patron (45:13–25)**

The nāšī’ makes his next appearance in the vision narrative at 45:16 when all the people of the land are to join with him in making the specified offering. The nāšī’ performs the role of leader and representative of the worshipping community. The offering is specified in the preceding verses (13–15): one-sixth of an ephah from each homer of wheat, one-sixth of an ephah from each homer of barley, one-tenth of a bath from each cor of oil, and one sheep from every flock of 200 sheep. These are specified as the grain offerings, burnt offerings and offering of well-being, the purpose of which is to make atonement.

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28 See the reproduced map of the Temple and the nāšī’ place in my article “Holiness Has a Shape” 20.
Block has calculated that the offerings demanded of wheat and barley constitute 1.6%, that the stipulated offering of oil is 1%, and that of sheep is 0.5%. He comments this is a quite modest tax on the people compared to what is asked of the nāšī’ by way of provision for the cult.\(^{31}\) Under the representative leadership of the nāšī’ (45:16) the people make the offerings prescribed (45:13–15). As Zimmerli comments, while it is the people who present the offerings, these only become offerings acceptable for sacrifice through the mediation of the nāšī’ as community leader.\(^{32}\) However, it is the priests who actualise the atonement. The nāšī’ does not perform any priestly or liturgical function. The text then goes on in Verse 17 to highlight the role of the nāšī’ as the patron of the cult. For all the appointed festivals (festivals, new moons, Sabbaths) the nāšī’ is to provide sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, again, the purpose of which is to make atonement.\(^{33}\) In comparison to the previous legislation and the modest demand on the people, this legislation represents an extensive demand on the nāšī’ in terms of material provision for the cult. As we shall see with the legislation on land allotment, the generous provision of land to the nāšī’ is by way of compensation for the demands of material provision for the cult.\(^{34}\) The text highlights his role as patron and provider. It is not suggested here that he either performs or usurps a priestly function. He is the representative of the lay community and patron of the cult.

The extensive provision required of the nāšī’ for the festivals is specified in additional legislation in 45:18–25.\(^{35}\) For the festival of Passover (the fourteenth day of the first month) the nāšī’ is to provide a young bull as a sin offering for himself and the people of the land (45:22). For the seven days of the festival he must provide as follows: seven young bulls and seven rams without blemish each day as a burnt offering and a male goat each day as a sin offering. Additionally, he must provide each day seven ephahs of grain for the bulls and seven ephahs of grain for the rams, together with fourteen hin of oil. The same material provision is required for the festival of the fifteenth day of the seventh month (45:25). These quantities represent considerable outlay in terms of grain and livestock for these festivals each year. The legislation for provision here


\(^{32}\) Zimmerli, Ezekiel 476.

\(^{33}\) Zimmerli, Ezekiel 478, comments that the task of the nāšī’ is to arrange for the sacrifices which bring about expiation for the people. Steven Tuell, Ezekiel 316–18, suggests that these verses reflect a type of tax levied and collected by the nāšī’ and so the cult becomes state-sponsored.

\(^{34}\) See Block, Ezekiel 659–60.

\(^{35}\) Margaret Odell, Ezekiel (Macon, GA: S & H Publishing, 2005) 518, makes the point that restoration of cult (as envisaged in Chapters 40–48) involves the establishment of the calendar of festivals.
(45:21–25) is placed in the immediate context of the atonement ritual for the Temple conducted by the priests (45:18–20). On the first and seventh days of the first month the priest purifies the Temple in an elaborate ritual with the blood of a young bull offered as a sin offering.

