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The Prophets' Use of the Shepherd Motif and  
Its Contribution to Their Presentation of the Character of God

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## **Dedication**

Major works, such as a dissertation, are started, developed, and finished by a team of people. I want to dedicate this work to my team. To my husband, Jimmy, and kids—Lily, Ellie, and Ranly—who prayed for me, encouraged me, and championed me to the finish line. They joined me on the road trips to Virginia and often stayed up with me on the long nights of researching and typing. They are a gift and my greatest delight. I had many prayer partners, for which I am thankful, but my brother Mark has prayed for me since I began my MDiv. He never wavered in providing encouragement and prayer for me, especially on the most challenging days. I would also like to thank Dr. Yates, Dr. Percer, and Dr. Sloan for their training, knowledge, and tireless efforts in reading and redirecting me to finish well. I am also grateful for the conversations and prayer time with the many family members and friends who called, prayed, and encouraged me— you know who you are. Lastly, I am forever grateful to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who bore a price for me that I could not pay. He guides me to everlasting life.

## **Abstract**

The shepherd motif provides one of the most significant portraits of God in the Old and New Testaments. Various research on the historical metaphor within these studies frequently focuses on the relationship between rulers and leaders in the ancient Near East. The shepherd motif provides a tangible picture of the characteristics of deities and kings in their world. Therefore, it is a natural step for the prophets of the Old Testament to utilize a commonly used metaphor. In modern research, numerous studies in Ezekiel 34 have explored different facets of the shepherd motif. Several studies are related to leadership roles. The shepherd is one of the most beloved metaphors, and Psalm 23 is one of the most used funeral passages. In addition, much research relates to Jesus and the Good Shepherd in John 10. However, most essays and books discuss leadership and how humanity should act or lead. But do these passages express something about the character of God? Are these passages in the prophets contributing to a theology of God reflecting his nature? Yes, in the Old Testament, the prophets painted God with familiar imagery and explained his role and character to his people. In addition, the shepherd imagery demonstrates the purpose and plan of Yahweh through human agents. Lastly, the prophets express a theology of God utilizing the shepherd motif that reflects his mercy, judgment, compassion, and faithfulness, which displays the character of God.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, LITERARY REVIEW, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### Introduction

The shepherd is one of the most prominent metaphors in the Old and New Testaments. As D. Brent Sandy explains, “a metaphor is usually picturesque, expressing ideas in visual images. A metaphor helps convey abstract ideas, many of which cannot be readily expressed without the use of a metaphor.”<sup>1</sup> When examining metaphors and symbols, it is wise to recognize that “Jewish prophetic symbolism though quite unique in its own right, is to be understood against its ANE (ancient Near East) background.”<sup>2</sup> The ancient writers used the shepherd metaphor to convey a belief system about the deities and kings and how their roles related to the shepherd. J. N. Oswalt explains, “Although a shepherd was in the lowest social stratum in the ancient world, it was fairly common for kings to refer to themselves as the shepherds of their people.”<sup>3</sup> In light of how the prophets of the Old Testament deploy this motif, it is clear that the shepherd metaphor communicates a specific theological message. Nine of the latter prophets mention or allude to the shepherd metaphor over forty times. Bruce Waltke claims, “Through the prophets, the invisible God becomes audible.”<sup>4</sup> The prophets elucidate who he is, what he is like, and his relationship with humanity.

Isaiah 40:18 is a prime example of this dynamic: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him.” The prophet Isaiah recognizes that there is nothing great enough to be compared to the greatness of God. Nevertheless, the prophets attempted to

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<sup>1</sup> Brent D. Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Joel K. T. Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor* (Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 9WZ, UK: Langham Monographs, 2013), 33.

<sup>3</sup> J. N. Oswalt, “God” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., (InterVarsity Press, 2012), 291.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 805.

demonstrate God's role and character in the shepherd imagery. Isaiah 40:11 states, "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms."

