

A RECONSIDERATION OF THE 'THIRTIETH YEAR' IN EZEKIEL 1:1

By S. G. TAYLOR

The precise meaning of the 'thirtieth year' in Ezekiel 1:1 has long puzzled students of the prophecy; as there is no clear indication in the text as it stands, we must look elsewhere for evidence that will lead to a satisfactory interpretation of בשלשים שנה.¹

Apart from those scholars² who have proposed textual emendation, the majority have been drawn towards one of the following interpretations. It has been suggested that the 'thirtieth year' may refer to a time some thirty years after the Josianic Reforms, dated 621 BC, thus making the Inaugural Vision of Ezekiel occur in 591 BC. Even if the chronology could be made more coincident, there have not been found other examples of such a mode of reckoning.³

Again, W. F. Albright⁴ has advanced the view that it may refer to the thirtieth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, the year in which the prophet edited or published this oracle, but the flow of the introduction tells against this, and as C. F. Whitley points out verses 2 and 3 seem to disprove it.⁵

This leaves us with the third and traditional view, namely, that this refers to the age of the prophet himself.⁶ No attempt is made here to examine the vocational significance of the age

1. H. H. Rowley, *Men of God*, Nelson, London (1963) 202.
2. C. F. Whitley, 'The "Thirtieth" Year in Ezekiel 1:1', *VT* 9 (1959) 326-330.
3. In Ezekiel 1:2, the moment of the prophet's vision is closely linked to the Royal Chronology, on which basis of reckoning the vision occurred in 593 BC.
4. W. F. Albright is followed by C. G. Howie, *The Date and Composition of Ezekiel*, *JBL* Monograph IV (1950).
5. *Loc. cit.*
6. A view held by Origen and many others.

of thirty; the intention of this paper is to draw attention to the apparent stylistic affinities between Ezekiel 1:1 and the following verses from the Genesis flood narratives.

Genesis 7:6 reads as follows: 'Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters came upon the earth.'⁷

Genesis 7:11 reads: 'In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month . . . the fountains of the great deep burst forth . . .'

In Genesis 8:13 we read: 'In the six hundred and first year,⁸ in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth.'

The question as to whether the prophet borrowed from the author of Genesis, or whether both drew upon a common literary usage, is a minor one.

The suggestion is here submitted that there is adequate stylistic affinity between Ezekiel 1:1 and Genesis 8:13 to warrant a stronger acceptance of the traditional view, namely, that the 'thirtieth year' of Ezekiel 1:1 does refer to the age of the prophet at the beginning of his ministry.⁹

7. All quotations are from the RSV.

8. The Septuagint supplies ἐν τῇ ζωῇ τοῦ Νῶε, though the context scarcely requires such an elucidation.

9. For a previous statement of this explanation, cf. K. Budde, *ET* 12 (1900) 39-43.