We can offer four comments on this legislation on the nāšī' as patron of the cult (45:13–25). First, the legislation on the celebration of Passover (45:21–24) represents a significant departure from the Passover legislation in Exod 12–13 in at least two key respects, as Block points out. In Exodus, Passover is a family celebration whereas here the nāšī' performs the function of community leader. In Exodus, the offering is an unblemished lamb; here the offering is a young bull on the first day and then offerings of bulls, rams and goats on subsequent seven days. This is not to suggest (necessarily) that Ezekiel's legislation supersedes the Mosaic law. Block suggests rather that what we see here in the text is an evolution in sacrifice and the nomination of animals. He writes: "Ezekiel's legislation may thus represent the culmination of an internal evolution of the Passover ..."37 Zimmerli goes somewhat further than Block. He sees Chapter 45 as a "schematic levelling out of the feast days" when compared with the Mosaic legislation in Num 28–29.38 Zimmerli suggests, in effect, that Chapter 45 represents a revolution in the liturgical calendar in three respects: the major feasts are reduced to two annual festivals (45:21, 25); these two feasts become similar in terms of the offerings required (45:25); and, placing the legislation in Verses 21–25 in the context of the sin offering of a bull (Verses 18–20) gives a strong sense of atonement to both feasts.39 The legislation in Chapter 45 then represents a significant departure from or refinement of or evolution from the Mosaic legislation on the feasts. It is worth noting in this context that the legislation on the cult in Chapters 40–48 (including 45:18–25) is the only legislation in the First Testament not placed in the mouth of Moses.40 Second, the key emphasis in this legislation in 45:18–25 where the nāšī' figures so prominently appears to be on purification and atonement.41 The legislation in Verses 18–20 on atonement acts as the context for the legislation which follows in Verses 21–25. Third, we note that the nāšī' plays no role in the ritual act of purification of the sanctuary by blood in Verses 18–20. This action is reserved to the priest (v. 19).42 And finally, the text emphasizes

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36 See his discussion in Ezekiel 665–66.
37 Block, Ezekiel 665–66.
38 Zimmerli, Ezekiel 485.
39 Zimmerli, Ezekiel 485–86.
41 See Block, Ezekiel 666–67.
42 See Zimmerli, Ezekiel 482. He comments further (484): "It is nevertheless clear how for the priestly author of Ezekiel 45 the effects of the Deuteronomic reform
that, while the *nāšî*‘ is the chief patron of the cult and representative of the people, he remains a layman and is not a priest. Nevertheless, as Block suggests, the *nāšî*‘ plays a pivotal role in this theocracy.\(^{43}\)

**Nāšî’ as Cult Provider and Privileged Worshipper (46:1–15)**

Further legislation in 46:1–15 focuses again on the role of the *nāšî*‘ as provider and patron of the cult. While these verses complement in many respects what has already been said in 45:13–25 about the material provision required of the *nāšî*‘ for the cult, nevertheless new elements are introduced in so far as the text now focuses on the rights and privileges of the *nāšî*‘ in terms of his access to the sanctuary site and his personal offerings as a worshipper. Access is presented as privilege. While he has no access to the inner sanctuary since he is not a priest, the *nāšî*‘ certainly enjoys greater proximity to the sphere of YHWH’s holiness in the Temple plan than do other lay worshippers.\(^{44}\) The place assigned to the *nāšî*‘ for his worship in the Temple complex, both as lay leader of the community and as individual worshipper, is the vestibule of the eastern gate. He alone is permitted to occupy this place. The text clearly sees this as privilege accorded to him. This text (46:1–15) begins with reference to the vestibule of the *nāšî*‘ and the eastern gate. The gate of the inner court of the sanctuary (which the *nāšî*‘ would face from the vestibule) is to be opened on the sabbath day and on the day of the new moon (46:1), thus according visual access to the inner court and the ministrations of the priests. A precise ritual is established for the *nāšî*‘: entrance, vantage point, prostration, departure.\(^{45}\) His burnt offering and offering of well-being are presented by the priests, on his behalf (46:2). He does not officiate nor perform any representative function. He is an individual worshipper. While he cannot enter the inner sanctuary, he has a clear view of what is going on. The gate remains open. The people’s role is more limited than that of the *nāšî*‘: they worship at the entrance of the gate (46:3) but they do not enjoy the visual access to the inner court that his vantage point affords him.\(^{46}\)

The text then specifies what the *nāšî*‘ must offer to the Lord on the Sabbath: six lambs without blemish, a ram without blemish, an ephah of grain with the ram, a voluntary grain offering with the lambs, and a hin of oil (46:4–5). Commentators note that these provisions represent a departure from those stipulated in the Mosaic law (Num 28:9–10) for the Sabbath. The Mosaic law

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\(^{43}\) Block, *Ezekiel* 667.

