Ezekiel is hardly a normal prophet nor is the book of Ezekiel a normal prophetic book. The book is filled with bizarre imagery, language, and concepts, such as the inaugural vision of YHWH’s throne chariot borne through the heavens by four “creatures” in Ezekiel 1–3 later identified as Cherubim in Ezekiel 10; the portrayal of Ezekiel’s supernatural journey to witness the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Ezekiel 8–11 by the command of YHWH; or the enigmatic Gog from Magog oracles from Ezekiel 38–39 with their imagery of burning corpses. Such imagery presupposes a priestly mythological worldview that often confounds modern interpreters. Working especially under the influence of Julius Wellhausen’s antagonism to priestly theology, practice, and literature, early scholars attempted to deny Ezekiel’s priestly identity or to declare the entire book to be a late forgery designed to serve priestly interests. Thus, Gustav Hölscher argued that the work of the ecstatic prophet, Ezekiel ben Bubi, had been heavily edited by priestly circles, and stripped away more than eighty percent of the book in an effort to recover what he considered to be the authentic oracles of the true prophet.¹ Charles Cutler Torrey took the argument a step further by declaring that the entire book was a forgery written by priestly circles during the Hellenistic period in an effort to condemn the Seleucid monarchy by establishing an analogy with the purportedly sinful monarch, King Manasseh ben Hezekiah of Judah.² Even today, interpreters struggle with Ezekiel’s language, concepts, and imagery, sometimes prompting a rekindling of earlier charges that Ezekiel suffered from mental illness or drug use.³

But modern critical scholarship has come a long way since the early twentieth century. Scholarly interpretation of the book of Ezekiel began to change in the years following World War II as scholars began to probe the book and to develop reading strategies for engaging the complexities of its distinctive forms of expression, literary development, and theological worldview. Georg Fohrer employed tradition-historical tools to argue that Ezekiel was indeed an exilic prophet who spoke to Jews in exile, but that later tradents shaped the book into a priestly work that addressed the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Walter Zimmerli employed a combination of form- and tradition-critical tools to demonstrate the unique speech forms employed by the prophet and to trace the process of later interpretation in the book by the prophet’s disciples who were themselves steeped in the priestly traditions of the Pentateuch. Moshe Greenberg set aside tradition-historical research to focus on a holistic reading of the book that would demand the apprehension of the book as a whole—as well as its theological worldview—as a basis for understanding its presentation of the prophet and his message. Ellen Davis emphasizes the impact of the textualization of the prophet’s words as an essential aspect of the process by which Ezekiel’s tradents interpreted the master’s words. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr employs literary tools to engage Ezekiel’s message and to raise questions concerning the theological message of the book in the aftermath of the Shoah. And my own work emphasizes the priestly character of Ezekiel’s visionary experience and worldview as a basis for attempting to apprehend the holiness of G-d and creation and to grapple with the theological questions posed by the destruction of Jerusalem. Today,

9. Marvin A. Sweeney, “Ezekiel: Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet of the Exile,” in Form and Intertextuality in the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Literature, FAT
scholars take Ezekiel quite seriously, and a host of commentaries and studies—and even a thriving program unit in the Society of Biblical Literature—demonstrate the importance of the book of Ezekiel in contemporary biblical scholarship.¹⁰

The present volume, edited by two rising Ezekiel scholars, Michael A. Lyons and William A. Tooman, makes a substantive contribution to the burgeoning discussion of the book of Ezekiel by emphasizing the theme of transformation, understood in relation to the text of Ezekiel, the traditions on which it draws and by which it developed, and its theological perspectives. Each essay engages a different aspect of the study of the book, and thereby opens and advances scholarly dialog in its own right.