Likewise, Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 11, and 34 refer to some delegated shepherds who are rapacious and lead the people of God astray. They rebuke the bad shepherds and utter oracles that God himself is the shepherd who will rescue his people. The prophets compare and contrast the shepherds, which sheds light on the nature of God. The prophetic theology at work here expresses the character of God.

The following research will review some of the prophetic passages of the shepherd motif in ANE history, demonstrating how the shepherd passages contribute to the theology of the prophets. First, this study will shed light on what the prophets believed about God by identifying the prophets' use of the shepherd language. Second, it will establish that the prophets used the shepherd motif to communicate a theology of the character of God, revealing his just and merciful nature. The audience understood that the shepherd metaphor served as a corrective teaching tool and was used to display the plans of God. The reader will recognize how the shepherd theme moves people from abstract ideas about God to concrete truths imperative for understanding his nature. The patterns of the shepherd will identify God as gathering the scattered, healing the limp, and feeding the sheep in pastures. Yahweh is a sovereign judge, incomparable in his ways, faithful to his promises, and compassionate to restore.

### Significance of the Study

Frequently, authors have connected the shepherd metaphor to rulers, kings, social justice advocates, and Jesus. Still, sometimes a familiarity with the concept of the shepherd can cause the reader to miss the full impact of the prophets' theology. In most cases, if a person is pursuing

an idea of the character of God by using the shepherd motif, the individual will quickly turn to Psalm 23. However, the shepherd is prevalent through the prophets. Suppose one is to ask what the prophets believed about God. This metaphor can shed light on the question.

An analysis of the culture also provides insight into why the shepherd metaphor is prominent in the Old Testament. The shepherd metaphor is prevalent in the ANE literature from this era, liberally applied to deities and kings. “Shepherd language was used in stock titles and epithets to define a king’s role as a just ruler, benevolent provider, and powerful defender. Ancient sources describe a country’s citizenry (or army) as a flock and their experience of plenty as green pastures.”<sup>5</sup>

The prophets employ the metaphor of the shepherd in many places: Isaiah 5:17; 13:20; 14:30; 27:10; 30:23; 31; 40:9-11; 44:24-45:7; 56:9-12; 63:7-14; Jeremiah 3:15-20; 10:19- 21; 22:18-23; 23:1-8; 25:30-38; 31:10-14; Ezekiel 34; Hosea 4:16; 9:2; 12:1; Amos 1:2; 3:12; 7:15 Micah 2:12, 4:8, 5:4-6; 7:14; Nahum 3:18; Zephaniah 2:6-7; 3:13; Zechariah 10; 11; 13.

Concerning the metaphor of the Shepherd, Jonathan Gan writes that it “is a common usage in the culture of ancient Near East to refer to the kings and rulers as Shepherd, and the people as sheep. As part of that culture, Israel is familiar with this appellation in reference to their rulers and kings.”<sup>6</sup> This metaphor also reflects how the prophets viewed the nature and role of God.

Donald Davidson argues, “Metaphor is the dreamwork of language and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator.”<sup>7</sup> As

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart : Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 58, ProQuest Ebook Central. Laniak did the most wholistic research on the relationship between kings and the shepherd metaphor in the ancient Near East.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” *Critical Inquiry* 5, no. 1 (1978), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1342976.31>.

scholars have studied the prophets, they have associated their theology with the law and the covenants. The correlation is appropriate; also, the shepherd motif contributes explicitly to the prophets' understanding of the nature of God. Readers of the Bible need to understand that the prophets were not using a metaphor for the sake of being poetic: they were voicing a theology of God expressed in the behavior of the shepherd and how he cared for his sheep. This understanding is particularly significant in light of the prophets speaking of Yahweh, the God who sent them into exile for disobedience. Within the pages of the prophets, the reader encounters a righteous judge, protector, provider, redeemer, and one who cares for his people.

#### Purpose of the Research

The theology of the prophets expressed in the shepherd motif is a picture of how the idea of the shepherd discloses the character of God concerning his righteousness, justice, and mercy. This study will analyze the motif's use and reveal hints of the prophets' theology. How did the Israelites understand the character of God through the shepherd motif?

