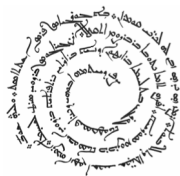


“I will be King over you!”



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“I will be King over you!”

**The Rhetoric of Divine Kingship in the Book of
Ezekiel**

Terry R. Clark



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ABBREVIATIONS

AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
AfOB	Archiv für Orientforschung: Beiheft
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3rd edn. Princeton, 1969.
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
ARAB	<i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . Daniel David Luckenbill. 2 vols. Chicago, 1926–1927.
ArOr	<i>Archiv Orientalní</i>
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ATSHB	<i>Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: a Guide to the Background Literature</i> . Kenton L. Sparks. Peabody, 2005.
BARead	<i>Biblical Archaeologist Reader</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BM	Foster, Benjamin R. <i>Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature</i> . 3rd edn. Bethesda, 2005.

BO	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BRev	<i>Bible Review</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHJ	<i>The Cambridge History of Judaism</i> . 4 vols. Edited by W. D. Davies et al. Louis Finkelstein. Cambridge, 1984–2006.
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	<i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 2003.
CQR	<i>Church Quarterly Review</i>
DBI	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Imagery</i> . Edited by Leland Ryken et al. Downers Grove, 1998.
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . 2nd rev. ed. Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van der Horst. Grand Rapids, 1999.
Di	<i>Dialog</i>
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ETSSSt	Evangelical Theological Society Studies
FCBS	Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
Hermeneia	Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
IBC	Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary

<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962.
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>KTU</i>	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. 2nd enlarged ed. of <i>KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995 (= <i>CTU</i>)
<i>LAI</i>	Library of Ancient Israel
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LHBOTS</i>	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>MDB</i>	<i>Mercer Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>NIBC</i>	New International Bible Commentary
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>OAN</i>	Oracles against the Nations
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OBt</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OLA</i>	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>PTMS</i>	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>SANE</i>	Sources from the Ancient Near East

SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSDL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SIR	Studies in Religion (University of North Carolina Press)
SOTBT	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
SPOT	Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
UUA	Uppsala Universitetsårskrift
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The historian's chief tasks — reconstructing the past and explaining why it happened — are exercises fraught with peril, because they can never be completed to perfection. One's best efforts may only produce an outcome that achieves a degree of probability (preferably a higher degree, rather than a lower one). A more credible outcome is less likely, on the whole, when only a limited amount of resources is available for assisting the endeavor of reconstructing "what really happened."

In the case of examining an artifact like the Book of Ezekiel, the task of determining *what* happened is rather simple — someone(s) composed a book! Here, the major task is to seek clarity on the question of *why* something happened. Why was the Book of Ezekiel composed? What was its originally intended purpose? Or, as I like to state the questions for the students in my college classes, "Why do we have what we have? Why was this material composed, preserved, and for whom?" And then, of course, all of these questions lead to the most central question for any biblical interpreter: "How should we read this material?"

As a biblical scholar who greatly values the historical quest, my starting point for interpreting biblical texts is an attempt to read for the original author's and/or ancient editor's purpose(s). And of course, as a modern day person far removed from the culture of the ancient world, this task is not simple. Biblical texts are always received by later generations as products that have been, to some degree, shaped by the hands of those who collected, organized, and passed on their content for their own ideological purposes. There is no way of knowing for sure how a text might have looked in any kind of "original" form, or if it is even appropriate to postulate such a thing, since many ancient texts grow out of originally oral tradition, and may change significantly over time. The actual production of a text might happen rapidly in response to one, major

crisis or concern, or it might occur very slowly through a gradual process of accumulation, passing through a number of scribal and editorial hands before any kind of “final” product emerges. Thus, within the bounds of a single text (in this case understood as a biblical book), one might encounter a variety of ideological concerns, which could reflect various editorial hands. This can result in a great deal of internal conflict in a single text, especially when a final editor or preserver does not care to edit the text for anything akin to our modern notion of logical consistency.

The book you are now reading takes all of this into consideration, but it still attempts to read an ancient text, in this case the Masoretic Text of the Book of Ezekiel, to see if the final product might contain a coherent argument.¹ Scholars have long noted the degree to which the Book of Ezekiel has been organized by one or more editorial hands. The text appears to be rather polished. It exhibits multiple levels or types of organization. And yet, however many editors may have contributed to the task, the final product contains a great degree of coherence in terms of the agenda and writing style. But important questions remain. Why was it organized in this particular fashion? How should it be read? What message or messages is it intended to convey, and for whom? Is there a central argument, a coherent thread that runs through all 48 chapters? Are there certain topics or motifs that recur throughout?

The argument here is that MT Ezekiel does provide the reader with a coherent message that may be deduced by approaching the text as an act of rhetoric. That is, Ezekiel is primarily intended to convince the intended reader to believe and/or do something, and the text itself is the single greatest key to deciphering its originally intended (i.e., historical) purpose. This purpose revolves around a persistent assertion of Yahweh’s sovereignty, an idea that is found either explicitly or implicitly throughout the entire biblical book. It is my conviction that, by focusing on this thread, one may come to a better understanding of the intended purpose of the Book of Ezekiel, and therefore a greater understanding of the rhetorical situation to which Ezekiel serves as a response.