Michael A. Lyons, “Transformation of Law: Ezekiel’s Use of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26),” examines the continuing problem of Ezekiel’s intertextual relationship with the so-called Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26. Based on observations of shared terminology between Ezekiel and the Holiness Code, scholars have long agreed that some interrelationship exists, although they have disagreed as to the nature of the interrelationship. Does Ezekiel make use of H? Does H make use of Ezekiel? Or do the two works simply share terminology? Lyons examines the shared locutions and argues that Ezekiel makes use of a preexisting body of material in the Holiness Code. Such an argument has important implications for recognizing—against Wellhausen and his followers—that priestly literature had already been composed at the outset of the exilic period and that it was therefore possible for a priest like Ezekiel to develop his prophetic self-consciousness on the basis of

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his own engagement with priestly literature. The Jerusalem Temple—and before that Shiloh and other temples—had stood for centuries as the major religious establishments of ancient Israel and Judah, and it would be shortsighted to assume that the priests who served in these temples developed no body of teachings prior to the exilic and post-exilic periods. Lyons’ argument attempts to demonstrate that Ezekiel was doing what he was trained to do, viz., interact with, interpret, and teach a body of priestly tradition in relation to the needs and circumstances of his time (see Lev 10:10–11). But one must also ask, to what degree is Ezekiel’s envisioned restoration not simply a restoration of Israel/Judah, but a restoration of creation at large? Temples, after all, were the holy centers of creation in the ancient world, and H’s preoccupation with land and blood would have implications for a defiled creation that must be purified and restored.

Tova Ganzel, “Transformation of Pentateuchal Descriptions of Idolatry,” likewise points to Ezekiel’s interrelationship with Pentateuchal literature by arguing that the portrayals of idolatry in the book of Ezekiel are drawn from the portrayal of idolatry in the book of Deuteronomy. Scholars have long argued that the laws of Deuteronomy predate the exilic and post-exilic periods; perhaps they originated in the northern kingdom of Israel or in King Josiah’s court. But Ganzel’s argument raises an important insight, i.e., the role that Deuteronomic law plays in relation to the Jerusalemite priesthood. D and P are often viewed in modern scholarship as distinct spheres of legal literature. But Ganzel’s model maintains that a figure like Ezekiel, identified as a priest originally from the Jerusalem Temple, would have access to the Deuteronomic law code and make use of it in formulating his own prophetic perspectives while in exile. Whatever its origins, the Deuteronomic law code would have been promulgated from the Jerusalem Temple itself. Would it then have been viewed as antagonistic to priestly law? Or does it point to the dynamism of ancient Israelite/Judean legal literature, in which new understandings of law are developed during the course of Israel’s and Judah’s history and applied to the needs of a dynamic living society? For a priest like Ezekiel, the various law codes available in ancient Jerusalem prior to the exile would have constituted another portion of the basis for his own reflection, interpretation, and teaching, especially since the reality of exile would have prompted reflection on the issue of idolatry or apostasy, which is such a concern in Deuteronomy.
William A. Tooman, “Transformation of Israel’s Hope: The Reuse of Scripture in the Gog Oracles,” argues that Ezekiel 38–39 display extensive interaction with other biblical literature, including the book of Ezekiel itself, which indicates that these chapters are a later addition to the book. Important Vorbilder, literary models or templates for the Gog oracles, appear in Ezek 28:25–26; Ezek 6:1–14; and Ps 79:1–4. A host of other texts also play important roles in the Gog oracles, e.g., the Balaam oracles of Numbers 22–24; the portrayal of the downfall of the Babylonian king (itself based on an Assyrian model!) in Isaiah 14; the portrayal of judgment against Hazor in Jeremiah 49; the presentation of world-wide destruction in Zephaniah 1, and others. Again, the intertextual elements of the book of Ezekiel come to the forefront demonstrating that the book is well informed by earlier tradition and literature. At this point, Ezekiel and his tradents emerge as interpreters not only of legal literature, but of a variety of genres, such as the Psalms (which play such an important role in the Temple liturgy) and even the book of Ezekiel itself. Such a study indicates a potential window into the origins of the phenomenon of inner-biblical interpretation, i.e., does it begin with the priesthood, which acts as the fundamental interpreter of tradition in ancient Israelite/Judean society? And does such a phenomenon not then identify the priesthood as the major creative and potentially progressive theologians of ancient Israel/Judah, not as a body interested in self-preservation as Wellhausen and his followers would have it? As for Tooman’s contention that Ezekiel 38–39 is a later addition to Ezekiel, one must also observe that the Gog oracle plays an important role in the book, i.e., the burning and consumption of the corpses of Gog’s army purifies the land and thereby makes it possible for the Temple to be restored in Ezekiel 40–48. Does the later character of Ezekiel 38–39 then point to a post-Ezekielian composition of the book? Or does Ezekiel 38–39 elaborate on the imagery of purification from corpse contamination evident in Ezekiel 37? Or perhaps it is the later work of the prophet/priest himself?

