

THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN ZECHARIAH 11:4–17

By

JONATHAN GAN

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## SUMMARY

This study examines the metaphor of the shepherd in Zechariah 11:4-17, which is a prominent and significant one in the Hebrew Bible. It defines Yahweh's relationship with the nation of Israel and those who have faith in him. But Zechariah 11:4-17 presents a shepherd image which contradicts to the basic metaphor in the Hebrew Bible.

The thesis of this study argues that the differing shepherd image in Zechariah 11:4-17 is the result of the rejection by the people of the responsible shepherd, which caused Yahweh to surrender his shepherd responsibility. It is a metaphor designed to punish an unrepentant Israel.

Zechariah 11:4-17 furnishes an example of a situation where Yahweh surrendered his shepherding responsibilities to those irresponsible shepherds. This example should be incorporated into the said metaphor, so as an objective and comprehensive meaning may be achieved, and one should consider this metaphorical meaning in the study of the subject.

Key terms:

Metaphor; Shepherd Metaphor; Yahweh as shepherd; Historical-literary approach; Shepherd Metaphor in the literature of the Ancient Near East; Shepherd Metaphor in the literature of the Hebrew Bible; Shepherd-King Metaphor; Shepherd-God Metaphor; Allegory; Covenant

## **DECLARATION**

Student Number: 3273-519-7

I declare that 'The Metaphor of the shepherd in Zechariah 11:4-17' is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY	i
KEY TERMS	i
DECLARATION	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Problem Encountered	
1.2 Purpose	
1.3 Methodology	
1.4 Outline of Chapters	
CHAPTER 2 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN THE LITERATURE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST	5
CHAPTER 3 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN THE LITERATURE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE	8
3.1 The Shepherd-King Metaphor	
3.2 The Shepherd-God Metaphor	
3.2.1 Explicit References	
3.2.2 Implicit References	
CHAPTER 4 THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS OF ZECHARIAH	21
4.1 Historical Context of Zechariah	
4.2 Literary Context of Zechariah	
4.2.1 Zechariah 1-8	
4.2.2 Zechariah 9-14	
4.3 Genre	
4.3.1 Visions	
4.3.2 Oracles	
4.3.3 Analysis	
4.3.4 Metaphor	
CHAPTER 5 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN ZECHARIAH 11:1-17	46
5.1 Zechariah 11:1-3	
5.2 Zechariah 11:4-14	

5.3 Zechariah 11:15–17

CONCLUSION

78

BIBLIOGRAPHY

80

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The metaphor of the shepherd is a prominent and significant one in the Hebrew Bible. It defines Yahweh's relationship with the nation of Israel and those who have faith in him. In the Hebrew Bible, this metaphor also defines the relationship between the rulers and the people. It has shifted from an agrarian context, of shepherd and sheep in the literal sense, to a socio-political context, of rulers and people in the political sense.

The said metaphor is depicted in many characters. These include Yahweh himself, Abraham, Moses, David, and many others. It is different from the shepherd image presented in the New Testament, which portrays the metaphor of a counsellor but which is beyond the scope and nature of this dissertation. The pastoral image which exists in the ecclesiastical context does not correspond with the shepherd metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps the former focuses more on the functional role of the shepherd in the church while the latter concentrates on the literary meaning of the shepherd in the Biblical texts.

### 1.1 The Problem Encountered

Often the metaphor of the shepherd is presented as a benevolent attitude of the caregiver towards the recipients. But Zechariah 11:4–17 offers two different images of the shepherd in comparison with the basic metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. A good shepherd is one who provides, protects, and leads the flock, a mandate demonstrated by Yahweh himself. The two shepherd images presented in Zechariah 11:4-17 are one who does not care for the flock and one who cares. And both images enacted under the instructions of Yahweh. How should this difference be explained? What is the intrinsic

meaning of this metaphor in the Hebrew Bible? And how do the images of a shepherd in Zechariah 11 fit in with the rest of the said Bible?

## 1.2 Purpose

The aim of this research is to examine the shepherd image in Zechariah 11:4–17 and the way it differs from the mainstream image of the shepherd in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The objective is to explain the meaning of the negative image of the shepherd in comparison to the positive one, and the reason Yahweh instructed the prophets to enact both shepherd roles. Ultimately, this research seeks to reconcile the two opposing shepherd images in Zechariah 11:4-17 in view of the reason behind this phenomenon. And this interpretation reads against the metaphor of the shepherd in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. As the focus of this study falls on the Hebrew Bible, references to ancient Near Eastern literature will be brief and for comparison only.

## 1.3 Methodology

Traditional scholarship relies much on historical-critical approach to biblical studies. This involves source, tradition and redactions criticism. Source criticism deals with the discovery of the literary sources that produced the biblical texts and seeks to understand the significance of the texts fostered by materials from earlier dates. Tradition criticism deals with the analysis of the underlying traditions that shaped the biblical texts and seeks to understand their meanings through the analysis of traditions transmitted. Redaction criticism assumes that the biblical text is the work of the compilers and seeks to understand its meaning inserted by them. But these critical methods do not fit the study

of the shepherd metaphor. Metaphor is a literary device utilized by authors to present ideas through figure of speech and must be interpreted in its literary contexts. To meet these criteria, the approach must employ literary criticism and interpret in light of its historical background, and that is historical-literary criticism.

The historical–literary method is employed in the study of the shepherd metaphor in Zechariah 11:4–17. This approach presupposes the literary nature of the Hebrew Bible in the perspective of historical progression. It requires literary competency in reading historical materials and relating them to their respective historical contexts. Choosing the term “literary” over “grammatical” is deliberate. “Literary” includes the broad spectrum of literary techniques while “grammatical” denotes language and linguistics. The emphasis of the historical–literary method is placed on the literary-analytical exegesis and historical criticism. In other words, exegesis is based on the Hebrew text, the meaning of which is determined by means of literary criticism in the perspective of history.<sup>1</sup> The presupposition of the historical–literary method is that the meaning of the biblical text will be unveiled through historical progression. Historical activities and literary records that form this progression constitute the context in which the meaning of the text might be ascertained.

Exegesis encompasses three contexts. The first is the historical context which entails much more than a mere timeline. The broader aspects of such contexts should include social, political, economic, and religious aspects of the text. The second comprises the literary context that involves source criticism, literary criticism, tradition criticism and redaction criticism. The third considers the philological aspects of the text

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew text and biblical references are based on BHS unless otherwise indicated. For convenience, the English version is based on RSV unless otherwise indicated.



which encompass grammatical principles, syntax, semantics and semiotics. All these contexts provide a framework to guide the interpretive work which will pave the way for a comprehensive reading of the text.<sup>2</sup>

Exegesis based on the historical–literary approach satisfies the requirements of a study of metaphor. Thus, the significance of the metaphor is derived by careful exegesis, as well as the interpretation of the text in its wider historical context.

#### 1.4 Outline of Chapters

The dissertation is structured in five chapters. Chapter One states the problem encountered, the purpose of the research and the research methodology involved in the study of metaphor. It sets the stage for the premise of research into the shepherd metaphor. Chapter Two examines cases of this metaphor in the ancient Near Eastern literature in order to understand the significance of the said image in a wider context than the Hebrew Bible. The Israelites were not living in isolation and were indubitably influenced by other cultures of the ancient Near East. Chapter Three examines the metaphor of the shepherd in the books of the Hebrew Bible so as to gain an understanding of this image there. Chapter Four examines the historical and literary contexts of Zechariah, in order to pave the way for an interpretation of the said metaphor in Zechariah 11:4-17. This involves historical research and literary criticism. Chapter

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<sup>2</sup> The divergence of the historical–critical and historical–literary methods is to be found in the premise of exegesis. Historically, the historical–critical method was utilized to verify the historicity of the Bible: the search went deep beneath the literary fabric of the biblical text. The consequence was its abuse by liberals that led to the result, intentionally or unintentionally, of discrediting the Bible and its religious message. In comparison, the historical–literary method aims to retain the religious nature of the biblical text by accepting it as the basic text of research and examines it under the scrutiny of historical criticism and literary analysis. It juxtaposes the Bible at the centre of inquiry with critique by all available scholarship, so that the textual meaning is unfolded while, at the same time, the veracity of the Bible is established.

Five examines this metaphor in the specific passage from Zechariah

In the next chapter the given metaphor will be studied in the wider context of ancient Near Eastern literature.

## CHAPTER 2 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN THE LITERATURE OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In the ancient Near Eastern literature the metaphor of the shepherd is shaped by various images such as leading, feeding and protecting. The most common figure of speech in the ancient Near Eastern context is that of the king which resembles a shepherd or a leader. A king is not merely a national figure, but is accorded statutory power by God. In the myth Etana, kingship is presented in this way:

Scepter, crown, tiara, and (shepherd's) crook  
Lay deposited before Anu in heaven  
There being no counseling for its people.  
(Then) kingship descended from heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Etana was listed as a shepherd in the Kish dynasty and also described as one who rose to heaven.<sup>4</sup> In the Old Akkadian times, the cylinder seals presented a shepherd ascending towards heaven on eagle's wings.<sup>5</sup> The name Etana is associated with certain deities, which is also appropriate to the kings in the Old Akkadian and subsequent dynasties, and he is the main character of a significant legend. This legend is supported by sources from the library of Ashurbanipal that have been revised throughout three different historical eras, the Old Babylonian, the Middle Assyrian, and the Neo-Assyrian. The third revision

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<sup>3</sup> ANET = James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 114, A-1i. The lines may be fragmentary, but they are parallel with "shepherd" as regards the seeking of the king: dIn-nin-ni ri-e-[a-am . . .] u sarram i-se-'I . . .; Stephen Langdon, "The Legend of Etana and the Eagle," *Babyloniaca*, 1931, vol. 12, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> ANET, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

in the Neo-Assyrian is the most comprehensive, and reconstructs the legendary story that Etana is designated to undertake the providential care of the human race such as a king should provide.<sup>6</sup>

Kings and princes were the rulers of all states in the ancient region of Western Asia, and were perceived as the images of gods, or of supreme gods.<sup>7</sup> But among them, Babylonian and Assyrian kings were perceived as mortals like ordinary human beings, while Egyptian pharaohs were adored as gods. In some extreme cases, arrogant kings divinized themselves. The Akkadian kings Naram and Sharkalisharri inscribed themselves in several relics as god, when they were designated to govern the city.<sup>8</sup>

Kings were divinized in different ways. One of these was cultic in nature. The cultic ritual was the union of the king and the high priestess: the former representing the god of fertility, Dumuzi, and the latter representing the goddess of love, Ishtar. The completion of the ritual would mean that the divination of the king was confirmed. But Wolfram von Soden states that there is no convincing evidence regarding a divinized ritual for kings in the era of the Akkadian kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Cylinder seals and pictorial evidence in the Early Sumerian period contained an image of the “man in the net robe,” which many regarded as a god or a king, but who was probably only perceived as the defender of the flock. It was in the later period that the image was regarded as a god who

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

assumed the form of the defender of the “Holy flock.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Soden states that the divine title assigned to dead Hittite kings, “he became God”, has no connection with the ideology of the monarchical divination.<sup>11</sup> In other words, there is no concrete evidence in the ritual of the divinizing of the kings. However, inscriptions on the historical relics evidently proved the existence of certain forms of divinization.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Soden, p. 69.

## CHAPTER 3 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN THE LITERATURE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Psalm 23 is the key passage regarding the metaphor of the shepherd in the Hebrew Bible, especially because it refers to Yahweh as shepherd. This ideology forms the theological foundation of the New Testament shepherd image. There is a two-fold dimension of Yahweh as the divine shepherd: He is both shepherd-king and shepherd-god.

In the literature of the Hebrew Bible Yahweh is depicted as shepherd and king in the formation of Israel. Like the ancient Near Eastern kings, Yahweh is perceived in both roles, and their relationship is intertwined. Prior to the era of the monarchy, many biblical characters exhibited the qualities of a shepherd. Abraham was privileged to have had Yahweh making a covenant with him (Ge. 12:1-3), and through him blessings flowed to his entire household. This covenant was an everlasting one: therefore it would also benefit the descendants of Abraham (Ge. 17:13). The imputed authority vested in Abraham made him a channel of blessings to his people, his flock.

In the Hebrew Bible Yahweh is perceived as a shepherd. He led the Israelites like a flock through the wilderness (Ps. 77:21). Careful examination shows that the shepherding responsibility was passed on from Yahweh to his earthly shepherds such as David (2 Sa. 5:2; 7:7-8). Similar to the kings in the ancient Near East, David was a king as well as a shepherd. In the Hebrew Bible the metaphor of the shepherd was applied both to Yahweh and the earthly king. However, Yahweh is the overseeing shepherd who ensures that a reliable shepherd is provided because an unreliable one will destroy and scatter his flock (Je. 23:1) and will neglect feeding them (Ezk. 34:7-10). The

metaphorical figure of the shepherd that was applied to David as king of Israel, and to Yahweh the God of Israel, illustrates the two aspects of the shepherd metaphor as shepherd–king and shepherd–god in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near Eastern literature. The shepherd-king metaphor needs further exploration: this will be provided in the following section.

### 3.1 The Shepherd-King Metaphor

The metaphorical reference to kings as shepherds is one of the oldest titles in the ancient Near East.<sup>12</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler contends that the metaphor of the shepherd applied to God indicates that “he is the ideal king,” and in comparison, is better than all other royal shepherds. Brettler also argues that the crook of the shepherd is used for “comfort” rather than punishment.

The most common role of the shepherd–king metaphor is to lead.<sup>13</sup> For example, in Number 27:17 Joshua is not simply a leader: he leads like a shepherd-king “who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd.” Thus, he demonstrates the role of leadership.

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<sup>12</sup> Marc Zvi Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series 76 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> It is remarkably different from the non-figurative usage of the shepherd in the Old Testament. Of nearly 50 uses of the shepherd, 30 supply a nuance contextually. Half of these involve feeding/grazing/pasturing (Ge. 30:31; 41:2, 18; Ex. 34:3; Is. 11:7; 27:10; 30:23; 65:25; Je. 6:3; Hos. 9:2; Jon. 3:7, an outstanding example of this use; Job 1:14; So. 2:16; 4:5; and 1 Chr. 27:29). Five times, resting in a quiet place is involved (Is. 11:7; 13:20; 27:10; So. 1:7). Watering or giving drink is seen four times (Ge. 29:7; Ex. 2:17, 19; and Jonah 3:7). Provision of protection and the act of shearing are used twice (Ge. 30:31; Am. 3:12; and 1 Sa. 25:7, 16, respectively). Healing and breeding are each used once (Is. 30:23; and Ge. 30:25-43, respectively). Non-figurative usage of the shepherd does not explicitly reflect the function of leading, whereas the figurative use of the metaphor leading is its most common implication.

The second role of the shepherd–king metaphor is to feed or provide. Yahweh promised that a day will come when there will be shepherds who will feed the flock with “knowledge and understanding” (Je. 3:15). This verse depicts the role of the king as a caring shepherd, feeding the people of Yahweh, not with physical food, but rather the precepts of Yahweh. David exemplified this role as he ruled by the power of Yahweh, which caused the surrounding nations to fear the nation of Israel. According to Mesopotamian kingship, symbolized by the sceptre, crown, tiara and shepherd’s crook, the king was considered the counsellor of the people in the kingdom (see Je. 40). The feeding on knowledge and prudence mentioned in Jeremiah 3:15 is probably the counselling of the people by the king in the proper ways of Yahweh and is, therefore, another way of saying that they will be led by the shepherd-king according to the way acceptable to Yahweh. Although David died many years before the Babylonian exile, it is reasonable to interpret Ezekiel’s reference to the shepherd who will feed God’s flock (Ezk. 34:23) as a reference to the Davidic rule which will continue even after the exile, in the example of David as a shepherd-king.

