

A Murderous, Captured Lion: Ezekiel's Negative Approach toward Jehoiachin

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Both Ezekiel and Jehoiachin king of Judah were exiled to Babylonia. This shared fate led many scholars to the assumption that Ezekiel's approach toward Jehoiachin was positive, and some even maintained that Ezekiel considered him worthy of participating in Israel's future restoration. But does the critical analysis of Ezekiel's prophecies which relate to Israel's leadership indeed support this hypothesis?

This article will investigate this issue through the study of the dirge in Ezek 19. Its first part will discuss the different images appearing in it and propose that although the unity of this dirge was frequently questioned, the overall evidence in this case rather supports its unity and pre-fall dating. Its second part will present new evidence for identifying the different images in the dirge which prove that the murderous lion depicted in Ezek 19:5–9 is an image of no other but Jehoiachin. Its last part will evaluate how these findings shed new light on the literary considerations which led the prophet to switch from the lion's image to the vine's in the middle of the dirge and discuss how this reading of Ezek 19 contributes to our understanding of other sections in the book of Ezekiel which relate to Israel's past, present and future leaders.

THE LIONESS AND HER CUBS

Ezek 19 is a dirge over Israel's princes.¹ Its first part (vv. 1–9) opens with defining these princes' mother as a lioness who lay peacefully among lions,² where she also reared her cubs.

The lioness and her pride had existed peacefully for a long time without anyone trying to harm them. But then, the lioness raised one of her cubs.³ He grew up and learned to devour prey, but he was not satisfied with that and devoured humans as well.

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¹ The dirge does not open with the regular messenger formula but rather with the words “and you” (19:1) which usually open sub-units. This caused many scholars to question its independence and consider it a continuation of some other unit. Some proposed that it continued Ezek 18 and that the three figures mentioned there are Josiah, his wicked son Jehoiakim and his just grandson Jehoiachin. See G.A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 198; A. Laato, *Josiah and David Redivivus: The Historical Josiah and the Messianic Expectations of Exilic and Postexilic Times* (CB, 33; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992), 169–71. But beside the fact that Ezek 18 mentions fathers and sons and Ezek 19 mothers and sons, the wrongs mentioned in Ezek 18 (pledging, usury etc.) are usually committed by ordinary people and not kings. Therefore, others suggested that Ezek 19 was originally the continuation of Ezek 17 and that Ezekiel's editor inserted Ezek 18 between them. See W. Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*, trans. R.E. Clements and J.D. Martin (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 380; W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, trans. C. Quin (OTL; London: SCM, 1970), 252; J.W. Wevers, *Ezekiel* (CB; London: Oliphants, 1976), 146–47; K. Schöpflin, “The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles within the Book of Ezekiel,” *VT* 55 (2005), 101–20. However, there are many differences between Ezek 17 and 19 that do not allow them to be seen as one continuous literary unit. First, Ezek 17 is a riddle and a parable (17:1) while Ezek 19 is a dirge; Second, Ezek 17 only deals with Jehoiachin and Zedekiah while Ezek 19 deals with three royal figures; Third, although both prophecies use the vine image (17:5–10; 19:10–14), they differ in all other images: While Ezek 17 depicts Jehoiachin as a cedar, Ezek 19 depicts the other royal figures as lions. Likewise, Ezek 17 depicts the king of Babylonia as an eagle while Ezek 19 calls him by name (19:9). If this was one continuous literary unit, one would expect consistency in the use of the various images; Fourth, Ezek 17 accuses the leaders of disloyalty to Babylonia, while Ezek 19 accuses them of other sins. These differences indicate that despite the lack of opening formula, Ezek 19 is an independent literary unit. See also M. Haran, *The Biblical Collection* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2008), 3:306–8 [in Hebrew].

² רבץ describes animals couching peacefully (Gen 29:2; Deut 22:6; Isa 13:21; 17:2). It might also relate to the peaceful existence of human beings (Zeph 2:14; Job 11:19).

³ LXX καὶ ἀπεπήδησεν, reflects the variant יעל, meaning the cub rose by himself. However, since the dirge emphasizes the lioness' role in appointing her cubs (v. 5) it seems that MT ותעל is preferable, and that the Greek translator was influenced by the rest of the masculine verbs in this verse.

Lions are capable of that, but this is not their normal habit. They usually prey other animals and if they do so, humans usually do not bother to capture and harm them. Therefore, this cub's deviation from the lions' habit caused the nations to act against him and precisely then. They caught him in their pit and led him in shackles to Egypt. This is the first clue to the dirge's meaning which in this case is highly necessary. Contrary to other parables (Ezek 17; 21:1–10), the dirge does not specify its interpretation here and assumes that the clues it supplies are enough for properly understanding its message.

The dirge does not tell what happened to the cub in Egypt, only that after some time, the lioness' hope for his return was lost. She then took another of her cubs and appointed him instead of his brother. This cub as well, grew up, gained confidence and walked among lions, meaning manifested his lordship over the pride.⁴ Unfortunately, he did not learn any lesson from his brother's happenings and started devouring humans as well. Moreover, his acts were much more severe. To begin with, he “knew his widows” וַיֵּדַע אֶלְמְנוֹתָיו (v. 7, MT) the meaning of which is debated.⁵ It seems that the most probable suggestion is Luzzatto's proposal to read וַיִּרְבֵּא אֶלְמְנוֹתָיו, “he multiplied his widows,” through devouring their husbands.⁶ This suggestion tallies

⁴ See Gen 13:17; Deut 11:24; Josh 1:3; 24:3; 1 Kgs 21:16; D.I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 602.

