Original Article

Ezekiel's immobility and the meaning of 'the house of Judah' in Ezekiel 4

Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
2019, Vol. 44(1) 182–197

DOI: 10.1177/0309089218778591
journals.sagepub.com/home/jot
SAGE

C L Crouch
University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract

Ezekiel 4.4-6 recounts a sign-act in which the prophet is instructed to lie first on his left side and then on his right, to symbolise the עון of the house of Israel and the עון of the house of Judah. The interpretive crux of the passage concerns the identification of 'the house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah', usually understood as either the northern and southern kingdoms or as interchangeable terms for the same entity. This article challenges the assumptions about Israel and Judah which underlie these interpretations, re-examining the terms' use in the immediate and wider contexts in order to argue that the condemnation of the house of Judah in 4.6 extends a sign-act originally concerned only with the inhabitants of Jerusalem to the inhabitants of the country as a whole. The interpretation explains the specifications of 'left' and 'right' and the significance of the 40 years allotted to Judah, as well as enabling a consistent meaning for the key term עון.

Keywords

Ezekiel, house of Israel, house of Judah, sign-acts

Ezekiel 4-5 contains a series of sign-acts which the prophet is instructed to undertake in connection with the siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation of its population. In the first instance, he is instructed to construct a model of Jerusalem (4.1) and to lay siege to it (4.2-3), before lying on his left side for 390 (LXX: 190) days, to symbolise the guilt (or the punishment, עון) of the house of Israel (בית ישראל) (4.4-5). He is then to lie on his right side for 40 days, symbolising the guilt (or the punishment, עון) of the house of Judah (בית יהודה) (4.6). He prophesies facing Jerusalem (4.7) and bakes bread to eat during the 390 days he is lying on his side (4.9), albeit in minimal quantity (4.10-11). This is to be prepared on human excrement, to symbolise the uncleanness of the sons of Israel (בני ישראל) while in exile (4.12-13). Ezekiel protests this and is permitted to prepare it on animal excrement instead (4.14-15). The minimal quantities afforded the prophet (cf. 4.10-11) are said to symbolise the starvation which will accompany the

Corresponding author:
C L Crouch, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA 91182, USA.
Email: clcrouch@fuller.edu

city's siege (4.16-17). Chapter 5 commands the prophet to shave and to allocate his hair symbolically (5.1-4), before commencing a lengthy declaration of judgement (5.5-17).

These chapters have attracted particular attention in the context of investigations into the phenomenology of prophetic sign-acts and in analyses of the psychology of the prophet, in both cases with particular concern for the plausibility of the actions described and their implications for the mental and physical health of the prophet who claims he was asked to undertake them. The focused attention of commentators, however, has been on the instructions given to the prophet in 4.4-6, to lie first on his left side and then on his right, to symbolise the עון of the house of Israel and the עון of the house of Judah. Aside from concerns about the prophet's ability to remain immobile for 390 (or 430) days and the implications of this for the historical enactment of the sign-act, the crux of the issue concerns the appropriate identification of the entities named as 'the house of Israel' (4.4-5, also 4.3, and 'sons of Israel' in 4.13) and 'the house of Judah' (4.6). The identification of these two entities has consequences for the interpretation of the passage's symbolic parts and for its ultimate meaning.

The passage's apparent paralleling of 'house of Israel' with 'house of Judah', together with the mention of the prophet's left and right sides, inclines most commentators to conclude that the text as it stands requires a reading in terms of the northern and southern kingdoms.[1] Such a reading, however, is not free of difficulties. To the contrary, it creates a baffling inscrutability in the passage's numerical symbolism, resolvable only by appeal to variant meanings for a recurrent key term, עון. It also demands a book-level inconsistency in the entity to which 'the house of Israel' is thought to refer. In what follows, we will examine these issues in more detail, attending to the variety of proposed solutions put forward by recent commentators, before suggesting a simple solution that is nonetheless able to account for the difficulties of the text: namely, that the addition of the house of Judah in 4.6 serves to extend an original condemnation of the house of Israel, associated with the leadership in Jerusalem, to the country as a whole.

The following observations do not presume that the instructions in 4.6 are original to a sixth-century prophet. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of commentators consider 4.6 a redactional addition, in which a careless editor inserted a reference to Judah without regard to the interpretive muddle thereby produced.[2] Zimmerli is typical when he observes that a 'considerable obscurity has entered into the meaning of the original oracle by the addition of v 6'.[3] Although he offers a variety of interpretive suggestions for individual parts of the sign-act, he ultimately concludes that the received text is 'unsatisfactory', with 'many uncertainties of detail'.[4] That a careless or theologically insensitive

1. Thus, for example, William H. Brownlee (*Ezekiel 1-19*, WBC 28 [Waco, TX: Word, 1986], 60), Moshe Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1-20*, AB 22 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 104-105), Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann (*Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 1-19*, ATD 22/1 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996], 89), John W. Wevers (*Ezekiel*, NCB [London: Thomas Nelson, 1969], 61) and Walter Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1979], 166). For opposing arguments based on Israel and Judah's purported interchangeability, see below.
2. Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), 56-57, 68-69; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, NICOT (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997), 168; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 119; Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, FOTL 19 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 30, 33; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 59-60; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 166-167.
3. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 167.
4. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 167.

editor has made a muddle of the text is, of course, quite possible. But an interpretation that renders editorial activity meaningful is surely preferable. The following analysis therefore does not dispute the consensus opinion that 4.6 is an editorial expansion, but it does argue that it is an intelligible one.

*

As almost all commentators observe, the introduction of the house of Judah in 4.6 is pivotal to the problem at hand. Up until this point, the instruction that Ezekiel is to lie on his (left) side, for 390 days, to symbolise the guilt of the house of Israel, is relatively straightforward. 'The house of Israel' is far and away the book's preferred name for its audience; the collocation appears no less than 83 times in the MT. It far outstrips alternatives such as 'sons of Israel', 'my people Israel' or, simply, 'Israel'.