¹ Of course, one might also attempt to read other extant texts of Ezekiel, such as Septuagint Ezekiel, with the same goal in mind.

The greatest danger in this endeavor is the temptation to embrace circularity in one's analysis. The text is used to establish a rhetorical situation that called it forth. And yet, it is easy to assume from the start to know too much about the rhetorical situation and therefore read into the text an assumption one already holds. However, this particular text contains clues that not only point to a situation that existed for the originally intended audience, it also excludes information that one might expect to find if it intended to address other audiences, and this may provide an important way to set limits on how far into the future one should look for its original purpose(s). For example, few scholars would argue that any part of Ezekiel was composed prior to the Babylonian exile that began in 597 BCE. But how long after that time might material have been added? I would argue that one topic glaringly absent from the text is any reference to the Persians conquering Babylon under the leadership of King Cyrus of Persia in 539 BCE, when Cyrus liberated the Israelite exiles. Why would no reference be made whatsoever to this incredibly important and relevant event if it had already occurred, especially if it is referred to in other post-exilic biblical texts (2 Isaiah, Ezra, 2 Chronicles, and Daniel)? Nowhere does the Book of Ezekiel deal with the future in such a way as to suggest knowledge of this event. Instead, when Ezekiel does deal with the future, its general orientation is extremely idealistic rather than practical, if not outright idyllic. Normally, a lack of evidence serves as a poor means of argumentation, but in this case, the lack of any mention of Cyrus, coupled with an idyllic approach to the future of Israel makes a rather strong case for a completion date prior to the year 539 BCE.²

² Ezekiel 43–48 does contain material reflective of specific priestly concerns that some might consider practical. But there is little evidence to suggest that the prescriptions here were closely followed or implemented later in Israelite history when temple worship in Israel was reinstated, except perhaps that Zadokite priests continued to be favored over Levitical priests, and that secular political authorities were to have more limited influence over or involvement in temple worship in the Second Temple Period. Clearly, the promise of a new, idyllic Davidic king (cf. Ezek 34) was never fulfilled, nor was the vision of a new division of the Promised

Thus, it is not only possible, but also perhaps even probable, that one may legitimately place rather firm parameters around the rhetorical situation, including the historical setting, that gave rise to the Book of Ezekiel. The work as a whole attempts to deal with a situation that pertained to the original Israelite exilic community and the first generation of Babylonian-born Israelites, dwelling in Babylon between the years 597 and 539 BCE. This is the perspective from which the current work will proceed with its analysis.

Thus, there should be no mystery concerning the purpose of the book you are currently reading. It has primarily been written to explore the original intention of the Book of Ezekiel. The process is far from being an exercise in certainty. Instead, it represents an attempt to move more in the direction of probability by employing a particular type of methodology that, in my estimation, has not yet been applied in a rigorous enough manner. This is the methodology of rhetorical analysis, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The next idea that guides the current work surrounds the role of a particular motif that was pervasive in the ancient Near East, and is pervasive in the Book of Ezekiel. This is the motif of divine kingship. Like other cultures in the ancient Fertile Crescent, ancient Israel imagined the divine realm as being organized in a hierarchical and monarchical fashion, much as the human realm was organized.³ Under normal circumstances, one deity was chiefly in charge of the divine realm, just as the human king was in charge of most well organized human societies. Whether human or divine, kings were surrounded by a retinue of servants that either implemented the will of the monarchs or, on some occasions, sought to overthrow their rule.

Land among the traditional twelve tribes (Ezek 48). For more on the unity of the book and dating prior to the end of the sixth century BCE, cf. Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 16, 219–221.

³ Roughly speaking, the Fertile Crescent refers to a fairly well watered, forward-leaning C-shaped stretch of geography running from Egypt to Babylon, or the Nile River Valley to the Persian Gulf.

This was the standard way of ordering society, and disruptions in this order led to chaos until a new regime emerged to replace the old one. In ancient Israel, as in other ancient Near Eastern societies, the human king's rule was intrinsically connected to that of the divine king, and a disruption in the former's position and power naturally led to speculation about the position and power of the latter. In the case of Israel's history in the early sixth century BCE, just such a disruption occurred when the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (alternately spelled Nebuchadrezzar) conquered the state of Judah in 597 BCE, deposed the Israelite King Jehoiachin and much of his royal administration, and appointed his own despotic ruler from among the native populace (i.e., King Zedekiah, of the same royal family). This was the event that also brought the priest Ezekiel to live in exile, led to his supposed appointment by Yahweh as a prophet to the exilic community in Babylon, and eventuated in the construction of the prophetic Book of Ezekiel as a rhetorical response. Thus, the Book of Ezekiel represents a unique way of construing a crisis precipitated by the Babylonian exile, and serves as an attempted rhetorical solution.

The critical role played by the motif of divine kingship in the Book of Ezekiel has been recognized by prior scholars. The most thorough rhetorical analysis of Ezekiel to date is provided in Thomas Renz's 2002 publication, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*. In this work Renz claims that, "all chapters [of Ezekiel] can be said to presuppose the kingship of Yahweh."⁴ However, Renz provides very little detail to demonstrate the way the motif of Yahweh's kingship operates as a means of argumentation. By way of contrast, in this book, I examine Yahweh's kingship from the perspective of rhetorical analysis in order to highlight the argumentative strategies and purposes of those units of text in which the motif is most powerfully present, whether that presence is expressed implicitly or explicitly.