⁵ The Mediaevals interpreted יָדַע as “had sexual relations” see M. Cohen (ed.), *Mikra'ot Gedolot 'Haketer': Ezekiel* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 114 [in Hebrew]. Thus, the prince who is likened to a lion is accused of killing the husbands and lying or raping their widows (thus also B. Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* [OBO, 212; Fribourg/Göttingen: Presses Universitaires/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005], 56, 249). However, this suggestion assumes a shift from the parable to its interpretation while the subsequent mentioning of “his roaring” indicates that יָדַע still relates to the lion and not to the prince who was likened to him. Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 597 suggested that this verse reflects the dominant lion's habit to copulate with the previous dominant male's females. However, the word אֶלְמְנָה, widow, refers only to humans and never describes an animal whose partner died. The exegetical difficulty is also evident in the versions. LXX ἀγα ἐνέμεστο τῶν θράσει αὐτοῦ, might reflect the Hebrew בְּאִמְצוֹ, “he devoured with his might” (see LXX to Job 4:4; 17:9; 3 Macc 2:2, 4, 21, 26). TJ וַאֲצִדִי בִּירְנִיתִיהָ, “he ruined his castles,” which is accepted by M. Saur, “Eine prächtige Zeder. Transformationen der Königstradition im Ezechielbuch,” in R. Ebach and M. Leuenberger (eds.), *Tradition(en) im alten Israel. Konstruktion, Transmission und Transformation* (FAT, 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 303–20, probably reflects the Hebrew וַיִּרְעֵא אֶרְמְנוֹתָיו (for this interchange see the versions to Isa 13:22). The exegetical difficulty has also led to many different emendation proposals. See e.g. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 208, 211 who proposed וַיִּרְבֵּץ אֶל מְעוֹנוֹתָיו, “he crouched in his dens,” but it is not clear why would a lion be condemned for this. For many other proposals see C. Begg, “The Reading in Ezekiel 19,7a: A Proposal,” *ETL* 65 (1989), 370–80.

⁶ See S.D. Luzzatto, *A Commentary on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Proverbs and Job* (Lemberg: Menkes, 1876), 159 [in Hebrew]. Thus, “his widows” are

with a similar depiction of Israel's leaders **קָשֶׁר נְבִיאֶיהָ בְּתוֹכָהּ** **הַרְבּוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ** **כְּאֵרֵי שׂוֹאֵג טֶרֶף טָרֵף . . . אֶלְמְנוֹתֶיהָ הַרְבּוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ**, “whose princes⁷ behave like roaring lions inside her, tearing prey . . . they have multiplied widows inside her” (Ezek 22:25). In addition to multiplying widows, the second cub also ruined cities and his roaring desolated the entire land.⁸

Here as well, the nations confronted the lion, and just as his acts were more numerous than those of the first lion, so were the means used to capture him: net, pit, neck-stock,⁹ shackles and toils. Unlike the first lion who was brought to the land of Egypt, the second lion was brought to the king of Babylonia. The dirge does not tell what happened to him there or what was the lioness' reaction this time. Nevertheless, for the first time it conveys where were the two lions taken from and the Babylonian king's intention of a final and irrecoverable removal of the second cub “so his voice would never again be heard on the mountains of Israel” (v. 9).¹⁰

THE VINE AND ITS BOUGHS

In verses 10–14 the dirge leaves the lions image and describes the mother, mentioned already in verse 2, as a vine.¹¹ This vine was fruitful and ramified because of abundant water and she had mighty boughs fitted to serve as rulers' scepters. Like the dirge's first part, which started with depicting a pride of lions and then moved to focus on the happenings of a specific lion, here as well after relating to the vine, the dirge moves to focus on one of its boughs.¹² This bough stood out in relation to all the others, and

the widows caused by his actions. See also **חַלְלִיכִם**, “your victims” (Ezek 11:6), those who died because of you.

⁷ See LXX ἡς οἱ ἀφηγούμενοι, **אֲשֶׁר נְשִׂיאֶיהָ**.

⁸ Many of Ezekiel's exegetes understood **וְתִשָּׁם אֶרֶץ וּמְלֹאָהּ** as depicting the land's appalment. See e.g. M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB, 22A; New-York: Doubleday, 1983), 348; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 389; Saur, “Zeder,” 306. However, considering the preceding depiction of the ruined towns it seems that the land's desolation fits the context better.

⁹ The *hapax legomenon* **סוּגַר** is probably a loan-word deriving from Akkadian *šigaru*. See *CAD* Ṣ II:410–11.

¹⁰ See further Strawn, *Lion*, 39 who showed that ancient Near Eastern parallels of lion hunting indicate that the context of Ezek 19 is clearly one of hunting a lion, not maintaining one.

¹¹ The literal meaning of MT **בְּדָמָךְ** (19:10), “in/because your blood” does not fit the context. LXX has *ὡς ἄμπελος ὡς ἄνθος ἐν ῥόα ἐν ὕδατι πεφυτευμένη*, like a flower in a pomegranate planted in water. Some suggested “Your mother was equal to a vine” (see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 390), but this was manifested already through the **כ** of resemblance **כְּנֶפֶן כְּנֶפֶן** **אִמְךָ**. It seems that the most reasonable solution is to assume **כ/ב** and **ר/ד** interchanges and to read **בְּרִמָּךְ**, your mother is like a vine, your vineyard is planted on water (see Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 205).