To this point in the text, 'house of Israel' has already been used several times, each time plainly in reference to those who are the object of Ezekiel's prophetic mission: those to whom he is to speak the word that comes to him from YHWH (3.1, 4, 5, 7 [twice] 17; cf. 'sons of Israel' in 2.3). In the immediate context of the sign-act, 'house of Israel' in 4.3 refers to those for whom Jerusalem is their current or was their former residence; in 5.4 it refers to the survivors of the city's destruction. In 4.13, 'house of Israel' must refer to those who have been exiled to Babylonia from Jerusalem.[5] This usage carries on throughout all of what follows. Whatever variation on 'Israel' Ezekiel's audience is called, it is evident that they are the deportees of Jerusalem who are presently alongside Ezekiel in Babylonia, and/or their compatriots who still remain in the city. Initially, therefore, the most natural reading of 'house of Israel' in 4.4 is as a reference to the former and/or present inhabitants of 'the city' (4.3). Whether explicitly identified as such or not (LXX lacks a counterpart to את־ירושלם in v. 1), this city is clearly meant to be Jerusalem (cf. 4.7). In light of Babylonian deportation practices and the evidence of other texts from this period, this Jerusalemite 'house of Israel' may be more narrowly construed as a name for the city's elites or ruling class(es), who have already and will continue to bear the brunt of the empire's punitive deportations.[6]

In this reading, the specification in 4.4-5 that Ezekiel is to 'set the עון of the house of Israel upon it' (his side) and to 'bear the עון of the house of Israel' for 390 days is, if mildly obscure in its ritual significance and in the precise signification of its numerology, fundamentally unproblematic.[7] The length of time specified—390 days, said to signify a corresponding number of years—may be reasonably understood as a reference to the ignominious history of the people, dating back either to the foundation of the temple or

5. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 176.

6. The most exhaustive analysis of Mesopotamian deportation practices remains Bustenay Oded, *Mass Deportations and Deportees in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1979), especially 43-45; on Babylonian practice, see Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 82-84; Avraham Faust, 'Deportation and Demography in Sixth-Century B.C.E. Judah', in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle, Frank R. Ames and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 91-103. For discussion of Israel's social composition, see C.L. Crouch, 'Before and after Exile: Involuntary Migration and Ideas of Israel.' *HeBAI 7* (2018): 334-358

7. On the idioms עון (את) שם and עלון (את) נשא see Allen (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 50), Hans F. Fuhs (*Ezechiel 1-24*, NEchtB 7 [Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1984], 34), and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 148, 164-165); cf. Matty Cohen, though the distinction he wishes to make requires special pleading for 4.4-6 ('Etude sémantique des locutions *nśʾ roʾš—nśʾ ʾæt-roš* et *nśʾ ʿawôn—nśʾ ʾæt-ʿawon* en hébreu biblique', *ZAW* 115 [2003]: 65-71).

to the beginning of the monarchy.[8] Likewise, the עון which Ezekiel bears is straightforwardly rendered as the 'iniquity' or 'guilt' of the house of Israel which has accumulated over the course of this period of time, whether Ezekiel's 'bearing' of this guilt is interpreted as expiatory, or not.[9] The elaboration of the sign-act in 4.9, through the making and baking of bread which will sustain the prophet for the duration of the 390 days, is in keeping with the presentation of 4.4-5.

Where matters become problematic is with the introduction of the 'house of Judah' in 4.6. Now, rather than a single period of lying on his (left) side, Ezekiel is instructed to undertake a second period of immobility: 40 days, on his right side, to signify the עון of the house of Judah. In the view of most commentators, this requires a reinterpretation of 'house of Israel' in 4.4-5 as a reference to the northern kingdom and of the passage as deliberately contrasting this with the southern kingdom of Judah.[10] Contributing to this interpretation is the symbolism of the 'left' side, assigned to the house of Israel, and the 'right' side, assigned to the house of Judah. 'Left' (שמאלי), as is widely recognised, may be used in Hebrew to signify the cardinal direction 'north', while 'right' (normally ימני, and so *qere*, though *ketiv* offers ימוני) may be used to signify 'south', flowing from the imagined personal orientation of an individual facing east. Lying on his left/north side, Ezekiel symbolises the northern kingdom; lying on his right/south side, he symbolises the southern kingdom.[11]

There are, however, a number of peculiarities which arise from this interpretation of the 'house of Israel' as a reference to the northern kingdom. First, it is exceptional: nowhere else in the book is 'Israel' used to refer to the northern kingdom or to its inhabitants.[12] Where the text wishes to refer to the former state to the north of Jerusalem, it

8. In favour of the foundation of the temple, Allen (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 66), who observes the coherence of such a reference with the book's wider concerns vis-à-vis the temple; Block (*Ezekiel 1-24*; 178), Fuhs (*Ezechiel 1-24*, 34-35), and Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1-20*, 105). In favour of the beginning of the monarchy, Brownlee (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 60), Paul M. Joyce (*Ezekiel: A Commentary*, LHBOTS 482 [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 86), Margaret S. Odell (*Ezekiel*, Smith & Helwys [Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2005], 63), and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 166), though with some variations as to whether they see in the number a reference to the foundation of the monarchy in its entirety or a reference to the division of the kingdoms; cf. Pohlmann, who suggests that the LXX reckoning implies a reference to the latter (*Hesekiel 1-19*, 91).
9. Hals (*Ezekiel*, 35) and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 164) see the action as expiatory. Against this are Allen (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 66), Block (*Ezekiel 1-24*, 177), and Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 85). Odell suggests that Ezekiel bears Israel's guilt in the manner of his priestly forebears, but that because he is no longer a functioning priest he is unable to do so in an effective, expiatory manner (*Ezekiel*, 63-64).
10. Most notably, Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1-20*, 104-105), Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 166), and Pohlmann (*Hesekiel 1-19*, 89).
11. Note the tendency of commentators to suggest that the specification in 4.4 that Ezekiel is to lay on his *left* side was introduced at the same time as the reference to the house of Judah was introduced by 4.6 (Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 59; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 164).
12. This article's analysis proceeds from an expectation that texts should be interpreted first and foremost with reference to their immediate context, including and especially the book in which they are preserved. Only if this proves impossible should recourse be had to texts outside the book. This general policy is further justified by the fact that the book of Ezekiel remains widely recognised as perhaps the most theologically and stylistically coherent of any of the prophetic books. Even if 4.6 derives from editorial activity, therefore, there remains an especially strong case for attempting to interpret the resulting sign-act with reference to the rest of the book.

uses a different term, as in the comparison between Jerusalem, Sodom, and Samaria in ch. 16 or the comparison between Jerusalem and Samaria in ch. 23.[13] The vision of two sticks in ch. 37, though widely acknowledged as among the book's later developments, maintains this terminological distinction in its identification of the entity to be contrasted with Judah as Joseph.

