REDACTION, RHETORIC, AND A NEW BEGINNING
IN EZEKIEL 1:1–3:15

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at Ezek 1:1–3:15, in particular at the literary and theological function of the initial vision in 1:4–28. It proceeds in three steps: firstly, a redaction-critical analysis suggests that the bulk of Ezekiel 1 is, in its oldest parts, a redactional expansion of an older call narrative (2:3–3:15*). Secondly, on this basis, the portrayal of the characters in Ezek 1:1–3:15—YHWH, the prophet, and the collective House of Israel—receives a diachronic dimension. Thirdly, the development in the portrayal of YHWH in particular indicates the expansion had a rhetorical aim. While the original call narrative, quite classically, legitimated Ezekiel as a prophet and focussed on the transmission of the divine word, the expanded account reinforces YHWH’s greatness and power. Even in its outline the new beginning puts God before anything else. The awe-provoking overture in Ezekiel 1 is at the service of the book’s announcement of judgement and, even more so, of the (yet unfulfilled) restoration promises. The opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel now contain in a nutshell both the tension between the power of God and the rebelliousness of his people and the tension between judgement and deliverance.

EVERY GOOD BOOK NEEDS A GOOD BEGINNING. THIS IS TRUE FOR ANY GREAT work of literature, including biblical narrative. Among the prophetic books in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the book of Ezekiel is known for its cohesion, its character as a book, and as an organised, planned, literary whole. And this is true even if taking into account the equally present signs of redaction. Assuming the organisation of the book is deliberate, the question arises: Why does the book begin in this way, plunging the reader, almost without warning, into a dizzying vision of four-faced and four-winged creatures, a flying throne,

1 This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Catholic Biblical Association in Sydney, July 2015.

2 For a recent concise overview (in German), see Tobias Häner, Bleibendes Nachwirken des Exils: Eine Untersuchung zur kanonischen Endgestalt des Ezechielbuches (Herders Biblische Studien 78; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2014) 2–7.
and nothing less than the personified glory of God? No other biblical book has such a dramatic overture. The amount of text-critical issues within Ezekiel 1, as well as the rabbinic prohibition for anyone under thirty to even read the chapter, indicate how challenging this text was found throughout the centuries.

This article aims to outline the literary and theological function of the mysterious vision in Ezekiel 1. It will do so in three steps, looking at Ezek 1:1–3:15, the first literary unit in the book of Ezekiel. It will use a diachronic approach that employs redaction criticism as well as elements of narrative criticism. The first step will consist of a redaction-critical analysis of the main body of the text, Ezek 1:4–3:11, focussing on the question of whether the sequence of the vision in Ezek 1:4–28 and the divine speeches in Ezek 2:3–3:11 are original or redactional. Secondly, on this basis, the portrayal of the characters in Ezek 1:1–3:15—YHWH, the prophet, the house of Israel—receives a diachronic dimension. Finally, drawing on these considerations, the question of the meaning of Ezek 1:4–28 and its literary function for the book can be answered.

REDACTION-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EZEK 1:4–3:11

The literary unit Ezek 1:1–3:15 is well-defined through its unity of time and place. In 3:15, the prophet-narrator moves from the location of the vision to the settlement of Tel Abib and, between 3:15 and 3:16, a week goes by. However, Ezek 1:1–3:15 is not a unity in the sense that it was written by one author.

It is no novelty that the two main parts of the narration, the description of the vision in Ezek 1:4–28 and the divine speeches in 2:3–3:15, are hardly connected. The only point of contact is the short transitional piece of 1:28b–2:2. The awe-inspiring details of the vision—living beings, cloud, light effects, firmament and throne—seem to suddenly vanish after 1:28; none of these are