¹² See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 353. This explains the shift from plural to singular forms in v. 11 and makes it unnecessary to harmonize the text (see LXX) or to consider v. 11aβb a subsequent addition (see M. Noth, “The Jerusalem Catastrophe of 587 B.C.,” in idem, *The Lams in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966], 260–80,

its height was visible from afar. It seems that its enormous height angered someone who acted furiously against the whole vine, uprooted it, and tossed it to the ground. However, contrary to the dirge's first part which hints at the identity of those who acted against the lions (the Egyptians, the king of Babylonia), the identity of the one acting against the vine remains obscure. After being uprooted and tossed away, the vine was exposed to the east wind which dried its fruits and branches and the mighty bough itself was consumed by fire. At this point, only the mighty bough was burnt while the rest of the vine was replanted in the wilderness, a far worse place than where she had been planted before. These harsh conditions, in themselves, may not necessarily lead to the final wilting of the vine.¹³ Nevertheless, in this case the dirge emphasizes that the vine had no chance to recover. Another fire broke out but this time it consumed the vine's other branches and fruits as well causing that "no mighty bough remained on her, no scepter for ruling" (v. 14). This fire then is final—this vine will no longer grow scepters to be used by the rulers.¹⁴ The prophecy concludes with a declaration that creates an *inclusio* with its opening and defines its literary boundaries: וְתִהְיֶה לְקִינָה הִיא וְתִהְיֶה לְקִינָה, thus should be read instead of MT וְתִהְיֶה לְקִינָה—this dirge that has not been fulfilled yet, will be fulfilled and indeed become a lament for the princes of Israel.¹⁵

UNITY AND COMPOSITION

The dirge's unity was questioned by many scholars who pointed at several differences between its two parts. First and foremost, scholars mentioned the shift in image from lions to vine in v. 10. They claimed that while vv. 1–9 show consistency in meter, refer specifically to concrete realities (Egypt, Babylonia) and focus on the offspring figures (the lions), vv. 10–14 are

p. 274; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 390).

¹³ See G. Eidevall, "Trees and Traumas: On the Use of Phytomorphic Metaphors in Prophetic Descriptions of Deportation and Exile," in J. Høgenhaven, F. Poulsen and C. Power (eds.), *Images of Exile in the Prophetic Literature* (FAT, 103; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 217–32.

¹⁴ According to M.H. Patton, *Hope for a Tender Sprig: Jeboiachin in Biblical Theology* (BBRSup, 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017), 102–3, v. 14 does not relate to a new fire but rather re-describes the events mentioned in v. 12. Therefore, he concludes that even after it burns the vine might recuperate. However, the phrasing of v. 14 does not indicate the past perfect (וְאֵשׁ יִצְאָה מִמֶּנּוּ בַדִּיָּה) but rather the perfect tense. Moreover, v. 12 describes a fire that consumes the mighty bough alone אֵשׁ אֲכָלְתָהּ, "fire consumed *him*," while the fire in v. 14 relates to the entire vine וְתִצְאָה אֵשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ בַדִּיָּה פְרִיָּהּ אֲכָלָהּ, "and fire came out from the boughs of *her* shoots, it consumed *her* fruit."

¹⁵ See also Ezek 32 which opens with the instruction "recite a dirge over Pharaoh" (32:2) and concludes with the affirmation that this dirge will indeed be recited (v. 16). For a discussion of the sophisticated use of the lament genre here see S. Burt, "It is a lamentation—It Has Become a Lamentation!: Subverting Genre in Ezekiel 19," in J.B. Couey and E.T. James (eds.), *Biblical Poetry and the Art of Close Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 199–215.

less consistent in meter, more vague regarding concrete realities (fire, east wind) and focus on the mother figure (the vine). Moreover, verse 13 *וְעַתָּה שְׁתוּלָה בַּמִּדְבָּר* “and now it is planted in the wilderness” was understood to indicate a post-fall dating, *after* the vine which resembles Zedekiah has already been uprooted and re-planted elsewhere. This led scholars to the opinion that Ezek 19 contains two separate dirges. The first, using an original lions’ image, was written before Judah’s fall,¹⁶ while the second, reusing the vine’s image appearing already in chapters 15 and 17, was written after the destruction and was supplemented to the first part only secondarily.¹⁷

However, without adopting a general methodological holistic approach to the study of the book of Ezekiel, it seems that *in this specific case* there are several compelling arguments for the unity of Ezek 19. To begin with, the metaphor spectrum that the prophet could have used was not limited and “a poet must be allowed freedom in the play of his metaphors.”¹⁸ Indeed, several prophetic texts indicate that biblical authors tend to diversify the metaphors they employ and in many cases they use images of both animals, plants and inanimate objects to relate to the same thing within a single prophetic unit.¹⁹ Therefore, Ezekiel as well was free to change the images or meters he used and did not have to describe Judah’s last kings exclusively as lions or vine boughs. Beside the change in metaphor, there are no apparent contradictions between the dirge’s two parts that do not allow reading them as one coherent sequence or necessitate the ascribing of one of them to other than Ezekiel. In sum, it seems that Ezek 19 is a unite dirge that contains two stanzas, each of which using a different image. The transition between the images resulted from literary considerations, but these could be discussed only after identifying the characters addressed in the dirge.

¹⁶ According to K.F. Pohlmann, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 1–19* (ATD, 22/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 283, even vv. 1–9 are not unite but rather consist of an original lion folk-song (vv. 2*, 5b, 6, 7b, 8*, 9*) who was supplemented by later redactors.

¹⁷ See e.g., A. Bertholet, *Hesekiel* (HAT, 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1936), 68–71; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 204–5; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 397; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 256–58; Pohlmann, *Hesekiel 1–19*, 287–92. Compare Saur, “Zeder,” who claimed for the priority of vv. 10–14 over 1–9.

¹⁸ See Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 205, who added “there is no sufficient reason for denying Ezekiel’s authorship of vv. 10–14; he was merely making use of his favorite images drawn from the vine or the cedar.” According to G. Fohrer, *Ezechiel* (HAT, 13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), 106 Ezekiel used the vine image, which he already encountered in chapters 15 and 17, in connection with the image of the lions, because both images appear in Gen 49 in relation to Judah.