The introduction of a 40-day period meant to symbolise 40 years of עון of this house of Judah also causes problems, because there is no immediately obvious method of accounting by which these 40 years might be rendered meaningful. While the 390 years of עון of the house of Israel in 4.4 could be understood as looking backward to a past history of Israelite iniquity, this is not obviously the case with regard to the עון of Judah. Zimmerli declares that he 'cannot see how we can arrive at an intelligible result' by such reckoning.[14] Likewise Greenberg despairs: 'where does one start to work out 40 years (only!) of iniquity for the southern kingdom?'[15] Most commentators resort to viewing the 40 years—unlike the 390 allotted to the house of Israel—as looking forward from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE and as a round, symbolic number, signifying the length of a generation or serving as an allusion to the wilderness and/or exodus traditions, ultimately concluding that the number is intended to signify the duration of the exile.[16] Many point to Num. 14.34, in which 40 days of sin correspond to 40 years of punishment, to suggest that the use of the number 'may reflect Ezekiel's understanding that the exile is a second wilderness experience, which will last for an entire generation'; others observe that the sum of Israel's 390 and Judah's 40 amount to 430, the same number of years allotted by Exod. 12.40-41 to the sojourn in Egypt prior to the exodus, and suggest that the intention of this numerology is to characterise the eventual end of the exile as a second exodus.[17] Still others suggest that the combined total of 430 refers—like 390—to the beginning of the monarchy, using a different version of the regnal calculations offered by the books of Kings.[18] Aside from the fragility of such

13. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85-86.
14. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 166.
15. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 105.
16. Thus, e.g., Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1994), 68; Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 60; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 178-180; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 63; Pohlmann, *Hesekiel 1-19*, 90. Turning from this to redactional considerations, many also argue that the contrast between this 40-year exile and the more common (and more accurate) declaration of a 70-year exile (so Jer. 25.11-12; 29.10, followed by Daniel 9 and 2 Chr. 36.21) makes it possible to conclude that the verse must have been in place no later than 547 BCE, calculating 40 years from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE (Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 86; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 59; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 168). Brownlee reckons that the verse was written no later than 557 BCE, having calculated from 597 BCE rather than 587/6 BCE (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 68).
17. For a generational interpretation, see Odell, with reference also to Ezek. 20.33-39 (*Ezekiel*, 63); cf. Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 86) and Pohlmann (*Hesekiel 1-19*, 90-91). For the exodus, see Fuhs (*Ezechiel 1-24*, 35) and Hals (*Ezekiel*, 34), the latter following Zimmerli, who invokes Exod. 12.40-41 together with the new exodus motif in the latter half of Ezekiel 20 (*Ezekiel 1*, 167); similarly, albeit opaquely, Brownlee (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 71). On the end of the exile as a second exodus in Ezekiel, see C.A. Strine (*Sworn Enemies: The Divine Oath, the Book of Ezekiel, and the Polemics of Exile,* BZAW 436 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013], 175-283) and Rebecca G.S. Idestrom ('Echoes of the Book of Exodus in Ezekiel', *JSOT* 33 [2009]: 489-510); on the development of this theme in LXX, see John W. Olley ('Ezekiel LXX and Exodus Comparisons', *VT* 59 [2009]: 116-122).
18. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 66-67. Note that all of these commentators assume that the author has a

calculations, they require that the עון of the house of Judah be rendered as a reference to its 'punishment', rather than as a reference to its 'iniquity'. Although within the semantic field of עון, this is a departure from the meaning of עון when taken in reference to the house of Israel in 4.4-5.[19]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, LXX alters the difficult enumeration, accommodating itself to a more consistent interpretation of the עון of the house of Israel and the עון of the house of Judah as the 'punishment' of the northern and southern kingdoms, respectively. It achieves this by introducing 150 in 4.4, as the number of days that Ezekiel will bear the punishment of the house of Israel, and by amending the 390 days of MT 4.5 to 190, reckoned as the sum of Israel's 150 and Judah's 40. LXX thus, by rough calculations, seems to conclude that the punishment of the northern kingdom began with the Assyrian conquest in the 730s, approximately 150 years before the destruction of Jerusalem. Equally unsurprisingly, commentators are disinclined to resort to this LXX sleight of hand in their own solutions to the passage, widely concluding that it represents an effort to resolve the challenges posed by the Hebrew text.[20]

*

In light of these problems, several recent commentators have argued against interpreting 'the house of Israel' as the northern kingdom and 'the house of Judah' as the south. 'Although the references to Israel and Judah appear to signify the respective punishments of the northern kingdom of Israel ... and the southern kingdom of Judah', writes Odell, 'that is not likely'.[21] Joyce similarly suggests that, although

> [t]he parallel between Israel (vv. 4-5) and Judah (v. 6) might suggest that the reference is to the two kingdoms, northern and southern ... this is incorrect, for wherever else Israel and Judah are found together in Ezekiel they are used interchangeably (e.g. 8.6, 17) and where the two kingdoms are contrasted a term other than 'Israel' is used for the north.[22]

This notion of Israel and Judah's 'interchangeability' is reiterated by Odell ('Ezekiel uses Judah and house of Israel interchangeably') and by Block ('In every instance where

---

high degree of familiarity with the variant regnal calculations presented by the books of Kings and with the years assigned to the exodus and wilderness periods by Exodus and Numbers, though only Allen ('a tradition close to that of the Deuteronomistic History is evidently being followed' [*Ezekiel 1-19*, 68]) and Zimmerli ('the temple chronicles ... must have been authoritative in the priestly circles around and after Ezekiel' [*Ezekiel 1*, 166]) are explicit about this. Given that the book of Ezekiel shows relatively little acquaintance with the theology or style of the books of Kings, this merits greater caution than has generally been allowed; Exod. 12.40-41 is at least generally reckoned to be priestly, but its 430 years is unique and at variance with other calculations. For discussion, see e.g., Umberto Cassuto (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967], 85-88), Thomas B. Dozeman (*Exodus*, [Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009], 281-284), John I. Durham (*Exodus*, WBC 3 [Waco, TX: Word, 1987], 172), and William H. C. Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, AB 2 [London: Doubleday, 1998], 415-416).

19. Prophetic word play is well attested, of course, and in this case could be seen as an invocation of talionic principles of divine justice. If this were the intention, however, the use of different terms for the community that committed the offence and the community that suffers the consequences significantly obscures the point.
20. So Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 50; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 105-106; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 167.
21. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 61.
22. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85.

Judah is juxtaposed with "Israel", the names are used interchangeably').[23] Joyce sums up this approach when he concludes that in this sign-act '"Israel" and "Judah" stand together in a relationship of synonymous parallelism'.[24] The difference in titles used to refer to the past and the present is effectively meaningless.