The third role of the shepherd–king metaphor is to protect the afflicted sheep. When there is no shepherd, or the shepherd lacks understanding, the flock will be vulnerable (Is. 56:11; Zc. 10:2–3). A foolish shepherd will abandon the flock and leave it to the mercy of a predator. The lost sheep will be neglected and scattered (Zc. 11:16–17). It is the responsibility of the shepherd to shield the sheep from harm or danger.

The role of protecting is also one of keeping the flock from scattering. For example, in Jeremiah 10:21 the foolish shepherds who do not consult Yahweh will fail to protect the flock and prevent it from scattering. As Yahweh is the overarching shepherd,



the earthly shepherds should consult him for divine guidance concerning the journey ahead. Danger in the form of an ambush lies ahead and is hidden from the earthly shepherd, but not from the divine one. If the shepherds do not inquire of Yahweh, their foolishness will endanger themselves and the safety of the flock.

These three roles embodied in the shepherd–king metaphor, rely on two foundations. Firstly, the tender care of the shepherd–king. The metaphor of the shepherd is an illustration of love and care for the flock. Ezekiel 34:4 and Zechariah 11:16 present the unrighteous shepherds who fail to care for it. They did not strengthen the weak, heal the sick or take care of the injured. A righteous shepherd, on the other hand, will search for the straying sheep (cf. Ezk. 34:4–6, 8; Zc. 11:16).

Secondly, faithfulness will equip the shepherd–king to be responsible for his people. For example, in Isaiah 44:28, Cyrus, who was regarded as Yahweh’s shepherd, was vested with the responsibility of performing the task of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. This portrays his faithfulness in the appointed role of a shepherd–king over the people of Yahweh and their welfare. The flock completely depends on the faithful shepherd to lead them in the right way, protect them from harm, and feed them with understanding and knowledge. Without such a shepherd, the flock will be left to the mercy of the beasts of prey.

Thirdly, the shepherd–king metaphor also presupposes that righteousness brings about deliverance from distress. This foundational presupposition is evident in the Hebrew Bible. Without a righteous shepherd, the flock will be scattered, and without a righteous king, the nation will be dispersed: “I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd” (1 Kgs. 22:17; cf. 2 Chr. 18:16). Central to

the idea of righteousness is the keeping of the law. Therefore, it is important for the king of Israel to observe the law of Yahweh and obey his commandments so that the kingdom may be prolonged from generation to generation (Dt. 17:20).

As stated above, the shepherd–king image vividly portrays the idea of deliverance. The feeding and the protecting of the flock are two responsibilities of the shepherd–king metaphor which are very closely related to one another. Irresponsible shepherds do not feed the flock but instead cause them to “become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep” (Ezk. 34:3, 8). On the other hand, a righteous shepherd, who is devoted to Yahweh, will feed the flock with “knowledge and understanding” (Je. 3:15; cf. Ezk. 34:23). It is clear that in the shepherd metaphor, leading and protecting to deliver the flock from harm or danger, the objective is to enable the sheep (the people of Yahweh) to grow in knowledge and understanding.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, of the three roles of the shepherd–king metaphor in the Hebrew Bible, leading is the most prominent. The roles of feeding and protecting are less so. This image has been downplayed in many studies, which more often than not have focused on caring, feeding, and protecting. It is argued that leading implies these three functions. But the direction that the shepherd provides, by this leadership, brings prosperity to his flock. And likewise the king will bring prosperity to the nation.

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<sup>14</sup> This is the core of the contemporary image of the shepherd which concerns the well-being of the soul. Careful exegesis will show that the activity of feeding is not passive like consolation, but rather an active education and equipping.

## 3.2 The Shepherd-God Metaphor

The concept of territorial deity is prominent in the ancient world. The god was confined to a region, and was regarded as the shepherd of the people of that locality. Any earthly king was understood to be a shepherd vested with authority from the divine shepherd. In the literature of the ancient Near East, the image of the shepherd–god is a rare appellation. The epithet mostly used is, rather, that of shepherd–king.<sup>15</sup> However, the Hebrew Bible utilises the figure of the shepherd–god as the one who leads and guides the people.

The said metaphor in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible literature often alludes to activities related to distress and deliverance. God, like a shepherd, delivers his people (his sheep) from suffering or troubles. After leading them away from danger he provides a place of peace and rest. He feeds them with wisdom and knowledge, so that the people may be strengthened. This image is both explicitly and implicitly evident in the literature of the Hebrew Bible.

### 3.2.1 Explicit References

In the metaphor of the shepherd–god Yahweh is explicitly depicted as a shepherd ( ) or acting as a shepherd, being the subject in the verb . The lexical meaning of the verb is given as “pasture,” “tend,” or “graze.”<sup>16</sup> For example in Jonah 3:7

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<sup>15</sup> Ssm, “lead, guide, show” (see Heinrich Schafer, *Urkunden der Alteren Athiopenkonige* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1905), p. 91, line 14; and p. 93, line 16; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Revelation ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, 1957), p. 592; ANET, p. 448). The army describes itself as a herd (idr, see Schafer, p. 87, line 5; Gardiner, p. 556; ANET, p. 447) without a herdsman (nn + ptc. of m[i]niw, see Schafer, p. 87, line 5; Gardiner, p. 568; ANET, p. 447).

<sup>16</sup> William L. Holladay, ed, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), s.v. .

(pasture) is used together with (drink) while both are aspects of (eat) in the proclamation of the king that no person or beast is to taste any food or drink water.

Among the 60 uses in literary contexts, is employed only 16 times with regards to the feeding of sheep.<sup>17</sup> The participial form of in literary contexts is usually a frozen *nomen agentis* for “shepherd.”

The first extensive explicit reference to the shepherd–god metaphor in the Hebrew Bible is found in Ezekiel 34. The verb is used five times with Yahweh as shepherd “protecting” and “feeding” his flock (Ezk. 34:12, 13, 14, 15, 16). Although these verses contain explicit references, they also include implicit indicators present in (pasture), (keep) and (sheep). These latter highlight the metaphorical meaning of : the usage of these words, which portray a shepherd at work, reveals a major theme in the chapter. They present a list of common shepherding activities in the Hebrew Bible. In Ezekiel 34 those kings are judged who had failed in leading, protecting and feeding the flock. Now this responsibility reverts back to Yahweh in whom the two roles of god and shepherd are fused. Yahweh fulfils the role of a faithful shepherd in these three tasks.

Although there are many contexts where the shepherd-god figure is explicitly used of Yahweh, it is difficult to assign to it a single precise qualifying shepherding activity directly related to . For example, in Genesis 48:15–16, the verb is placed between “the God that walked before my fathers” and “the angel who has redeemed me.” It refers to Yahweh safely leading Jacob through the trying situations in his life,

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 30:31; 41:2, 18; Exodus 34:3; Isaiah 11:7; 27:10; 30:23; 65:25; Jeremiah 6:3; Hosea 9:2; Jonah 3:7; Job 1:14; 24:21; Song 2:16; 4:5; and 1 Chronicles 27:29. Additional eighteen uses in non-figurative contexts are without further nuance (Ge. 29:9; 30:36; 36:24; 37:2, 12, 13, 16; 46:32, 34; 47:3; 1 Sa. 16:11; 17:15, 34, 40; 2 Kgs. 10:12; Is. 38:12; and 61:5). Lying the sheep down is used five times (Is. 11:7; 13:20; 27:10; Zp. 2:7; So. 1:7), giving drink four times (Ge. 29:7; Ex. 2:17, 19; Jon. 3:7), guarding twice (Ge. 30:31; Am. 3:12), shearing twice (1 Sa. 25:7, 16), healing once (figuratively, Is. 30:23), breeding once (Ge. 30:25-43), and leading once (Ex. 3:1).

especially in leaving and returning to the land of Canaan. In the recollection of the event, it seems to be an explicit reference to Yahweh's shepherding of him. At the point when the incident took place, however, it was not obvious that Yahweh was shepherding Jacob. After the event, Jacob realised that Yahweh was leading him through his life journey, although at the time he may not have fully apprehended this.

The second explicit reference of the shepherd–God metaphor is found in Isaiah 40:11. It primarily concerns leading the sheep. Yahweh sent the messenger to proclaim to the captives in Babylon that he will certainly assume rulership ( ), over his people (Is. 40:10). He will pasture ( ) his flock ( ), gather them ( ) in his arms, carry them ( ) and lead them ( ) (Is. 40:11). Owing to their sin Yahweh had scattered Israel, but his responsibility as their shepherd would lead him to gather them again ( ), and keep them ( ) as a shepherd ( ) keeps his flock ( ) (Jeremiah 31:10). In Jeremiah 31:11–12, the text describes Yahweh as the one who ransomed and redeemed Jacob and returned the people to Zion. The metaphor presented here may be that of leading, but its overriding significance is as a figure of speech to describe the deliverance of captives from distress. For example, the verb (lift) is used in Isaiah 40:11 where Yahweh proclaims comfort to the captured, weary sheep. The verb (lead) is employed in conjunction with (carry) to explicate the meaning of shepherding. “Leading” is used here in the sense of care, and may be perceived as protecting. Consequently, Yahweh will carry the flock in his arms and lead them with care so that they will be delivered from distress or danger. To “lift” his people is indicative of Yahweh's deliverance.

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The appellation “shepherd of Israel” ( ) is used in parallel with “lead the flock of Joseph” ( ) (Ps. 80:2) to indicate the role of the shepherd. When in trouble, the community implores the divine shepherd of Israel to deliver them from danger or distress. For example, in Micah 7:14–20, the plea for Yahweh to “shepherd” ( ) and “let them [Israel] feed ( ) in the land of Bashan and Gilead”, as in the past, is indicative of the result that Yahweh will deliver Israel from their enemies in response to their plea. The shepherding activity of Yahweh in Micah 7:14–20 entails deliverance from captivity and the restoration of the people of Yahweh to their previous condition, as “in the days of old” ( ).

The third explicit reference of the shepherd–God metaphor is the giving over of the sheep to distress. Jeremiah 13:17, 25:30, Psalms 44:12 and 74:1 indicated that Israel was disobedient to Yahweh so that he brought them into captivity. This image is in stark contrast to the images of safety and salvation used in various instances to portray the attitude of the shepherd-God towards his people (2 Sa. 22:20; Ps. 18:20; 31:9; 118:5). This is now an altogether different picture of sheep that are left without protection when danger threatens their lives.<sup>18</sup> However, the irony is that although Yahweh was the one who led the sheep to the wilderness, it was he that saved them. This is indicative of the fact that giving the sheep over to distress is an act of disciplining the flock for their misbehaviour or disobedience. This too, is the responsibility of the shepherd. Leading is not limited to directing the flock to a particular destination, or taking charge of their lives. It also involves discipline should they disobey or misbehave. The intention is to make the flock realise their waywardness and to restore them to where they belong.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, Old Testament Commentaries, trans. M. G. Easton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 83.

It is proper to conclude that Yahweh is explicitly known as a shepherd because the shepherding activities described in eight contexts are the delivering of the Israelites out of distress or danger. In one case, the shepherd placed the sheep in distress.

### 3.2.2 Implicit References

The shepherd-god figure is also implicit in those references in which the people are designated as sheep. The foremost implicit allusion to Yahweh as the shepherd is also found in the activity of leading the people of Israel. Two major events which are exemplary of Yahweh doing so, like a shepherd leading his flock, are the exodus out of Egypt and the return from the Babylonian exile. After crossing the Red Sea, Moses celebrated the overthrowing of the Egyptian army and described the mighty acts of Yahweh in leading his redeemed people, and guiding them to his holy abode (Ex. 15:13).<sup>19</sup>

The action of leading in the shepherd metaphor is also described as restoration. For example, Jeremiah 23:1 describes the wicked shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of Yahweh. The flock is dispersed all over the place and driven away from their pasture with no one to “attend” ( ) to their needs (Je. 23:2). Yahweh comes to their rescue. The sheep will be gathered and returned to their fold (Je. 23:3). This is an act of restoration and more, because “they shall be fruitful and multiply.” In the context of

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<sup>19</sup> The use of offers the probable indication that this is a shepherding activity. Of the 30 uses of , 26 are certainly dealing with shepherding, or less often animal dwelling and nomadic dwelling; see 2 Samuel 7:8; 1 Chronicles 17:7; Isaiah 27:10; 32:18 (pasture, habitation); 33:20 (habitation); 34:13; 35:7 (haunt); 65:10 (pasture); Jeremiah 10:25 (habitation); 23:3 (fold); 25:30 (fold); 31:23-24 (see v. 24, habitation); 33:12; 49:19, 20 (fold); 50:7 (habitation), 19 (pasture), 44, 45 (fold); Ezekiel 25:5 (pasture); 34:14 (pasture); Psalm 79:7 (pasture); Job 5:4, 24 (fold); 18:15 (habitation); Proverbs 24:15 (dwelling); and Isaiah 65:10 (pasture).

shepherding, this restoration of the sheep through leading them out of distress or danger is related to the gathering of the flock back to the land where they belong. In Micah 2:12, Yahweh “will gather the remnant of Israel” and “will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture.” This expresses the act of restoring the flock to their fold - - restoring their lives as in the days of old.

This restoration requires an intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The result is the confidence that Yahweh the shepherd will protect Israel the flock (Ps. 74:1, 2, 20). Yahweh is the maker of Israel; they are the people of his pasture ( ) and the flock ( ) of his hand. In Psalm 74:2, “Remember thy congregation, which thou hast gotten of old” indicates that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel began in the ancient past. The word “old” ( ) means “before, earlier” and “ancient times”: in Deuteronomy 33:27 it denotes “primeval times” or “eternal” to describe Yahweh as the eternal God.<sup>20</sup> In Proverbs 8:22, 23, the word “old” ( ) is used to mean “beginning of his work” and “beginning of the earth,” and it is employed in the context of creation.<sup>21</sup> Hence, in Psalm 74:2 the Psalmist reminded Yahweh that Israel had been gathered by him to be his people from the beginning of the existence of Israel and the existence of the Hebrew people.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it depicts a picture of more than shepherd and sheep, but rather of a creator and creation, that which has been a binding relationship from the emergence of creation history (cf. Ezk. 34:19–24).

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<sup>20</sup> Holladay, p. 313.

<sup>21</sup> BDB = Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906), p. 869.

<sup>22</sup> The term “Israel” and “Hebrew people” are used to differentiate the descendants of Adam during different historical eras. “Israel” is used for people belonging to the tribes of Israelites and the nation of Israel, while “Hebrew people” is used for those before the formation of the tribes of Israelites.



The other two shepherding activities, feeding and giving rest, complement the leading alluded to by the shepherd metaphor. For example, Zephaniah 2:6–7 describes the provision of “pasture” ( ) and rest ( ) by Yahweh and indicates that he restores the fortunes of his people. As a protector, Yahweh provides food and rest to the remnant of Judah after deliverance from danger. Zephaniah 2:6–7 presents the point of hypocaustasis when Yahweh gives strength to his people.

Ensuring procreation is another implicit reference of the shepherd metaphor. In Ezekiel 36:11, Yahweh has delivered his people so that they will again procreate. This reference is based on Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it”, which is the blessing Yahweh bestowed on Adam and Eve when they were created. Thus, it testifies that the Yahweh in Ezekiel 36:11 who ensures procreation amongst the people of Israel is the same as the God in Genesis 1:28 who is also the same Yahweh who declares, “I am who I am”, in Exodus 3:14.