¹⁹ See e.g. the metaphors of vine, she-camel and wild ass for Israel (Jer 2:21–24); of moth, rottenness and lions for God (Hos 5:12–14); of cake and dove for Ephraim (Hos 7:8–11); of dew and lion for Israel’s remnant (Mic 5:6–7); of heifer and forest for Egypt (Jer 46:20–23); of lion and eagle for God (Jer 49:19–21); and of lion and dragon (תנין) for Pharaoh (Ezek 32:2–3).

The assumption that verse 13 must reflect post-fall perspective is likewise not at all unavoidable. Verse 14 concludes with the proclamation that it would *become* a dirge, reflecting its author's understanding that not all the "lamented" events have yet occurred. Moreover, this assumption does not give enough weight to the unique use of the dirge genre in the prophetic literature.

A dirge is a lament song often sung after the death of a person or a significant disaster (2 Sam 1:17; 2 Chr 35:25). This genre usually praised the deceased and emphasized the differences between the good past and the grim present. In the prophetic literature however, this genre has another use in which a dirge is recited *before* the death or the disaster of its addressees. The prophetic dirge does not praise its addressees but rather mentions their sins, thus justifying the fate that will befall them. Likewise, the prophetic dirge does not express true sorrow and grieve, but rather mockery and defiance, and it declares a death sentence against its addressees.²⁰

Therefore, the post-fall dating of vv. 10–14 leads to the conclusion that this is a true dirge that reflects a sincere sorrow for the fallen kings.²¹ This however is not consistent with Ezekiel's negative approach toward Judah's last kings, especially Zedekiah (12:1–16; 17:11–20; 21:30–32). Likewise, it does not tally with his dirges over the kings of Tyre and Egypt (28:12; 32:2) where there is no reason to assume that Ezekiel would lament their fall. The prophetic dirge looks at future events as if they have already occurred, thus emphasizing the complete certainty of their occurrence. By this manner, Ezekiel can eat a scroll of dirges (קִינִיּוֹת, 2:10) even prior to Jerusalem's actual fall, he can recite a dirge over the Babylonian conquest of Tyre and Egypt even though they were never conquered by them, and he can lament the fall of Israel's princes although one of them is still sitting on his throne. We may conclude then that the dirge over Israel's princes is a pre-fall unite oracle,²² and in light of this conclusion, we can now turn to identify the different characters that the dirge refers to.

²⁰ See E.L. Greenstein, "Lamentation and Lament in the Hebrew Bible," in K.A. Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 67–84.

²¹ See e.g., Pohlmann, *Hesekiel 1–19*, 288, and the criticism of T. Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (VTSup, 76; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 81.

²² For a pre-exilic dating of both parts of Ezek 19 see Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 104, 107. According to the date formulas in Ezek 8:1; 20:1, it seems that it could be dated sometime between 591–590 BCE. Indeed, a pre-fall dating of the dirge's two stanzas does not necessarily rule out the possibility that each stanza was originally an independent prophetic unit. However, in this case, vv. 10–14 rely on vv. 1–9 in two crucial issues: only according to vv. 1–9 one can figure out who are the addressees of vv. 10–14 (the princes of Israel), and the proclamation in v. 14 ("it will become a lament") is clarified only in light of v. 1.

THE DIRGE'S INTERPRETATION

The dirge's opening states that it relates to Israel's princes. According to this initial clue, their mother, the lioness, should be identified as a general image to Judah's royal house from which all these princes came.²³ It follows that raising one of the cubs (v. 3) means the appointing of one member of this house as a king.

Methodologically, it is unlikely that a prophetic parable would open with depicting one certain figure as a lion and then continue by depicting that same figure as a mighty bough without explicitly relating to this shift in image. Therefore, our findings regarding the dirge's unity indicate that it deals with three *different* royal figures who were likened to two lions and one bough.²⁴

As to the identity of the first cub there is unanimity among Ezekiel commentators that this is Jehoahaz. The parable tells that the lioness was involved with his raising. And indeed, Jehoahaz who was appointed king after Josiah, was not his firstborn and therefore was not considered to be his legitimate heir.²⁵ The involvement of the "people of the land" in his enthronement and the exceptional mentioning of his anointment

²³ See F. Sedlmeier, *Das Buch Ezechiel: Kapitel 1–24* (NSKAT, 21/1; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 256, 262. Other possible identifications are that the lioness resembles Jerusalem or the entire kingdom of Judah. See C. Carvalho, "Putting the Mother Back in the Center: Metaphor and Multivalence in Ezekiel 19," in J.J. Ahn and S.L. Cook (eds.), *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 208–21; P.C. Beentjes, "What a Lioness Was Your Mother – Reflections on Ezekiel 19," in B. Becking and M. Dijkstra (eds.), *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelen van Dijk-Hemms* (BibInt, 18; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 21–35. However, it seems that the birth relationship between the mother figure and her offspring makes her identification with the royal house a more accurate one. For the proposal that the lioness resembles Josiah's wife Hamutal, see below.

²⁴ For this reason, it is hard to accept interpretations that consider two separate figures in the parable to resemble only one figure in reality. See e.g., Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 254; B. Lang, *Kein Aufstand in Jerusalem: Die Politik des Propheten Ezechiel* (SBB; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981), 102–3; L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19* (WBC, 28; Dallas: Word, 1986), 287; Laato, *Josiah*, 167–71, who identified the first cub with Jehoahaz, and both the second cub and the mighty bough with Zedekiah. Likewise, it is less likely that some figures in the parable resemble one figure in reality while others resemble two. See e.g., C. Begg, "The Identity of the Princes in Ezekiel 19," *ETL* 65 (1989), 358–69; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 598–611, who identified the first cub with Jehoahaz, the second cub with Jehoiakim, and the mighty bough with both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. Patton, *Tender*, 99 identified the first cub with Jehoahaz, the second cub with both Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, and the mighty bough with Zedekiah.