Israel, these scholars conclude, is the same thing as Judah. Although such claims are widely made within the guild by the most esteemed and learned of scholars—with regard to Ezekiel as well as other, similarly awkward texts—they fail to account for the fundamental incongruity in this assumed doubled nomenclature. Rather, they note it and consider it normal. Undoubtedly, the ultimate culprit in this conflation of terms is the biblical text's own presentation of the history of Israel: a people brought out of Egypt that, after a period of wandering in the desert entered the land and became a large and powerful Israelite state, before fracturing into two kingdoms—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Although the north kept Israel's name, the south retained its traditions, transforming Israel into a religious identity which it carried through the destruction of Judah, the deportation of its elites to Babylon, and the return of their descendants to the land. In the wake of the historiographical and archaeological insights of the last half century, however, this narrative no longer functions for terminological purpose. In the absence especially of a great united monarchy, the thread which holds together the disparate textual narratives of Israel and Judah disintegrates; there is no apparent reason for the population of one kingdom to have laid claim to the name and the traditions of its execrable neighbour. The use of the name 'Israel' by the biblical authors to describe a people living in a territory called Judah, in other words, becomes downright bizarre.

A full exploration of the history of 'Israel' and its relationship with the state called Judah is well beyond the confines of the present discussion, but for present purposes, it is necessary to recognise that the assumptions which have been made with regard to the relationship of Israel to Judah more generally have hindered rather than helped the interpretation of 4.4-6. This applies both to claims that 'house of Israel' and 'house of Judah' necessitate the interpretation of the passage in terms of the northern and southern kingdoms as well as to claims that these two entities are effectively coterminous. The following will attend most particularly to the situation in the book of Ezekiel; wider conclusions await the more sustained analysis of a longer study.

*

Within the book of Ezekiel, there are a number of difficulties with the assumption that 'the house of Israel' in 4.4-5 could refer to the northern kingdom. As noted by Joyce and Block, the first and foremost of these is that the book does not appear to do so otherwise.[25] Where the book does refer to the northern kingdom, it does so clearly and through reference to its capital, Samaria, as in 16.46, 51, 53, 55, and in 23.4, 33. This is precisely in parallel, in both chapters, to the identification of the southern kingdom with reference to its capital, Jerusalem; in none of this material is either 'Judah' or 'Israel' used.

In addition to this is the largely unnoticed fact that, in the broad core of the book, the idea that these two kingdoms shared—at any time—a single history is entirely lacking.[26]

23. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 61; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 176.
24. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 86; cf. also Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 163, 164. In an excursus on Israel in Ezekiel, however, he suggests that this is a peculiarity of the addition in 4.6, insofar as the terms are not used interchangeably elsewhere in the book (Walter Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983], 563). See also below.
25. Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 176; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85-86; cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 583.
26. By 'broad core' we refer to the parts of the book which are generally considered either to stem

In ch. 16, in which Samaria is introduced only in the last quarter of the chapter, there is a comparison between Samaria and Jerusalem, but so too is there a comparison with Sodom. The relationship between Jerusalem and Samaria is not singled out as different in kind from that between Jerusalem and Sodom. Indeed, if anything, the text focuses more on Sodom than it does on Samaria. The rhetoric also depends on a comparison between the behaviour of Jerusalem and the behaviour of ignorant foreigners, who may hardly be expected to know any better. Such an accusation becomes less cogent if Samaria is not considered representative of foreigners. If the suggestion that the language of תועבה tends to reflect issues of identity differentiation is correct, the accusation that Jerusalem has imitated the 'abominations' of Samaria and of Sodom further underscores their conceptualisation as foreign entities, distinct and differentiable as such from Jerusalem.[27]

Chapter 23 is similar. Although, unlike ch. 16, it limits itself to a comparison between Samaria and Jerusalem—doing its part to shore up the assumption that the most obvious bedfellow for the house of Judah in 4.6 is its neighbour to the north—its focus is on the history of the relationships which each of these kingdoms has had with other nations, rather than their mutual history. The lovers with whom each are in turn accused of fornicating are the two states' political allies down the decades: first Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylonia, and again Egypt.[28] The point of the allegory is to condemn inept political leadership on the part of the government in Jerusalem, which failed to heed the lesson meted out to the government in Samaria, namely, that foreign allies are not to be relied upon. There is no sense that the histories of these two states were ever more nearly intertwined, let alone unified in such a way as to explain their mutual use of the name 'Israel'.[29]

---

from Ezekiel or from a hand(s) in near temporal and theological proximity. It excludes, most prominently, the temple vision in chs 40-48 as well as parts (though not all) of the restoration material in chs 33-39. To the shifting conceptions of some of this material, we will return below.

27. C.L. Crouch, 'What Makes a Thing Abominable? Observations on the Language of Boundaries and Identity Formation from a Social Scientific Perspective', *VT* 65 (2015): 516-541. Note that the restoration promises in 16.53-63, though they introduce the more theological language of covenant (ברית), maintain this distinction: YHWH will give them to Jerusalem 'as daughters, but not of your covenant' (16.61).

28. Under the influence of the wider biblical narrative, the declaration in 23.3 that 'they played the whore in Egypt' might be taken as a reference to the idea that Israel's origins lay in Egypt and the exodus, but the immediate context weighs strongly against any temptation to do so; the sexual exchanges detailed in the following verses are all clearly meant as depictions of political alliances. This is universally recognised with regard to the Assyrians and the Babylonians/Chaldeans and there is no reason to interpret the relationship with Egypt in different terms. The present continuous nature of the action indicated in the climactic reference to alliances with Egypt in 23.27 reiterates that this is the correct understanding (and coheres well with Jerusalem's tumultuously shifting alliances in the late seventh and early sixth centuries). Note that the sibling allegory does not itself imply shared history, in ch. 23 any more than it did in ch. 16.

29. This is allowably less clear-cut in 23.36-39, which suddenly introduces the image of both Oholah and Oholibah sacrificing in 'my sanctuary ... my house' (מקדשי ... ביתי) and thereby suggests the possibility of some religious continuity between the two kingdoms. The confused and probably supplementary nature of the section aside (see Allen, *Ezekiel 20-48*, 51-52; Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 756; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 480), this hardly constitutes a shared history of the sort which might explain the use of the (apparent) political title of the northern kingdom as an ethno-religious term by the inhabitants of the south.

Last but not least, though the history recounted by ch. 20 is usually remarked upon for its unrelenting negativity, it is equally remarkable in making no reference to a shared history between the kingdoms lately centred on Samaria and on Jerusalem, though its reckoning of the history of Israel ranges from Egypt to exile and such a division would fit neatly into the narrative of Israel's rebellion. At the very least, this undermines claims that the 390 years of iniquity in 4.5 might refer to the division of a united monarchy; no such united monarchy, let alone its schism, is known in this material.[30] More fundamentally, it underscores the extent to which the book of Ezekiel is essentially disinterested in the northern kingdom, aside from its function as a convenient political object lesson in chs 16 and 23.