The remainder of the current chapter briefly reviews the history of rhetorical research on Ezekiel. It then discusses the method of rhetorical analysis to be employed in the remainder of the pro-

⁴ Thomas Renz, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 129.

ject. Chapter two provides a brief discussion of the rhetorical arrangement and rhetorical genre of Ezekiel, and what these suggest about the rhetorical purpose of the book. Chapter three discusses the rhetorical context or situation that underlies the Book of Ezekiel as a whole, addressing that situation as primarily an ideological, theological, and cultural crisis resulting from the Babylonian conquest of the Israelite kingdom of Judah in the early sixth century BCE. Chapters four through seven provide detailed rhetorical analyses of various rhetorical units of text in which the motif of Yahweh’s kingship is most prominent. Chapter eight concludes the project with a synthesis of the insights gleaned from all that precedes it, and an evaluation of the unique contributions of the project as a whole.

THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Rhetorical analysis recognizes that nearly all acts of human communication have an argumentative nature to them. That is, they attempt to persuade their intended audience in some way to agree with their authors. This book employs a classical version of rhetorical analysis to understand the argument or message of a text in light of the historical setting in which it was originally composed or in which it reached its final form. The operating assumption is that all texts arise in response to particular historical situations, which they interpret, reflect, and respond to in their own unique ways. This relationship between context and text may be described as a “problem-solution,” “question-answer,” or “crisis-resolution.”

A classical approach need not merely employ ancient categories of rhetoric in order to analyze the nature of a text’s argument. As the study of human rhetoric progresses, so also do the analytical tools available to the scholar for understanding texts as argumentative forms of communication. Thus, the emphasis here is not so much on rhetoric as an art form or merely a method for literary analysis. This book employs both classical and modern *categories* of rhetoric to focus attention on the argumentative strategies in the Book of Ezekiel. In other words, what ideas does the Book of Ezekiel attempt to convince the intended reader to agree with, how are those ideas communicated, what do they suggest about the perceived situation or crisis of the original author(s), and how do they relate to what modern day readers think they know about the rhetorical situation of the book’s composers and intended readers?

PRIOR RHETORICAL ANALYSES OF EZEKIEL

A brief review of prior rhetorical analyses of Ezekiel will situate the present work academically. In 1988, James Arthur Durlleser completed a dissertation titled *The Rhetoric of Allegory in the Book of Ezekiel*, which consisted of a rhetorical analysis of allegorical oracles in Ezek 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 27, 29:1–6a, 32:1–16, 33, and 34.⁵ Emphasis was placed upon the role of important metaphors that operated in these oracles, keeping in mind the “rhetorical triangle” of author, text, and audience. While acknowledging that these oracles “originated at a particular time and were written for a specific rhetorical situation,” Durlleser concluded that “allegory as a literary medium [has] a remarkably universal quality.”⁶ Durlleser noted that “the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the people of earth was always an important theme in the oracles,” no doubt a result of the fact that this covenant relationship, in the time which the oracles were composed, was being called into question by the historical realities of the exile.⁷

Lawrence Boadt published a number of works on Ezekiel that also employ a rhetorical methodology. His 1986 essay “Rhetorical Strategies in Ezekiel’s Oracles of Judgment” sought a “single, coherent ‘message’ from Ezekiel” that could overcome the limitations of prior form-critical approaches that had dissected the text into individual and unrelated parts.⁸ In this article, Boadt uses linguistic and thematic arguments to assert that the collection of oracles against foreign nations in Ezekiel 25–32 “relate to the basic prophetic message that must be traced back to Ezekiel’s own ministry.”⁹ In addition, there is a “planned unity” to the canonical form of the work that originally sought to “rework the religious tradition,

⁵ James Arthur Durlleser, *The Rhetoric of Allegory in the Book of Ezekiel* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1988).

⁶ Durlleser, *Rhetoric of Allegory*, 362.

⁷ Durlleser, *Rhetoric of Allegory*, 361.

⁸ Lawrence Boadt, “Rhetorical Strategies in Ezekiel’s Oracles of Judgment,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation* (ed. Johan Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Leuven University Press: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1986), 182–200.

⁹ Boadt, “Rhetorical Strategies,” 198.

the *myth*, of Israel in order to re-establish the authority and power of Yahweh as the only god.”¹⁰ Thus, Boadt sees a central, polemical message behind all of Ezekiel, including the oracles against the nations, which asserts Yahweh’s sovereignty in the face of political, religious, and social threats to the identity of the people of Israel.