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3 See b. ag. 13a and m. Meg. 4:10; m. ag. 2:1; cited in Paul M. Joyce, Ezekiel: A Commentary (Second ed.; LHB/OTS 482; New York: T&T Clark, 2009) 50–51.
4 With Adele Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield: Almond, 1983) 111, this approach may be described as “diachronic poetics. Just as one is able to write a historical grammar, showing grammatical changes over a period of time, so one ought to be able to write a historical poetics, showing the changes in structure and discourse that a text may undergo.” However, Berlin doubted that this was feasible in practice.
5 The beginning and end of the unit, Ezek 1:1–3 and 3:12–15 contain additional difficulties that need more discussion than is possible here. For a more thorough redaction-critical analysis of the entire unit Ezek 1:1–3:15, see Janina M. Hiebel, Ezekiel’s Vision Accounts as Interrelated Narratives: A Redaction-Critical and Theological Study (BZAW 475; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015) 58–71.
mentioned in 2:3–3:11.\(^6\) In prophetic vision accounts, the dialogue or monologue following the vision usually offers a key to the interpretation of the vision. One would expect the same here but, after the mysterious vision just described so meticulously, 2:3–3:11 seems unaware of the presence of anything more extraordinary than a voice, a hand, and a scroll. The latter two elements in fact belong to a second, much shorter vision (2:9–3:3), which appears unrelated to the previous scenario of creatures, wings and wheels. In terms of content, there is no continuity between 1:4–28 and 2:3–3:11.

In addition, Ezek 1:4–28 and 2:3–15 are strikingly disparate in style and vocabulary. For instance, the vision in 1:4–28 employs for the most part descriptive verbless clauses; it contains very little action and no direct speech. By contrast, direct speech makes up most of Ezekiel 2–3. It is interrupted only by a short narrative passage, the eating of the scroll in 2:9–3:3, in verbal and participial clauses. Whereas the vocabulary of Ezek 1:4–28 abounds with comparative terms, such as נבון and יְהוָה,\(^7\) this vocabulary does not recur from 2:1 onwards. Only 1:4–28 share significant vocabulary with P, for example "dome/firmament" (มาจากן), the “bow in the clouds” (泜ן), and “Glory of יהוה” (יהוה).

Moreover, the textual and grammatical problems in Ezekiel 1, in particular the erratic use of feminine and masculine suffixes and pronouns, disappear from 1:27 onwards. The linguistic differences are such that one of the first computer-based statistic-linguistic analyses\(^9\) indicated different authors for 1:4–14, 22–28; 1:15–21 and 2:1–3:11.

Lastly, the complex imagery of winged creatures, wheels, and eyes in Ezek 1:4–28 draws more extensively on Mesopotamian iconography\(^10\) than any other passage in Ezekiel. Again, this is not the case for 2:3–3:11.

\(^6\) The Glory of יהוה is mentioned again briefly in the concluding verses of this unit, in 3:12. The only reference to the living beings, their wings, and the wheels occurs in 3:13, which is widely regarded as a late gloss.

\(^7\) נבון: Ezek 1:5bis, 10, 16, 22, 26ter, 28 (nine out of twenty-five occurrences in the OT); יְהוָה: 1:5, 13, 16bis, 27bis, 28bis; יהוה: 1:13, 14, 26bis, 27bis, 28.


The sum of these observations recommends the assumption of different authors for 1:4–28 and 2:3–3:15. Zimmerli defended the connection of the two segments as original on tradition-historical grounds, but mainly because 1:4–28 is “a torso,” incomplete both structurally and in its content. In the Old Testament, a vision is always followed by a speech or dialogue that ensures its interpretation. It is therefore very unlikely that Ezek 1:4–28 ever existed independently.

Ezek 2:3–3:11, on the other hand, is a complete and meaningful prophetic call narrative, even on its own. It has a concentric structure: speech (2:3–8), vision (2:9–3:3), speech (3:4–11), followed by a short conclusion. Its introductory and open-ended character recommends it as a likely beginning of an early collection of “Ezekiel’s” writings.

Ezek 1:4–28 makes good sense as an expansion to this pre-existing call narrative. The redactor artfully used the chiastic structure of the existing material and created a new sequence of two vision accounts each with a vision and a speech part: vision (1:4–2:2), speech (2:3–8), vision (2:9–3:3), speech (3:4–11).

The short transition from the latter part of verse 1:28 (from נְכוֹנָה) to verse 2:2, still bears the signs of the piecing together of the redactional expansion and the original narrative. As mentioned above, these verses connect vision and speech, by linking the prophet-narrator’s reaction (“and I fell on my face”) to the beginning of the audition (“I heard a voice speaking”). The passage combines words used in 1:4–28 (לְהַלְוָא, וּלְחוֹר, עָדָּה) and words used in 2:3–3:15 (פָּדֵג, בַּלֶּה, הָעָבֹד). Thus, 1:28b–2:2 reflects the redactor’s effort to attach the new introduction (1:4–28a) as seamlessly as possible to the older narrative (from 2:3 onward).