The result of this lacunae is that it is by no means obvious that the reference to the house of Israel in 4.4-5 should be interpreted as a condemnation of the iniquity of the kingdom centred on Samaria, even after the addition of the house of Judah in 4.6. Indeed, Zimmerli highlights the oddity of this purported interest in the northern kingdom when he observes that

> We should therefore expect that in this oracle regarding the two kingdoms all the emphasis would be placed on the saying about Judah (and Jerusalem) as in the oracle against the two kingdoms in ch. 23 ... Instead of this, in 4.4-5 the action of the prophet concerning the house of Israel is given in detail, whilst the house of Judah is dealt with briefly in v 6.[31]

*

The brevity with which Judah is considered in 4.4-6 draws attention to another feature of the book's presentation of these two entities, namely, that Judah appears both very rarely in the book overall and, when it does, appears most frequently in the parts of the book which are widely identified as supplementary. A brief review is worthwhile.

Judah appears 15 times in the book, with the appearance in 4.6 being its first. It appears next in Ezekiel's vision of the temple: in the introduction (8.1), in the final stage of his tour (8.17), and in YHWH's explanation for the scope of his destruction (9.9). It then disappears until 21.25, where it is mentioned as an alternative military target for the king of Babylon, and ch. 25, where it occurs three times in the short oracles against the nations (25.3, 8, 12); these are prior to a single occurrence in 27.17 in the oracle against Tyre. It then vanishes for several chapters again, until its appearance in the sign-act of the two sticks (37.16, 19). It reappears for its last act in ch. 48, as one of the 12 tribes allotted territory radiating outward from the temple (48.7, 8, 22, 31). The perceived interpretive demands of 4.4-6 have no doubt contributed to the conclusions drawn about the rest of these passages.

Despite claims to the contrary, Judah does not function as an *alter ego* for Israel in this subsequent material. The most straightforward of these passages is 21.25, in which the king of Babylon is seen to make a decision as to which direction to proceed in his mission of destruction: towards 'Rabbah, of the Bene-Ammon, or Judah—in fortified Jerusalem'. Although the syntax and transmission history of the final words of the verse are not entirely clear, it is evident that Judah is the location to which the Babylonians may (will) come, with Jerusalem its capital city.[32] A similarly territorial sense may be understood by

30. As, e.g., Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, 60.
31. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 163.
32. On the text critical issues, see Block (*Ezekiel 1-24*, 681, 684) and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 436-437). Block notes that בני עמון is almost invariably the form of the name used for the territory

Judah's appearances in the temple vision and its aftermath (8.17; 9.9), insofar as both passages refer to offences taking place in the wider countryside beyond Jerusalem.[33] This is especially apparent in the contrast between Ezekiel's query about the extent of YHWH's destruction in 9.8, which concerns only Jerusalem and refers only to the house of Israel, and YHWH's answer in 9.9, which mentions both Israel and Judah in its condemnation of both city and countryside. This use of Judah to designate the country as a whole contrasts with the aforementioned association of Israel with the capital.[34]

The reference in 27.17 demands a similarly territorial frame of reference for Judah and likewise appears to distinguish Judah from the 'land of Israel', though the passage as a whole may well be part of the subsequent development of the book.[35] Indeed, all of the other instances in which Judah appears are peculiar to greater or lesser degrees; the threefold 'house of Judah' in ch. 25 occurs in a series of short oracles against the nations which differ markedly from those against the nations in chs 26-32, while the vision of the two sticks in ch. 37 and the vision of the restored temple in chs 40-48 are widely considered to be contributions from the book's later editors.[36] It is perhaps unsurprising that in

(104 of 106 biblical occurrences, reiterated by the Assyrian royal inscriptions) and therefore should not be understood as an (ethnic) gentilic but as a location; thus likewise Judah should be understood in territorial terms (*Ezekiel 1-24*, 684 n. 164). Greenberg glosses the final three words as 'the population of Judah concentrated in fortified Jerusalem' (*Ezekiel 1-20*, 427).

33. It should be noted that the appearance of Judah in both 8.17 and 9.9 has been considered suspect; see already Walter Zimmerli ('Israel im Buch Ezechiel', *VT* 8 [1958]: 82). The 'elders of Judah' in 8.1 (זקני יהודה) make a particularly dubious contrast to the otherwise consistent references to the 'elders (of the house) of Israel' in 8.11, 12; 14.1; 20.1, 3 (זקני [בית] ישראל). Zimmerli implies the superiority of 'Judah' in 8.1, 17 as *lectio difficilior*, against certain manuscript traditions which have Israel, but suggests that the term is used to indicate men of political office—unconsciously echoing the idea that the term's principal referent is the territory and state (*Ezekiel 1*, 216, 221, 236). The exceptional appearance of the phrase in 8.1 perhaps reflects the fact that chs 8-11 are concerned ultimately with the fate of Jerusalem, the state's capital, whereas chs 14 and 20 are more interested in Israel as an ethno-religious entity (though of course these are not mutually exclusive concerns). Without further evidence, it is impossible to determine decisively the nature of the Judah by which these elders are defined.
34. Again, see Crouch, 'Before and after Exile', 350-351.
35. This apparently geographical formulation of 'land of Israel' (ארץ ישראל) is otherwise found only in 40.2; 47.18, within the lengthy vision of the restored temple which is widely thought to be a later development. This list in 27.12-24 is sometimes also thought to be a secondary elaboration; thus Walter Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 2*, transl. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia [Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983], 63), but contra Daniel I. Block (*The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, NICOT [Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998], 52), who follows Mario Liverani ('The Trade Network of Tyre according to Ezek. 27', in *Ah, Assyria ...! Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al, ScrHier 33 [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1991], 79), though Block is obliged to admit that 'the reference to *ʾereṣ yiśrāʾēl*, 'the land of Israel', is remarkable, not only because of Ezekiel's reluctance to use the phrase but also because Israel [the northern kingdom] had ceased to exist more than a century earlier' (*Ezekiel 25-48*, 75). Note also that Liverani observes a number of anomalies in the literary makeup of the chapter and suggests that the prose material in 27.12-25 originated separately. On Ezekiel's unusual interest in Israel's homeland, see Crouch, 'Before and after Exile', 352-357.
36. On the oracles against the nations, see Lawrence Boadt (*Ezekiel's Oracles against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29-32,* BibOr 37 [Rome: Biblical Institute Press,

this material, the entity described in connection with this name takes on a different character.