²⁵ According to 2 Kgs 23:31–36, Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he became king. He reigned only 3 months and was replaced by his 25 years old brother Jehoiakim. See also 1 Chr 3:15 who mentions Jeho-

(2 Kgs 23:30), may reflect the attempt to exploit Josiah's unexpected death in order to circumvent the succession order.²⁶ Moreover, the taking of the first cub to Egypt is consistent with Jehoahaz's deportation there (2 Kgs 23:33–34). Since the parable accuses the first cub of devouring humans, we may conclude that Ezekiel accuses Jehoahaz of bloodshed.²⁷

The identification of the second cub is however a matter of heated debate.²⁸ Many claimed that this is Jehoiakim.²⁹ They mentioned that the dirge is arranged chronologically, and since it opens with Jehoahaz, the second cub must be Jehoiakim who succeeded him; that the murderous nature of the second cub is consistent with Jehoiakim's actions (2 Kgs 24:4; Jer 22:16); that it is more likely that the second cub, heard by the surrounding nations, was Jehoiakim who reigned for eleven years, than Jehoiachin, who reigned only three months and probably did not manage to create himself such a reputation; that the capture of the second cub by the nations reflects the attacks of the Chaldean bands against Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 24:2); And that the taking of the second cub to Babylonia is consistent with Jehoiakim's deportation there (2 Chr 36:6; Dan 1:1–2).

However, even if the dirge is indeed arranged chronologically, it does not necessarily have to relate to all of Judah's last kings. Jehoiachin indeed reigned only three months, but so did Jehoahaz. This did not prevent Ezekiel from depicting him as a lion with murderous reputation. Therefore, the actions attributed to the second cub do not necessarily reflect long-term activity. In this case it seems that one part of the parable did not receive full consideration. Both lion cubs were said to be raised by the lioness. Since the lioness resembles Judah's royal house their "raising" must relate to the enthronement of one of its members. However, since in both cases, the dirge relates to the lioness' active role in raising her cubs, this enthronement should relate to an internal Judean procedure, and not one imposed by external forces which are identified in the dirge as גוים, nations. Therefore, it is unlikely that Jehoiakim would be depicted as the second cub "raised" by the lioness. Contrary to Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, he was crowned by an external agent, Pharaoh Necho (2 Kgs 23:34), and not in an internal Judean procedure.

akim and Jehoahaz (=Shalum) as Josiah's second and fourth sons, respectively.

²⁶ See b. Hor. 11b; O. Lipschits, *Jerusalem between Destruction and Restoration: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2004), 65–66 [in Hebrew].

²⁷ It is difficult to know whether this accusation had a historical basis. Except for the formulaic statement that Jehoahaz "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kgs 23:33), neither the book of Kings nor Jeremiah mention anything regarding his short reign.

²⁸ For a comprehensive review of the history of interpretation see Begg, "Identity."

²⁹ See Rashi; Radak; R. Eliezer of Beugency (*Mikra'ot Gedolot*, 114–115); Noth, "Catastrophe"; Begg, "Identity"; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 603–4; idem, "The Tender Cedar Sprig: Ezekiel on Jehoiachin," *HBAI* 1 (2012), 173–202.

Likewise, the description of the Chaldean bands, does not tally with the dirge. These bands surely harassed Judah but it was not told that they caught and exiled Jehoiakim. And most importantly, in complete contradiction to the dirge, from 2 Kgs 24 it appears that Jehoiakim was never exiled to Babylonia. He rebelled against the Babylonians, but by the time they reached Judah to suppress this rebellion, he had already passed away. The obscure, late and secondary reports in the books of Chronicles and Daniel cannot outweigh those of the book of Kings and Jer 22:13–19 which relates to Jehoiakim’s disgraceful burial and not to his deportation. Moreover, the ration lists found in Nebuchadnezzar’s palace in Babylon which mention Jehoiachin’s rations,³⁰ reinforces the understanding that Jehoiakim was never exiled to Babylonia. If he had been there, he would have been given the rations and called the “king of Judah,” not his son Jehoiachin.³¹

Since the second cub was taken to Babylonia, many commentators identified him with Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25:7), and his depiction as a murderous lion was claimed to be consistent with Ezekiel’s negative approach toward him (Ezek 12:1–16; 17:1–21; 21:30–32).³² The main argument raised was that like the lions, the lioness should also resemble a human figure, whose two descendants are full brothers. Therefore, the lioness is Josiah’s wife Hamutal and her two cubs are her two sons, Jehoahaz and Zedekiah (2 Kgs 23:31; 24:18). In addition, it was claimed that the second cub’s walking among lions (Ezek 19:6) is consistent with Zedekiah’s international affairs with foreign kings (Ezek 17; Jer 27).

However, the identification of the lioness with Hamutal leads to a major decrease in the lioness splendor, since the dirge now focuses on a quite marginal historical figure, and Ezekiel never relates to her in his discussions of Judah’s leadership (Ezek

³⁰ See E.F. Weidner, “Jojachin, König von Juda, in Babilonischen Keilschrifttexten,” in *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud* (Paris: Geuthner, 1939), 2:923–35.

³¹ According to Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 603–4, after his surrender, Jehoiakim was taken to Babylon to participate in the victory celebrations as a vassal king. This short visit was enough for Ezekiel to describe the taking of the second cub there. However, neither Jehoiakim’s arrival in Babylon nor his return from there are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or the Babylonian chronicles. His return also contradicts the very purpose of his taking according to the dirge “so his voice would never again be heard on the mountains of Israel” (19:9).