11 This has been put forward e.g. by V. Herntrich (1932); A. Bertholet (1936); E. Baumann (1955), C. Houk (1981), B. Lang (1983), E. Kutsch (1985), W. H. Brownlee (1986).
12 Walther Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24 (Trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 109. The incompleteness of Ezek 1:4–28, which points beyond itself to the following audition, has more recently also been observed by Häner, Nachwirken 81–82.
13 Behrens, Prophetische Visionsschilderungen 32–60.
14 This was first suggested by Jörg Garscha, Studien zum Ezechielbuch: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung von 1–39 (Europäische Hochschulschriften 23/23; Frankfurt a. M.: P. Lang, 1974).
15 לְהַלְוָא 1:24 (five times), 25, 28; 3:12,[13]; הָעָבֹד 1:4, 12, 20 (three times), 21; 2:2; 3:12, 14bis; הָעָבֹד 1:24; 2:2; 3:12 (other forms of מִלְוַה: 2:5, 7, 8; 3:6bis, 10, 11).
16 פָּדֵג 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3:1, 3, 4, 10; הָעָבֹד 1:28; 2:1, 2, 6bis (noun), 7 (verb + noun), 8; 3:1, 4 (verb + noun), 6 (noun), 10 (verb + noun), 11; פָּדֵג 2:1, 3; 3:1, 3, 4, 10.
17 For the same reason, the redactor also inserted references to Chapter 1 (3:12, 14abd) into the original conclusion (3:14c, 15*). Of the introductory verses, 1:1, 3b would seem to belong to this redaction, which would then also be responsible for the prom-
In short, Ezek 1:4–2:2 likely is a redactional expansion to 2:3–3:15*. In the same way as the foreword of a book is meaningless without the book to which it belongs, so Ezek 1:4–28 is incomplete without the call narrative—but the two parts were written by different authors. The Mesopotamian imagery and language strongly suggest that the expansion occurred in exilic times.

A continuing redaction-critical analysis will, of course, find more than two stages of redaction in Ezek 1:1–3:15. Most notably, the feature of the wheels, which is almost entirely contained to one paragraph (1:15–21), is a classic suspect as being a secondary or tertiary addition. However, for the purpose of the present article, a simplified two-stage redaction history shall suffice.¹⁹

PORTRAIYAL OF THE CHARACTERS IN THE ORIGINAL CALL NARRATIVE (2:3–3:15)

On this basis, we shall now turn to questions raised by other methodologies that usually are used in a synchronic perspective; in particular, the portrayal of the characters in the original call narrative (2:3–3:15).²⁰ There are three characters: YHWH, the prophet who is also the first-person narrator, and the “House of Israel.” The last character is a collective entity and is not present at the scene but only appears in the third person within God’s speeches.

The most prominent character is YHWH. He is the only speaker in this unit, without receiving, or requiring, any verbal reply. The narrator does not describe the divine character, except for mentioning a “hand stretched out” in 2:9. However, it is precisely through the divine speeches that the reader is given considerable insight into this character. In his very first sentence (2:3), YHWH presents himself as the one who is commissioning the prophet. He also presents the House of Israel as “a nation of rebels who have been rebelling against me” for generations. Despite foreseeing that they will not listen (3:7), YHWH seems intent on establishing communication, repeatedly telling the prophet to “speak my words to them” (2:7; 3:4). The style of the speeches is commanding and authoritative, frequently using imperatives²¹ and clauses with

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¹⁸ As well as the exilic setting provided in the frame of the narrative (1:1, 3b; 3:15).
²⁰ For this section, see Hiebel, Vision Accounts 264–74.
²¹ Several occurrences each in Ezek 2:8; 3:1, 4, 10, 11; negated imperatives in 2:6; 3:9.
an imperative meaning.\footnote{Jussive and \(w\)qatal forms in 2:3, 4, 7; 3:3, 11.} Even passages fortifying the prophet (2:6; 3:8–9) have a more imposing than encouraging tone.