Thus, the fourfold appearance of Judah in ch. 48 is as a simultaneously tribal and territorial entity, one among the 12 tribes said to constitute 'the house (or people) of Israel' (48.7, 8, 22, 31). In a mirror image of Israel's territorialisation in these chapters, Judah moves beyond its earlier territorial meaning and towards a more notably tribal or ethnic one. Despite the shifting conceptualisation of both entities, however, it remains clear that Judah and Israel are not coterminous; Judah constitutes but one of the 12 tribes which make up Israel as a whole. Likewise, in 37.16, 19 Judah is clearly something distinct from, though associated with, the sons of Israel (בני ישראל) which, in the form of the house of Israel (בית ישראל), are also associated with Joseph. The ultimate point of the episode, despite the confusion introduced by the muddled and multiple identifications of the two sticks, is clearly to subsume Judah within some wider notion of Israel; indeed, it is to Israel that the promises of restoration—here as throughout Ezekiel—are directed. This is particularly obvious in the immediate context, from the solitude of the house of Israel in the rest of the chapter and in the immediately preceding vision of the valley of dry bones. It is equally apparent from the wider swathe of material between ch. 33 and ch. 48, throughout which all the restorative attentions of YHWH are directed at Israel.

This phenomenon—the development of an ethnic sense for Judah and efforts to correlate this entity to Israel—may also be observed in the book of Jeremiah. There, in a series of parallels which are, indeed, clearly intended to be synonymous, the 'sons of Judah' are paralleled with the 'sons of Israel', and the 'house of Judah' is paralleled to the 'house of Israel'.[37] These efforts are concentrated in the later stages of the book's development, appending Judah onto condemnations of and promises to an originally solitary Israel—much like this material in Ezekiel seems to do. Also like Ezekiel, the older parts of Jeremiah refer to Judah as territorial; this ethnic idea represents a novel development, associated in some way with the collapse of the state and the deportation of the Israelite elites. Unlike Ezekiel, the Jeremiah passages place Judah and Israel on equal footing, as effectively coterminous ethnic identities.[38] Although Ezekiel 37; 48 and Jeremiah reflect similar struggles to formulate a relationship between Israel and a newly ethnic Judah, the Ezekiel material differs from the Jeremiah material in its insistence on Israel's dominance. Nevertheless, both books attest to a marked conceptual shift in the presentation of Judah. Whereas in the earlier material it signifies a simple political and territorial state,

---

1980], 9), Walther Eichrodt (*Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. Cosslett Quin, OTL [London: SCM, 1970], 351-364), John B. Geyer ('Mythology and Culture in the Oracles against the Nations', *VT* 36 [1986]: 141), and Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1*, 61, 72). Hals provides a summary of ch. 25's oddities (*Ezekiel*, 182). On chs 37; 40-48, see Hals (*Ezekiel*, 231-233, 274), Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 2*, 552-553), and Anja Klein (*Schriftauslegung im Ezechielbuch: Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Ez 34-39* [BZAW 391; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008], 211-219, 224-232); cf. Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, for whom 37.15-28 are flagrantly linked to chs 40-48 (*Ezechielstudien: zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Buches und zur Frage nach den ältesten Texten*, BZAW 202 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992], 112 n. 95).

37. Jer. 3.18; 5.11; 11.10, 17; 31.27, 31 [LXX 38.27, 31]; 32.30, 32 [39.30, 32]; 33.14; 50.4, 33 [27.4, 33].

38. A few passages in Jeremiah, most notably Jer. 3.1-14, seem to reflect a struggle for dominance and a preference for Israel which more closely resembles the material in Ezekiel.

later passages extend it into something more nearly resembling an ethnic entity—a tribe, to use the language of Ezekiel 48.[39]

From this survey, it seems likely that early versions of the book of Ezekiel either did not refer to Judah or referred to it only as the territory against which the king of Babylon would come (21.25). In a series of likely expansions (8.17; 9.9; cf. 27.17), which serve primarily to extend Ezekiel's condemnation to the countryside beyond Jerusalem, it continued to function in this sense of a territorial entity centred on Jerusalem, in contrast to (the house of) Israel, which represents YHWH's people in Jerusalem (some of whom have now been deported to Babylonia). The muddying of the conceptual waters is most apparent in chs 37 and 48; in the latter, Judah has been transformed into a tribal entity and in both it is subsumed into a comprehensive notion of Israel.

Returning to our ultimate point, it is clear that the Judah which appears in the book of Ezekiel, in all of these various guises, should be distinguished from the entity called Israel. Israel constitutes the unbiddable people of YHWH, first in Jerusalem and later in Babylonia. Judah is the territorial state as a whole; only in the book's latest passages does the term suggest an ethnic or tribal referent. The commonly repeated assertion that Israel and Judah are used 'interchangeably' is, on examination, simply not true. The proposal to explain the 'house of Judah' in 4.6 as effectively equivalent to the 'house of Israel' in 4.4-5, therefore, cannot be upheld.

*

If the 'house of Israel' is not the northern kingdom nor the 'house of Judah' its *alter ego*, what are we to make of the situation in 4.4-6? This final section will observe one further difficulty with the interpretation of 'house of Israel' and 'house of Judah' as northern and southern kingdoms—namely, the 'left/north' and 'right/south' notations—*en route* to suggesting that the introduction of 'the house of Judah' in 4.6 was intended to extend a judgement on Jerusalem to the country as a whole. It will then undertake an exposition of the remaining puzzling aspects of the section, namely, the significance of the 40 years and the meaning of עון, and make some final observations on the relationship of the passage, thus interpreted, to the wider trends observed above.

It was noted above that one of the justifications put forward for the interpretation of 'the house of Israel' as the northern kingdom and 'the house of Judah' as the southern kingdom concerns the inclusion, in 4.4 and 4.6, of the information that Ezekiel is to lie immobile on his left and right sides, respectively.[40] As part of their rejection of the north–south interpretation, commentators have been obliged to assert that 'left' and 'right' do not, in this context, signify 'north' and 'south'.[41] The unanswered difficulty of this claim is that the rationale according to which this detail was included then becomes opaque. If they do not signify 'north' and 'south', 'left' and 'right' appear to be meaningless. In a

39. The material in ch. 25 reflects a similarly wandering concept of 'the house of Judah'; sometimes it refers to a territory (25.8), sometimes to people (25.3), and throughout with notable lack of clarity with regard to its relation with Israel (25.3, 12-14). This may be connected to the chapter's suspect pedigree; its distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* the oracles in chs 26-32 especially has led scholars to the conclusion that it represents a late addition to the book (see Hals, *Ezekiel*, 182). Within ch. 25 itself, Hals observes that the prophecies against Moab and Edom, which contain two of the three 'house of Judah' occurrences, are 'in considerable part only stereotypical expansions parallel to 25:1-7' (*Ezekiel*, 178; cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 11).

40. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 104-105; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 163, 166.

41. Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 85; Odell, *Ezekiel*, 63.

passage in which 'there is an almost allegorical aspect to the way each item in the action has a symbolic significance', meaningless detail seems unlikely.[42]

It is pertinent here to return to the text and, in particular, to 4.3. Without the difficulty posed by 'house of Judah' in 4.6, 4.4-5 flows naturally from the instructions given in 4.1-2 to build a model of the city of Jerusalem and to lay a mock siege against it.[43] 4.3 develops the image of 4.1-2, introducing an iron object as a wall between the prophet and the city, against which the prophet is instructed to set his face. Although הכינתה את־פניך may well be idiomatic, the image is of a prophet who enacts this sign while facing the model representing the city.[44] The whole of this is described as a sign for the house of Israel (4.3). It is clear that—like the whole of Ezekiel—it sees the fate of the house of Israel as intimately connected to the fate of the city of Jerusalem.

With this in mind, it is most natural to read 4.4-5 similarly, as the prophet lying on his side (left or otherwise) while (still) facing in the direction of Jerusalem, the locus of the house of Israel and object of the sign-act's message. As he lies on his side, he is instructed to 'set the guilt of the house of Israel upon it' (i.e., upon his side).[45] This affirms the primary focus of the sign vis-à-vis the house of Israel. By virtue of the intimate association of the house of Israel with Jerusalem, it also very strongly implies a continuation of the focus on Jerusalem, whose siege is the primary interest of the whole chapter.[46] Judgement on the house of Israel is tantamount to judgement on Jerusalem, and vice versa.

If this is correct, it suggests that the immobility allotted for the עון of the house of Judah is to be 'borne' while facing in the opposite direction—that is, away from the city. Before dismissing the prophet's turn away from the city on the grounds that it would be symbolically meaningless, careful consideration is required. We have already seen that Judah may be used in contrast to Israel as a means of signifying the wider countryside outside of Jerusalem (8.17; 9.9). A similar usage is apparent in the book of Jeremiah, in which territorial references to Judah serve as a way of referring comprehensively to the whole of the state.[47] If such a referent for Judah is in mind in 4.6, then the verse serves

42. Hals, *Ezekiel*, 33.

43. There is a *setuma* between 4.3 and 4.4 but otherwise the next stage of the sequence in 4.4-5 is demarcated from 4.1-3 only by the 'and you ...' which characterises the various stages of the sign-act(s) (4.1, 3, 9; 5.1).

44. Compare 3.7, which uses the same idiom: 'toward besieged Jerusalem set your face and your bare arm, and prophecy against it'. Indeed, to convey a message concerning the city while facing any other direction would be quite odd.

45. While querying the significance of 'left' and 'right', one might observe that laying on the left seems to imply that the only side upon which something might then be set (שים), even metaphorically, would have to be the exposed and upturned right side. Zimmerli runs into difficulties on this front when he assumes that 'Ezekiel is to lay the guilt of the house of Israel on the left side of his body' (which is beneath him) and, consequently, declares this to be a 'quite impossible picture' (*Ezekiel 1*, 148). Of course, if ושמת is emended to ונשאת, to mirror 4.6, this is somewhat obviated, insofar as the latter does not locate the עון which is to be borne by the prophet anywhere specifically upon his body; the emendation also tends to be accompanied by the deletion of עליו or its emendation to עליך (e.g., Hals, *Ezekiel*, 27; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 148; also *BHS*).

46. Redactional discussions which attempt to divide between siege and exile imagery in ch. 4 invariably view siege as primary (Block, *Ezekiel 1-24*, 169; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 118; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 59; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 161-170).

47. Note especially the frequency of the phrases 'each man of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem' (איש יהודה וישבי ירושלם, Jer. 4.4; 11.2, 9; 17.25; 18.11; 32.32 [LXX 39.32];

to extend 4.4-5's condemnation of the עון of the house of Israel with a condemnation of the עון of the house of Judah. That is, 4.6 signals that it is not only the house of Israel which is associated with Jerusalem whose עון is to be borne by the prophet, but the עון of the country as a whole.

Such an understanding of the prophet's movements has the advantage of offering a coherent interpretation of the specifications of 'left' and 'right' that neither relies on an anomalous appearance of the northern kingdom nor elides the house of Judah with the house of Israel. Although there is a notable shortage of precise details in the biblical material, the core of Judahite territory was undoubtedly the hill-country between Bethlehem and Hebron.[48] Jerusalem stood at the northern border of this territory. In order to be situated between Jerusalem and Judah—in a location in which he could conceivably turn 180° from one to the other—the prophet must be envisioned to lie to the south of the city. From such a location, the prophet would have faced north ('left') as he bore the עון of the house of Israel. Upon turning over, he would have faced south ('right') while he bore the עון of the house of Judah.

This returns us to two questions which have been raised above, namely, the significance of עון and the significance of the 40 years allotted to Judah. As already observed, the difficulty of identifying a meaningful historical reference for 40 years of past 'guilt' for the house of Judah has consistently led scholars to resort to an interpretation of עון in 4.6 which differs from its interpretation in 4.4-5: the 'guilt' or 'iniquity' of the house of Israel, but the 'punishment' of the house of Judah. This irregularity is not required. Coherent sense may be made of a reference to 40 years of 'guilt' of the house of Judah, if it is recognised that 40 years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 BCE brings us to 627/6 BCE.[49] That this was a significant year internationally is certain. It may also have been domestically significant.

Internationally, 627/6 BCE is the point at which the hitherto dominant Assyrian empire began its ignominious descent into oblivion, as a series of inept successors to the long-reigning Assurbanipal failed to establish or maintain their control over the empire and its dominions.[50] Assyria's weakness led ultimately to the annihilation of the Judahite

35.13 [42.13], 36.31 [43.31]) and 'in the cities of Judah and in the squares of Jerusalem' (בערי יהודה ובחצות ירושלם, Jer. 7.17, 34; 11.6; 33.10 [40.10]; 44.6, 17, 21 [51.6, 17, 21]), in which Jerusalem and Judah together represent *pars* and *toto*, as well as references to 'all the people of Judah' (כל עם יהודה, Jer. 25.1, 2; 26.18 [33.18]) and to 'all Judah' (כל יהודה, Jer. 7.2; 17.20; 20.4; 26.19 [33.19]; 36.6 [43.6]; 40.15 [47.15]; 44.11-12 [51.11-12]; 44.24, 26 [51.26]), which are used to emphasise the comprehensiveness of the population in mind. Its use of 'Judahites' as a way to refer to the general population—especially after the final fall of the city—is also particularly notable (יהודים, Jer. 32.12 [39.12]; 34.9 [41.9]; 38.19 [45.19]; 40.11-12 [41.11]; 41.3 [48.3]; 43.9 [50.9]; 44.1 [51.1]; 52.28, 30).

