CHAPTER THREE

‘NEWNESS’ IN EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH

3.0. Perspective

We temporarily set aside the cosmic dimensions to which the word ‘new’ has led us as we followed the route Psalms → Deutero-Isaiah → Trito-Isaiah, and we will now immerse ourselves in the anthropological conceptions to which Ezekiel and Jeremiah connect the word—conceptions that stand at the cradle of the evidently alluring idea of ‘the new man’. A comparison between these anthropological and cosmological lines will be more meaningful once we have gained a clear picture of the relation between Ezekiel’s and Jeremiah’s relevant passages. If one takes into account how many issues this relation raises in itself, it quickly becomes clear that our third chapter forms an essential intermediate trajectory en route to the cosmic-anthropological comparison which has been set in the programme for chapter four.

Besides the exhortation in Ezek. 18:21–32 that the addressed should acquire themselves a new heart and a new spirit, Ezekiel carries the promise in Ezek. 36:16–38 that on his part Yhwh will provide a new heart and a new spirit to those Israelites that were scattered among the nations when he reinstates them in the land. The discussion of the exhortation [→ 3.1.1] and the promise [→ 3.1.2] gives rise to a description of their connections with a number of other passages from Ezekiel [→ 3.1.3]. The central question resounds, what significance does the promise of newness hold within Ezekiel’s restitution perspective as a whole? Even though it is unfeasible for our purposes to undertake a comprehensive discussion on the recent redaction-critical research of this book, we will not dismiss an opportunity to modestly attempt a relative dating of the texts, partly in light of the deviating textual form represented in papyrus 967 [→ 3.1.4.1–3]. The diachronic question whether Ezekiel’s portrayal of a new heart and a new spirit reaches back to cultic motifs, brings it into confrontation with Ps. 51 [→ 3.1.4.4].

Jer. 30–31 uses the term ‘new’ in two instances, first in view of a new creation [→ 3.2.1] and second in view of a new covenant [→ 3.2.2]. Subsequent to the discussion of these passages and their positioning within
the structure of the so-called ‘Booklet of Comfort’ \([\rightarrow 3.2.3]\), comparisons are made with other promises of return and internal change in the book of Jeremiah \([\rightarrow 3.2.4]\). As for Ezekiel, we will attempt to determine the diachronic, text-genetic relationships between the pericopes in Jeremiah as best possible without too many external interferences, both within Jer. 30–31 itself \([\rightarrow 3.2.5.1]\) and between Jer. 24, 29, 30–31 and 32 \([\rightarrow 3.2.5.2]\).

These steps are preparatory for a comparison between the two prophetic books pertaining to their newness utterances. This chapter’s journey will reach its final destination in this comparison. In the course of the twentieth century there have been several attempts to reduce similar prophetic expectations to a communal generic pattern, but these endeavours have failed in offering deep insight into the relationship between Jeremiah and Ezekiel.\(^1\)

Our intertextual approach, as in the previous chapter, will be based on the hypothesis of direct literary borrowings, which has been proven to be fruitful in more recent research \([\rightarrow 3.2.5.3–4]\).

One more comment needs to be made before presenting the translations of the Hebrew passages. In biblical Hebrew there are no sharp distinctions between prose and poetry. For obvious poetic texts in Jeremiah, colometric and/or strophic reconstructions such as those in the Psalms and Isaiah will be followed. The remaining translated passages from Jeremiah and Ezekiel are divided according to the Masoretic punctuation system. Thus, after the ‘\(\text{‘atnāh}\) the second verse half shifts back against the margin, \(\text{et cetera}\). A third type of translation is already known from the preceding chapter: it is arranged according to the grammatical clauses (or clause-atoms) in Hebrew to help make linguistic analogies visible. Other clause-wise translations are segmented hierarchically using brackets, thus offering graphic support to a passage’s text-grammatical analysis.

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