The figure of the prophet has here, as throughout the book, the role of the first-person narrator. This means that the reader follows the story through the prophet-narrator’s eyes. At the same time, however, the character of the prophet-narrator remains strangely colourless. Save for a few exceptions, his personal views and feelings are not disclosed.\footnote{This phenomenon is observed frequently in the literature, notably by Walther Zimmerli, “Das verhüllte Gesicht des Propheten Ezechiel,” in \textit{Studien zur alttestamentlichen Theologie und Prophetie: Gesammelte Aufsätze} (TB 51; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1974) 138–47, and more recently by Michael Konkel, “Ezechiel—Prophet ohne Eigenschaften: Biographie zwischen Theologie und Anthropologie,” in \textit{Biblische Anthropologie: Neue Einsichten aus dem Alten Testament} (Ed. Christian Frevel, QD 237; Freiburg: Herder, 2010) 224–25.} He is not important as a person; he is an instrument of communication from \(YHWH\) to the House of Israel (and, on another level, from the author to the reader). Accordingly, he is not addressed by his personal name but simply as \(בֶּן נָרָק\) “son of (a) man,” or “human being.”\footnote{On this address, see for example Karin Schöpflin, \textit{Theologie als Biographie im Ezechielbuch: Ein Beitrag zur Konzeption alttestamentlicher Prophetie} (FAT 36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 72–74; Corrine L. Patton, “Priest, Prophet, and Exile: Ezekiel as a Literary Construct,” in \textit{Ezekiel’s Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality} (Eds Corrine L. Patton and Stephen L. Cook; SBLSymS 31; Atlanta: SBL, 2004) 76; Kathleen M. Rochester, \textit{Prophetic Ministry in Jeremiah and Ezekiel} (CBET 65; Leuven: Peeters, 2012) 38.} Moreover, the prophet-narrator is portrayed mainly as passive and obedient. His actions show him either as the passive recipient of the divine message (נָשָׁה 2:9; בָּשַׂל 3:12) or as the obedient executor of commands, such as eating the scroll (3:2–3; cf. 2:8; 3:1, 3) and going to the exiles (3:14, 15; cf. 3:1, 4, 11).\footnote{However, the prophet does not immediately obey the command to speak. On the contrary, he remains speechless for seven days (3:15).} No resistance or protest is mentioned, despite the fact that an objection is a common, even expected, feature in call narratives.\footnote{Cf. Exod 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13; Judg 6:15; Jer 1:6. A sign of resistance could possibly be seen in the fact that God has to repeat the command to eat the scroll three times (so Daniel I. Block, \textit{The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24} [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997] 11–13). However, even then, the resistance is passive and does not amount to a verbal or physical objection.} Through his silent obedience, the prophet-narrator is set in stark contrast to the House of Israel.

The House of Israel is a collective character and does not appear in person in this text. The reader only hears one side of the story, namely \(YHWH\)’s. The divine speeches draw an entirely negative picture of the House of Israel: they are “rebellious” (2:3, 7), “not willing to listen” (3:7), and they have “a strong forehead and a hardened heart” (3:7). All this culminates in the label “House of Rebellion” (ךָצְלָה); the phrase “for they are a house of rebellion” is repeat-
ed like a refrain throughout the divine speeches (2:5, 6, 7, 3:9; cf. 2:3, 8). The divine command to the prophet to speak is, right from the beginning, contrasted by the foreseen resistance of the people and by their refusal to hear. It seems that, “Their evil character is hereditary, ingrained, and therefore hopeless.”

AIM OF THE ORIGINAL CALL NARRATIVE

The aim of a prophetic call narrative typically is to provide legitimation for the prophet; his or her words are confirmed as words of God and therefore as true. Ezek 2:3–3:15* also serves this purpose, as becomes evident in the repeated commands to the prophet to “speak my words to them” (2:7; 3:4), and in the graphic image of the prophet physically eating and ingesting the written words of God (3:1–3), in order to then regurgitate them to the House of Israel (3:4). The prophet’s obedience to God’s command legitimates him as a true divine messenger. The message, as prefigured by the scroll, will consist in laments, words about death (2:10), and its addressees will not listen to it (3:7). The only somewhat positive outcome that the narrative seems to consider is that “they shall know that a prophet has been among them” (2:5).

From a rhetorical point of view, this text invites the reader to empathise with the prophet-narrator and, by consequence, to follow him in his compliant, “non-rebellious” attitude, as opposed to the defiant not wanting to listen of the “House of Rebellion.” In the same way as the prophet is instructed to “eat what I am giving you” (2:8) even before he sees the object in question, the readers are asked to accept the prophetic message before actually knowing what it contains. However, readers acquainted with the pre-exilic prophetic writings

27 Häner, *Nachwirken* 101–3, observes this tension within the two semantic fields of “speaking” and “hearing” (see also 120–21).