The idea of the flock, referring to the Israelites, recurs no less than four times in the book of Micah (2:12; 4:6-8; 5:4-6; 7:14), revealing their God and the importance of their accountability to Him. Through the shepherd motif, the prophets also advanced ideas of good and evil practices about the undershepherds and the people. The prophets spoke about the character of their shepherd and the Israelite leadership expectations. These qualities become evident by comparing the accusations of the bad shepherds and the picture of a good shepherd. The prophets were exposing that God would not misuse his power over the people as the bad shepherds did.

The study of the shepherd motif in the prophets leads to three significant outcomes. First, the ANE writings provide the prominence of the shepherd motif and its understanding to communicate the theology of their gods and kings. It offers evidence that the prophets of the Old Testament were conveying aspects of their theology through an established shepherd metaphor. Second, the shepherd pattern contributes to the Israelites' understanding of the nature of God and associated beliefs. Third, against the backdrop of the Exile, the shepherd motif communicates a God of judgment and restoration.

### Survey of the Research

W. Hallo attests that the shepherd is the most prevalent metaphor used for the deities and kings of the ANE.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the Old Testament, the writers employ metaphors, such as the marriage metaphor of Hosea expressing the faithfulness of God or the potter in Isaiah representing his sovereignty. Throughout history, scholars have likewise developed the metaphor of the shepherd to pastoral care, leadership care, social care, and Jesus' care as the good shepherd, to name a few.

First, the following scholarship survey will relate the theology of the shepherd in the ANE regarding deities and kings to understand the use of the metaphor in the surrounding cultures. This research identifies the metaphor as the common language to the ANE cultures, and the use of it communicates a belief about their gods. Second, the research survey will narrow its focus to specific studies on the shepherd and reveal a lack of investigation into how the shepherd motif contributes to the theology of the prophets. The research will include how studies on this metaphor overwhelmingly relate to leadership or the messianic revelation of Christ. Lastly, the

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<sup>8</sup> William Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1957), 171, <https://archive.org/details/earlymesopotamia0000hal/page/n1/mode/2up>.

studies will provide an overview of the prophets in general, demonstrating established groundwork on the prophets' theology. Also, it will show the missing contribution the shepherd motif could add to the understanding of the theology of the prophets and how that articulates aspects of the nature of God. These studies will give insight and foundational elements that will set up the stage for recognizing the asset of the shepherd motif in helping understand the beliefs of the prophets regarding the nature of God.

### **Research on the Shepherd Metaphor in the Ancient Near East**

In his book *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles*, William Hallo lays the groundwork for examining titles and epithets in the ANE.<sup>9</sup> His book provides insight into the ancient languages and how they functioned in their society. One of his significant contributions is examining the word *sipa*, which translates as *Shepherd* in the ancient Sumerian language. He explains the significance of the titles and provides insight into their attributive form to deities and kings. For example, King Gudea was referred to in one of the cylinders as *sipa Gudea*, which refers to “king Gudea” as “shepherd Gudea.”<sup>10</sup> Also, Hallo includes a specific section on kings that used *sipa* in the attributive mode. The term highlights the desire of the king to link the traits of the shepherd with him. Hallo provides an excellent springboard for understanding the prevalence of the shepherd motif in ancient history.

*The Context of Scripture* is a more recent translation of ancient texts edited by W.W. Hallo, K.L. Younger, and William Hallo. The book focuses on the translations of ancient Near

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<sup>9</sup> William Hallo has written extensively on the ancient Near East gods and how they behaved. He specialized in understanding how they were using titles. A helpful journal on titles is also the “Royal Titles from the Mesopotamian Periphery,” *Anatolian Studies* 30 (1980): 189–95.

<sup>10</sup> Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles*, 147.