Jill Middlemas, “Transformation of the Image,” focuses on the images of idolatry envisioned by Ezekiel, including such dimensions as the various images portrayed in his tour of the Jerusalem Temple at the time of its destruction; the personification of the city of Jerusalem as woman; and the image of YHWH presented throughout the book. Presupposing
Davis’s argument concerning the textualization of Ezekiel,\(^\text{11}\) she argues that the book displays a rhetorical strategy designed to create distance between divinity and forms. Indeed, she discusses Ezekiel’s use of simile, with terms such as “as,” “like,” “image of,” etc., as means to describe elements of divine presence while simultaneously protecting the sanctity of G-d by refusing to identity the Deity with any tangible imagery. Of course, such a strategy corresponds well with the symbolic character of the Jerusalem Temple itself, the features of which would symbolize creation, the Garden of Eden, the passage through the Red Sea, etc., and would well inform the theological worldview of a priest like Ezekiel who would have been raised and educated in the Jerusalem Temple. Her comments on the emergence of the divine word as representation of the Deity therefore are particularly important, i.e., words and the teachings and concepts that they convey then become the representations of divine presence in the world. In her view, Ezekiel’s understanding of divine Torah presupposes that Torah serves as an image of YHWH or YHWH’s word to Israel, and such an understanding informs the presentation of the laws of the Temple in the final vision of Ezekiel 40–48. But then we must ask, does the book of Ezekiel itself not then become divine Torah? And would not the same apply to any other prophetic book?\(^\text{12}\) Or even the totality of sacred literature in the Bible? Such a contention has tremendous possibilities for opening up our understanding of the formation of sacred literature in ancient Israel/Judah.

Paul Joyce, “Ezekiel and Moral Transformation,” rightly notes the problems in the common assertion that Ezekiel focuses especially on the moral responsibility of the individual in the presentation of ethical perspective in the book. Indeed, Ezekiel 18 points to the roles of the various generations represented by individuals in its articulation of moral responsibility for righteousness and wrong-doing. Modern interpreters have been especially influenced by the role that individualism plays in modern western philosophy and theology, but Ezekiel’s theological worldview presupposes a far more corporate understanding of reality and moral action. But does this not entail a sense of corporate responsibility on the part of individuals to the whole? Joyce correctly

\(^{11}\) Davis, \textit{Swallowing the Scroll}.

portrays Ezekiel’s presentation of a theocentric view of creation, history, and ethics in which the dimensions of the holy emerge as fundamental reality in the book of Ezekiel. Recognition of the holiness of YHWH and of the divine name then becomes the means by which creation and Israel itself relate to YHWH in the midst of national or world-wide crisis and develop moral perspective in an effort to sanctify corporate and individual self as well as creation at large. But such a contention points to the multifaceted character of human moral responsibility within a larger web of relationships in Ezekiel that includes the human individual, the human nation, and creation at large as well as G-d. Human responsibility in Ezekiel must then be directed not simply from the human to G-d, but from the individual to the nation at large and from the nation to creation at large. When such relationships are realized, then one recognizes the import of the Self-Recognition formula in Ezekiel, “and they shall know that I am YHWH.”

Thomas Krüger, “Transformation of History in Ezekiel 20,” eschews redaction-critical analysis of the text of Ezekiel to focus instead on the conceptual development of the understanding of history evident in Ezekiel 20. The chapter recounts the history of Israel from the time of the Exodus from Egypt to the present, with a particular focus on Israel’s idolatry in the wilderness and YHWH’s intentions to scatter Israel among the nations. YHWH emerges as an ambiguous figure in Krüger’s analysis insofar as YHWH punishes Israel by misleading them with bad statutes and laws that prevent people from changing their attitudes or their behavior. Krüger attempts to justify YHWH’s actions by arguing that YHWH misleads and punishes people who are already guilty. He argues that, according to Ezekiel 20, not everything that YHWH has said or done remains valid for perpetuity. Ultimately, YHWH will triumph. But, what kind of a triumph is achieved? One must ask whether such a position actually sidesteps the question of theodicy that emerges in the book of Ezekiel as well as in other prophetic literature, such as YHWH’s command that Isaiah should make sure that the people of his time do not see, hear, understand, or repent, so that the divine purpose might be realized (see Isaiah 6). Krüger nevertheless places his finger squarely on the theological problem of the book of Ezekiel, viz., does the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its people demonstrate

13. See my Reading the Bible after the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).
that the people have sinned against YHWH? Or does the charge of sin against YHWH become a means to explain the destruction of the city and the fate of its people?