The last implicit reference of the shepherd metaphor is that of protecting the sheep from danger. This relates to the saving acts of Yahweh towards the flock. According to Zechariah 9:16, Yahweh “will save them for they are the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land.” The word means “save” or “deliver” from captivity (Zechariah 9:16). Psalm 79:1 and 7 express the distress of the nation which was ruined by foreign rulers and by Jerusalem’s being “laid waste.” In Psalm 107:41, Yahweh “raises” ( ) the needy persons out of affliction, and makes ( ) their families like “flocks” ( ). The term (raise) denotes the height of inaccessibility and indicates that one is out of reach of being captured. It refers to delivering Israel from

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her enemies and Yahweh saving his flock as a good shepherd would do.

In summary, the above brief study of the metaphor of the shepherd points to the fact that Yahweh is both the God and the shepherd of the people of Israel. This relationship encompasses leading, providing for, and protecting the well-being of the flock. It is established at the beginning of the history of Israel. And similar references can be found in the ancient Near Eastern literature. But what is the relationship of this shepherd image to the shepherd metaphor found in Zechariah 11:4–7? To answer this question one will have to research the historical and literary contexts of the prophecies in the book of Zechariah.

## CHAPTER 4 THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXTS OF ZECHARIAH

This section explores the book of Zechariah in general in order to pave the way to study the metaphor of the shepherd as it was used in the prophecies of Zechariah. The purpose is to understand the historical situation and theological message behind the literary fabric.

### 4.1 Historical Context of Zechariah

The vision of Zechariah occurred in the reign of Darius (Zc. 1:1). This post-exilic history was characterized by the return of the diasporic Jews to Palestine; Darius enabled the returned Jews to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem in 515 B.C.E. (Ezr. 4:5; Hg. 1:1; Zc. 1:1).<sup>23</sup> It began with the succession of King Cyrus who reigned over the Persian Empire between 539 to 530 B.C.E.<sup>24</sup> The decree of King Cyrus in 538 B.C.E. resulted in 50,000 Jews returning to Jerusalem from Babylon, having received his permission and assistance to rebuild the temple (2 Chr. 36:22–23). Upon returning, however, political turmoil was rampant. Consequently, sixteen dreary years passed by in which no progress was made on the temple project, which was the heart of the theocratic system of the worship of YHWH. It was not until 523 B.C.E., when Darius gained the throne, that under his reign those obstacles were removed which had prevented the temple from being rebuilt. However, the people of Israel had become spiritually indifferent. They no longer evidenced enthusiasm for completing the rebuilding of the temple. Under such circumstances, the prophetic message of Zechariah emerged.

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<sup>23</sup> Mark J. Boda, *The NIV Application Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 27. Cf. Kenneth L. Baker, *Zechariah*, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (CD-ROM), ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989-1998).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas E. McComiskey, "Zechariah," *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 1004.

In such a context, God abundantly poured forth new revelations concerning his divine intentions. These intentions were focused on the Davidic king through whom God would bless the world (Zc. 12:7-9; 14:20-21). Zechariah 9–11 is the section of the prophets most quoted in the passion narratives of the gospels. Furthermore, the book strongly influenced the author of Revelation in presenting the eschatological future. The role of Israel in the plan of Yahweh is to demonstrate that the promise of Yahweh to David’s descendants will continue and bring glory to Yahweh himself (2 Sa. 7:26).

Otto Eissfeldt affirms that Zechariah 1-8 was written in the second year of Darius but argues that Zechariah 9-14 was written around 300 B.C.E. or later: chapters 12-14 in particular have no resemblance to pre-exilic prophetic traditions.<sup>25</sup> As in Haggai 1:1-6, the Temple building project is the main theme; the prophetic narrative occurred in the sixth month of the second year of Darius which is two or three months earlier than Zechariah 1-8.<sup>26</sup> Eissfeldt agrees with Kittel Elliger as regards dating 9:1-8 in the year 332 B.C.E. on the basis that this was the year in which Alexander was waging war against Tyre.<sup>27</sup> Yahweh’s promise in Zechariah 9:9-10, to deliver Zion, is perceived as the same event as that war. Zechariah 9:11-17 is interpreted as the destruction and conquering of Greece, “over your sons, O Greece” in Zechariah 9:13, which coincides with the earlier argument for dating the event in the fourth or third century B.C.E. The focus here is different from that in Zechariah 1-8, in that the Jews in the diaspora might

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<sup>25</sup> Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), pp. 437-440.

<sup>26</sup> Eissfeldt, p. 429.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

have felt the threat of the Greeks. But the distinction between 1-8 and 9-14 lies in the teraphim mentioned in Zechariah 10:2 which belong to the pre-exilic folk religion. However, according to Eissfeldt the reason for incorporating teraphim in the context of Zechariah 10:2 is unknown, owing to its origin which belongs to an ancient source. Elliger argues that Zechariah 10:1-2 should be understood in the metaphorical sense that Israel should seek salvation from Yahweh alone and not from the false gods or teraphim. But this argument does not advocate any date for Zechariah 9-14. Eissfeldt calculates that Zechariah 9:1-10:2 was written in about 300 B.C.E., and may stem from more than one author. Other references such as Zechariah 9:1, 10, 13 and 13 point to the existence of Damascus and Ephraim while 9:5 refers to the king of Gaza; these are seen as unsubstantiated pieces of evidence for earlier dates.<sup>28</sup>

To this end, Georg Fohrer states that at the end of the eighteenth century, the narrative in 9-11 was dated by scholars at 722 B.C.E., and 12-14 at 587 B.C.E. This proposition is based on the multiple prophecies compiled in Zechariah 9-14, “An oracle. The word of Yahweh” (Zc. 9:1; 12:1; cf. Ma. 1:1).<sup>29</sup> This is caused by the problems created by the textual divisions, literary forms, and dates; these complexities are difficult to resolve. References to historical events are not concrete and lead to a later date in the fifth century for Zechariah 12-14. But Fohrer, like Eissfeldt, followed Kittel Elliger, ascribing Zechariah 9-11 to 332 B.C.E. during the reign of Alexander. This division of Zechariah is also known as Deutero-Zechariah. Fohrer, as with Eissfeldt, dates Trito-Zechariah (12-14) in the mid-third century.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 437-438. Contrast Zechariah 9:1, 10, 13 and 9:5.

<sup>29</sup> Goerg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 465-468.

Eissfeldt allocates the event in Zechariah 10:3-12 to a later date than that in 721 B.C.E. The “house of Joseph” and “Ephraim” referred to the Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt which are different from those in pre-exilic origins, and Zechariah 10:3-12 is based on Isaiah 19:23-25 and 27:13, and the Qumran War Scroll.<sup>30</sup> Zechariah 11:1-3 is a poem that is designed to insult the rulers of the world, on their fall. Its literary nature makes it difficult to determine the exact event in history. Eissfeldt, however, juxtaposes the narrative in Zechariah 11:3 with the fall of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic regimes, referred to as the “shepherds and goats” threatened by the acts of Yahweh. This assumption is based on the argument that the narrative is original and deviates from Elliger’s proposition that it is a later insertion.<sup>31</sup> In terms of either view, Zechariah 11:1-3 refers to an event where the threat from Yahweh is directed against the kings of these two powers, and not the kings of Judah.<sup>32</sup>

Eissfeldt read Zechariah 11:4-17 as a unit in view of the fact that Zechariah 13:7-9 cannot be ascertained to be the conclusion, as suggested by Ewald; it must be in a defined context of its own. But the ambiguity of the literary form causes difficulty in identifying specific events, and Eissfeldt believed that the work of a redactor was behind this intricate text. In this perspective, the three rejected shepherds could be Moses, Aaron and Miriam, or Galba, Otho and Vitellius.<sup>33</sup> Ewald relates the three shepherds to Kings Zechariah, Shallum, and Menahem in 2 Kings 15:8[mine], 10, 14, 16-17, along with

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Eissfeldt, p. 653.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 438.

<sup>33</sup> Miriam may be interchanged with Jerome, and Vitellius with Calmet. See Eissfeldt, p. 438.

Marti and Sellin, and the high priests Lysimachus, Jason and Menelaus, or the Toboids, Simon, Menelaus and Lysimachus.<sup>34</sup> The three rejected shepherds are in contrast to the image of the good and responsible shepherd, in that Zechariah 11:4-17 may refer to the rise of the Maccabeans. Since nothing transpired in the one hundred and fifty years between 450 to 300 B.C.E., it is assumed that 11:4-17 occurred in the fourth or third century B.C.E., the same period as 9:1-10:2.<sup>35</sup> Eissfeldt agrees with Elliger that the historical context of Zechariah 11:4-17 was established in the settling of the Samaritan community and its religious practice away from the Temple at Jerusalem in the end of the fourth century B.C.E., but this perspective also cannot be conclusive.

To Eissfeldt, Zechariah 12-14 resembles nothing in the pre-exilic era, proved by many items of evidence advocating a later historical period. The eschatological tone in Zechariah 12:1-9 concerns the destruction of certain enemies while the presentation of Zechariah 13:1-6 deals with the persecution of the prophet and rendering the shepherd role undesirable. But Zechariah 12:10-14 seems to suppose a specific event about the judgment of wrongdoers. Even this cannot be certain. The shepherds referred to in Zechariah 11:4-17 appear to be earlier than the era of the Maccabeans.<sup>36</sup> Eissfeldt, however, states that nothing can be conclusive due to the lack of knowledge about the religious community and the nation of the Jews as a whole during the third century B.C.E. But the judgment in Zechariah 13:7-9 is incurred upon the rulers and the people,

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<sup>34</sup> Eissfeldt makes reference to Josephus' work. See Eissfeldt (p. 438) for details and more references.

<sup>35</sup> Eissfeldt, p. 439.

<sup>36</sup> Sellin suggests that the man killed in 170 B.C.E. was Onais III, according to 2 Maccabees 4:32-38 and Daniel 9:26. Alternatively, Duhm proposes that the man is Simon who was inferred to have been murdered in 134 B.C.E. (1 Mc. 16:11-12). See Eissfeldt, p. 439.

and along with it comes the cleansing of one-third of Yahweh's people. Evidence for a later date from Zechariah 14 derived from the idea of the Day of Yahweh is not convincing to Eissfeldt, and he remarks that it is contradictory and may have been written by more than one author. Redactions of the text make it extremely difficult to determine its historical origin.<sup>37</sup>

Eissfeldt concludes that it is futile to claim the same author for Zechariah 9-14 and 12-14. But whether Zechariah 9-14 needs to be subdivided is undecided. Eissfeldt could not discover a connection between Zechariah 9:1-11:3 and 11:4-17, and chapter 14, which involved various historical referents that complicate the identification of the origin of the text. Multiple authorships appear to be the case with Zechariah 9-11 and 12-14, but Eissfeldt finds it best to retain a single authorship of each section; 9-11 (Deutero-Zechariah) and 12-14 (Trito-Zechariah). Interpreters, he advocates, should read Zechariah with three authors in mind.

Brevard Childs, while holding to the canonical approach, agrees that the Zechariah 1-8 and Zechariah 9-14 display no similarity in literary expressions, form, and means of communication. Redaction has made the two works distinct.<sup>38</sup> But Childs, who dates Zechariah 1-8 in 519 B.C.E., argued that the prophecy occurred in the second year of Darius which is twenty years after the re-occupation of Judah by the diaspora, which causes Babylon, as the threat, to be illogical. To regard Zerubbabel as the deliverer, as some have suggested, would underscore the eschatological purpose imprinted in the

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<sup>37</sup> Eissfeldt, p. 440.

<sup>38</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), pp. 476-479.



prophecy. Childs argued that the “Branch” in Zechariah 3:8, as the coming deliverer, not only provides deliverance from enemies, but also restores the life Judah once had.

Dividing Zechariah into three sections (Zechariah, Deutero-Zechariah, and Trito-Zechariah) would be unnecessary; but for interpretive purposes, it is best to keep to two divisions: 1-8 and 9-14. Multiple authorships may be logical but Zechariah 1-8 and 9-14 are not without connections. Though the literary form in each section is different, they are related in terms of the eschatological future of Judah. The prophecies in Zechariah 1-8 illustrate the judgment of Yahweh against Judah, while 9-14 emphasize the restoration of Judah through the Davidic king. If referents are required to justify the dating of Zechariah, only scanty references could be found to support such an argument, just as it is difficult to defend a single authorship.

In any case, the book of Zechariah concerns the glorious future of Israel which is in stark contrast to the situation of despair in the diaspora. Interestingly, Zechariah’s name means “the LORD remembers” ( ), a reminder that Yahweh remembers his covenant promises to Israel and will fulfil them. This is very appropriate, since the book bearing his name will depict how God will work through history and ultimately restore the nation of Israel, defend its members and bless them through the coming Davidic king. The whole episode of God’s disciplinary action of sending his people into exile has a purpose. If indeed it is that God would bring them back to the “promised land,” then this must be indicative of his compassionate intention to “further the program” that would result in his glory. Before examining the message, it is important to investigate the literary context of Zechariah, without which one will fail to understand the meaning of the text.

## 4.2 The Literary Context of Zechariah

Concerning the literary context, David Petersen infers that there are two types of literature in the book of Zechariah, namely visions and oracles.<sup>39</sup> Petersen also remarks that the book can be divided into three sections, “an introduction (1:1-6), a block of reports of visions, replete with oracular responses (1:7-6:15), and a concluding block of prophetic speeches organised around Zechariah in the role of oracle giver” (7:1-8:23).<sup>40</sup> The dates presented in Zechariah 1:1; 1:7; and 7:1 marked the divisions and influenced readers towards that direction. But some scholars would divide the book of Zechariah into only two sections, chapters 1-8 and 9-14. Others argue for a tripartite division, namely, Zechariah (1-8), Deutero-Zechariah (9-11), and Trito-Zechariah (12-14).<sup>41</sup>

### 4.2.1 Zechariah 1-8

Traditionally, as mentioned, scholars divided the book of Zechariah into two sections, 1-8 and 9-14. Otto Eissfeldt points out that the author of Zechariah is presented in 1:1, “Zechariah the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo.”<sup>42</sup> Eissfeldt has vividly identified the author as the same Zechariah in Ezra 5:1, 6:14, and Nehemiah 12:16, but maintained that chapters 9-14 were penned by someone else. One may conclude, with Eissfeldt, that in terms of authorship the latter chapters bear no relationship to chapters 1-8.

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<sup>39</sup> David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), p. 110.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Eissfeldt.

<sup>42</sup> See Eissfeldt, p. 429 for details.

