CHAPTER TWO

EZEKIEL 18 AND 20
A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Since concluding that the MT of Ezekiel 18 and 20 offers a reliable basis for a vision of the relationship between individual and corporate responsibility in this biblical book, it appears sensible to clarify the composition of these chapters by means of a structural analysis. The analysis shows the literary composition and internal cohesion of both chapters as offered by the MT.

The approach of the textual material in this structural analysis is synchronic. Particularly the homogeneity of the Ezekiel tradition suggests a synchronic approach. The text critical, philological and grammatical analysis of the text confirms the choice of a synchronic approach. This does not a priori exclude diachronic remarks. When they may throw light on the coherence and structure of the literary design, they will certainly be cited. Whenever necessary, the terminology of form criticism will be used to label the various parts of the text with an eye on clarifying the structure. The term ‘structure,’ for the description of the ordering of the text, is indicated by previously listed criteria. The weight assigned to the various criteria determines to a large extent the description of the ordering of the text. The structure as it is read in the text knows a clear subjective component. The ‘structure’ is a description of the ordering of the text, which clarifies as fruit of close reading of the text by means of the indicated criteria. This chapter describes the structure, as read in the texts on the basis of formulated and indicated criteria for particular verses. The description of the structure of Ezekiel 18 and 20 demonstrates the coherence of these two textual units,

---

1 See Joyce 1995 (125–126) on the legitimacy of both the synchronic and the diachronic approaches to Ezekiel. Utzschneider 1996 (4): “Diachronic exegesis is inconceivable without synchronic elements—that is to say, without taking account of the linguistic form of the presently existing text; and conversely, synchronic exegesis cannot deny—and generally has no wish to deny—the complex history of the text’s development. To this extent most exegesis may be said to recognize the justification of both perspectives.”

2 With Greenberg 1986 (18–27). Cf. also this aspect of the Amsterdam School, see Oost 1986.
which stand centrally in the testing of Wheeler Robinson’s corporate personality hypothesis.

A brief sketch of the structure of Ezekiel precedes the structural analysis of both chapters. This will provide insight into the place of Ezekiel 18 and 20 in the whole of the book of Ezekiel.

The Structure of Ezekiel

A threefold structure is recognizable in Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24 (section I) contain a message of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. Chapters 25–32 (section II) feature the prophecies against the nations, and chapters 33–48 (section III) are characterized by a message of comfort, hope and restoration. Many subdivisions may be added to this threefold structure. Ezekiel 40–48 may serve as a clear example of this. These chapters contain the vision of the new temple and the division of the land. The prophecies against the nations fill a ‘bridge function’ between the first and third sections of the book, in which the fate of the people of Israel is central. The connecting link is the theme of the prophecies against the nations, namely their attitude opposed to Jerusalem and their behavior during the fall of Jerusalem. The first and third sections have strong thematic connections, for example the theme of the prophet in the midst of the people in 2:5 and 33:33, the theme of the watcher in 3:16–21 and 33:1–9, the muteness of the prophet in 3:25–27; 24:25–27 and 33:21–22, God’s glory in the opening vision of the book, further in 11:22–23 where the glory leaves the city and in 43:1–11 where the return is described.

The threefold structure does not function as a straitjacket for the textual material. The ordering is not applied scrupulously, as appears from 11:14–21; 16:60–63; 17:22–32; 20:40–44 in the first section. Within the message of judgment they offer a perspective for the future. In the

---

3 Cf. Isa 1–39 and Jeremiah (in the LXX) as well as Zephaniah (see Neef 1999 [530–546]). Thus also Krüger 1989 (298). He qualifies this (305) as a threefold scheme imprinted in the book by the final redaction. Krüger seeks “das ältere EB” (305–394), which has a twofold eschatological scheme, following Fuhs 1986 (7). Their opinions vary on the extent and structure of the older book.

4 See Hals 1989 (3).

5 Contrary to Joyce 1989 (144): “[T]he two watchman passages now form ‘bookends’ around the pre-587 ministry of Ezekiel.”

6 Renz 1999 (162–177) understands this positive perspective in the first half of the book (Ezek 1–33) as a rhetorical technique.