In 1990, Boadt followed up his earlier essay with an article emphasizing another major portion of Ezekiel in “The Function of the Salvation Oracles in Ezekiel 33 to 37.”¹¹ Here, he continues the argument that the Book of Ezekiel contains a unified rhetorical “‘program’ of Ezekiel [the historical prophet] himself.”¹² Essentially, Boadt sees these oracles continuing the emphasis on Yahweh’s sovereignty found in the judgment oracles of Ezek 25–32, and he suggests the following thematic structure for the entire corpus:

- (1) The oracles of judgment in chaps. 1–24 explain the justice in Israel’s subjection to domination and exile by its enemies;
- (2) the oracles against nations in chaps. 25–32 reestablish the divine mastery over arrogant pride of these nations who do not merely punish but want to possess God’s chosen people and their land;
- (3) the oracles of hope and visions of the future aimed at Israel in chaps. 33–48 will restore the special relationship of blessing that God had promised in the covenant.¹³

Boadt concludes that the Book of Ezekiel is not a loosely organized collection of prophetic oracles and narratives with “extensive later adaptations,” but instead is an orderly work with an “over-

¹⁰ Boadt, “Rhetorical Strategies,” 199 (Boadt’s *italics*). I deal with the problematic nature of the terminology of myth below, along with my own decision to bracket its use, but for the moment, suffice it to say that “myth” has become a popular designation for certain ancient Near Eastern traditions that Ezekiel employs or adapts, just as “mythmaking” has, in some scholarly circles, become a descriptor for what the Book of Ezekiel was at least attempting to do.

¹¹ Lawrence Boadt, “The Function of the Salvation Oracles in Ezekiel 33 to 37,” *HAR* 12 (1990): 1–21.

¹² Boadt, “Salvation Oracles,” 1.

¹³ Boadt, “Salvation Oracles,” 5.

arching theological conception behind it.”¹⁴ I make a similar argument here on the basis of an analysis of the pervasive motif of Yahweh’s kingship in Ezekiel, recognizing its intention to establish the sovereignty of Yahweh for its intended audience.

In 1996, Boadt published his “Mythological Themes and the Unity of Ezekiel,” where his search for an overarching rhetoric for the entire collection centers upon Chs. 38–48.¹⁵ Building upon the work of Ellen Davis (*Swallowing the Scroll*, 1989), he argues that the whole of Ezekiel serves a “paradigmatic” or teaching purpose of explaining “God’s ‘new’ ways as a result of the Exile and captivity in Babylon.”¹⁶ Here, his emphasis is primarily upon what he calls the “mythopoeic” [mythmaking] work of Ezekiel.¹⁷

In this approach, the popular ancient Near Eastern combat myth (*Chaoskampf*), a cosmic struggle between the forces of creation and chaos that eventuates in the creation or recreation of the world, is adapted by the composer(s) of Ezekiel in an attempt to create a mythology of Yahweh that can explain and supersede the recent catastrophe of the exile. Following the work of Bernard Batto, Boadt claims that the oracles against the named nations in Ezek 25–32 and against anonymous future enemies in Ezek 38–39 are

¹⁴ Boadt, “Salvation Oracles,” 21.

¹⁵ Lawrence Boadt, “Mythological Themes and the Unity of Ezekiel,” in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible* (eds. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman; Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum; Eisenbrauns, 1996), 211–231.

¹⁶ Boadt, “Mythological Themes,” 215. Cf. Ellen Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel’s Prophecy* (JSOTSup 78; Sheffield, Almond Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Boadt draws upon the following works to argue that Ezekiel consciously adapts extant mythical tradition to make a theological statement about Yahweh in response to the exilic crisis: Michael Astour, “Ezekiel’s Prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean Legend of Naram Sin,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 567–579; Susan Niditch, “Ezekiel 40–48 in a Visionary Context,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 208–224; M. Nobile, “Beziehung zwischen Ez 32, 17–32 und der Gog-Perikope (Ez 38–39) im Lichte der Endredaktion,” *BETL* 74 (1986): 255–259; and Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

designed to demonstrate Yahweh’s universal sovereignty, in the process making both historical and meta-historical claims about the ultimate reality of Israel’s god. Together, these enemies represent all the forces of chaos arrayed against Yahweh and his people, and the ultimate defeat of these enemies, depicted with so-called mythological language, “suggests that Ezekiel’s purpose in organizing the book as a whole involves establishing a counter ‘myth’ for Israel.”¹⁸ As such, the prophetic book’s central purpose is rhetorical and theological, responding to Yahweh’s supposed defeat by the patron deity of Babylon (Marduk) and his damaged reputation in comparison to the patron deities of those nations which escaped destruction by Babylon in the sixth century BCE. Ezekiel’s method, according to Boadt, is literary and rhetorical, constructing a myth based upon a typical ancient Near Eastern pattern of divine chaos-victory-enthronement, which is found in MT Ezek 25–48. This new Yahwistic myth responds to the exiles’ temptation to abandon their traditional patron deity and assimilate to Babylonian society. It does so by reasserting Yahweh’s authority and sovereignty over his exiled people.¹⁹

While Boadt makes an important contribution to the study of Ezekiel by highlighting the existence of mythological themes, it is difficult to conclude that the reader should therefore interpret the bulk of the corpus as an exercise in mythopoesis. The multiple genres of the texts in Ezekiel 25–48 by themselves do not support such an interpretation. One would expect a more coherent, straightforward, mytho-poetic cycle depicting the mighty acts of Yahweh if in fact the author(s) intended to create a new Yahweh myth. Instead, it might be more appropriate to consider much of the material in the Book of Ezekiel as an exercise in theological

¹⁸ Boadt, “Mythological Themes,” 229.

¹⁹ Boadt also references his earlier work, *Ezekiel’s Oracles Against Egypt: A Literary and Philological Study of Ezekiel 29–32* (BibOr 37; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1980), 176–177, in which he highlighted unique vocabulary connections between 1–24, 25–32, and 38–39 to argue for the unity of the corpus.

apologetics, that is, an attempt to defend the legitimacy of continued faith in Yahweh as the sovereign lord of Israel.