Zechariah 1-8 consists of visions and oracles, as indicated by Eissfeldt. In 1:2-6, the opening statements depict the grace of Yahweh which will return to Israel if they will respond with repentance. In 1:7-6:8, the eight visions that were given to Zechariah were related to either a promise to the post-exilic leaders of the returning diaspora, or one to remove the guilt of the people of Israel who will experience the grace of Yahweh.<sup>43</sup> Of the eight visions, 1:8-15 describes the “three . . . diversely coloured post-horses;” 2:1-4 the “four horns and the four smiths;” 2:5-9, “the man with the measuring line;” 3:1-7, “the cleansing of Joshua the high priest;” 4:1-6a, 10a-14, “the golden lampstand and the two olive trees which stand beside it;” 5:1-4, “the flying scroll;” 5:5-11, “the woman in the ephah carried away from the land by two women with stork’s wings;” and 6:1-8, “the setting out of four chariots with different coloured horses.”<sup>44</sup> In 6:9-15, the oracle came to Zechariah, with a direct command from Yahweh, to bring the silver and gold and to crown the high priest: this was accompanied by the prophecy of the coming Davidic king. In 7:1, a direct oracle from Yahweh was given to Zechariah in the month of Kislev which provides the answer to the inquiry of the men of Sharezer and Regem-melech regarding whether they should fast in the fifth month as in the past. But Eissfeldt doubts that fasting is carried out in the fifth month; rather the burning of the house of Yahweh occurs in this month (Zc. 7:1-3; cf. 2 Kgs. 25:8-9). In 7:4-14, the text concerns judgment to the enemies and justice to the needy. According to Eissfeldt the commands of Yahweh in 8:1-7 close with seven promises, depicting the blessing Jerusalem will receive, the return of the diaspora, and the renewal of Yahweh’s blessing bestowed upon the people with the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 430. See Zechariah 1:8-17; 2:1-4; 2:5-17; 4:1-14; 6:1-8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 430.

beginning of the reconstruction of the temple.<sup>45</sup>

J. Alberto Soggin provides a more detailed analysis of Zechariah 1-8.<sup>46</sup> Zechariah 1:7-17, the first vision, concerns the appearance of the divine horsemen who will bring stability to the nation of Judah. But the vision consists of the anger of Yahweh which does not exclude grace from flowing to Judah. The second vision, Zechariah 2:1-14, concerns the judgment of Judah, Israel and Jerusalem, in the vision of the four ironsmiths. The third vision, Zechariah 2:5-17, concerns the rebuilding of the holy city of Jerusalem but without a wall. In ancient times walls ensured protection, but this city does not need it because Yahweh will be her wall. The fourth vision, Zechariah 3, deals with the indictment of the high priest Joshua before the divine throne, wearing dirty clothes that represent his sin and the sins he bears for his people, with Satan accusing him. Soggin asserts that the definite article preceding the term Satan implies a function, not a name.<sup>47</sup> The vision ends with Yahweh showering down his grace to spare his people from judgment, and the filthy garment of the priest being changed to a clean garment as a symbol of forgiveness. The fifth vision, Zechariah 4, describes the lampstand which symbolizes the people of the world, the seven lamps which signify Yahweh's eyes, and the olive trees which connote Joshua, the high priest and Zerubbabel, the last Davidic descendant. The sixth vision, Zechariah 5:1-4, concerns the flying scroll containing the destruction of blasphemers. However, this judgment is executed by Yahweh himself and

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<sup>45</sup> Eissfeldt, p. 431.

<sup>46</sup> J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, The Old Testament Library, 3rd ed. (Louisville: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), pp. 388-390.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 388-390.

perceived as a “symbolic action.” Soggin explains that the content of a revelation is crucial in ancient Near Eastern writing, rather than the method of communication, because the “objective value” of blessings and curses is its centre.<sup>48</sup> The seventh vision, Zechariah 5:5-11, deals with the symbolic presentation of two women transporting the people’s sin to Babylon. This represents the cleansing of Judah’s sin and sending it far away. Soggin relates this vision to Revelation 14:8; 18:10, 21, which depict the greatness and the collapse of Babylon.<sup>49</sup> The eighteenth vision, Zechariah 6:1-8, concerns the four chariots and the four winds of heaven representing Yahweh’s judgment against Babylon because of her sin. Babylon is the centre of the Persian Empire and the judgment symbolizes the destruction of the core of sin.

Following the visions, the crowning of the high priest, Joshua, occurs. Soggin has pointed out certain problems in the text.<sup>50</sup> He avers that textual corruption is evident in the plural form of the word “crowns” ( ), rather than the single form “crown” ( ), and the omission of Zerubbabel from the edited work. The exclusion of Zerubbabel may be justifiable due to this individual’s identity being suspicious so that he has been removed from the scene of crowning. Alternatively, the term “crowns” could mean the possession of two crowns; one for Joshua and one for Zerubbabel, but this reading is literally dysfunctional. Soggin rejects the proposition of two crowns for an individual. This would be applicable to the Pharaoh as king in Upper and Lower Egypt, but never in the case of an Israelite king. A third reading is that the allusion refers to one

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>50</sup> Soggin, pp. 389-390.

crown but to that of Zerubbabel who is the descendant of David. Soggin prefers to read the plural form “crowns” which is used to represent the dual roles of priest and prince, as in Ezekiel 45-48, of the future Davidic king.

Zechariah 1-8 ends with the issue of fasting: the audience was instructed to perform it in a pre-exilic manner, and this touched the unrepentant heart of Israel. Soggin argues that the answer to the issue of fasting presented in Zechariah 7 that was provided two years previously has the same value as in Micah 6:8, “Mercy is worth more than sacrifice.” However, this is unsatisfactory. Micah replied in the same fashion as Zechariah that justice must be exercised; kindness and mercy must be shown to the people of Israel. Perhaps, Soggin summarizes the idea by quoting a popular idiom. But the point of this last section of Zechariah 1-8 is that the unrepentant heart of Israel angered Yahweh, which led to their judgment; yet, by his grace, a promise was given to Zion.

#### 4.2.2 Zechariah 9-14

This section can be further divided into two subsections: 9-11 and 12-14, which, as has been indicated, are also known as Deutero-Zechariah and Trito-Zechariah, respectively. However, such a division may be unnecessary, because the inscribed statement in 12:1 could be read as a continuation of 9-11. Without using the labels Deutero-Zechariah and Trito-Zechariah, Eissfeldt provides an analysis of this entire section.<sup>51</sup> The inscription in 9:1 indicates the threat against the surrounding nations along with the rescue of Judah. This rescue plan comprises a king of peace settling in Jerusalem

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<sup>51</sup> Eissfeldt, pp. 434-435.

(vv.9-10) while Ephraim and Judah will exercise power over their enemies (vv.11-17). Zechariah 10:1-2 illustrates the point that the power of Yahweh supersedes the power of the teraphim, so that Judah should seek Yahweh, and not other means of divination. Zechariah 10:3-12 concerns the anger of Yahweh against the shepherds and the leaders, and the deliverance of Judah and Israel with the notion that they will return to their homeland. At the same time, the power of Egypt and Assyria will be humbled. Moving forward, 11:1-3 describes the collapse of the world power represented by the cedar of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan. This is followed by 11:4-17 where Yahweh assigns the role of a shepherd to the prophet of a flock that is earmarked for slaughtering. According to 11:8a, Yahweh got rid of three shepherds in one month. The prophet-shepherd broke the two staffs, grace and union, when he resigned from the role. The pericope ends with another command by Yahweh to assume the role of a worthless shepherd who will bring destruction to the flock (v.17). With the opening statement of the oracular inscription, 12:1-13:6 describes how the enemies of Judah are destroyed while the people of Israel and the house of David are purged of their sin, so that they are purified. But in 13:7-9, the purification process is extensive and the flock is faced with destruction. One third of the sheep survived and are purified to be Yahweh's people. Finally, Zechariah 14 concludes with the destruction of Israel's enemies, and the glorious restoration of Jerusalem is presented in "brilliant colours."

Childs, however, argues that the oracles and sign-acts are literary devices which are related to the original vision through redaction.<sup>52</sup> The literary techniques employed are similar to the prophetic message of Israel's future. Zechariah 1-8 consists of various

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<sup>52</sup> Childs, pp. 476-479.

genres which are crafted by the redactor to proclaim the message of Yahweh. The message is a future deliverance beyond the return of the diaspora or a second exodus which Yahweh desires for Judah.

Regarding Zechariah 9-14, Childs contends that it cannot be perceived to have been written by the same redactor as Zechariah 1-8, which is evident from the inscribed statement in Zechariah 9:1 and 12:1, "An oracle. The word of Yahweh." These inscriptions depict literary independence from Zechariah 1-8. But Zechariah 9-14 is a single unit and may be divided into two subdivisions: 9-11 and 12-14. The concept of the unity of Zechariah 9-14 can be perceived through the progression of the prophetic message, moving from strengthening the nation of Judah to promising a glorious future.

While some scholars have perceived Zechariah as a collection of multiple prophecies, Childs argues for the unity of the theological message in both sections.<sup>53</sup> These works were juxtaposed alongside each other to complete the prophecies in 1-8 to 9-14. Childs states that Zechariah 9-14 was linked to Zechariah 1-8 by the redactors with the purpose of completing the prophecy.<sup>54</sup> But such a juxtaposition creates a theological connection between Zechariah and Deutero-Zechariah.

The book of Zechariah deals with the restoration of the nation of Israel; this includes the rebuilding of the Temple.<sup>55</sup> Zechariah is perceived to fulfil Ezekiel's prophecy of the new Temple and the creation of a new people, which deviated from the

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<sup>53</sup> Childs' opinion seems to be that there were two authors, though this is difficult to determine owing to his ambiguous writing.

<sup>54</sup> Childs, pp. 482.

<sup>55</sup> Eissfeldt, pp. 433-434.



old prophetic tradition that Yahweh's grace depends on the sustainability of the Temple. The night visions in Zechariah are similar to those in Ezekiel; the experiences are real but detached from the mundane life of the prophet and they are unable to reconcile the visions with the real world. In Eissfeldt's view the visionary narrative is the result of Zechariah's effort in reconstructing the visionary experiences and presenting them in written form.

### 4.3 Genre

Visions and oracles constitute two types of prophetic literature found in Zechariah. Such literature is the written form of prophecy received from Yahweh regarding judgment on and blessings of Israel and other nations. As Boda puts it, prophecy deals with divine words conveyed from God to humans, by means of a human who acts as mediator.<sup>56</sup> Prophecy is not limited to oral transmission, but also appears in written form; as noted, this became prophetic literature.

#### 4.3.1 Visions

The common understanding of prophecy is that it offers a prediction of the future, but this is not accurate.<sup>57</sup> Prophecy involves both present and future occurrences. Grant Osborne comments that the majority of the prophecies concern the present state of Israel [Israel and Judah], with only a few that concern the future, and more often reiterate the

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<sup>56</sup> Boda, p. 36. Traditionally, vision is thought to be ecstatic experience; however, it does not appear to be in Zechariah's case (NBD = James D. Douglas, ed. *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester: IVP, 1982), p. 1239).

<sup>57</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Illinois: IVP, 1991), pp. 211-216.

point that Yahweh is sovereign after all. In Zechariah, poetry is employed along with visions and oracles. Osborne writes, “The difference is that the vision is a supernatural manifestation that corresponds to external reality while the hallucinatory, or ‘trance possessions,’ is subjective and irrational.”<sup>58</sup> Most visions occurred as “night visions” but some took place in the daylight. The imagery was mostly apocalyptic and requires explication. For example, Ezekiel 37 depicts the dramatic scene of the dry bones coming alive, which calls for interpretation pertinent to the present and future of Israel. The most common formula to identify a vision is the phrase, “And the word of Yahweh came to me” ( ). Historical origin is often the backbone of interpretation of visions, but this is not the case in Zechariah.

#### 4.3.2 Oracle

The oracle is one type of prophetic literature that exists in Zechariah. This form of prophecy mainly contains judgment and these passages were commonly known as “woe” oracles. Some perceived the presence of such oracles to be negative, while others understood them as instructional visions.<sup>59</sup> But the former conclusion is widely accepted. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart add that “woe” oracles connote the tone of mourning over mishaps or death.<sup>60</sup> Such oracles consist of “announcement of distress,” “reason for the distress,” and “prediction of doom.” At times, promises of deliverance follow after the “woe” oracles, of which Zechariah 9-14 is an example. Accompanying the oracles

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (Singapore: SU, 1982), p. 160.

come poetry which exists in Zechariah 9-14. This style of writing makes memorization easy, especially where it concerns the message of Yahweh. Poetry is regarded as a method of instruction which is common in the ancient world.<sup>61</sup> In relation to Zechariah 9-14, all three forms of prophetic literature are present.

#### 4.3.3 Analysis

According to Petersen the genre of visions existed in pre-exilic and classical prophetic literature.<sup>62</sup> For example, as regards Micah in 1 Kings 22 and Amos in Amos 1:1, the typical indication of a vision is the inscription: “The visions . . .” ( ) or “The words . . .” ( ) along with the word “saw” ( ). Therefore Zechariah is grouped with the pre-exilic and classical prophetic writings owing to the inscription of “. . . the word” ( ) in Zechariah 1:1 and “. . . saw” ( ), which denotes to see something visually: this fits the category of the vision. A significant point regarding Zechariah’s visions from 1:1-7:8 is that these visions are received by the prophet in one night. If a vision is similar to a dream, some scholars believe that an individual in a normal state can experience multiple dreams in one night with various themes. Furthermore, the ancient Greeks’ “waking [*hypar*] and dream [*onar*] visions” would be similar to Zechariah’s visionary experiences. This verifies the possibility of the prophet seeing the visual prophecy while being awake. But biblical scholars rejected such an understanding of the visions which occurred in different contexts which in turn therefore weakened the proposed coherence within

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 161-162.

<sup>62</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 111.

them.<sup>63</sup> One argument, as presented by K. Galling, would be that each historical event identified in each visionary experience is not identical, despite appearing to be similar.<sup>64</sup> For example, some visions depict a situation in the diaspora before the return as in Zechariah 1:8-15, 2:1-4, 2:5-9, and 6:1-8. Others could depict the situation of the diaspora after the return as in Zechariah 4:1-6a, 10b-14, 5:1-4, and 5:5-11. Petersen remarks that this interpretive approach was rejected because one would encounter similar problems when interpreting the Psalms by relying on their historical origin. Like the visions of Zechariah, this approach is subject to criticism.<sup>65</sup>

A challenge posed to the unity of Zechariah's visions is the setting of the fourth vision, in Zechariah 3, which differs from the rest of the vision reports, and which may lead one to think differently regarding their coherence. But Petersen argues that the fourth vision, intended to depict the people of Judah who need cleansing, is the centre of all the visions. In this perspective, Zechariah 3 coheres with the other visions to form a unity. Furthermore, there is a progression evident in these visions, according to Galling and Seybold.<sup>66</sup> But Petersen comments that the process of Judah's restoration involves theological idealism depicted through the visions, and that the historical origin is not of primary importance.<sup>67</sup>

The characteristic of Zechariah's visions is that they comprise a mixture of

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 112; cited K. Galling, *Studien zur Geschichte Israels im perischen Zeitalter*, 1964, p. 123.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>66</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, pp. 112-113; cited Galling, p. 123; and K. Seybold, *Bilder zum Tempelbau: Die Visionen des Propheten Sacharja*, VT (1974) supp 26, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 113.

national reformation and religious duties, and are not concerned with prosperity and building a perfect society (cf. Hg. 2:6-7; Ezk. 43:7). In the view of Petersen this middle position vividly expressed the visions of Zechariah and their relationship with other contemporary literature. For example, the geographical context of the first vision is not only worldly or heavenly, which expresses the nature of Zechariah's visionary experiences. The visions are "motion" and "movement", and are evident in every vision. Although the imagery of visions is enigmatic, they depict the new order for Judah and the world.<sup>68</sup> Such an order is the result of catastrophic activities, especially of the divine ruler: these occurred not-within an earthly Judahite boundary or visionary platform.<sup>69</sup> Petersen adds that the continuous theme of Yahweh's actions is found in the activities of the middle sphere, movements of activities, and the idea of "all the earth" ( ).<sup>70</sup> These visions are summed up by Yahweh being seated in Jerusalem, not in the temple as in the past, but the city is his dwelling and is without a wall. Yahweh becomes a wall of fire for the city. In so doing, the new future order will be operating with righteousness as a result of the cleansing of Joshua the high priest.