Paul R. Raabe, “Transforming the International status quo: Ezekiel’s Oracles against the Nations,” reexamines the oracles concerning the nations in the book of Ezekiel as an essential element in the overall vision of the book. He argues that the chronological correlation of the oracles against the nations with the downfall of Jerusalem indicates a tight interlocking, viz., if Jerusalem is to suffer strict judgment from G-d, so must the other nations of the Levant. Why? So that “they will know that I am YHWH” emerges as the fundamental explanation for such judgment throughout. In looking at the issue of causation of punishment, Raabe distinguishes between efficient cause and final cause. The efficient causes include the principle of lex talionis, i.e., the principle that the nations will suffer the punishment that they have inflicted on Jerusalem or that they wished for Jerusalem as well as their own human pride. But such punishment also serves other purposes, viz., to direct attention away from the nations of the world and toward YHWH, to elicit Israel’s exclusive loyalty to YHWH, and to give Israel hope. One must also ask of Ezekiel the question why YHWH demands such recognition and loyalty? Perhaps YHWH’s role as creator must also come into play? The book of Ezekiel, after all, portrays the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple in Ezekiel 8–11 as the fundamental cause of the destruction of Jerusalem. Insofar as the Jerusalem Temple is the holy center of creation, its desecration has an impact upon all Judah/Israel and all creation at large, requiring the resanctification of the Temple, Israel, the nations, and creation itself throughout the book culminating in Ezekiel 40–48. Indeed, the sequence of nations included in Ezekiel’s oracles is also significant, viz., Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt, the very nations that would have been the targets of Babylon’s westward expansion in the late-sixth century B.C.E., which suggests that the oracles concerning the nations are included as a means to interpret Babylonia’s intentions at expanding its empire as an act of YHWH that is designed to resanctify the world.14

14. See my Isaiah 1–39, with an Introduction to Prophetic Literature, FOTL 16 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 212–17, which argues that the sequence of nations in Isaiah 13–23 reflects a similar interest in interpreting the rise of the Persian empire as an act of YHWH.
Daniel I. Block, “Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel,” examines the means by which the book of Ezekiel adapts and transforms traditional texts and viewpoints concerning the monarchy in Israel. Block points out that Ezekiel rarely uses the title melek, “King,” for the kings of Israel and Judah, but refers to them instead as nāšî, “Prince.” Such a designation points to the kings’ subordination to YHWH who must be recognized as the true king throughout the book. His survey of Ezekiel’s treatment of the kings of his own day points to Ezekiel’s negative understanding of those kings. Josiah was the model for a pious and just king, but figures such as Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah failed to live up to the ideals set by their ancestor in Ezekiel’s estimation. Looking to the future, Block observes that judgment cannot be the last word, especially when one considers the promises that YHWH has made cannot be revocable. Texts such as Ezek 17:22–24; 34:22–24; 37:22–25; and 40–48 point to Ezekiel’s understanding of YHWH’s commitment to the promise of a Davidic dynasty, although the role of the dynasty is to point to the presence of YHWH in the world. Such a role for the house of David nevertheless entails a measure of irony, insofar as the Babylonian royal house of Nebuchadnezzar plays the key role in ensuring the future of the dynasty. Such an interest in the transformation of the royal promise would provide interesting correlations with other prophetic books, such as Isaiah which grants the Davidic promise to the people of Israel (Isaiah 55) or MT-Jeremiah which grants the Davidic promise to the city of Jerusalem and the Levitical priesthood (Jeremiah 33). But one must also consider another dimension of the royal promise in Ezekiel. According to Ezek 1:1–3, the inauguration of Ezekiel’s prophetic (and priestly) career commences in his thirtieth year, which is identified with the fifth year of Jehoiachin’s exile in 592 BCE. This date indicates that Ezekiel’s birth took place in 622 BCE, the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign, which is the year that the Torah scroll that informed Josiah’s reform program was discovered during the course of Temple renovations (2 Kgs 22:3; 2 Chr 34:8). Such a correlation indicates that Ezekiel’s view of the monarchy was influenced by the ideals of Josiah’s reform, but the failure of the reforms following Josiah’s untimely death in 609 BCE would have prompted Ezekiel to reconsider his evaluation of the monarchy, pointing to a view that YHWH was
the true king whereas the Davidic monarchs could only be regarded as nêšî’îm, “princes.”