\(^{44}\) See the reproduced plan of the spheres of the Temple in my article “Holiness Has a Shape” 20.

\(^{45}\) See Block, *Ezekiel* 671.

\(^{46}\) See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 490.
requires two lambs while the Temple law here requires six lambs and a ram.\footnote{See Block, \textit{Ezekiel} 673, and Zimmerli, \textit{Ezekiel} 491.} For the new moon festival the \textit{nāšî} must offer a young bull, six lambs and a ram, all livestock without blemish, as well as an ephah of grain with the bull and the ram, voluntary grain offerings with the lambs, and two bins of oil (46:6–7). Again, we note the departure from the Mosaic law (Num 28:11) where the provisions stipulated for the feast are two young bulls (rather than one), a ram, and seven lambs (rather than six).\footnote{See Block, \textit{Ezekiel} 674, and Zimmerli, \textit{Ezekiel} 491. A comparison between the Mosaic law in \textit{Numbers} and the Temple law here in \textit{Ezekiel} of the provisions stipulated for sacrifice for the feasts could constitute an article in itself. As indicated, commentators such as Block and Zimmerli provide comparative charts. It is disputed what significance is to be given to these changes and to what degree the Temple law makes innovation to the Mosaic law. In his recent commentary, \textit{Ezekiel} (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009) 320–21, Steven Tuell is inclined to minimise the significance of the differences, suggesting that both come from a common tradition. He writes (321): "... the Law of the Temple nowhere presents itself as a corrective or reform." Block is inclined to read the matter somewhat differently and see in Ezekiel's innovations the claim of a new liturgical calendar for a new age. See his \textit{Ezekiel} 677.} The \textit{nāšî} is to make full provision from his holdings. His entrance and his exit in the vestibule are regulated (46:8). The provision for both feasts is similar, except for the provision of the bull for the new moon festival. For both feasts the people have access to the sanctuary of the Temple. In effect, a procession or pilgrimage is established through the shrine: people enter from the northern gate and exit through the southern gate, or enter by the southern gate and exit via the northern gate (46:9). This again is something of a privilege although this route affords only limited physical and visual access to the inner sanctuary. As the plan of the Temple compound indicates, the most holy area of the sanctuary is on an east-west configuration. On these feasts when popular access to the shrine is permitted through a processional route, the \textit{nāšî} enters and exits with the people (46:10), thus clearly identifying himself with them, in some contrast with the priests who are identified with YHWH's shrine.\footnote{See Block, \textit{Ezekiel} 674.} Zimmerli makes the point that the text insists the \textit{nāšî} not separate himself from the community.\footnote{Zimmerli, \textit{Ezekiel} 492, 493.}