30 Albeit in a different context, Thomas Renz (The *Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* [VTSup 76; Leiden: Brill, 1999] 18) writes with a similar expression, “As Ezekiel received the scroll and ate it (2:9–3:5), so the reader is expected to take the book and ‘stomach’ it.”
would already have an idea of what to expect. Even though not yet explicitly announced, it has become evident that YHWH is no longer going to tolerate the situation. Because repentance is not portrayed as a realistic option (3:7), judgement is likely to be imminent. As indicated on the scroll that the prophet is commanded to eat (2:8), what could be expected were lamentation, mourning and woe (2:10)—it surely would be a message hard to digest.

**WHAT CHANGES WITH THE EXPANSION?**

As argued above, a second author added a new beginning to the original call narrative (1:1–2:2*). This new beginning changes the overall perception and interpretation of the text. The focus of the narrative has now shifted from the vision of the scroll (formerly the centre) onto the apparition of the divine Glory (culminating at the end of the first half—the new centre). The apparition of the divine Glory (1:4–28) inevitably distracts from the much shorter and less elaborate vision of the scroll (2:8–3:3). Now the commission of the new prophet is overshadowed by the demonstration of divine power and by the apparition of the Glory of YHWH.

Contrary to the original call vision, Ezekiel 1 is a pure description with little action, no plot, and no direct speech involved. Despite a notable attention to movement (1:12, 17, 19–21, 24), this vision also has a static quality, generated by the uniformity of the four creatures’ movement in a stable square.\(^{31}\) It almost is the literary equivalent of a picture, describing a complex scene in great detail. At the point when the prophet-narrator reacts (1:28) and the divine voice begins to speak (1:28b–2:2) we are already entering the older call narrative (2:3–3:15*).

The expansion features only two of the main characters: the prophet-narrator and YHWH or, more precisely, “the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of YHWH” (1:28). The House of Israel is not mentioned.\(^{32}\) The prophet-narrator is once again portrayed as the passive and overwhelmed spectator. Analogous to his role in the original call narrative, he only sees (יָרֵא 1:10, 4, 15, 27, 28), hears (יָשָׁה 1:24, 28; 2:2; 3:12) and, as the description arrives at its climax, he falls on his face (לָכֵי 1:28). At the same time, the prophet-narrator is the only figure in Ezekiel 1 with whom the reader can possibly identify. Not only is the story told from his point of view; he is the only human being present.

YHWH as a character is not described directly. That the apparition is ultimately the visible presence of YHWH—his נִצָּב—is not clear until the very

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\(^{31}\) As noted in Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* 122.

\(^{32}\) However, the exiles are briefly referred to in 1:1, which secures an exilic setting: the vision is localised “by the river Chebar” in Babylonia. Hence the prophet-narrator is characterised up front as part of the exilic community.
last verse of the description (1:28); thus, from the narrator’s and from the readers’ perspective, YHWH is only then really “on stage.” However, it is clear already from the introduction that the vision is “divine” (תנור מ’ תירם ה’ 1:1). Moreover, the stormy wind and cloud (1:4), fire and brightness (1:4, 13, 27), lightning (1:13) and thundery noise (1:24) are common elements of a storm theophany33 and thus it is evident that this vision is an appearance of God—in fact, the first appearance of God in the book of Ezekiel.

The description of the vision involves light effects, sound effects, and colours, as particulars of the apparition are compared to e.g. bronze, ice and the rainbow.34 Hence, in this text God is portrayed visually, by means of his appearance, whereas in the older text God was portrayed by means of God’s words.

Another prominent feature of the vision would suggest itself as an additional character: the four-headed and four-winged composite creatures. These living beings (דמויים) are, however, not autonomous characters in themselves; their function is it to underscore certain aspects of the character of YHWH. They could be described as auxiliary characters, or personified attributes of YHWH. Their presence vividly underlines that YHWH dominates all the elements and all of creation, even the most awesome creatures.35 Although there is no perfect match to the four-headed and four-winged composite creatures in ancient Near Eastern iconography, they are closely related to either four-winged or two-faced sky bearers known in Mesopotamia.36 Sky bearers usually are depicted as carrying the firmament upon which a deity is enthroned. They can also have the secondary function of guarding the entrance to heaven.37 In both functions, they separate and protect the realm of the holy from the profane. Applied to Ezekiel 1, this would mean: the Glory of YHWH appears on its heavenly throne above the firmament—בָּרֵאשֵׁים indicates precisely the fir-
The presence of the sky bearer figures underlines that it is the heavenly throne, not the earthly one in the temple (which at the time of this editor was in ruins). They also ensure that, even in theophany, due distance is maintained between the divine and everything else. YHWH is present in the land of the exile, but at the same time “separated,” set apart: holy.39