The reports of Zechariah's visions reflect the emerging restoration of the coming future.<sup>71</sup> Divine activities in the restored world of Judah will be followed by human involvement in the process of restoration. Petersen writes, "In so doing, he is providing the theological rationale that will make concrete forms of restoration possible. He is not,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 114; Seybold, pp. 106-107.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-115.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>71</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, pp. 115-116.

in these visions, directly proposing or engaging in the actual work of restoration.”<sup>72</sup>

Rather, the vision entails the outline of the temple construction, similar to the details indicated in other prophetic literature. However, the visionary experiences of Zechariah are realistic enough to include unrepentant violators which are released without judgment.<sup>73</sup>

To summarize, Petersen considers that the visions of Zechariah provide a theological framework for the restoration process of Judah and the world in the religious context of Judahite society, and the revelatory communication between Yahweh and the prophet. Some contend that the visions encompass the deliverance of the returned diaspora community and the process of their ritualistic purification. In any case, these symbolic visions are subject to contention and criticism, even as they concern the political, economic, and social rebuilding of the community of Yahweh.<sup>74</sup> The visions display the process of how Yahweh returns to his position as the God of Judah and to the centre of its religious society.

Oracles are utterances stemming from a deity through the prophets: the term is derived from the Hebrew word “ .”<sup>75</sup> These utterances, as discussed earlier, may or may not have been given to Zechariah, owing to the diversity of writing style. Oracles contained in Proto-Zechariah may be regarded as in two blocks; some interspersed in the visions, and others concentrated in Zechariah 7-8. But such a setting may be intended for

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-120.

<sup>75</sup> NBD, p. 860.

a different objective. Oracles contained in Deutero-Zechariah occurred not in a visionary manner, which demonstrates a similarity to Amos as a prophet with a diverse style of writing.<sup>76</sup> Two oracles interspersed in the literary fabric of Zechariah 9-14, which have been discussed, were not written by Zechariah.<sup>77</sup> Utilizing the historical-critical approach, Mede and Duhm argue that since Matthew 27:9 contains a reference to Jeremiah when citing Zechariah 9-11, the author is obviously the said prophet, and that the writing style especially is different from that of Zechariah 1-8. Some scholars argued that Zechariah belonged to pre-exilic prophetic literature, while Eissfeldt and others determined that Deutero-Zechariah had been written around 300 B.C.E.

In Petersen's view Zechariah 9-14 is prophetic literature, similar to Isaiah, which contains judgment language and promises, the phrase "On that day" ( ), and the introductory formula of an "oracle" ( ).<sup>78</sup> The visions of Zechariah 9-14 reflect the work of a prophet mediating between heaven and earth. These sayings are written in poetic form. Zechariah 9:1-8 contains judgment of Judah and the surrounding nations, while Zechariah 9:8-17 express promises of Judah's restoration which will bring peace and stability to the nation. The people of Jerusalem will become the weapon of Yahweh against Judah and the other nations. Yahweh desires that Jerusalem be filled with people beyond the wall of the city and that those who have been scattered can return to their homeland. The indictment oracle to Judah in Zechariah 10:1-12 proclaimed, in battle

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<sup>76</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 120.

<sup>77</sup> David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

imagery, Judah's returning home from this terrible environment for the purpose of rest. Zechariah 11:1-3 shows a glimpse of the disaster waiting to happen which will soon dawn on Israel. What follows are the disappointing events when Yahweh hands Syria-Palestine over to irresponsible shepherds who are rejected and judged, and thus the three oracles conclude.

Zechariah 12-14 which belong to the second "oracle" ( ) contain two lengthy discourses and a short one. These oracles are different from the previous series. This utterance is divided into two sections: 12:1-13:6 and 14:1-21, with an introductory "behold" ( ), which separates the two sections.<sup>79</sup> Petersen notes that the short discourse is juxtaposed between the two lengthy discourses in order to bridge the transition. The two oracles differ in nature: the first, Zechariah 12:1-13:6, contains direct speeches from Yahweh, whereas the second, Zechariah 14:1-21, contains prose. The rhetoric of the text demonstrates two distinct literary materials integrated into a wider context that provides a vivid image of Israel's future, highlighted by "On that day" ( ). Such a phrase causes the flow of the oracles to form a more integrated whole than the oracles in Zechariah 9-11. For Petersen, "Although Zechariah 9-11 expresses the hope that the deity will act with and on behalf of Israel (e.g., 9:11), Zechariah 12-14 affirms that the critical moment, 'on that day,' lies in the future."<sup>80</sup> The focus is on the future of Judah.

To reiterate, the significance of prophetic literature is the perception of that literature as God's divine message, even though the author may not be the prophet who

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



received the words from God.<sup>81</sup> The literary purpose is theological, and the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is described in the theology of the prophetic literature and in diverse literary forms.<sup>82</sup> The role of the prophets is related to national and social welfare. They lived during eras which included both monarchical and exilic periods. Generally, prophetic messages target the kings and the people, since the prophets are guardians of religious traditions and the covenant relationship. It is this deep historical heritage that caused prophets to be significant people, other than kings, priests and political leaders.<sup>83</sup> Their words which are oracles, including visions, became literature so that understanding them requires literary competency.

#### 4.3.4 Metaphor

Metaphor is a literary art form, rather than a methodology. It employs literary competencies to interpret the literary text by analyzing its literary structure and style. John Gibson comments that passages such as Jeremiah 4:2 and Isaiah 30:7 described human conflicts in the history of the human race to symbolize the impact of the evil power on the Israelites or the entire human race.<sup>84</sup> A metaphor is a literary figure of speech employing a direct identification to convey the meaning of the text.

The first image is that of Yahweh as king. As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, the

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<sup>81</sup> Boda, p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Petersen, *Prophetic Literature*, p. 14.

<sup>84</sup> John C.L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), p. 99.

literature of the ancient Near Eastern and the Hebrew Bible portrayed him in this role. This image has dominated throughout the biblical text: that Yahweh is the creator of the heaven and earth, and the Israelites. Gibson adds that such an image is generally mythological and can be found in the Psalms, but occasionally also in historical narratives (e.g. Jdg. 8:23; Ps. 5:2, 4; 29:3, 10; 74:12, 14, 17; 95:3–5; 96:10; 103:19–22; Is. 6:5; Zc. 14:6–9).<sup>85</sup>

There are other images related to Yahweh as king in the said metaphor. As Gibson comments, titles such as “the LORD” ( *יהוה* ), “God Most High” ( *אלהינו* ), and “God Almighty” ( *אלהינו* ), present the image of Yahweh as king.<sup>86</sup> The term “ *באל* ” is the common name for a Canaanite god, but was used by Israelites to address Yahweh.<sup>87</sup> Gibson remarks that this is unlike “ *באל* ” (Baal), which means “lord,” “owner,” and “husband” and is not used to address Yahweh.<sup>88</sup> Gibson utilizes Hosea 2:16 to vividly contrast the terms through a play on words to distinguish the allegiance of Israel which was once directed to Baal but is now intended for Yahweh.<sup>89</sup> This signifies the return of the unfaithful wife to her faithful husband, Yahweh. But the image of king is closely related to images such as “Warrior, Judge, and the Living God.”<sup>90</sup>

The second image is that of Yahweh as shepherd. Gibson is right to point out that

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>87</sup> TDOT = G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., “ *באל* ,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 253–261.

<sup>88</sup> Gibson, p. 123.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

the representation of Yahweh as shepherd and the people of Israel as sheep popularized by Psalm 23 is the most prominent one throughout the Hebrew Bible.<sup>91</sup> Other biblical texts that refer to Yahweh as shepherd include Psalm 80:1 and Jeremiah 31:10. Gibson states that Ezekiel 34 is an allegorized description of the shepherd metaphor among many biblical references.<sup>92</sup> The image of the shepherd describes Yahweh's relationship with Israel and Ezekiel 34 extensively describes the activities of Yahweh involved in the life of the Israelites.

In summary, these images are vividly outlined in the language of the biblical texts which readers should examine carefully to interpret the meaning of the metaphor. There is no hard and fast method of interpreting metaphor other than to read within the literary context and to be sensitive to genre. With this in mind, the next Chapter will examine the meaning of the metaphor of the shepherd in the text of Zechariah 11:4–17.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

## CHAPTER 5 THE METAPHOR OF THE SHEPHERD IN ZECHARIAH 11:4–17

This chapter aims to explain the meaning of the shepherd metaphor in Zechariah 11:4–17 in relation to the same metaphor in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Special emphasis will be placed on the two conflicting shepherd images. Zechariah 11:4–17 is a distinct unit, but for exegetical purposes, this text is divided into two sections (vv.4–14; 15–17), while vv.4–14 are further subdivided into two parts: vv.4–6 and vv.7–14. However, the context of Zechariah 11:4–17 cannot be properly understood without first discussing 11:1–3.

### 5.1 Zechariah 11:1–3

Zechariah 11 is a continuation of the description of the victorious glory of Yahweh defeating the enemies, and restoring the glory, of Israel in chapter 10. One might have expected to hear blessings, but Yahweh is set on cleansing the nation of Israel and reminding them of their sins. Words of condemnation emerge from the assignment to reflect the devastation of Israel. As H.C. Leupold observes, the security of Israel has failed them.<sup>93</sup> It is true that Yahweh will bless Israel, but it is also the case that wickedness flourishes in the nation. This refers to the foreign rulers who were judged by Yahweh in Zechariah 10. Petersen states that the Israelite leadership is represented by foreign rulers in the context of Zechariah.<sup>94</sup> The lamentation in Zechariah 11:1–3 explicates the scenario. Though the typical threefold lament structure in vv. 1–2 appears to be regular, it differs from laments in Isaiah 14:31, 23:1–14, Jeremiah 25:34 and 49:3.

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<sup>93</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 203.

<sup>94</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, p. 80.

Petersen explains that the final clause of v. 1 indicates the result of the lament, and that v. 2 states the reason for the lament. Moreover, the imperative verb “open” ( ) refers to the call to “surrender and destruction,” rather than a call to defeat and capture.

In v. 1, “Lebanon” is utilized to symbolize a region, rather than a specific locality.<sup>95</sup> Petersen states that the Lebanon is famous for its timber produce but also represents pride as in Jeremiah 22:6, “the summit of Lebanon” ( ). Although one may read this as an allegory, it is best to interpret it as a personification. The point is that the entire region [Lebanon] will be burned down and be destroyed like a city. The word “open” ( ) speaks about the only option for the people in the city, which is to surrender and to die. Thus, the notion of decimating the foreign rulers is evident.

In v. 2, the lament continues, except that this time its subject is the commodity produced by Lebanon. Although it is difficult to determine the meaning of as a cypress, the following clause suggests such a denotation. For Boda the burning of the cedars of the Lebanon indicates the collapse of power in Assyria and Egypt, as in Ezekiel 31.<sup>96</sup> As in Isaiah 2:12-17, the cedars of the Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan represent the pride of the human race. Boda translates the Hebrew word in v. 2 as “stately trees” to present the reader with a “double entendre,” because it is used in Psalm 8:9 and Isaiah 33:21 to describe the destructive acts of Yahweh,<sup>97</sup> while this figure of speech is usually conferred on human leaders as shown in Jeremiah 14:3 and 30:21, and in the

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<sup>95</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 81. Following Otzen’s argument, the complexity of Lebanon is seen in Jeremiah 22:6 where it is referred to as Jerusalem.

<sup>96</sup> Boda, p. 459.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

reference to the cedars of the Lebanon in Ezekiel 17:23.<sup>98</sup> Boda remarks that it alludes to the Lebanon cedar to portray leadership, while the word (stately trees) in Nah. 3:18, is used along with “shepherd” to indicate the affiliation of royal officials and the Assyrian court. But Petersen argues that though the word can mean human leaders, in Ezekiel 17:23 it is an adjective which denotes a cedar. According to Petersen, cypress and cedars could grow parallel to each other. If this is true, the cypress is lamenting the fall of the cedars; the cedar is perceived as a “glorious” ( ) tree, compared to the cypress. The lament denotes a sense of judgment. Boda regards the message in chapter 10:1–3a as a judgment of the political leaders and the people who had rejected the appointed rulers.<sup>99</sup> Verse 2 repeats the “call to lament”, which is a pronouncement of judgment on the nations. The preposition “for” ( ) denotes a “negative characteristic” which is judgmental in nature.<sup>100</sup> The concept here is that the commodity which makes the region [Lebanon] famous is destroyed completely, and the forest that grows it. On the same note, Bashan, which is famous for her oaks, suffers the same fate as Lebanon and will be lamenting after the destruction of the cedars.<sup>101</sup> Following the previous scenario, the situation in the first half of v. 2 continues here, which entails the destruction of the forest. The word “thick forest” ( ) refers to a vast area of trees: this symbolises not a

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<sup>98</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 81.

<sup>99</sup> Boda, p. 458.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.

<sup>101</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 82. According to Petersen, Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p. 177, W. Rudolph, “Sacharja 9-14,” *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8-Sacharja 9-14-Maleachi*, KAT XIII 4 (Gutersloh, 1976), p. 200 and M. Saebo, *Sacharja 9-14: Untersuchungen von Text und Form*, WMANT 34 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969), p. 231, utilized form criticism to infer that the affected area is not specific, though not universal.

city, but an entire region which is affected by the destruction.

Yahweh's judgment of the foreign rulers continues in v. 3. According to Petersen, v. 3 offers the response to the situation in vv. 1-2. The reference to "shepherds" and "lions" indicates that the scope of destruction includes both animals and humans. Some perceive the lions and the shepherds as allegorical figures pointing to political leaders.<sup>102</sup> For example, Hinckly Mitchell suggests that the shepherds in v. 3 are the foreign rulers, referred to in v. 1.<sup>103</sup> Julia O'Brien describes the illustration in vv. 1-3 as "animal imagery."<sup>104</sup> This correlates with the image of shepherds in chapters 10 and 11. Linguistically, the description of the shepherds and lions depicts the devastation of the pastures and the trees, as indicated in other prophetic literature. The atmosphere is altered by the introduction of judgment.<sup>105</sup> Though the prophecy continues with the image of the shepherd and sheep, the usage differs from that of protecting the people, to an unusual and confusing use of this imagery.

Boda considers that the insertion of the shepherd and lion imagery is unclear, especially in the context of destroying the nations.<sup>106</sup> The closest connection would be the reputation of Lebanon for producing cedars (e.g. Is. 14:8). 1 Kings 5 and 7 indicate that Solomon used cedars in the building of the temple and the palace. Boda infers that the

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83.

<sup>103</sup> Hinckly G. Mitchell, "Haggai and Zechariah," *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai and Zechariah*. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 197.

<sup>104</sup> Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), p. 249.

<sup>105</sup> O'Brien, p. 249.

<sup>106</sup> Boda, p. 459.

notion connotes judgment against the king.<sup>107</sup>

For Joyce Baldwin the metaphor of a roaring lion is an image of “victory.”<sup>108</sup> In Jeremiah 49:19, the prophetic message pictures a lion coming from Jordan to grasp whatever it chooses, as a symbol of judgment on nations that are enemies of Israel. Boda adds that it is an allegorical expression of the fact that the security of Judah against external political powers is failing.<sup>109</sup> The ambiguous term “laid waste” ( ) in v. 3 is probably best understood as referring to the pastures in ruin because the shepherds are indicted.

But these leaders may or may not be the Israelite ones. Agreed with Petersen, the context does not support the mention of these leaders as alluding to the Israelite leaders. Verses 1-3 do not refer to Judah, but to Syria-Palestine. If the lions in an allegorical fashion refer to Judah, and to the Israelite leaders, and the shepherds likewise refer to the political leaders, this would signify that in the use of these two metaphors lions and shepherds have become one and the same. The word “jungle” ( ) in v. 3 denotes “a dense forest,” and is combined with “thick forest” ( ) in v. 2b, to illustrate the extent of the destruction. Petersen states that the lost glory of the shepherds could refer to tress and livestock. There is also the possibility of an ecological lament.<sup>110</sup>

While some scholars argue that vv. 1-3 took their reference from Jeremiah 25:34-

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 459.

<sup>108</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 178.

<sup>109</sup> Boda, p. 460.

<sup>110</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 83.