Thomas Renz's 2002 publication, *The Rhetorical Function of the Book of Ezekiel*, treats the entire corpus of Ezekiel as a coherent rhetorical unit, analyzing it for the light it sheds upon the following: the rhetorical crisis or situation from the composer's (or composers') perspective; the rhetorical disposition and argumentative arrangement of the corpus, the rhetorical techniques or strategies used to change the audience's thinking; and the rhetorical effectiveness, which analyzes how well the text responds to the rhetorical situation by alleviating the perceived crisis. Renz concludes that the Book of Ezekiel is a coherent argument that interprets the historical prophet's ministry for a particular audience, which Renz defines as the generation of exiles immediately following the prophet's own generation.²⁰

Renz understands the overarching rhetorical situation of Ezekiel as a crisis of identity-maintenance for the exiles, who now find themselves dislocated from Jerusalem, the socio-political and religious center of Judean society.²¹ Ezekiel's argument, according to Renz, is designed to urge readers "to become Israelites in the full sense, that is, the people of Yahweh that will be restored in the land of Yahweh,"²² even if, for the moment, the exiles are destined to reside in Babylon. Hence, the primary concern of Ezekiel is exilic Israel's ethos, "the self-understanding and belief-system of the community,"²³ which must be clarified and reinforced if the exiles are to avoid being totally assimilated into Babylonian society. The central thesis of the larger prophetic project is that "the exilic community is to define itself not by the past but by the future promised by Yahweh," a future that has as its beginning and end "the acknowledgement of Yahweh's kingship."²⁴

²⁰ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 15.

²¹ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 45. For a more detailed discussion of the exilic crisis, see my discussion of the rhetorical situation below.

²² Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 53.

²³ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 55.

²⁴ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 249.

It can be seen then, by this short summary of prior rhetorical analyses of Ezekiel, that scholars have noticed thematic and rhetorical unity in the corpus for several decades. In addition, scholars have also zeroed-in on the importance of reasserting Yahweh's sovereignty, and the necessity of maintaining faith in Yahweh in the face of the threat of assimilation to Babylonian society. However, in spite of Renz's recognition of the central role of Yahweh's kingship in the rhetoric of Ezekiel, his book spends very little space focusing attention on those passages in which this motif is most implicitly and explicitly present. Hence, a major purpose of the current work is to fill this gap in modern day rhetorical analysis of Ezekiel.

THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

This book, like the works of Boadt and Renz, acknowledges the important role of Yahweh's kingship in Ezekiel's response to the exile. But it seeks to analyze in greater depth, and therefore better clarify, the rhetorical function of Yahweh's kingship by scrutinizing those texts in which the motif is most prominent.²⁵ This study demonstrates not only that Yahweh's kingship plays a critical role in the way Ezekiel understands the crisis of exile, but also the way Ezekiel presents a rhetorical solution to that crisis.

This study analyzes the Masoretic Text of Ezekiel without resorting to unnecessary emendations on the basis of other texts or translations. The assumption here is that the MT represents a unique piece of ancient Israelite rhetoric, and provides the modern scholar a valid unit for rhetorical study. Admittedly, the textual history of the Book of Ezekiel is a matter of some debate, but at present, there is no scholarly consensus on the place of the Masoretic

²⁵ Renz's lack of focus on the rhetoric of divine kingship in Ezekiel is quite surprising, especially in light of the fact that in one of his early footnotes (Ch. 1, n. 36, p.12), commenting on prior rhetorical approaches to Ezek 28 and 29, states, "A rhetorical critic needs to know that certain myths are used and will explore what the purpose of their use was." This book seeks to follow up on that advice with a more comprehensive examination of the rhetorical function of so-called mythological material in Ezekiel.

Text in relation to the LXX text and other (fragmentary) texts of Ezekiel (e.g., Papyrus 967).²⁶ However, as argued above, there is no convincing evidence to place the MT later than just prior to 539 BCE, and therefore it will be treated in its entirety as a product of the sixth century BCE. Regardless of the as yet imperfectly understood textual history of Ezekiel, the MT makes sense when read as a product of the sixth century BCE, and the agreement between the MT and the Qumran manuscripts support the “antiquity of the [Masoretic] text it represents.”²⁷

While the scope of this project is limited to the rhetoric of Yahweh’s kingship in MT Ezekiel, it does address rhetorical topics that are related to, and that contribute to, this central motif. These include such things as divine presence and absence, divine abandonment and return, paradise, the underworld, divine name theology (including the prolific recognition formula: “then you will know that I am Yahweh”), the exodus, and honor and shame. Many of these topics have already been treated in some fashion by other scholars, some under the rubric of “myth.”²⁸ My approach, as much as possible, avoids the term “myth” in recognition of the difficulties inherent in defining this term as representing a distinct genre in any broadly accepted way. The emphasis here is on the way divine kingship functions *rhetorically* in Ezekiel rather than *mythically*.

Largely in response to Renz, I contend that the rhetorical function of Ezekiel cannot be understood without analyzing in

²⁶ For the most recent analysis of P967, cf. Ingrid E. Lilly, *Two Books of Ezekiel: Papyrus 967 and the Masoretic Text as Variant Literary Editions* (New York: Brill, 2012).