Without actually doing, or saying, anything, God is portrayed here as even more transcendent (high up), more overpowering, and more unhindered by any boundaries than in the older call narrative. In all its puzzling detail, Ezek 1:4–28 has one purpose: to underscore YHWH’s greatness and power. All other aspects of the unit—God’s frustration with the “House of Rebellion,” the commissioning of a prophet to whom no one will listen, the message of laments and woe—become subordinate to this first impression that the text imposes on its readers: YHWH’s greatness and power.

THE RHETORICAL AIM OF THE EXPANDED TEXT

The present form of Ezekiel 1 is clearly designed to inspire a strong sense of awe in the audience. As the readers identify with the prophet-narrator, they are directed to mentally imitate his physical response of falling down on his face (1:28), filled with fear and admiration. The emphasis on YHWH’s authority and power, which was already present in the original writings, is in 1:1–2:2 raised to the maximum.

While the original call narrative, quite classically, legitimated Ezekiel as a prophet and focussed on his literally taking in the divine word, the expanded account, 1:1–3:15, now affirms the authority of both prophet and God. The exact transmission of YHWH’s words to rebellious Israel is now, with the new “foreword,” overshadowed by the apparition of YHWH’s Glory. Before YHWH even utters a word, the reader is faced with a display of unlimited power—as if to say: whatever the message, you can trust it. It seems that here, for some reason, the normally implicit assumption that God is trustworthy needed to be made explicit.

This coheres with the exilic date of the expansion. The judgement predicted by the early Ezekielian writings had happened promptly; but the same could not be said about Ezekiel’s promises of restoration. Years passed by without any sign of their coming true. This delay inevitably would have led to a reliability crisis for the Ezekiel tradition. I think this is when Ezekiel 1 was added.

The redactor who placed this vision at the beginning of the collection of Ezekiel’s writings was eager to give the reader straight from the outset the “right” perspective on this book. Ezekiel 1 presents the main character of the

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38 Cf. Gen 1:6–8, 14–17, 20; Ps 19:2; 150:1; Ezek 10:1; Dan 12:3.
39 Cf. the very similar concern in the second temple vision, pinpointed in Ezek 42:20: “to make a separation between the holy and the common.”
book—YHWH—in a way that intends to provoke awe and thus belief in the reader. The main attributes of Ezekiel’s God are in fact unlimited power and holiness, which are expressed both in judgement and in creating a new beginning for God’s people. To recognise the sovereignty of YHWH is the necessary basis for accepting the book’s proclamation of judgement. In fact, there are allusions to judgement in Ezekiel 1. Yet believing in the power of YHWH is even more indispensable for keeping confidence in the restoration, especially in the face of its delay. Only an absolutely powerful God could bring about not only judgement but also restoration.

Moreover, the new overture presents to the reader two hallmarks of the book of Ezekiel: the vital question of God’s presence and absolute theocentricity. These two thus precede a third key issue, namely Israel’s rebelliousness. Thus, even in its outline the book puts God before anything else; and it indicates at the outset that at the root of the announcement both of doom and of hope is God’s power and holiness.

CONCLUSION

This brief exercise in “diachronic poetics” (Berlin) was aimed at shedding some light on the mysterious vision with which the book of Ezekiel begins. Reading Ezek 1:4–2:2 as an expansion to Ezek 2:3–3:15* opens the way to seeing in it the redactional endeavour of underlining and heightening the power and awesomeness of the character of God in the face of circumstances that would suggest otherwise. While this aim is in harmony with the thrust of the book in general, it certainly would have reinforced the authority of Ezekiel’s writings. I have suggested that the restoration oracles in particular were in need of such reinforcement. The emphasis of YHWH’s omnipresent and omnipotent power is supposed to increase, or generate, trust in the readers. At the same time the theophany of the Glory of YHWH also alludes to judgement and thus shimmers in a range of interpretative colours. The first chapter of the book now contains in a nutshell both the tension between the power of God and the rebelliousness of his people and the tension between judgement and deliverance.

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40 On the portrayal of YHWH in the Ezekielian vision accounts, see Hiebel, Vision Accounts 259–82.