38, Petersen contends that these verses are not transposed from another prophetic book.<sup>111</sup> His reading holds that although both texts are similar in syntax, trees and destruction are not present in the text of Jeremiah 25:34-38 where Yahweh is the enemy, whereas in Zechariah 11:1-3, Yahweh is not mentioned, and lions and shepherds are victims of the destruction. Although both texts seem similar, they are different in literary terms.

According to Boda chapter 11 deals with the problem of leadership, as a continuation of chapters 9 and 10, so that the judgment now turns to the political leaders and the shepherds, as in Zechariah 10:1-3.<sup>112</sup> Boda adds that the judgment in Zechariah 11:4-17 is developed through “prophetic sign-acts,” which are also shepherding activities. The chapter concludes with the return of an oracular message directed at the leaders.

In summary, the destruction is regional and the impact is devastating because animals and humans suffer the same fate. The phrase the “glory” ( ) of the enemies is “despoiled” ( ) signifies that the destination of those who are judged is total destruction. Relating to the image of the shepherd, the description refers to the destruction of the shepherd’s pasture that feeds the sheep.<sup>113</sup> The words “wail” ( ) and “roar” ( ) express the devastation of these foreign rulers. What they have been proud of is now destroyed, yet they are powerless to restore their glory. The shepherd image in leading and protecting is diminished because they themselves are the targets of judgment.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-84.

<sup>112</sup> Boda, p. 458.

<sup>113</sup> Mitchell, p. 297.

## 5.2 Zechariah 11:4–14

This section continues the judgment of Yahweh from chapter 10–11:3, except that now it is directed to the leaders of Israel and the people. The text is subdivided into chapter 11:4–6 and 11:7–14. Before we proceed to the exegesis, a textual issue must be addressed.

Some scholars argue that Zechariah 11:4-17 coheres with 13:7-9 because both texts concern judgment against the role of shepherds and the flock, and furthermore, it is Yahweh who judges.<sup>114</sup> The lack of a conclusion in Zechariah 11:4-17 favours this proposition. Petersen notes that the arguments revolve around the coherence of Zechariah 11:4-17 with the rest of Zechariah 9-14, the meaning of Zechariah 13:7-9 in its literary context, and the identity of the shepherd in Zechariah 13:7-9 and 11:15-17.<sup>115</sup> The hope of using form criticism to resolve the problem is a tenuous one. For Petersen the answer to the incoherence of Zechariah 11:4-17 and 13:7-9 lies in the literary form of Zechariah 11:4-17; he considers that Zechariah 13:7-9 is an independent literary unit.<sup>116</sup> He also asserts that it is unnecessary to define 11:15-17 as an independent unit, since 11:4-17 is a whole.<sup>117</sup> Scholars have assigned many different genres to Zechariah 11:4-17 but some

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<sup>114</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 88. Petersen cited Stade, “Deuteriosacharja,” p. 29. Cf. T. Chary, *Aggée–Zacharie–Malachie*, SB (Paris, 1969); Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*; Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, CBC (Cambridge, 1977); and W. Rudolph, *Sacharja 9–14*. Some scholars such as Willi–Plein, *Prophetieam Ende*, 59; K. Elliger, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten*, II, ATD 25 (Göttingen, 1964), pp. 165–167; Otzen, *Deuteriosacharja*, pp. 162–163, 192–194; Plöger, *Theocracy and Eschatology*, pp. 88–89; Jones, “A Fresh Interpretation of Zechariah 9–14,” p. 251; Saebo, *Sacharja 9–14*, pp. 276–282, suggest that taking Zechariah 13:7–9 in its context, it is appropriate to assume its similarity with 11:4-17. According to Petersen, Plöger considers the judgment announcement as similar to Zechariah 14. Cf. S. Cook, “The Metamorphosis of a Shepherd: The Tradition History of Zechariah 11:17 + 13:7–9,” CBQ 55 (1993), pp. 454–456.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>117</sup> According to Petersen, Mason, *The Use of Earlier Biblical Material in Zechariah IX–XIV*, pp. 160–65,

are inappropriate.<sup>118</sup> Often, the focus falls on the literary and structural characteristics of 11:4-17 and the reports in prosaic style. Such an approach leads to the identification of two genres: allegory and action reports. Baldwin treats v. 4 as allegory, rather than an actual event.<sup>119</sup> But Petersen argues that since allegory is in form a figure of speech, then 11:4-17 should be an action report. He asserts that the literary origin of 11:4-17 as an action report is immaterial to criticism.<sup>120</sup> According to Georg Fohrer, a proponent of the action report, this genre is interspersed in the Hebrew Bible, and includes “a command to perform a task, a report of the performance, and a statement about the meaning of the task.”<sup>121</sup> Saebo observes that the “command to perform a task” can be found in Zechariah 11:4b and 15, while “one performance report” may be found in vv. 7-12, and the interpretations in vv. 6 and 16.<sup>122</sup> Petersen notes that these action reports are not always present as Fohrer proposed, and therefore, may lead one to reading vv. 15-17 as a second report.<sup>123</sup> But Saebo perceives vv. 13–14 as the second command and report, instead, and

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considers vv.11–13 are secondary; Rudolph, *Sacharja 9–14*, p. 206, perceives v. 6 as an addition; and Elliger, *Das Buch*, p. 151, assigns vv. 15–16 to a redactor. At the same time, Saebo upholds the view that the literary genre in the text has been identified, but extends to v. 5, or even v. 7 and 11 in MT, or v. 14 in LXX.

<sup>118</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 89. A genre such as a “commissioning narrative” does not fit the literary form of Zechariah 11:4-17.

<sup>119</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 179.

<sup>120</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 90.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90; cited G. Fohrer, “Die symbolischen Handlungen der Propheten,” *ATANT 54* (Zurich, 1969). See Fohrer (“Die symbolischen,” p. 18) for the form of action reports. Fohrer (“Die symbolischen,” p. 73) perceives Zechariah 11:4–14 as an allegory.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90; cited Fohrer and W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 28. Cf. D. Jones, “A Fresh Interpretation of Zechariah 9–14,” p. 253.

v. 5 as a later addition.<sup>124</sup> For Petersen the commands are divine while the speeches belong to humans, and thus resolves the question regarding the literary genre of 11:4-17.<sup>125</sup> He argues that 13:7-9 belongs to chapters 12-14 and is distinct from chapters 9-11, and adds that making the action reports the focal point of the text will disregard the meaning of vv. 13-14 in relation to the judgment against Judah. The focus should be placed on vv. 6 and 16 where the mystery of the shepherd's judgment is unlocked. The reports of the performance indicate that Yahweh has surrendered his power to rule over Judah and vested such power in the wicked shepherds who do not provide for their flock according to the responsibility of a shepherd in the biblical sense.

### 5.2.1 Zechariah 11:4–6

The opening of this section begins with the popular prophetic affirmation, “Thus said the LORD my God” ( ) (v. 4). As Petersen points out, it is not surprising to see prophets address Yahweh as “my God.”<sup>126</sup> Such an address is perceived as personalizing the formality between one who commands a prophet and the latter. Mason, however, argues that the address is the prophets' way of staging a performance before their listeners.<sup>127</sup> Petersen observes that the commands depict a bleak future for the flock and are unusual.<sup>128</sup> Normally, shepherds will keep some sheep for slaughter, some

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<sup>124</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 90.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91. A similar Hebrew form of “my God” is used in Zechariah 11:13 and 15, “ .” Cf. Isaiah 7:13; 57:21; Hosea 9:8, 17; Joel 1:13; Micah 7:7; Zechariah 14:5; note that these are not direct addresses to God.

<sup>127</sup> Rex Mason, *The Use of Earlier Biblical Material in Zechariah IX–XIV*, pp. 139–40.

<sup>128</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-11 and Malachi*, p. 91.

for other means of livelihood. To slaughter all the sheep is not normal practice. The command to be a shepherd of this flock in this manner is therefore highly unusual. This image of shepherding offers a stark contrast to the shepherding exhibited in Zechariah 9:15, “The LORD of hosts will protect them, and they shall devour and tread down the slingers” ( ).

The atmosphere of judgment in 11:1–3 is extended to v. 4. This shepherding role is futile because the judgment is certain. The Hebrew term , generally translated as “shepherd,” means “to feed or shepherd,” or “to tend or shepherd” (1 Sa. 16:11; 17:15; 25:16; Je. 23:2).<sup>129</sup> In the context of Zechariah 11:1-3, which concerns the judgment of the foreign rulers, the term clearly means feeding the flock: which is the responsibility the foreign rulers have neglected.<sup>130</sup> In Thomas McComiskey’s opinion the leaders here are the rulers of Israel.<sup>131</sup> But Mitchell argues that the historical context points to Ptolemy III, the King of Egypt who ruled from 247 to 222 B.C.E.<sup>132</sup> However, a twist occurs when Yahweh appoints Zechariah, who was among the Israelites, as shepherd to tend the “flock doomed to slaughter.” Perhaps the context concerns judgment on Israelite and foreign leaders. Reading from vv. 1–3, it seems clear that the rulers are foreign rulers who abuse and mistreat the Israelites. But if one continues reading from vv. 4–6, “and their own shepherds have no pity on them” ( ) (v. 5), this

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas E. McComiskey, “Zechariah,” *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 1191.

<sup>130</sup> Contra McComiskey, “Zechariah.”

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Mitchell, p. 303.

<sup>132</sup> Mitchell, p. 304.

seems to imply that the rulers are Israelite leaders. The phrase in v.6, “Lo, I will cause men to fall each into the hand of his shepherd; and each into the hand of his king” ( ), affirms that the author is thinking both of Israelites and foreign rulers. But Petersen states that the shepherd figure cannot be identified with any political leaders in history without understanding the meaning of that image. To achieve the latter, it is important to observe two points. First, v. 8 indicates that more than one shepherd is involved in the context, and to link them with political leaders in history would be difficult. Secondly, the shepherd in v. 4 and v. 15 is the same person, but he acts in totally contradictory ways.

The word “slaughter” ( ) depicts the responsibility of the shepherd to destroy the flock.<sup>133</sup> For Eugene Merrill such an expression fits the circumstances of the people of Israel who enjoy no protection because they were sold to foreigners for slaughter (v. 5). The slaughter benefits those who buy and sell the sheep, but ironically, this serves Yahweh’s purposes.<sup>134</sup> McComiskey argues that the slaughter is nationwide because vv. 5 and 6 indicate that the rulers spare not a soul (cf. Zc. 11:9).<sup>135</sup> According to Boda, though the trading of sheep for meat is common, this is a negative side of the shepherd metaphor.<sup>136</sup> In contrast to 10:6, “I will strengthen the house of Judah, and will save the house of Joseph,” ( ), the shepherding responsibility of protecting the flock is defied in the trading of the sheep.

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<sup>133</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 288–289.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>135</sup> McComiskey, “Zechariah,” p. 1191.

<sup>136</sup> Boda, p. 462.

Verse 5 explains the slaughter of the flock in greater detail. According to Boda the economic situation drives the shepherds to neglect their roles of protecting and providing for the flock.<sup>137</sup> Baldwin highlights the fact that the word “them” ( ) indicates that the sheep are ewes, which are normally reared for breeding, and not for slaughter. This reflects negatively on the character of the owners of the sheep. McComiskey states that these shepherds have no pity on the sheep and allow them to be destroyed by the merchants who are the “influential or wealthy members of the community.”<sup>138</sup> In other words, the oppression stems from the leaders of Israel, the upper class of the society and the masters of the common people. The irony is that Yahweh as the shepherd of Israel does not protect Israel, but rather permits such destruction to come upon them. As Petersen points out, the shepherds portrayed in v. 5 are not the owners of the sheep.<sup>139</sup> He writes, “The role of shepherd in ancient Israel was, and is in this symbolic action, not necessarily identical with that of the flock owner.”<sup>140</sup> These shepherds may be hired hands; the owners [shepherds] are those who slaughter and sell the flock. The wealth acquired is attributed to Yahweh, “Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich” ( ) (v. 5). Petersen states that this Hebrew phrase presents a negative view of those who gain wealth through such means. Riches acquired through the deity’s blessing were not uncommon in the ancient world but this is not a crime that is subject to judgment (Hos. 12:7-9; Ge. 31:6). Petersen adds that the phrase “Blessed be the LORD” ( )

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<sup>137</sup> Boda, p. 462.

<sup>138</sup> McComiskey, “Zechariah,” p. 1191-1192.

<sup>139</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 92.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

is aligned with the language of praise to Yahweh in the Psalms for making people good and loving, which reflects the gratitude of an agrarian society.<sup>141</sup> But the involvements of the multiple shepherds portray a different picture of the shepherding role assumed by the prophet. The sheep owners [multiple shepherds] do not respect the newly appointed shepherd, and act as they wish. Given the scheming of the sheep owners, the newly assigned shepherd cannot perform the task of shepherding.

In v. 6, the change in pronoun to first person indicates an alteration in mood. The attention now turns to Yahweh himself. The “I” ( ) highlights the consequence of the acts of the shepherds. Yahweh declares that “I will no longer have pity” ( ): this speaks of abandonment of responsibility, but for a reason unknown to readers. The shepherds and kings are specifically mentioned in Yahweh’s declaration as regards punishing the people, and in so doing, interpret the action report of vv. 4-5 regarding the slaughtering of the flock. Petersen adds that the response of Yahweh in the first person provides the cause of the symbolic acts in vv. 4-5.<sup>142</sup> In his view, Yahweh’s acts increase the strength of the foreign rulers. Perhaps the word “for” ( ) in v. 6 identifies the reason for the action of buying and selling sheep. Indeed, v. 6 is not a primary or secondary report, but the centre of 11:4-17 which explains the action of the shepherds and the consequence of these. According to Petersen the environment is pessimistic, and the judgment is not only against Judah and Israel, but also against the other nations.<sup>143</sup> The

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Genesis 24:27; Psalms 31:21; 41:13; 66:20. The praise of the people is attributed to the “steadfast love” of Yahweh.

<sup>142</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 93.

<sup>143</sup> Baldwin (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 180) notes that the word can mean “land” and is uncertain that it refers to all nations as in v. 6.



phrase “and I will deliver none from their hand” ( ) emphasizes this extensive impact of Yahweh’s response.

Boda avers that the judgment is directed against the shepherds and the people for a distinct reason.<sup>144</sup> The shepherds had failed to fulfil their role of leading, protecting, and providing, and the people therefore rejected them. Boda points out that this is the reason why Yahweh shows no pity towards his sheep.<sup>145</sup> The context of Zechariah 11:4-6 concerns the irresponsibility of the shepherds, which has resulted in the people detesting their leadership. But it is for a different reason from that in v. 8, which is opposite to that of Boda’s suggestion: the people detest the responsible shepherd who deposed three shepherds in a month.<sup>146</sup> Merrill elaborates that Yahweh subjugates his people under the tyranny of the irresponsible shepherds and does “nothing to interfere” with the situation.<sup>147</sup> The imagery of a “hand” represents power and connotes that the people are under the “power” of the oppressors. Here, the shepherds abandon their role of protection due to the rejection of the people in not acknowledging their leadership, which may rightly justify the actions of the former. This shepherding role is in direct conflict with the shepherd image of Yahweh exhibited in Zechariah 9:16, “the LORD their God will save them for they are the flock of his people” ( ). To reiterate, v. 6 indicates not only a conflicting image but the reason for the image of the irresponsible shepherd.

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<sup>144</sup> Boda, p. 462.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>147</sup> Merrill, p. 290.