²⁷ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 48. Joyce, *idem*, asserts that “there seem to have been two early divergent textual traditions, Hebrew and Greek.” Joyce, *idem*, 49, also rightly concludes that “the quest for original, ‘pure’ form of the text must ultimately be regarded as an abstract ideal.”

²⁸ On the mythic analyses of these themes, cf. Batto, *Slaying the Dragon*. Ch. 4: “The Exodus as Myth,” 102–127. For a more thorough treatment of myth in ancient Canaanite and Israelite culture, cf. N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: a study of royal myth and ideology in Ugaritic and biblical tradition* (UBL 13; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996).

more depth the major rhetorical *topics* found throughout the corpus. Here, I examine a rhetorical topic found in all major units and also in multiple sub-units of Ezekiel, demonstrating how Yahweh’s kingship provides coherence for the larger corpus.²⁹

Generally stated, my thesis is that the motif of Yahweh’s kingship plays a central role in the rhetorical purpose of the Book of Ezekiel.³⁰ But I also focus in some detail upon how the motif

²⁹ Here, the composite nature of Ezekiel is acknowledged, but also kept in mind is the particularity of the historical context in which the larger work of MT Ezekiel was eventually completed. As Renz (*Rhetorical Function*, 9–15) argues, the finished product of Ezekiel was intended to address the continuing theological crisis for a second generation of exiles in Babylon, a crisis of identity that did not differ greatly from that of the first generation of deportees. My emphasis differs slightly by emphasizing that identity maintenance is far less in mind than the immediate need of identity rescue or salvage. I suggest that the bulk of Ezekiel reflects a sense of urgency in responding to the threats of disorientation and disbelief following the deportations and destruction of Jerusalem that argues for a first generation audience as much or perhaps more so than a second generation. Toward this goal, Renz’s own work at times may be seen to support my argument better than his own, as evidenced in one of his concluding remarks [based upon the work of Daniel Patte, “Charting the Way of the Helmsman on the High Seas: Structuralism and Biblical Studies,” in *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God’s Control of Human Events* (ed. James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel; New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980), 183]: “the book [of Ezekiel] is more concerned with . . . manipulating the audience so as to make them believe rather than to make them do something” (246). Here and elsewhere throughout his work, Renz touches upon the way Ezekiel is more concerned with clarifying and establishing the proper foundation for Israelite identity than with providing specific strategies for identity maintenance in a foreign land (cf. 42–50). In his estimation, “the exilic parts of the book (which seem to make up at least the great bulk of the book) and the prophet addressed essentially the same social and social-psychological situation,” (42) all of which seem to raise questions about why the central rhetoric of Ezekiel should be addressed originally to a late exilic versus an early exilic audience.

³⁰ When referring to Yahweh’s kingship in Ezekiel as a motif or topic, I in no way intend to say that the author(s) of Ezekiel consciously con-

works argumentatively in various key sections of Ezekiel. The purpose of the motif is to preserve the traditional faith and identity of the exilic remnant. Both Yahweh's reputation and exilic identity are placed in jeopardy by the exile and by the destruction of Jerusalem, and Ezekiel is designed to rescue these things by building Yahweh's ethos or reputation among his exilic people. Thus, Ezekiel is, by and large, an ethos-oriented argument designed to encourage the exiles to remain faithful to their traditional, patron deity.

Ezekiel employs a variety of argumentative strategies to accomplish its overall purpose. In those passages where divine kingship is a prominent motif, the strategies are designed to build Yahweh's ethos by arguing for such things as his compassion, faithfulness, honor, justice, patience, or sovereignty. The predominant form of the rhetoric is judicial — it is designed to assist the reader in properly judging or evaluating the nature of Yahweh's character, but the predominant purpose is ethical, because it seeks to establish Yahweh's dependability as an object of faith.

This approach understands the overarching rhetorical situation of Ezekiel from a cultural and ideological perspective because the prophetic book itself treats the crisis of exile in this way. As Renz points out, "the book [of Ezekiel] is concerned more with the self-understanding and belief system of the [exilic] community than with pragmatic or political advice."³¹ What Renz means by this is that Ezekiel shows little concern for giving practical advice to the reader on the details of day-to-day living in exile. There is little to no attention given to economic matters, to the everyday struggles for survival, or even to the practice of regular worship in Babylon, things one might expect from a work composed among people who intended to stay in Babylon long-term. Instead, Ezekiel is more immediately and generally concerned with the faith and identity of the exilic community, with their avoidance of idolatrous (i.e., foreign) modes of worship. The threat of religious assimilation to Babylonian society is a major concern in the text. Assimilation to

sidered this merely to be a motif. Rather, I believe it was assumed to be a matter of reality in the worldview of the author(s), but one that at least some of the intended audience had begun to doubt.

³¹ Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, 55.

foreign religious practices is consistently treated in Ezekiel as idolatrous and therefore a rebellion against Yahweh.