48. See e.g., C. H. J. de Geus, 'Judah (Place)', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. Daniel N. Freedman, vol. 3 (London: Doubleday, 1992), 1035. Notably this does not cohere with the tribal allotments of ch. 48, in which Judah and Benjamin are inverted and several other tribes are also relocated. On the ideological structuring of those allotments, see Block (*Ezekiel 25-48*, 719-724) and Odell (*Ezekiel*, 522-523). The incongruence probably suggests that the development of 4.6 took place prior to that in chs 40-48.

49. That 587/6 BCE rather than 597 BCE is the likely point of departure for the passage's calculations is almost universally recognised; Brownlee is the exception which proves the rule (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 68).

50. For discussion of Assyria's rapid demise after the death of Assurbanipal, see Marc Van De Mieroop (*A History of the Ancient Near East: ca. 3000-323 BC*, 3rd edn. [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 284-287), Amélie Kuhrt (*The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, Routledge History

state, as the latter's government tried and failed to judge the relative strengths of its potential successors. Over the course of these four decades, Judah's loyalties swung wildly among the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the various small states of the southern Levant. In the process, it repeatedly betrayed its oaths of allegiance and alliance, in a series of ultimately disastrous efforts to align itself with the ultimate victors.

Looking backward from the city's destruction, these are the four decades of infighting, instability, and broken promises which destroyed the country—40 years of disastrous decisions by Judah's leaders that were directly responsible for its ultimate annihilation. Against this background, the recurring association of עון with lies, falsehood, and betrayal of one's word is particularly noteworthy; the 'guilt of the house of Judah' in 4.6 was its failure to keep its word to any of its overlords in the last four decades of its existence.[51] These realities would have been especially resonant in a declaration of the cause of Judah's devastation; Zedekiah's betrayal of his oath of loyalty is what finally prompted Judah's demolition at the hands of the Babylonians. Standing especially in contrast to the long *pax Assyriaca* preceding this turmoil, the government's failure to steer a safe course through the rocky shoals of international politics would have constituted a deep guilt indeed.

Domestically, 627/6 BCE stands out as the moment at which Josiah commenced his reforms, at least according to the Chronicler (2 Chr. 34.3). The attribution of the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic activity to 627/6 BCE is of similar significance (Jer. 1.1-2). The relationship and reliability of Kings and Chronicles on the chronology of Josiah's reign, not to mention the accuracy of the biblical dates of Jeremiah's career, are notoriously vexed. A decisive resolution is well beyond the scope of the present discussion, for which it will have to suffice to observe that, at some point, there appears to have been a tradition associating the beginning of Josiah's cultic activities with 627/6 BCE.[52] With this in mind, the range of the changes attributed to Josiah is notable; they were concerned not merely with the temple in Jerusalem but with worship practices in Judah more widely (2 Kgs 23.1-4 // 2 Chr. 34.29-33). Given the alteration of the obligations placed upon the general population of Judah as a result of these changes, it is conceivable that 'the guilt of the house of Judah' may be construed as the guilt which arose as a result of the wider population's failure to faithfully adhere to these new demands.

Internationally and perhaps also domestically, therefore, the events of 627/6 BCE offer a comprehensible point of reference for the attribution of 40 years of עון to the house of Judah in 4.6. The recognition of the significance of this year for the interpretation of 4.6 has the advantage of allowing a consistent meaning to be attributed to עון, as a judgement in 4.4-5 on 'the guilt of the house of Israel' was extended by 4.6 to 'the guilt of the house of Judah'.

*

---

of the Ancient World [London: Routledge, 1995], 540-546), and Mario Liverani (*The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy*, trans. S. Tabatabai [London: Routledge, 2011], 537-539).

51. Thus, e.g., Pss. 7.15; 10.7; 36.4; 41.7; Job 11.11; 15.35; Zech. 10.2; cf. Isa. 58.9; Prov. 17.4. *DCH* notes as synonyms שקר, 'deceit' and שוא, 'falsehood'. On the social power of speech, see Tarah Van De Wiele, '"Cast Them Out for Their Many Crimes!": Reading the Retributive Psalmist in Light of Ancient Near Eastern Legal Culture' (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2016).

52. On Josiah see variously the essays of Rainier Albertz, Ehud Ben Zvi, Philip R. Davies, Nadav Na'aman and Christoph Uehlinger in Lester L. Grabbe (ed.), *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, LHBOTS 393 (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

As elements of the preceding have insinuated, the interpretation of the guilt of the house of Judah in 4.6 as referring to the final four decades of the state's existence does not negate the redactional character of the verse. Indeed, the distribution of the other references to Judah in Ezekiel strongly suggest that 4.6 represents a later effort to integrate an entity of this name into a book whose principle concern is with Israel. Yet its message is not random, nor is it incoherent. Rather, it intentionally expands Ezekiel's judgement, extending a Jerusalem-orientated condemnation of the house of Israel to the country as a whole.

Elsewhere, Ezekiel's interest in this general population is negligible; it is Jerusalem and the house of Israel associated with it which are the unrelenting focus of attention. At some stage, however, the incorporation of Judah into the condemnation of—and subsequent promise of restoration for—Israel took on a marked significance and apparent urgency. This is evident in a number of late contributions to Ezekiel and to other books, including Jeremiah. The same material reflects a development in the conceptual range of Judah, from a geo-territorial term to a name for the people left behind in the land after 587/6 BCE. The concentration of such multivalent material in exilic-period works like Ezekiel and Jeremiah suggest that these developments may have occurred as part of the intense social upheaval and change which occurred in the wake of the twofold siege of Jerusalem, the deportation of its inhabitants, and the ultimate destruction of Judah. The details of this transition and the rationale behind the urgency with which this new Judah required integration into Israel await further investigation.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung/Foundation; to St John's College, Oxford; and to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, for their generous support of this and related research and to the Old Testament Seminar of the University of Cambridge for their useful feedback on an earlier draft.

ORCID iD

C L Crouch https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9569-5727