### 5.2.2 Zechariah 11:7–14

Verse 7 introduces another first person pronoun: this time its referent is not Yahweh, but rather the prophet.<sup>148</sup> Petersen adds that this is a switch from divine speech to human speech. For him, v. 7 is similar to v. 4 in transferring divine command to human command, to be shepherd of the flock and to bear the responsibility of shepherding. The difference is that in v. 4 the main characters are the sheep owners while in v. 7 it is the prophet. What is fascinating in v. 7 is the responsibility of the new shepherd which conforms to the shepherd image of Yahweh in 9:14-16 and 10:6 by leading, protecting, and strengthening. This new person shepherds the flock with grace and union, symbolized by the two staffs. Petersen comments that these are usual shepherding activities. The labelling of the staffs signifies that the prophet has the right tools to shepherd the flock, but the full meaning is explicated by their destruction in vv. 10 and 14.<sup>149</sup>

Boda considers that this is an autobiographical message. In v. 7, the antidote to the dire socio-political situation is the replacement of the leader or shepherd.<sup>150</sup> The reason is obvious in that the culture of trading sheep has turned into a ruthless business.<sup>151</sup> The assigned shepherd will conduct the duties of a shepherd in grace, so as to

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<sup>148</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>150</sup> Boda, p. 463.

<sup>151</sup> Mitchell, p. 204.

provide protection to the people of Israel from the sheep traders.<sup>152</sup> His intention is to take the two staffs, “Grace” and “Union”, to affirm his role, “And I tended the sheep” ( ) (v. 7). The term (lit. “favour”) describes Yahweh as beautiful or pleasant in Psalm 27:4. Other usages are found in Psalm 90:17 which implores Yahweh’s blessing, while in Proverbs 3:17 it describes wisdom. The term (lit. “bind”) has the same root as “pledge” which means “to hold in” as in Exodus 22:26 (RSV) and an obligation to deliver the poor in Ezekiel 33:15.<sup>153</sup> It is also used in the distribution of the land among the Israelites (Ezk. 47:13). Boda comments that, given the context of Zechariah 12–14, “all the peoples of the earth” in 12:6 and 14:12 provides the meaning of the breaking of the staffs since this action symbolizes that the favour of Yahweh towards all nations is broken but will be restored in the future.<sup>154</sup> No textual evidence exists of such a covenant between Yahweh and all the nations [peoples], though. The judgment falls upon the nations in chapters 9–10 and the restoration of Israel in chapters 12–14. Zechariah 11 functions as a transition between these two blocks and acts as the explanation of the judgment which befell Judah and Israel.

The two staffs represent the basic model of shepherding which the assigned shepherd employed in his task. Boda suggests that the two staffs are indicative of the shepherd’s “rod and staff” which are used to lead and protect the flock.<sup>155</sup> The two staffs

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<sup>152</sup> According to Baldwin (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 180) the term “traders” refers to a type of merchant, so that it is difficult to identify them. RSV translates the word in a general manner, “trafficked”, which seems to express the movement of sheep from one place to another, which denotes trafficking.

<sup>153</sup> Holladay, p. 94. Petersen translates as “pleasure” and as “agreement.” But these terms are too ambiguous in expression and easily misread. The writer prefers the RSV word choice, “grace” and “union.”

<sup>154</sup> Boda, p. 463.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 463. Cf. Merrill, p. 292-293.

entail the responsibility of a shepherd. The first staff denotes the shepherd treating the sheep with grace. The second staff denotes that apart from providing for and leading the sheep, the shepherd is to disperse disharmony and bind the flock in unity. For Mitchell these meanings of the staffs may have been behind the thoughts of the prophet when naming them.<sup>156</sup> Petersen co-relates the naming of the staffs to the naming in Hosea 1.<sup>157</sup>

Verse 8 embodies the progression of the message which indicated that the assigned shepherd is suffering under the dire situation of Israel's socio-political problems. In the opinion of Mitchell the three shepherds are perhaps Antiochus III, Seleucus IV, and Heliodorus.<sup>158</sup> The destruction of the three shepherds is not the work of Yahweh, but rather the work of a fallible human, the assigned shepherd. According to Baldwin the scenario of the prophet being impatient with the flock is allegorical, and expresses the hatred of the people towards the shepherd assigned.<sup>159</sup> Boda argues that no evidence is presented regarding the literal act of killing the shepherds because the genre is a "sign-act."<sup>160</sup> Possibly the destruction of the three shepherds creates tension between the shepherd and the flock. For Merrill such destruction is the reenactment of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan by eliminating the three kings.<sup>161</sup> Petersen avers that the

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<sup>156</sup> Mitchell, p. 305.

<sup>157</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 94.

<sup>158</sup> Mitchell, pp. 306-307; cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32, ed. John D.W. Watts (Dallas: Word Book, Publishers, 1984), p. 270. Baldwin (*Hag, Zech, Mal*, p. 181-183) has detailed different ways to identify these three shepherds. But Baldwin states that numbers, such as one month and three shepherds, may be representative figures in Hebrew, and therefore speculation to their meaning arises.

<sup>159</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 184.

<sup>160</sup> Boda, p. 464.

<sup>161</sup> Merrill, p. 293.

reason for the prophet being impatient with the flock is unknown, but the reason the prophet is disrespected by the other shepherds may be their dismissal or loss of status.<sup>162</sup> Probably, the judgment on the other shepherds represents Yahweh's plan to relinquish his shepherding responsibility over Judah and Israel. According to Petersen v. 8 indicates the involvement of multiple shepherds.<sup>163</sup> The destruction of the three shepherds may be commanded by Yahweh but does not denote the abandonment of their duties. Rather, the destruction constitutes a shepherding responsibility in that Yahweh exercises discipline over his people to lead them back to himself as a shepherd leading his flock to his fold.

Verse 9 speaks about the devastation of the shepherd. The two staffs represent the way Yahweh shepherds his sheep. Mitchell calls these requirements "ideals" or "obligations."<sup>164</sup> From v. 9 onwards, Yahweh refuses to be the shepherd of Israel. The breaking of the two staffs is also the breaking of the favour and the bond between the shepherd and the flock, and between Yahweh and Israel, though not entirely.<sup>165</sup> The reason is indicated in v. 8, that the assigned shepherd has destroyed three shepherds in a month, which indicates that the relationship is extremely difficult. The assigned shepherd is rejected by the people. Baldwin comments that the prophet allows the flock to suffer the consequences of their inappreciative attitude by simply letting nature take its

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<sup>162</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 94.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>164</sup> Mitchell, p. 305.

<sup>165</sup> McComiskey, "Zechariah," p. 1194.

course.<sup>166</sup> Given the context of the extremely difficult relationship between the shepherd and the flock, the assigned shepherd may not be responsible for the development of such a dire state of affairs.

Petersen adds that the removal of the shepherds signifies that Yahweh is the one who allows the flock to be exposed to a human executioner. This response of the prophet results in the flock reciprocating it: “and they also detested me” ( ). The word , which speaks of “breath” or “soul,” implies that the souls of the flock are tired, and “detested” ( ) the prophet, being their shepherd.<sup>167</sup> Petersen states that a remnant is involved in the process of the destruction. But it is not until chapter 12 that the remnant emerges through the restoration of Judah and Israel. In the context of vv. 4-17, the judgment befalls all the sheep. If a remnant is involved, it may be the prophet himself, but even this is not possible, because v. 17 declares “woe” to the worthless shepherd who is represented by the prophet, who himself is instructed by Yahweh. The writer perceives these series of reactions between the prophet, shepherds, and flock as reciprocal ones; the shepherd is impatient with the flock and the flock detest their shepherd, just as with the situation in v. 6, “to fall each into the hand of his shepherd” (

). And the report in v. 8 sets the stage for the ceding of Yahweh’s shepherding responsibility over Judah.

The action of the assigned shepherd is harsh but not without reason (v. 9). The phrase “what is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed” sends a strong message to the flock that judgment is inevitable. It indicates the severity of the

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<sup>166</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 184.

<sup>167</sup> Holladay, pp. 242, 37.

shepherd's anger and frustration regarding the situation in the sheepfold. According to Mitchell the shepherd is indifferent, probably because he is not Yahweh.<sup>168</sup> But Merrill argues that Yahweh is the one who has no compassion upon the flock.<sup>169</sup> While the assigned shepherd is a human being, the directive issues from Yahweh. The latter appears to be responsible for the destruction of the sheep.

Verse 10 continues from the abandoning of the shepherding responsibility. The affirmation of the shepherd's departure is evident in the breaking of the staffs. In the view of Boda the relationship of Yahweh and all the people as well as the relationship between Israel and Judah are signified by the two staffs. The staff "favour", which provides protection to the people, when broken symbolizes that disaster shall dawn on the people. The staff "union", which unites Israel and Judah, when broken signifies that disunity shall emerge between Israel and Judah. And in this situation, the prophet thereafter severed his relationship with the people, requesting his wages; however they possess the right to refuse payment as he has resigned from his shepherd role. The highlight of this destruction is in v. 10, where the blessing is removed from Israel, as is their protection from harm. The two staffs represent the covenant relationship between the shepherd and the flock.<sup>170</sup> The term ("cut off") is used in the making of a covenant, and it applies here. The breaking of the staffs signifies the breaking of the covenant, and therefore, Yahweh endorsed the annulling of the latter: "So it was annulled on that day" ( ) (v. 11). For Petersen, v. 10 emphasizes the pronouncement of slaughtering the

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<sup>168</sup> Mitchell, pp. 307–308.

<sup>169</sup> Merrill, p. 294.

<sup>170</sup> See Mitchell, p. 308; McComiskey, "Zechariah," p. 1197.

sheep.<sup>171</sup> The prophet takes the staff “grace” and breaks it, which symbolizes the breaking of a covenant or an agreement. This covenant or agreement is with “all peoples” ( ). Some suggest this covenant is the Noahic covenant, but the context of vv. 4-17 does not specify which covenant. According to Baldwin the breaking of the staff “grace” signifies the “end of a gracious rule.”<sup>172</sup> She adds that the covenant is a covenant between nations, including Gentile nations.<sup>173</sup> Petersen suggests that the “covenant of brotherhood” is similar to that in Amos 1:9 because the spectrum of the “covenant” includes not just Israel and Yahweh, but other nations. Hence, the breaking of the staff “grace” is the removal of protection over humanity.

In v. 11, Petersen notes that Yahweh abandoned his sovereign rule over humanity. He explains that the destruction is not the work of Yahweh, but rather of the “inhuman rulers,” and may assume that the deity transfers his power to those who rule over other nations. Moreover, it conveys an “eschatological connotation” which is related to Zechariah 14.<sup>174</sup> Petersen notes that the sheep owners were watching the contention between the prophet, the shepherds, and the flock, and they concluded that it was the directive of Yahweh.<sup>175</sup> He reiterates that Yahweh is ceding his shepherding role to human kings. The affirmation, “knew that it was the word of the LORD” (

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<sup>171</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 95.

<sup>172</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 184.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Merrill, p. 295. Merrill points out that the coming servant of the Lord is the centre of this covenant relationship.

<sup>174</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 96.

<sup>175</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 96.



), indicates the authority of the order for destruction, and shows that the traders understand that the judgment is from Yahweh, and not from the assigned shepherd. Baldwin notes that Yahweh's directive favours the other shepherds' desire.<sup>176</sup> This act of judgment is intended to guide the spiritually lost community, Judah, to the sheepfold; thus the shepherding role of leading is being enacted.

Verse 12 speaks about the response of the prophet to the situation. In this series of actions, Yahweh is regarded as the director of the resignation of the prophet. According to Boda the word "them" ( ) in v. 12 refers to the buyers in v. 5.<sup>177</sup> But Petersen argues that the "them" refers to the shepherds and the traders who own and sell the sheep for profit.<sup>178</sup> The breaking of the covenant of shepherding the flock provides a reason for the traders to bargain for a lower payment. But it also emphasizes the brutality of the traders, in that the wages paid to the assigned shepherd is thirty shekels of silver, which is equal to the price of a Hebrew slave (Ex. 21:32).<sup>179</sup> Baldwin comments that this amount is only a fraction of the two hundred shekels of silver used in the making of the molten image in Judges 17:4.<sup>180</sup> This may also indicate that the traders disapproved of the work done by the assigned shepherd.

Petersen notes that the episodes in vv. 12-14 indicate the closing of the deal between the prophet and the shepherds, and Yahweh instructing the prophet to return the

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<sup>176</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 184.

<sup>177</sup> Boda, p. 464.

<sup>178</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 96.

<sup>179</sup> Mitchell, p. 309. Cf. Merrill, p. 297-298.

<sup>180</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 185.

wages to the house of the Lord.<sup>181</sup> The assignment of shepherding the flock to be slaughtered is completed in vv. 9-10, while in v. 12, the prophet collects his wage despite the fact that his work is not acceptable to the traders. In Petersen's view the interpretation of vv. 12-14 depends on the evaluation of the significance of the thirty shekels of silver. Exodus 21:32 indicates that the thirty shekels of silver represents the price of a slave; while Nehemiah 5:15 identifies forty shekels as the payment received by Judean governors. Petersen notes that in these two instances, the noun "shekels" ( ) is used to indicate the denomination, but not in Zechariah 11:12. From the ancient Near Eastern perspective, the term "thirty shekels" denotes a minimum payment.<sup>182</sup> This implies that such payment is an "insulting low wage," as well as that the prophet's performance as a shepherd did not achieve an acceptable level and ends in his resignation, despite the fact that the prophet performed the duty of a responsible shepherd.

Verse 13 reports the immediate response of the prophet upon receiving these wages, as instructed by Yahweh.<sup>183</sup> For Boda this act of returning the wages to the house of the Lord should be perceived as a second act of report.<sup>184</sup> He states that although the word " " is used in the context where a blacksmith shapes coins and precious metals out of molten iron for the temple, it does not imply that the action of throwing coins back

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<sup>181</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 96.

<sup>182</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 96. Petersen cited Erica Reiner, "Thirty Pieces of Silver," *JAOS* 88 (1968), pp. 186–190, where "thirty" shekels is indicative of minimal payment. Cf. E. Lipiński, "Recherches sur le livre de Zacharie," *VT* 20 (1970), pp. 53–55; J. A. Knutson, *Die El-Amarna Tafeln, mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen*, Leipzig, 1907–15; and Rudolph, *Sacharja 9–14*, p. 209.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Merrill, p. 297. Merrill notes that it is difficult to determine the historical context of the event, but suggests that it is the "closing years of the southern kingdom."

<sup>184</sup> Boda, p. 465.

to the treasury of the temple is the same as the idea of the pot returning to its potter.<sup>185</sup> Instead, it signifies the temple workers' wages. However Boda considers that the reaction of the prophet implies the rejection of the wages and signifies the termination of the relationship between Judah and the other nations.

This sour relationship between the shepherd and the flock reflects the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Baldwin explains that the treasury of the temple not only held the tithes of the people and the "precious things dedicated to the LORD (Jos. 6:24; Ezz. 2:69; Ne. 7:70), but also served as a 'bank' for the private individual (2 Mc. 3:10ff.)."<sup>186</sup> She is right that the irony falls on the phrase "the lordly price at which I was paid off by them" (Zc. 11:13).<sup>187</sup> The instruction to return the wages to the temple is a proclamation of the prophet's displeasure with the ungratefulness of the flock, and even more so with the other shepherds. All of these point to the shepherding role of leading the flock to restoration – not destruction – through judgment.

Petersen notes that it is uncertain how the prophet perceived the wages. But it was Yahweh who reacted by instructing the prophet to fling these back to the temple. Following the divine directive is the prophet's sarcastic remark about the wages as a "lordly price" ( ). This wage is not valued because if the wage is only the minimum payment, this implies that the work of the prophet (as shepherd) will not be honoured by the other shepherds. Otherwise, the prophet should receive a higher wage. Therefore, the prophet concurred with Yahweh in tossing the wages back into the

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. Merrill, p. 298-299. The wages is related to the payment of a Hebrew slave, and here it is paid to a shepherd. For detail of the word , see Merrill, *Zechariah*

<sup>186</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 185.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185.

treasury of the temple.