³² See e.g., Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 106; K.W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (CBC; London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 123; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 253–54; Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 288; Laato, *Josiah*, 164–71; I. Kottsieper, “Was ist deine Mutter? Eine Studie zu Ez 19,2–9,” *ZAW* 105 (1993), 444–61; R.E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 83; A. Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 93; D. Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity: Identity Conflicts between the Exiles and the People who Remained (6th–5th Centuries BCE)* (LHBOTS, 543; London: T&T Clark, 2013), 143.

12; 17; 21; 34).³³ Moreover, the dirge describes the dominant involvement of the lioness in appointing her cubs and besides Bathsheba's involvement in Solomon's enthronement (1 Kgs 1–2), there is no biblical evidence that Hamutal or any other of Judah's queen mothers had such a status.³⁴ The lions in the dirge are members of the house of David and not foreign figures who are addressed in the dirge as גוים, nations. The walking among lions relates then to a Judean internal affair—the realization of the leadership of one of David's house over his brothers, and not to his international affairs. Moreover, the raising of the second cub by his mother is not consistent with Zedekiah's happenings, who was enthroned by an external agent, the Babylonians, and unlike Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin did not inherit the crown in a Judaic internal process (2 Kgs 24:17). And eventually, as will be argued shortly, it seems that the dirge likens Zedekiah to a mighty bough, and therefore it is less likely that he would also be likened to a lion.

We may conclude that the second cub cannot describe any king other than Jehoiachin.³⁵ This conclusion is not only through elimination, since Jehoiachin's happenings are entirely in line with the dirge. Jehoiachin was indeed exiled to Babylonia (2 Kgs 24:12–15), and it seems that his “bringing” to the king of Babylonia (Ezek 19:9) hints not only to his general deportation, but also to his specific *entrance* into the king's palace,³⁶ which is documented in both biblical and Neo-Babylonian sources.³⁷ The Masoretic punctuation of בַּמְצֹדוֹת implies that the lion was brought to Babylonia in cages or hunting nets (see Eccl 9:12). However, if בְּאֵהוּ בַּמְצֹדוֹת, “they brought him into the strongholds” should be read,³⁸ this might serve as a further hint at Jehoiachin's happenings and to the fact that he was brought into some sort of fortified compound.

³³ See also Strawn, *Lion*, 249 who showed that apart of two Egyptian examples, ancient Near Eastern iconographical or textual depictions of queens or queen mothers as leonine are non-existent. Therefore, the possibility that Ezek 19 refers to an actual woman seems very unlikely.

³⁴ Therefore, it is hard to accept Z. Ben-Barak, “The Status and Right of the Gēbîrâ,” *JBL* 10 (1991), 23–34 that Hamutal was a powerful figure in Judah's hierarchy, and that the dirge relates to her political initiatives to promote her sons. For a more balanced treatment of the role of the Gēbîrâ in Judah see E.K. Solvang, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Royal Women of Judah and Their Involvement in the House of David* (JSOTSup, 349; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

³⁵ This was maintained already by Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 205; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 393–95; and I.M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (VTSup, 56; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 35–36, however they mainly related to his deportation to Babylonia and did not consider the implications of this conclusion on Ezekiel's approach toward the exiled king.

³⁶ All the biblical occurrences of בּוֹ"א do not only depict the arrival at a place but also entering it.

³⁷ See 2 Kgs 25:27–30; Weidner, “Jojachin.”

³⁸ See NJPS; ASV; Judg 6:2; 1 Sam 23:14, 19; Jer 48:41; 51:30; Ezek 33:27.

As mentioned earlier, Jehoiachin's short reign is not a decisive consideration in this issue. Just as Jehoahaz could have been likened to a human devouring lion after only three months of reign, so too could Jehoiachin. Likewise, the assumption that Ezekiel's approach toward Jehoiachin was positive and do not allow his presentation as a murderous lion,³⁹ *might* be the discussion's final conclusion, but it cannot serve as its starting point.

It seems that there is a further resemblance in Jehoahaz's and Jehoiachin's happenings which was unnoticed in scholarship and supports their presentation as two parallel lions. Beside the fact that they both reigned only three months, they both were dethroned *because of the political actions taken by their fathers*. After his enthronement, Jehoahaz went to Riblah to surrender to Pharaoh Necho (2 Kgs 23:30–33). However, Pharaoh Necho imprisoned him and crowned Jehoiakim. It is less likely that in the three months of his reign, when the impression of Josiah's killing by the Egyptians was still strong, Jehoahaz planned a rebellion against Egypt. It is more reasonable that like his father, Jehoahaz was perceived by the Egyptians to have anti-Egyptian stance. Likewise, Jehoiachin's surrender to the Babylonians was not the result of his political initiative. Jehoiakim, his father, rebelled against them but he did not live long enough to see the results of his rebellion (2 Kgs 24:1–7). In fact, Jehoiachin's reign apparently paralleled the Babylonian journey to Jerusalem, which also lasted about three months, from the month of Kislev until the 2nd of Adar.⁴⁰ Under these circumstances, Jehoiachin had no choice but to surrender. Like the Egyptians, the Babylonians considered Jehoiachin to continue his father's anti-Babylonian stance, and therefore decided to exile him. These similar happenings, and not only their short periods of reign, enabled Ezekiel to place them side by side as two parallel figures.

The conclusion that the second cub is Jehoiachin creates a new understanding of Ezekiel's negative opinion of him. In Ezekiel scholarship it is widely accepted that Ezekiel's approach toward Jehoiachin was positive and many scholars pointed especially to Ezek 17 (where Zedekiah is more severely criticized than Jehoiachin) and to the fact that the book is dated according to Jehoiachin's deportation to Babylonia, as indications of Ezekiel's acknowledgement of Jehoiachin as the legitimate king.⁴¹ How-

³⁹ See e.g., Allen, *Ezekiel 1–19*, 288.