East divination, hymns, myths, prayers, and rituals. William W. Hallo argues that a text within a particular culture interconnects to the prior and current culture in its meaning. Understanding the ancient Near East has some bearing on the Bible. There have been several archaeological findings in the twentieth century that shed light on understanding the culture of the ancient Near East. Hallo writes, “we need a new compendium to assemble the existing renderings, update them where necessary, and indicate their relevance for biblical scholarship.”<sup>11</sup> The book analyzes the horizontal and vertical parallel relationships between the ancient Near East readings and the biblical readings. Some texts utilize the same language, and examining its use within the culture can assist in elucidating biblical passages. For example, *The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re* identifies the connection of the *Good Shepherd* language to the Creator. The everyday use of the language in other writings may assist in understanding its use in the biblical text.

The book provides insights into the attested period and significant relationship conclusions with other writings. Another benefit to the book is the expertise in the number of contributors. The three volumes attempt to understand the contextual relevance of the ancient Near East texts and monumental inscriptions that help clarify the language of the ancients. The book provides a canonical view of the ancient writings while revealing their probable relationship to biblical writings.

Another book on the culture and writings of the ANE is called *The Ancient Near East*, edited by James B. Pritchard.<sup>12</sup> It is an anthology with translations that include the

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<sup>11</sup> William W. Hallo, K. L. Younger, and William Hallo, eds., *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions and Archival Documents from the Biblical World* (Boston: Brill, 2003), xxvi, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>12</sup> An additional anthology edited by James B. Pritchard was the *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), ProQuest Ebook Central. Created from liberty on 2021-11-19 14:10:41. This book supplied important writings specific to the kings being identified as shepherd.

Mesopotamian, Akkadian, and Babylonian myths, among many others. It offers a view of the way ancients communicated. The Didactic and Literature section provides a tablet translation of a titled piece titled *I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom*. Tablet IV praises Marduk, stating, “Humanity, all of it, gives praise to Marduk!...shepherd of all inhabited places.”<sup>13</sup> They were specific with their titles, epithets, and stories in their temples. Some of the stories connect the imagery of the shepherd to the gods.

Another example is in *The Creation Epic from Mesopotamia*. Marduk is identified as the champion over the gods of heaven and earth. It states, “May he shepherd the black-headed ones, his creatures.”<sup>14</sup> The kings wanted the people to view them as leaders chosen by the gods, and their use of titles, such as shepherd, inferred a particular character on the gods and kings. The poems reveal the use of titles and the language of the day. The writings support the relationship between the King and the shepherd. The anthology affirms the evidence of the permeating use of the shepherd metaphor, but the scholarship does not offer any connection to the prophets’ theology of the Old Testament.

## **Research on the Biblical Shepherd Metaphor**

One of the most beneficial books examining the shepherd in the ANE and the Old Testament is *Shepherds After My Own Heart* by Timothy S. Laniak. It briefly examines metaphors before considering the shepherd in the ANE. Laniak claims there is a lack of deep biblical exegesis in the shepherd motif. He claims that “no exegetical resource orients the

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<sup>13</sup> James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts & Pictures* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), 373.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 35.

culturally removed contemporary ‘pastor’ to this wealth of material. He displays a journey through Scripture to prompt rich reflection on the nature of the pastor’s identity as God’s undershepherd.”<sup>15</sup> Laniak investigates the original writings of the ANE before developing the leadership argument. The work provides a detailed view of the shepherd through the lens of the Messiah. However, it does not spend specific time focusing on the patterns of the metaphor from the understanding of the prophets’ belief system regarding the nature of God. The canonical reading of the shepherd motif, specifically in the prophets, would contribute to the conversation.

Jonathan Gan wrote *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible* to reveal that “the picture of the shepherd in the Hebrew Bible should be the foundation of the metaphor of shepherd that which the New Testament and pastoral theology should anchor.”<sup>16</sup> He contends, “Yahweh is the divine shepherd, and it is in two-fold, shepherd-king and shepherd-god.”<sup>17</sup> The direction he advances is the formulation of pastoral theology. The image of the shepherd instructs the pastors on how to shepherd their churches and flocks of people.