The best way to understand the threat of assimilation for Ezekiel's intended audience is to consider the prevailing understanding of corporate human identity in the ancient Near East (ANE). Identity in the ANE was centered upon the idea of divine patronage in which a relationship was established between the deity, as divine sovereign, and his people, understood as the deity's vassals. This worldview imagines a hierarchical relationship between a people and their chief deity, and is structured much like ancient suzerainty treaties between human kings and the people they ruled.³² From this perspective, the supreme deity of a given pantheon functions as a divine king in the heavenly realm, sometimes exercising power over other deities. The divine monarch interacts with the mundane realm by entering into a covenant relationship with an earthly people. The covenant usually involves appointing an earthly monarch to rule the people on behalf of the deity. The human king serves as the deity's regent in the mundane realm, and acts as a mediator or guarantor of the people's service and worship of the deity through proper administration of a cult of the god. The human king also serves as mediator and guarantor of divinely granted blessings like

³² Cf. George E. Mendenhall, “Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East,” *BA* 17 (1954): 26–46, 49–76; Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontificio Ist Biblico, 1963); J. A. Thompson, “The Significance of the Ancient Near Eastern Treaty Pattern,” *TynBul* 13 (1963): 1–6; Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Treaty Background of Hebrew Yada’,” *BASOR* 181 (1966): 31–37; Hayim Tadmor, “Treaty and Oath in the Ancient Near East: A Historian's Approach,” in *Humanizing America's Iconic Book* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 127–152; Delbert R. Hillers, “Rite: Ceremonies of Law and Treaty in the Ancient Near East,” in *Religion and Law* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 351–364; Noel Weeks, *Admonition and Curse: The Ancient Near Eastern Treaty/Covenant Form as a Problem in Inter-cultural Relationships* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004); Gary M. Beckman, “Hittite Treaties and the Development of the Cuneiform Treaty Tradition,” in *Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 279–301.

fertility and protection of the kingdom, and he seeks to ensure that justice and peace prevail in the land granted by the god to the people.³³

Much of the rhetoric of Ezekiel suggests a recognition that the covenant established between Yahweh and his people during the period of the exodus is now in jeopardy, and this jeopardizes the identities of both parties. The dependability and viability of Yahweh as Israel's divine sovereign is defended throughout Ezekiel as a way to redeem Yahweh's reputation and preserve for both Israel and Yahweh their identities.

As a whole, Ezekiel is best understood as employing a variation of an ancient rhetorical strategy referred to by Aristotle in his work *The "Art" of Rhetoric*. It is, in essence, an argument by and for ethos, that is, an argument based upon and designed to bolster the "moral character" or dependability of the speaker. Normally, with this strategy, "the orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence."³⁴ However, Ezekiel presents Yahweh as the primary speaker, who persuades not simply on the basis of his previously established character, although this is extremely important when Ezekiel references the history of Yahweh's relations with Israel (cf. especially Ezek 20). The text attempts to establish Yahweh's good character by depicting him as a deity that justly punishes the wicked (both Israel and other nations) but that also will one day redeem his faithful followers. In doing so, the text attempts to clarify for the audience the true nature of Yahweh's character. In other words, the ethos of the deity is not a given in Ezekiel, nor is the ethos of

³³ Daniel Block discusses the "inseparable bond among national patron deity (Yahweh), territory (land of Canaan), and people (nation of Israel)" as an "inviolable" triangle in his *Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1997), 7. For a more thorough discussion of this triangular relationship in the ancient Near Eastern context, cf. idem, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* (2nd ed.; ETSS; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

³⁴ Aristotle, *The "Art" of Rhetoric* (trans. John Henry Freese; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 17.

the prophet through whom Yahweh speaks. Both are positions for which the text provides arguments to the reader.

Thus, a key rhetorical goal evident in all three major sections of the Ezekiel corpus (1–24; 25–32; 33–48), when examined in light of Yahweh’s kingship, is a rehabilitation of the deity’s reputation in order to persuade the audience to continue placing trust in Yahweh or to return to faithfulness. This highlights that the preservation of the worshiping community as the unique patrons of Yahweh is of ultimate concern, and this preservation is intrinsically tied to the preservation of Yahweh as the only legitimate Object of worship.

THE METHOD OF RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

It would be a mistake to assume that, because a classical rhetorical approach is used here to analyze Ezekiel, the ancient author(s) were familiar in any formal way with the tools of classical rhetoric. The methods employed in this book build upon the recognition that certain argumentative techniques can be found in various human cultures throughout history and across geographical boundaries. In utilizing a rhetorical approach here, I am initially following in the footsteps of New Testament scholar George Kennedy, as adapted by Hebrew Bible scholars Thomas Renz and Glenn Pemberton.³⁵ Kennedy promotes a return to classical rhetoric, as elaborated by Aristotle in *The “Art” of Rhetoric*. According to Pemberton, this approach emphasizes, “rhetoric as suasion,” rather than the mere “elucidation of compositional features.”³⁶ For Pemberton, “rhetoric is the means by which a speaker/writer attempts to persuade an audience in favor of her/his own view of reality (ideology), against other competing ideologies.”³⁷ Furthermore, Pemberton notes that

³⁵ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, and idem, *Comparative Rhetoric: An Historical and Cross-Cultural Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Cf. Renz, *Rhetorical Function*, and Glenn D. Pemberton, “The Rhetoric of the Father: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Father/Son Lectures in Proverbs 1–9” (Ph.D. diss., The Iliff School of Theology/The University of Denver, 1999).

³⁶ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 66.

³⁷ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 62.