⁴⁰ See M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *2 Kings* (AB, 11; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 304; Lipschits, *Jerusalem*, 65–66; A.K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (TCS, 5; Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1975), 102 (Chronicle 5:11–13).

⁴¹ See e.g. Fohrer, *Ezechiel*, 126; R.S. Foster, "A Note on Ezekiel XVII 1–10 and 22–24," *VT* 8 (1958), 374–79; C.R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (BZAW, 176; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), 121–63; Laato, *Josiah*, 173; L. Boadt, "Ezekiel, Book of," *ABD* 2:711–22; Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 541; idem, "Bringing Back David: Ezekiel's Messianic Hope," in P.E. Satterthwaite, R.S. Hess and G.J. Wenham (eds.), *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament*

ever, from Ezek 19 we may learn about specific personal accusations against him which depict him as worse than some of his fellow kings, if not the worst: he shed blood, multiplied widows and ruined the land. His deportation to Babylonia is not temporal and he was taken there not to return. According to Ezekiel, the nations who caught Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin did not harm Israel but rather saved them from their brutal and unworthy leaders.⁴²

Like its first section, the dirge's last section differentiates between the mother figure and her royal descendants. The vine, which like the lioness is called "your mother," is an image of the house of David,⁴³ and the mighty bough is this house's last king, Zedekiah, who was likened to a vine also in Ezek 17. The burning of the mighty bough led to the uprooting, withering and eventually burning of the entire vine. Unlike Jehoiachin who was not killed and whose fall did not end Judah's monarchy, these descriptions are consistent with Ezekiel's expectations that Zedekiah's death would also involve the final fall of the royal house (Ezek 12:13; 17:16–17, 21).⁴⁴ It is difficult to understand from the dirge what exactly Zedekiah is accused of, but it seems that his height and arrogance aroused God's wrath,⁴⁵ and like Ezek 17 here as well God will act to humiliate the high.

Messianic Texts (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 167–88; idem, "Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel," in W.A. Tooman and M.A. Lyons (eds.), *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 127; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 208–46; idem, "Tender"; Y. Avishur and M. Heltzer, "Jehoiachin, King of Judah in Light of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Sources: His Exile and Release According to Events in the Neo-Babylonian Kingdom and the Babylonian Diaspora," *Transen* 34 (2007), 17–36; Rom-Shiloni, *Exclusive Inclusivity*, 143.

⁴² As shown by Strawn, *Lion*, 54–58, 248–50, ancient Near Eastern traditions applied leonine metaphors to rulers in a positive way, indicating their might and protection of their subjects. In this regard, Ezek 19 deviates from this genre and depicts Israel's rulers in a negative tone, as lions who harmed their subjects and eventually were captured.

⁴³ Lang, *Aufstand*, 112 and Pohlmann, *Hesekiel 1–19*, 289–90 are certainly right in stating that generally the vine may resemble both the king and the people/the land. However, it seems that since vv. 10–14 differentiate between the entire vine and one of its boughs, the vine in this case, like the lioness which preceded it, relates to Judah's royal house. Here, indeed two figures in the parable represent one figure in reality. However, this figure is not human, and the parable refers explicitly to this shift by clarifying that the vine is still your "mother" mentioned earlier.

⁴⁴ Since Jehoiachin's deportation did not resemble the end of David's house, it is hard to accept Noth's opinion ("Catastrophe") that the vine and the mighty bough are Jehoiachin and his mother Nehushta. Likewise, it is hard to accept the opinions of Begg, "Identity"; Block, "Tender" that the mighty bough is Jehoiachin and the vine is Zedekiah. The vine is described as the mighty bough's mother, and it is less likely that Zedekiah who reigned after Jehoiachin would be defined that way.

⁴⁵ Patton, *Tender*, 103 showed that the mighty bough's arrogance is suggested not only by its height but also by the idea that a vine could

LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In light of these findings, we can now return to propose two new explanations to Ezekiel's choice to move from the lions' image to the image of the vine in the middle of the dirge. It seems that this shift was intended to indicate that the dirge moves from referring to events that have already occurred (Jehoahaz's and Jehoiachin's fall), to referring to events that have not yet occurred (Zedekiah's fall). For this reason, Ezekiel was not afraid to reveal exactly who were the captors of the two cubs, for the happenings of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin were already known. On the other hand, the identity of the one who uprooted the vine, an event that had not yet occurred, was left obscure.

The second explanation relates to the literary function of each image. It seems that the shift between the images stemmed from Ezekiel's desire to create a better correlation between the dirge and the events to which it related. Lions in nature are not physically connected to their mother.⁴⁶ Therefore, their capture should not necessarily affect her. This image suited the happenings of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin very well since their fall did not involve the fall of the entire royal house. This image, however, did not fit Zedekiah's predicted fate, which according to Ezekiel would involve the ultimate fall of the house of David and Judah's final destruction. Therefore, when coming to create a parable for such an event, Ezekiel chose to switch to the image of a vine whose boughs are connected to it, and their fate is bounded up in hers.⁴⁷

What are the implications of these findings for our understanding of Ezekiel's general approach toward Israel's past leaders and especially Jehoiachin?

As mentioned above, many scholars maintain that Ezekiel's approach toward Jehoiachin was positive. Indeed, Jehoiachin had many features that could have caused Ezekiel to evaluate him positively: he had managed to rule for only three months, and it is highly doubtful that in this short period he had sinned as violently as Ezekiel attributes to him; his surrender to the Babylonians was the result of his father's political initiative, not his; and from the national point of view, Jehoiachin's surrender prevented Judah's destruction that year. It is highly reasonable that

fit for scepters after Ezekiel already claimed that it is useless even for a peg (15:3).