Albeit brief analysis, Gan offers a preliminary exploration of the shepherd figure. It provides a good overview of the passages in light of the shepherd motif for the role of the pastor. From the beginnings of Abraham down to the reign of King David, Gan sheds light on the importance of this motif in Hebrew literature and the impact it should have on the New Testament.

There is a benefit to building on this research by more carefully analyzing the work of the prophets regarding the shepherd motif. Even though the shepherd metaphor relates significantly

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<sup>15</sup> Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 27.

to pastoral and leadership roles, it should enrich how the character of God is understood and presented to his people.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, in his journal essay “*Jesus the Good Shepherd who will also bring other sheep (John 10:16): the Old Testament background of a familiar metaphor*,” focuses on the Old Testament background of the shepherd motif in Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Isaiah. He also includes a look into the Apocrypha and the Jewish literature regarding their view on the coming Messiah. His view of John 10 is understood in light of the prophets and Jewish literature. Although his focus is to show that the historical information reinforces the intent and understanding of the gospel writers and how they interpreted the Old Testament, the essay provides valuable information on the analysis of the Shepherd in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah regarding intertextual reading.

In explaining the John 10 passage, Köstenberger reaches back into the Old Testament and examines the typology of the shepherd motif. He states, “the Prophets (especially exilic and postexilic) apply shepherd imagery to a personality partly human in the Davidic line, partly divine, and representing God himself.”<sup>18</sup> The analysis reveals that Jesus applied the imagery of the shepherd-king to himself, and the early church received and furthered this theology. Köstenberger explains Ezekiel 34 as typology and then describes Jesus as the fulfillment. Furthering the argument, he relates Yahweh as the one in Ezekiel sending this shepherd. The connection Köstenberger is making develops from King David to Jesus. He depicts Jesus as being the good shepherd. As he advances his argument by moving into Zechariah, he elucidates four passages explaining their reference to the future Jesus. He provides a theory on a unified picture of the coming Messiah throughout the verses of the shepherd. Then he furthers the

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<sup>18</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12, no. 1 (2002): 75.

argument by stating that the shepherd Isaiah passages present a bridge between the book of Ezekiel and Zechariah in identifying Jesus as the coming Messiah. Köstenberger reveals that the dispersed Israelites in exile will regather his people with a new shepherd. The Messiah, the good shepherd, will regather the people of God.

The research in this essay exemplifies the pursuit of the shepherd motif in light of the future Messiah. However, his focus is on fulfillment rather than the theology of the prophets. The research helps note the motif and recognize the importance of the Messianic implications.

*The Good Shepherd* by Kenneth E. Bailey may be the most recent extensive work on the shepherd motif in light of a canonical reading of the Bible. Starting the journey in Psalm 23, he walks through the O.T. passages of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah before moving into the N.T. He underscores how the motif reveals that Jesus is the ultimate Good shepherd. Amidst the hundreds of texts that mention shepherd in the Bible, his scope invites the reader to view nine texts. The focus is to “unfold the extraordinary story created in Psalm 23 and repeated across a thousand years down to the penning of 1 Peter.”<sup>19</sup> He desires to understand the significance of the Good Shepherd motif in the early church and how it should affect the church today.

His research is an asset to this study because it contributes to the motif approach when considering the development of the shepherd metaphor in the canon. It reveals the significance of the portrait of God to the early church. When each passage is considered together in a canonical view, the reader can discern the message and beauty of the Good Shepherd in John 10. Bailey’s emphasis is not on the character of God in the O.T. revealed through the theology of the prophets. Instead, the implications of his study rest in a high Christology of Jesus and salvation.

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

This research will do what Bailey does not: develop the prophets' theology regarding God's character in the O.T. in light of the shepherd motif.