“the essence of rhetoric ... is mental or emotional energy that arises from the basic instinct of self-preservation.”³⁸

Such an approach is highly relevant for the study of Ezekiel, because the context of the Babylonian captivity presented the Israelite exiles good reason to exercise a self-preserving instinct. It presented a competing religious ideology (if not multiple ideologies) in the form of imagistic, and therefore idolatrous, worship. And, at least for Ezekiel, it presented a serious threat to the traditional religious identity of Yahweh’s patrons by way of cultural assimilation. The so-called “basic instinct of self-preservation” referred to by Pemberton resounds throughout the text of Ezekiel when studied from a rhetorical perspective.

For both Kennedy and Pemberton, rhetorical analysis of any text should including the following: 1) establishing the text and textual boundaries of individual rhetorical units, sometimes providing a translation of each unit;³⁹ 2) determining the rhetorical “arrangement of the text, i.e., its subdivisions, the persuasive effect of these units, and how they work together,”⁴⁰ 3) defining the rhetorical situation of each unit, in which the “speaker usually faces one major rhetorical problem, i.e., one major obstacle that must be overcome in order to persuade the audience;”⁴¹ 4) analyzing the argument of the text, including its assumptions, “stylistic devices,” rhetorical strategies, and key topics;⁴² and 5) concluding with a review and synthesis, which asks whether the text “successfully meet[s] the rhetorical situation and problem” and whether “the analysis of details [is] consistent with the argument of the unit as a whole.”⁴³

³⁸ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 70.

³⁹ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 67.

⁴⁰ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 68–69. The purpose of this is not to engage merely in a review of “stylistics,” but rather “to define the function of these devices within the argument as a whole” (69).

⁴¹ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 67.

⁴² Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 69.

⁴³ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 69. Pemberton’s summary is based entirely upon Kennedy’s discussion in *New Testament Interpretation*

For both Kennedy and Pemberton, the analysis of the argumentative strategies (artistic proofs) of a text is based upon technical Aristotelian concepts. Artistic proofs, according to Aristotle, are those arguments created by the so-called “art” of the rhetor.⁴⁴ These are limited to three universal types, which Kennedy labels ethos, logos, and pathos.⁴⁵ These correspond to the following strategies: 1) ethos — appeals to the moral character of the speaker; 2) logos — appeals based upon the logic or message of the speech itself; and 3) pathos — appeals to the emotions of the audience.⁴⁶

Because ethos is such an important strategy for Ezekiel, it is helpful to review Kennedy’s understanding of this strategy.

Ethos means “character” and may be defined as the credibility that the author or speaker is able to establish in his work. The audience is induced to trust what he says because they trust him, as a good man or an expert on the subject. In Aristotelian theory ethos is something entirely internal to a speech, but in practice the authority which the speaker brings to the occasion is an important factor.⁴⁷

Kennedy helps to highlight here one of the fascinating circumstances surrounding ethos in Ezekiel. The historical prophet, who is treated in the book as the mediator for Yahweh’s communications, must be defended as a reliable source of revelation for the reader. While the prophet is depicted at times as having a certain amount of authority for the elders of the exilic community (8:1, 11, 12; 14:1; 20:1–3), the text emphasizes repeatedly the overwhelming pressure exerted upon him by the “hand of Yahweh” (1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1, 3; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1), apparently in an attempt to legitimize the prophet’s speech and symbolic actions as the exact words and will of the deity. As such, the ethos of prophet and deity are intricately

through Rhetorical Criticism (SIR; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33–38.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 15, and discussed in Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 77.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 15.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *The “Art” of Rhetoric*, 17.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 15.

tied in the text, but ultimately in such a way as to have the prophetic persona eclipsed by that of the deity. The book presents Yahweh as the chief speaker, whose authority is in one sense a given, yet in another sense in jeopardy and therefore in need of demonstration and defense.

Logos, according to Pemberton, “refers to the logical or rational development of the argument in the discourse,” which uses inductive or deductive forms of reasoning, both of which “are drawn from *topics* or places a rhetor may look for material to develop his/her argument.”⁴⁸ In my approach here, individual units of text are examined for their internal logic, as well as for the contribution(s) they make to the progression of a larger, logical argument in the prophetic book as a whole. The criterion for selecting the individual rhetorical units for study here is the implicit or explicit presence of the topic of Yahweh’s kingship.

Pathos, according to Pemberton, refers to the way speakers seek to “stimulate or manipulate” the emotions of their audience in order “to achieve their rhetorical goals.”⁴⁹ These might include the manipulation of fear, promise (pleasure), or both.⁵⁰ Ezekiel primarily uses the pathos of fear in the first major part of the collection (Chs. 1–24) to threaten further judgment against the exiles for their idolatry and rebellion. The second major unit of text (Chs. 25–32) employs a pathos of resentment toward foreign nations in order to convince the audience to agree with Yahweh’s judgment and condemnation of them. In the third, more future-oriented portion of the book (Chs. 34–48), Ezekiel primarily uses elaborate promises to instill hope in the exilic community.

While Renz and Pemberton have already proven the value of Kennedy’s approach for studying texts in the Hebrew Bible, it is also well-suited for studying a particular rhetorical theme or topic that is pervasive in a given book of the bible. It is in this sense that the current project differentiates itself the most in scope and method from the work of Renz.

⁴⁸ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 78–79. Cf. also Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 20–21.

⁴⁹ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 81.

⁵⁰ Pemberton, “Rhetoric of the Father,” 81.