⁴⁶ Young lion cubs are indeed more dependent on their mothers, however the word כפיר does not necessarily relate to a young helpless cub (see Judg 14:5) and it seems that the dirge as well relates to mature male lions that dominated their pride and became fearsome predators.

⁴⁷ Ezekiel's choice to depict Zedekiah as a vine and not any other tree was probably influenced by his choice to depict Zedekiah that way in Ezek 17, and this may also explain the same phrases appearing in both chapters. However, as mentioned above, this does not necessarily indicate that Ezekiel meant to connect the two prophecies. The differences between Ezek 17 and 19 in genre, motives and the historical figures to which they relate indicate the independence of each prophetic unit.

these matters led to concrete expectations for Jehoiachin's return to his throne (Jer 28:4).

Despite all this, Ezekiel does not reveal a positive approach toward the king who shared with him a similar fate. The second cub's voice would never again be heard on the mountains of Israel. This means that unlike Israel who would be restored to their land, Jehoiachin would never return from exile, not to mention will lead Israel again. This view also influences the reading of other prophecies which deal with Israel's future leadership.

Thus, the taking of the cedar to the city of merchants in Ezek 17:3–4, was considered by many as an act of divine grace. The cedar was removed to a “greenhouse” in order to preserve him during the cold winter of exile, and to enable him to take part in Israel's future restoration.⁴⁸ However, when Ezek 19 is taken into consideration, it appears that in both cases, the removal of the parable's protagonist from its original place reflects the interests and benefits of the taker, not the welfare of the one being taken. The Babylonian king takes Judah's leader not as an act of grace intended to protect him, but rather in order to punish him for his rebellion. In the prophecy's conclusion God declares that he will take “*from the cedar's treetop . . . from its roots*” (17:22), meaning that only *part* of the original cedar which resembled Jehoiachin, will be taken back to the land, while the rest of it will remain in the city of merchants. This indicates that Ezekiel predicts that Jehoiachin will stay in Babylonia and will not return to his throne. Someone else from the house of David will lead Israel in the future. This conclusion is reaffirmed by the fact that in the future God will take a “tender,” literally soft, shoot, meaning *new* and fresh, and not an old branch that had already thickened and hardened.⁴⁹ This cannot relate to Jehoiachin, who was described as part of a grown and mature cedar from the outset.

Similarly, Ezek 22:6, 25 depict all Judah's last kings without exception as blood shedding lions. Ezek 34 evaluates all Israel's past leaders, including Jehoiachin, negatively. He considers them responsible for the destruction and exile and predicts their dismissal from their position, never to lead Israel again. Like the future cedar, this prophecy designates the future leader as “David” (34:23–24), meaning an unidentified descendant of his dynasty, who will not be Jehoiachin himself.

We may conclude then that the dirge relates chronologically to three of Judah's last four kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. Jehoiakim is not mentioned probably because by the time the dirge was proclaimed, he was no longer alive. As mentioned above, the dirge is dated to somewhere between 591–590 BCE. There is no dispute that in these years both Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were alive. Jehoahaz was exiled to Egypt in 609 BCE at the

⁴⁸ See e.g., D.I. Block, “The God Ezekiel Wants Us to Meet,” in idem, *By the River Chebar: Historical, Literary and Theological Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 44–72, at pp. 61–62; Patton, *Tender*, 126–27.

⁴⁹ טר might serve as a metaphor for an inexperienced young man who has not yet managed to harden and sharpen. See Gen 18:7; 33:13; 2 Sam 3:39; Prov 4:3; 1 Chr 22:5; 29:1; 2 Chr 13:7.

age of twenty-three (2 Kgs 23:31), and it is quite reasonable that he as well was alive at that time.⁵⁰ Moreover, Ezekiel himself does not convey that the first cub died in Egypt, and his mother's long expectation for his return indicates that according to Ezekiel, Jehoahaz was kept alive in Egypt, and theoretically could have returned if the Egyptians had allowed that.

Ezekiel's dirge, therefore, does not express regret over what had happened to the kings in the past, but rather deals with Israel's future leadership. It seems that Ezekiel anticipates that one of Jehoiachin's descendants would lead restored Israel in the future. He depicts this leader as a new shoot from the cedar which resembled Jehoiachin (17:22–24) and unlike the vine which resembled Zedekiah's line, he does not predict the death of the lioness. This anticipation may have several explanations,⁵¹ but it does not indicate that Jehoiachin *himself* was evaluated positively by Ezekiel. The dirge in Ezek 19 addresses all Judah's last kings, past and present, who might have hoped to return to the throne. Ezekiel's position towards them is clear and unequivocal: arrogant kings who were involved in bloodshed, multiplying widows, and desolation are not worthy leaders, and will not be part of Israel's future leadership. Jehoiachin was no exception to this rule.

⁵⁰ According to 2 Kgs 23:34 "he took Jehoahaz and he came to Egypt and died there." However, this description is not necessarily immediate and may reflect the writer's knowledge of his death in Egypt many years later. This may be reinforced by the fact that Jehoahaz's death is absent from 2 Chr 36:4. Furthermore, Jeremiah's differentiates between Josiah, "the dead" that should not be lamented and Jehoahaz, "the one who is leaving" (22:10) that should, and declares "in the place where they led him captive, there he will die" (22:12). Had Jehoahaz died in Egypt shortly after his arrival there, these proclamations would have been unnecessary.

⁵¹ Following Zedekiah's sons death there were no other Davidides left (2 Kgs 25:7). Since Ezekiel emphasizes that Israel's future leader would be a descendant of David's line (34:23–24; 37:24–25) he was forced to hang his hopes on the only survivor of this royal house. Furthermore, according to Ezekiel's retribution principal, sons do not suffer for their fathers' sins (18:3–4). Therefore, Jehoiachin's descendants should not suffer for their father's misconducts and one of them may return from exile to lead restored Israel.