Verse 14 recounts the breaking of the second staff which signifies the breaking of the unity among the flock. The phrase “annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel” conveys the implications of the action in v. 14. The term *qata* (“cut off”) expresses the severity of destroying the brotherhood. This implies that there will be enmity among the flock. Yahweh disciplines the flock by disrupting the bonds within it, and shatters the strength of the rebellious people. The shepherding role is again one of leading the flock to correct their defiant attitude towards each other.

Boda states that the breaking of the second staff, “union”, is the opposite of Ezekiel 37 where the prophet is uniting the two sticks, that is Israel and Judah, whereas in Zechariah 11:14 the action concerns the severing of the blood relationship between Israel and Judah.<sup>188</sup> Baldwin rejected Elliger’s conjecture that the Samaritans are involved in this termination of the covenant.<sup>189</sup> According to Petersen, this action is twofold. Firstly, the specific identity of Judah and Israel, and secondly the breaking of a covenant between the brothers.<sup>190</sup> He argues that the word “brotherhood” describes not the covenant relationship between Judah and Israel, but the brotherhood within the Israelites as a nation.<sup>191</sup> Consequently the gravity of the problem in this relationship is to be found in the severing of the national unity. This explicit expression is the ceding of the

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<sup>188</sup> Boda, p. 465.

<sup>189</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 186.

<sup>190</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 97.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p. 98.

shepherding role by Yahweh portrayed throughout chapters 9-10.

Yahweh is the shepherd who oversees his sheep and decides on the appropriate action in response to the situation. The shepherds in vv. 4–5 refer to the foreign rulers. The first person pronoun indicates that it is Yahweh himself who sends the flock to destruction because of their religious infidelity. They violate the covenant between the shepherd and the flock. Yahweh as shepherd should show grace and foster unity, but instead, he imposes discipline on the flock for the purpose of correction. The shepherding role of leading the wayward flock to a righteous path is evident here, which involves the disciplining of the lower shepherds and the flock. Fostering unity and protecting the flock by means of grace is the role of the shepherd depicted in 9:15 and 10:6b; however, all of this becomes futile in the annulment of the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (Zc. 11:14).

### 5.3 Zechariah 11:15–17

Verse 15 speaks of the appointment of the worthless shepherd. According to Boda the assuming of the task of such a shepherd concerns acquiring the “equipment of a foolish shepherd.”<sup>192</sup> But this equipment is not the staff of the shepherd that provides care to the flock. The term “once more” ( ) does not alter the imperative “take” ( ) and functions as an “introductory statement” for the next act. Boda infers that the word “implements” ( ) implies “rod and staff.”<sup>193</sup> He adds that the difference between the assignments of the first and second shepherds is that the first is set to care for the flock,

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<sup>192</sup> Boda, p. 465.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 466

but the second is given to destroy them. This second shepherd feels no compassion with the dying, does not seek the lost, heal the sick, feed the needy, but instead feeds on their flesh and destroys the flock completely. The new shepherd is described as “worthless” ( ), which implies that he displays no morality, is disobedient to Yahweh and unrepentant. Petersen agrees that the instruction to again assume the shepherding role is intended for the destruction of the flock.<sup>194</sup> The negativity of this role is aggravated by the inadequate and inefficient equipment described. As Petersen suggests, the inadequate and inefficient equipment may be the “broken crooks” in vv. 10 and 14. He comments that v. 15 does not report the performance of the worthless shepherd, but rather the shocking appointment of a shepherd who will perform poorly. Whether the prophet willingly accepts the task is untold, but the command of Yahweh serves as an “open-ended” conclusion.

The Hebrew word , which literally means “foolish,” implies that the shepherd is unwise. The Hebrew word (“implements”) denotes that the assigned shepherd is to fully assume the role of the unwise shepherd who will defy the precepts of Yahweh, which include the proper responsibilities of a shepherd. Baldwin may be right in contending that when the flock rejected Yahweh as shepherd, the next shepherd will be a “shepherd of doom.”<sup>195</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the foolish shepherd is one who fails to understand the purposes of Yahweh and performs his duties without the assistance of the

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<sup>194</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 97.

<sup>195</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 186. Cf. Merrill (p. 303) who suggests that the foolish shepherd is the representation of all leaders of Israel including the coming leaders. The land mentioned in v. 16 refers to the land of Israel.

latter.<sup>196</sup> In wisdom literature, the Hebrew term (‘‘worthless’’) denotes a moral construction which implies the lack of divine wisdom. Similarly in the prophetic literature, a foolish shepherd represents one who cannot comprehend the will of Yahweh and responds in foolishness. Consequently the foolish shepherd often brings disaster to the flock.<sup>197</sup>

Verse 16 speaks about the works of the worthless shepherd. According to Boda this verse spells out the foolishness of the new shepherding role.<sup>198</sup> Many types of sheep have been listed here, such as: the perishing, the wandering or lost, the maimed, and the exhausted. Boda implies that the worthless shepherd does not provide protection to these needy sheep. Baldwin supports the notion that the worthless shepherd is one who lacks concern for the flock.<sup>199</sup>

Petersen comments that the work of the worthless shepherd is also due to the work of Yahweh.<sup>200</sup> Although the manner of carrying out the shepherding role is unacceptable, it signifies the ceding of the power to protect the flock. This second command is localized, as indicated by the phrase ‘‘in the land a shepherd’’ ( ). For Petersen v. 6 presents an ‘‘intentional context’’ while v. 16 describes the result. A single shepherd is mentioned in verse 16 and therefore it is unlikely that the allusion refers back to the shepherds mentioned in verse 5. Here the negative depiction of the

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<sup>196</sup> Mitchell, p. 315. The ‘‘tearing off even their hoofs’’ indicates the severity of the destruction to be carried out by the foolish shepherd who has been appointed. As mentioned in v. 15, the assigned shepherd fulfils a responsibility that is marked by cruelty to the flock.

<sup>197</sup> McComiskey, ‘‘Zechariah,’’ p. 1205.

<sup>198</sup> Boda, p. 466.

<sup>199</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 186.

<sup>200</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 98.

relationship between the shepherd and the flock creates the profile of a careless shepherd not providing care for the weak, the injured, the lost, and the exhausted. According to McComiskey the lack of the Hebrew (“and”), followed by the negative Hebrew (“not”) that appears three times in the verse, functions to signify the shirking of responsibilities on the part of the shepherd.<sup>201</sup> The negative particle word “not” ( ) serves to strengthen the negative depiction of this foolish shepherd. This second assignment does not embrace attending to any needs of the flock, which implies an absolute relinquishing of the shepherding responsibilities.<sup>202</sup> Petersen notes that the syntax indicates a disjunctive clause that is used in the reports to represent the inefficiency of the shepherd.<sup>203</sup> Petersen writes, “He will devour the flock.”<sup>204</sup> Based on the Hebrew word order, the object of the verbs implies that the shepherd will destroy the flock completely. Petersen remarks that the destruction is not simply an act of tearing off their hoofs, but the devouring of the flesh of the fat sheep. A difference between the first and second reports is that one concerns slaughter, whereas the second implies the sheep are “consumed totally.”<sup>205</sup> In the first report, the sheep owners gain by the selling of the sheep, while in the second, no one benefits. Petersen states that in this second report, the flock suffers from the inadequate providential care of the shepherd, but the shepherd did not profit from it.

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<sup>201</sup> McComiskey, “Zechariah,” p. 1205.

<sup>202</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 99.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.



Boda comments that while in verse 5 the shepherd did not protect the flock by selling it, in v. 17 the shepherd totally consumed the flock, which is reminiscent of the exile as described in Ezekiel 34:3-4 by the prophet.<sup>206</sup> He adds that Ezekiel 34:22-26 speaks of Yahweh's providential care of the flock, altering a negative situation into something positive. But in vv. 15-16 the declaration of Yahweh in v. 6 is fulfilled, which will "cause men to fall into the hand of his shepherd, and each into the hand of his king." Boda perceives this as the first warning of the judgment.<sup>207</sup> To recapitulate, vv. 4-16 speaks about the first shepherding role assigned to protect the flock, but the dispute between the other shepherds, the sheep, and the prophet causes their dispersion and the resignation of the prophet as shepherd. This separation between the prophet and the flock is also a separation between the prophet and other nations, as well as between Israel and Judah, which destroys the union of the brothers. Through the second shepherding role, the sheep will be devoured without protection because the shepherd is foolish and irresponsible. Ezekiel 34 is related to chapter 37 in that it concerns the prophecy regarding a future saviour, namely a Davidic king. In relationship to Zechariah 11:4-16, the vision report simulates the rejection of the Davidic king by his people and kingdom, so that another ruler is seated on the throne.<sup>208</sup> According to Boda Zechariah 3 and 6:9-15 contain the prophecy of a Davidic king and the hope of rebuilding the Judean community. Indeed, the context of Zechariah 1-8 seems to support the idea of Zerubbabel as the Davidic king, being the last male in the Davidic line to be involved in political

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<sup>206</sup> Boda, p. 467.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>208</sup> Boda, p. 467.

leadership.

Verse 17 speaks about the consequences brought about by the worthless shepherd because of his irresponsibility. Boda comments that v. 17 breaks away from the format of vv. 4-16, in that it completes the first oracle (Zc. 9-11).<sup>209</sup> Verse 17 not only speaks about the judging of the worthless shepherd, but also exhibits the coherence of chapters 9-11 as formed by the redactor of Deutero-Zechariah. Boda observes that the word “worthless” may convey the same meaning as in Ezekiel 34:2 to refer to idols, and as in Jeremiah 14:14 to refer to false prophets. Similarly, Ezekiel 34 spells out the reason why Yahweh became a shepherd for Israel: because the existing shepherds were not performing according to their role, and allowed the flock to be devoured by the wild animals. The hope, indicated in Ezekiel 34:23, is to be found in the Davidic king who will gather and shepherd the people of Israel.<sup>210</sup> The judgment as in v. 17 is severe: Boda notes that such punishment is imposed in Jeremiah 50:35-38, where Jeremiah used it on Babylonians and the idolaters, an action which is reported in Zechariah 10:1-3a.<sup>211</sup> Such a verdict is similar to the judgment of the wicked shepherds in Ezekiel 34 and the idolaters in Jeremiah 50.

For Petersen the meaning of the opening statement regarding “woe” in v. 17 and the identity of the speaker are uncertain.<sup>212</sup> The prophet may be the speaker himself, who is unreceptive towards the role he was assigned. This image of the shepherd is a negative

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Boda, p. 468.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 468.

<sup>212</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 99.

one compared to that in v. 4 which the prophet is unwilling to perform.<sup>213</sup> Petersen notes, “the word ‘worthless,’ *’elil*, is linked by assonance, if not by triconsonantal root (a complicated question), to the word ‘ineffective,’ *’ewilî* (v. 15).” This implies that the oracular “woe” addresses the shepherd as one neglecting his duties, rather than destroying the flock. According to Petersen the prophetic voice in v. 17 is the human response to the actions of the worthless shepherd, and the mangling of the ineffective shepherd’s body is intended to stop his malicious acts, while for Baldwin the removal of the arms signifies the inability to defend oneself against enemies.<sup>214</sup> The woe followed by the curse is designed to strengthen the power of judgment exercised by the shepherd. But in the context of vv. 15-16, the speaker is Yahweh himself, “The LORD said to me” ( ), and the declaration continues in v. 16 with “I” ( ) which refers to Yahweh as the one who will raise a shepherd in the land, a role assumed by the prophet, who neglects his shepherding role. Hence the “woe” in v. 17 is Yahweh’s pronouncement aimed at the worthless shepherd. Though it is agreed that the “woe” in v. 17 is typological in meaning, the judgment is literal in significance. Yahweh’s response is based on the inefficient shepherding performance and the response of the flock towards the entire situation. In other words, Yahweh punishes the shepherds, including the worthless shepherd, for being irresponsible and the flock for rejecting his taking care of their shepherding needs, except that the worthless shepherd is judged despite the fact that he was instructed by Yahweh to perform the task.

Verses 15–17 describe an extensive destruction which is in total opposition to

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<sup>213</sup> Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, p. 100.

<sup>214</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 187. Cf. Merrill (p. 305). As Merrill avers, the reason why Yahweh does not kill the foolish shepherd is unknown.

every aspect of the shepherd metaphor. This affords a vivid example of a foolish or bad shepherd. But in the context of Zechariah 11:4–17, and given the context of Yahweh’s judgment and the mandate of the shepherd metaphor, the foolish shepherd is assigned the task to destroy the flock that rejected Yahweh himself as their shepherd. The sentence of Yahweh against Israel for their rebellion and rejection was due to the irresponsibility of the shepherds and their brutality towards the flock, as is evident in the context of Zechariah 11. Since the worthless shepherd is a representative of these shepherds, the judgment on him is judgment on them.

In sum, the negative image of shepherd in Zechariah 11:4-17 is the result of Yahweh’s ceding his shepherding responsibility to negligent shepherds who do not provide adequate leadership to the flock. Particularly in the case of Zechariah 11:4-17, Yahweh is the one who is ceding his shepherding responsibility to the irresponsible shepherds, who exploited the flock to their own benefit.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the Hebrew Bible, a good shepherd is one who lives by the word of Yahweh. In providing, protecting and leading, the former exercises the judicial role with his righteousness and wisdom stemming from Yahweh. Thus, Yahweh is the overseeing shepherd over all subordinate ones.

The metaphor of the shepherd provides a mandate for the shepherds in the Hebrew Bible. Their role in Zechariah 11 must be read against the backdrop of the positive shepherd metaphor in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. Zechariah 11:4-17 presented an image of a shepherd which contradicts this metaphor. It does not convey a benevolent attitude in caring for the sheep. This image in Zechariah 11:4-17 is the result of the rejection by the people of the responsible shepherd, which caused Yahweh to surrender his shepherd responsibility. It is a metaphor designed to punish an unrepentant Israel. Therefore, the negative image must be interpreted in terms of the positive responsibility of the shepherd in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

The metaphor of the shepherd consists of two figures; the shepherd-king and the shepherd-god. The Hebrew Bible embraces the meaning of the former role in leading, followed by providing or feeding, and protecting the flock. Similarly, the shepherd-king figure in ancient Near Eastern literature has been used as an epithet for good rulers carrying out such functions as were described earlier. But the shepherd-king image presented in Zechariah 11:4-17 is unusual compared to the shepherd-king metaphor in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, as has been discussed.

The Hebrew Bible provides a fuller inventory of shepherding activity in the shepherd-god figure than the literature of the ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible, the

figure encompasses such roles of leading, and others considered earlier. The overriding presupposition of these activities involves deliverance from distressing situations. There are many passages which indicate the presence of the divine shepherd metaphor. When the people are referred to as sheep or a flock, they are presented as in distress, and it is indicated that the shepherd will deliver them from their predicament. The negative shepherd image in Zechariah 11:4-17 constitutes an example. But Yahweh, who is the divine shepherd, will deliver and restore the house of David as promised in Zechariah 12-14.

The use of the shepherd metaphor begins with its application to Yahweh in the early history of Israel. Throughout the formation of the nation of Israel, Yahweh appointed priests, prophets, and kings to be responsible for shepherding its people. These appointments were made to protect the last mentioned spiritually and politically, and to provide for their spiritual and physical needs. Zechariah 11:4-17 furnishes an example of a situation where Yahweh surrendered his shepherding responsibilities to those irresponsible shepherds as discussed earlier. This example which differs from the mainstream image of the shepherd metaphor should be incorporated into the said metaphor, so as an objective and comprehensive meaning may be achieved, and one should consider this metaphorical meaning in the study of the subject.

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