Verses 11–15 speak both of the privileged access the \textit{nāšî} has to the shrine as an individual worshipper and of the provisions he must make for the cult. If the \textit{nāšî} wishes to make a freewill offering to the Lord (burnt offering or wellbeing offering) the inner eastern gate opening onto the inner sanctuary is opened for him, as for the sabbath and new moon festivals (46:12). Again, the \textit{nāšî} enjoys privileged access as the priests present his offerings. The gate is then closed. However, privilege also brings the expectation of provision. The text then specifies what is to be the daily offering which the \textit{nāšî} must pro-
vide: a yearling lamb without blemish, one-sixth of an ephah of grain, one-third of a hin of oil (46:13–15). These constitute the daily burnt offering for which the nāši’ must make provision. We could now summarise what 46:1–15 says about the nāši’ as privileged worshipper and as material provider of the cult in four points. First, the nāši’ performs a key role as lay leader of the people in the worship, both in terms of provision for the cult and as leader and participant in the pilgrimage. This is a non-priestly role. While the nāši’ has a privileged vantage point in the eastern vestibule to observe the ministrations of the priests, he is not permitted to enter the inner sanctuary. Second, the nāši’ is linked or identified with the sphere of YHWH’s holiness. He stands in the vestibule of the eastern gate (the entry point of the divine presence into the shrine) and his vantage point is on the east-west configuration or axis of the plan on which lie all the more holy buildings. Third, he is a privileged worshipper who can offer worship individually. However, he is also responsible for the substantial provision for the cult, both on festal occasions and on a daily basis. Fourth, as both Block and Zimmerli note, the morning and evening sacrifice pattern as set out in Num 28:1–8 has been conflated here into one morning sacrifice (46:15), again an innovation in Ezekiel’s plan of feasts and a departure or innovation from the Mosaic dispensation. The nāši’ is presented as a key, even pivotal, figure in this new dispensation of worship. He is the mediator between priest and people. Blenkinsopp accurately describes his role and function in this passage as “the bearer of the gift to the altar and the transmitter of blessing back to the people whom he represents.”

Nāši’ as Land Tenant (45:7–10; 46:16–18; 48:21–22)

The second major area in the Temple vision (Chapters 40–48) which deals with the role, function and privileges of the nāši’ is the legislation of the land allotment, the disposition of the tribes in land holdings around the central holding for the Temple. This map of land holdings reflects the ideal theocratic state envisaged in Ezekiel’s vision. At the very centre of the plan is the Lord’s Temple. This holding is surrounded by land given to the Zadokite priests. To the north of their holding lies land assigned to the Levites; to the south, land given to the city and fields associated with urban cultivation. On either side of these central holdings, on both east and west, lies lands assigned to the nāši’. To the north and south of his holdings lies land assigned to the twelve tribes, begin-

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51 Zimmerli, Ezekiel 492–93, and Block, Ezekiel 676–77.
53 See my reconstruction of the landholdings in my article “Holiness Has a Shape” 18.
ning with Judah in the north and Benjamin in the south. The lands assigned specifically to the nāši’ are identified twice in the vision text (45:7–8a; 48:21–22). The lands of the nāši’ adjoin the holy district, on both eastern and western sides of that district, corresponding in length to land assigned to each of the tribes (45:7). On each side of the holy district the land assigned to the nāši’ is 25,000 cubits long and 10,000 cubits wide (48:21). In the middle of the nāši’ lands lie the lands assigned to the holy sanctuary, the Zadokite priests, the Levites and the holdings of the city. The nāši’ lands, effectively, create a buffer zone around the holy precinct in the middle. Although his is a non-priestly role, the nāši’ has lands adjoinging those of the priests. His lands are extensive, proper assignment, even compensation, for the considerable material provision he is obliged to make to the cult. The lands assigned to the nāši’ in the plan indicate his privileged and special status in this theocratic model of society.

The text also specifies the laws of land inheritance for the nāši’ (46:16–18). He may give his sons grants of land as gifts from his own lands and these can be held in perpetuity (46:16, 18b). He may also give grants of land to his servants and supporters but these cannot be held in perpetuity and in the Jubilee year (Lev 25) must revert to the nāši’ (46:17). The nāši’ may not dispossess others of their land holdings (46:18a). This legislation seems clearly linked to an earlier comment in the text about intimidation and misappropriation of land by rulers: “And my princes shall no longer oppress my people; but they shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes” (45:8b). The infamous incident of Ahab and Naboth on land dispossession comes to mind (1 Kgs 21). The legislation here on land possession and inheritance (46:16–18) seeks to emphasise two things about the role, function and privileges of the nāši’ in this state. On the one hand, the extensive lands assigned to him reflect