Daniel Block examines the shepherd motif in his work *The Shepherd of Israel* on Ezekiel 34:20-31. He establishes that Ezekiel 34 was building on the prophecy of Jeremiah 23 when the shepherds of God were exploiting and mistreating the flock. These passages are significant in demonstrating the patterns of canonical reading because they offer a more comprehensive portrait of the character of God. In his study, Block points out the character of YHWH as revealed in the words of the prophet Ezekiel as he denounces the shepherd leaders for treating the flock poorly. Block describes how the Ezekiel passage reflects that "the true Shepherd of God's people is the Lord Himself. Where human leaders capitalize on positions of power and privilege for personal gain, YHWH has the interests of His people at heart. He gathers the strays, nurtures the sick, feeds the flock from the finest of pastures, offers them His presence, and protects them from enemies, whether inside or out."<sup>20</sup> Although Block is ultimately pointing to the Messiah to come from God to protect his people, it is clear that this research plays a significant part in assessing the character of God in the O.T.

In addition, there is an essay by J. Randall Price titled *The Restoration of Israel Under the One Shepherd* on Ezekiel 37:15-28 that benefit this research in furthering readers' perspective on the gentle, eternal care of God. Price extends different interpretations of this particular Shepherd in Ezekiel. It considers the historical perspective of eschatological fulfillment. Even though it has an eschatological theme, his support for the character of the shepherd will benefit this current research. This essay on the Messianic aspect of the passages is helpful and develops a canonical look at the whole when considering the books of the Bible.

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Block, "The Shepherd of Israel" in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed by Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2019). 1093.

However, his research does not develop the many passages in the prophets regarding the shepherd. While the eschatological aspect of the shepherd affirms the larger context and points to the importance of canonical reading when contemplating the character of God in difficult passages, this study will focus instead on the additional passages of the shepherd in the prophets that shape the character of the shepherd.

Andrew Abernethy and Gregory Goswell included the chapter “The Sprout, the Divine Shepherd, and the Messenger in Zechariah and Malachi in their book *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament*. They offer insights into messianic passages in the Old Testament and reveal the cultural context of the hearer. In this chapter of the book, they reveal the passages of Zechariah on the divine shepherd.

The short chapter considers gospel passages picked up from Zechariah and Malachi and applied to Jesus. This is another point of research that considers the shepherd motif of the Old Testament in light of eschatology. The authors focus on Zechariah 11:4,7; 12; they claim the Israelites have troubles due to the lack of a shepherd. Abernethy and Goswell identify the poor leaders and oppressive kings as bad shepherds. They bring to the forefront that Yahweh is offering a futuristic look at a good shepherd to come. Again, the research in the area of the shepherd motif is rich in the area of the eschatological study. The authors state, “the figure in Zechariah 13:7 may also be equated with the ‘good shepherd’ of 11:4-14.”<sup>21</sup> They further explain the passages of Malachi 3 and connect it to the messianic prophecy in the plan of God.

The research is another example of the shepherd as a motif in the Old Testament. Eschatological and messianic implications are links that present the shepherd passages as working together toward a common goal: to reveal the Messiah. Their use of understanding the

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020).

passages and bringing them together offers an understanding of the plan of God. However, there is little space for other shepherd passages, and it lacks a focus on the theology of the prophets.

Joel Biwul authored *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor*. He explored symbolism in the book of Ezekiel, emphasizing the shepherd metaphor in light of its theological and ethical agenda of leadership. His research contains a good-quality analysis of metaphors in the ancient world. The study espouses the importance of metaphors. In it, he writes, “In order for finite humans to comprehend and walk in obedience to the universal principles of the divine, which appear abstract, the employment of figurative and metaphorical language is unavoidable.”<sup>22</sup> He contends that Ezekiel uses the shepherd metaphor to demonstrate how the shepherds of Israel should be acting, yet they operate contrary to the commands of God. “Such shepherding dislocation forces Yahweh, the true Shepherd of his covenant community, to raise a lament oracle against the selfish attitude of Israel’s shepherds whom he has placed over his flock.”<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, he also adds to his theological assessments the eschatological qualities to reveal the hope of God. His focus frames a theological-eschatological analysis of Ezekiel, emphasizing the shepherd metaphor.