Timothy Mackie, “Transformation in Ezekiel’s Textual History: Ezekiel 7 in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint,” presents a comparative study of the Masoretic Hebrew and the Septuagint Greek (and its presumed Hebrew Vorlage) texts of Ezekiel 7, which announce Ezekiel’s oracles of judgment against the land. He observes the intertextual relationships between this chapter and the portrayal of the king of the north in Daniel 7–12 as well as the shorter text of the Septuagint version of Ezekiel 7 in an effort to argue that the Hebrew Vorlage of LXX-Ezekiel 7 must represent an earlier edition of this text when compared with MT Ezekiel 7. The term śpîrâ, “crown,” plays a particularly important role in this text, especially since the term is employed as a metaphorical designation for the agent that will bring about disaster against the land in Ezekiel 7. Mackie’s analysis attempts to demonstrate that the supposed expansions of MT-Ezekiel 7 are motivated by an interest in reading this term in relation to the insolent king of the north mentioned in Daniel 7–12. But one must also consider that Daniel 7–12 builds on Ezekiel as well as on other prophets, and that there would be ample reason to shorten the LXX text of Ezekiel 7, especially since Jews in Ptolemaic Egypt were living under the rule of a foreign dynasty that had granted them relatively high status—at least until the Romans came. Nevertheless, Mackie addresses a key issue in his comparative textual study of Ezekiel 7, i.e., how do we read LXX texts as literature with their own literary constructions and hermeneutical perspectives? This issue promises to be a key concern in future scholarship. Indeed, consideration of the literary characters and hermeneutical perspectives of all of the textual versions of Ezekiel, including the Masoretic text, the Septuagint text forms, Targum Jonathan, the Peshitta, the Vulgate, and the other versions remains a desideratum for biblical scholarship.


16. See the forthcoming Claremont dissertation by Tyler Mayfield, who is examining the different literary constructions of the oracles concerning the nations in the MT and LXX versions of the book of Ezekiel.
Beate Kowalski, “Transformations of Ezekiel in John’s Revelation,” actually focuses on the use of Ezekiel in the book of Revelation, which refers to Ezekiel more than the other writings of the New Testament. Insofar as Revelation is an apocalyptic book, Ezekiel’s visionary experience of the divine and his supernatural journeys from Babylon to Jerusalem make the book a natural resource on which Revelation would draw. Kowalski presents a series of signals that direct the reader to Hebrew Bible citations and allusions in the book of Revelation, such as the Song of Moses (Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32); the so-called Dreizeitenformel based on the revelation of the divine Name in Exod 3:14; various institutions and characters from the Hebrew Bible; and other Hebrew Bible references. In discussing the transformation of Ezekiel in Revelation, she notes that Revelation does not constitute an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, but instead constitutes a revelation of Jesus Christ. But she limits her understanding of Hebrew Bible interpretation to Midrashic forms. Does not the use of Ezekiel in Revelation constitute a form of scriptural interpretation even when it is employed for some other purpose, particularly when she rightly points out the influence that the structure of Ezekiel 37–48 has had on the structure of Revelation 18–22? Kowalski’s study, growing out of her earlier monograph, Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes, offers a very useful model for understanding how Ezekiel was read and interpreted at least in some circles of early Christianity. Her research will stimulate more interest in Revelation’s intertextual relationships with the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature. But it also points to the need for consideration of the role that Ezekiel played in Jewish circles, especially the Heikhalot texts of the Rabbinic period and their development of Jewish mysticism.

The essays in this volume open the doors to a wide-ranging discussion of the various dimensions of the book of Ezekiel, its transformation of text, traditions, and theology, and indeed its transformation of its readers. The seeds of transformation planted here have the potential to see much fruit in the future as scholarly discussion continues to advance.


18. For an example of such work, see Gottfried Schimanowski, Die himmlische Liturgie in der Apokalypse des Johannes, WUNT 2/154 (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2002).