54 Again, the vision text offers a sense of continuity and discontinuity. We would expect the Judah portion to be in the south and the Benjamin portion to be in the north. The reader’s perception (and expectation) is jolted. Block, Ezekiel 720–24, comments (724) on the significance of this placement: while the division of the tribes along the monarchical period north-south groupings are retained, “the disruptive regional loyalties are neutralised by assigning Judah’s territory with the northern tribes and denying any tribe the religio-political center.”

55 See Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel 232–37, for a discussion of the boundaries and their significance.

56 See Block, Ezekiel 679–80; Odell, Ezekiel 519, 522–23; Zimmerli, Ezekiel 496–97; and Blenkinsopp, Ezekiel 223, for discussion of these inheritance laws.

57 These verses are placed within the wider context of 45:10–12 which speak of honesty in weights, measures and money in commercial dealings. This is a particular target in prophetic preaching (Amos 8:4–6). See the discussion on these verses in Block, Ezekiel 656–57, and Zimmerli, Ezekiel 477. The reference to “the house of Israel” in 45:8b also carries ideological import for Ezekiel, not only in terms of the land allotment in Chapter 48 but also as harkening back to a (perceived) ideal situation of the past.
his importance as leader and representative of the community in worship.\textsuperscript{58} The landholdings equip him to provide the substantial livestock required for the cult. The proximity of his lands to the holy precinct also give him special status. On the other hand, the legislation seeks to dissuade him from using this power and influence to intimidate and dispossess others. We may even speak here of a democratic basis in this land legislation: the nāṣī' enjoys the same rights of ownership, occupation, possession and inheritance as others in the state but he needs to recognise the rights of others.\textsuperscript{59} There must be an end to evictions, dispossession and intimidation. The legislation on land allotment reflects the special status of the nāṣī' but also reminds him that he is one among others.

CONCLUSION

The nāṣī' is an intriguing even enigmatic figure in Ezekiel's Temple vision. Previous research on this figure, as we have seen, has tended to focus on Ezekiel's use of the term (both in Chapters 1–39 and 40–48), the historic identity of the nāṣī' figure, and the implied criticism of the monarchy on Ezekiel's part in his use of or preference for the term nāṣī' rather than the term melek. Our focus here has been more directly on the texts dealing with the nāṣī' in the Temple vision. We have sought to clarify his role, functions and privileges in Ezekiel's new theocratic society. While acknowledging the importance of much of the research on the nāṣī' in Ezekiel, and particularly the meaning of the term in Chapters 40–48, our contribution to this research has been more by way of returning to the texts and seeing what they have to say about his identity and role. These texts (44:3; 45:7–10; 45:13–25; 46:1–18; 48:21–22) reveal a clear if incomplete picture of the role, functions and privileges of the nāṣī' figure in the new Temple. The text deals with him in two broad but related areas: his presence in the sanctuary precinct and his role as tenant in the land allotments. We may summarise what the text says about him as follows. He is a layman and not a priest. His principal duty and responsibility is to make material provision for the cult in terms of livestock, grain and oil, both for principal feasts as well as on a daily basis. This provision is considerable. He has a designated place of worship in the Temple (vestibule of the eastern gate) which affords him privileged visual access to the ministrations of the priests in the inner sanctuary. This gate is associated with YHWH. However, he may not enter the inner sanctuary and he is subordinate to the priests. He is the representative or leader of people in the cult. We may also speak of him as a mediator between the people and the priests. At the same time he is one of the people and is to be identified with them in their worship. He is assigned considerable

\textsuperscript{58} See Block, Ezekiel 653.
\textsuperscript{59} See Block, Ezekiel 680–81.
land holdings and these are in proximity to the central holy precinct. The land holdings compensate for the provision he must make for the cult.

While he is a powerful, even pivotal, figure in Ezekiel’s plan, the distribution of land holdings to priests, nāšı’ and the tribes works on a system of checks and balances for him. These checks and balances are intended to prevent corruption, intimidation and dispossession on his part since power lays the powerful open to self-advancement at the expense of others. He is not their equal but he is one of the people. The nāšı’ appears to be similar to Israel’s kings but the texts here have made significant departures or qualifications from a simple identification of the nāšı’ figure with a king. No political role is assigned to the nāšı’ in the plan. No such role is needed in a theocratic state. Further, the land legislation, as we have seen, is designed to prevent royal abuse of power in appropriation, an experience vivid from Israel’s past. The nāšı’ enjoys the same rights of possession, occupation and inheritance as others. Finally, in the plan, the placement of Temple sanctuary and royal residence are quite distinct. The nāšı’ is not the royal patron or protector of the cult, as was the case with the Davidic kings (1 Kgs 8). The Temple sanctuary in the plan is not located within the royal residence compound. In Ezekiel’s plan it is the Zadokite priests who are the guardians of the sacred, not the nāšı’. His task is to make material provision for the cult. The nāšı’ emerges from the text then as a powerful figure but one whose role, function and privileges are qualified with regard to the text’s principal focus, the identification and preservation of the realm of the sacred.

Some years ago (1999) the following statement occurred in the context of a book review in The Australian newspaper: “A culture not dedicated to the sacred has only itself to take as object. The self becomes sovereign.” By association this is a fine comment on and insight into the nature of the prophetic movement in Israel and the principal concern of the prophets to restore the Lord to the centre of Israel’s political, social and religious life. Prophets such as Amos and Hosea denounced a society, ostensibly religious, which had displaced the sacred from the centre of Israel’s life and put in its place concern for military, social and material security. One of the consequences of this displacement of the sacred from the centre of life was the ruthless exploitation of the economically and socially vulnerable by the rapacious and glutted, who still believed themselves to be religious people (Amos 5:21–27). The self, effectively, replaced the divine; the idol of self supplanted the place of the Lord. This comment from the newspaper is equally insightful into Ezek 40–48. Eze-

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60 See Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 50, 54.
61 See Duguid, Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel 55.
kiel, like the prophets before him, wanted to restore divinity or the sacred to its central and rightful place in Israel's religious and social life. For him the way to do this was to so carefully describe and determine the realm of the holy in his plan of a new Temple as to prevent further profanation and abuse of the sacred. The realm of the holy must be carefully guarded by the priests. Access is privileged and limited. The nāšī' has privileged access in the Temple to the sphere of the Lord. If the holy is to be determined and described in Ezekiel's elaborate plan in terms of location (inner, outer), elevation (upper, lower) and orientation (east, west), then the nāšī' enjoys access in all of these referents to the sacred. He is the principal lay worshipper and cult patron in this theocratic vision of society.

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63 In yet another fascinating study, Joseph Blenkinsopp, in his recent book *Judaism, The First Phase: The Place of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Origins of Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2009), has suggested that much of the pre-history of the ideology to be found in Ezra-Nehemiah may come from Ezekiel. He nominates five areas of contact/dependence in particular: status of foreigners, marriage policy and ritual ethnicity, temple priests and altar priests, privileges and duties of secular ruler, and the land. See *Judaism, the First Phase* 117–59, especially 129–59. In the section on the secular ruler (153–56) Blenkinsopp suggests Nehemiah may have been such a nasi figure. On the ideological relationship/dependence between Ezekiel and Ezra-Nehemiah, he suggests by way of conclusion (158) "points of agreement between the agenda of Ezra and Nehemiah (irrespective of historicity) and the temple law of Ezekiel 40–48 are impressive enough to suggest a relationship of dependence with special regard to community boundaries, the operation of the cult, and the creation of a theocratic polity."