Biwul argues that Ezekiel and its metaphors, especially that of the shepherd motif, have been neglected throughout time. He writes, “It is our contention that Ezekiel’s shepherd metaphor, which has been neglected over the years by scholars, is as critical as the other themes in the book, if not more. As such, Ezekiel’s shepherd metaphor is to be given adequate attention,

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<sup>22</sup> Joel K. T. Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Langham Creative Projects, 2013), 2, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5451123>.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



particularly so, given the exilic context within which he used the metaphor.”<sup>24</sup> He relates that the prophets use the shepherd motif in the leadership realm, which is true. However, there is an absence in the analysis of what the prophets could contribute to their theology of God. These metaphors carry more information than leadership behavior.

In his study, Biwul focuses on the lack of shepherd leadership, which results in the Exile. He writes, “That leadership failure was largely responsible for the Exile is clearly the Prophet’s point of argument as clearly presented by the shepherd metaphor.”<sup>25</sup> He emphasizes that Ezekiel was using the motif to spotlight poor governance. This metaphor exposed the leaders, according to Biwul, and it was calling for repentance and providing hope for the exiled people of Israel. This research continues to offer a wealth of wisdom pertaining specifically to the book of Ezekiel. Although a great analysis of the book of Ezekiel, Biwul’s study neglects several shepherd passages that contribute to the prophets’ theology using the shepherd motif intertextually.

In the article “Profitable and Unprofitable Shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives,” Andrew Mein elucidates the good shepherd in light of the provision of economics. This twist of research highlights the idea that Yahweh is more concerned about his loss of power and production than his sheep. Mein writes, “In economic terms, the problems are those of misappropriation of property and the failure to produce an adequate profit, and the disadvantage to the owner is of more significance than the suffering of the sheep.”<sup>26</sup> He argues that the

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<sup>24</sup> Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Mein, “Profitable and Unprofitable Shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31, no. 4 (2007): 393.

reading of these passages may be misapplied. Instead of Yahweh recovering the flock from a love for his people, Mein contends that God restores only for his name. He argues that the restoration of the Israelites is motivated by divine power and self-interest for his name. This perspective is dubious in the overall view of the shepherd in the book of Ezekiel.

Mein highlights Ezekiel and unfolds the argument stating, “The characteristic recognition formula ‘You/they shall know that I am YHWH’ echoes around both oracles of judgment and of deliverance. Equally important is the explicit concern for his name and reputation that dominates all YHWH’s actions.”<sup>27</sup> His claim states that Yahweh is not restoring Israel out of forgiveness or love but out of protecting his name. He contends Ezekiel is absent of divine favor, or at the very least, it is skewed. This theory would challenge the character of God caring about his people when evil rulers do not care for their people. In addition, Mein contends the shepherds raise sheep for their benefit “sheep are rarely if ever farmed for their good, but only to meet some human (or perhaps divine) need.” His analysis will place most of its value on understanding the job of a local shepherd during that time. He argues that Ezekiel 34 should emphasize shepherds in light of their economic expectations for sheep. This implication is a different way of considering the character of Yahweh and will be beneficial when addressing the character of God in the book of Ezekiel.

Philip Asura Nggada, in the *Shepherd Motif in the Old Testament and Its Implications for Leadership in Nigeria*, stresses the implications of the shepherd motif in the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah as it applies to the pastors in Nigeria. He argues that although there are materials stemming from these books designed to instruct pastors, there is still an absence of material that focuses on tending to the church members. In his analysis, he also points out the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 394.

differences between the Western and Eastern interpretations of the shepherd motif. He writes, “the researcher saw a lot of western interpreters struggling to establish the proper interpretation of the shepherd motif but were not able to justify the African understanding and experience of a shepherd, which is more closely to the eastern understanding.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Nggada’s research helps assess the dialogue between eastern and western ideas.

Another essential aspect of the analysis of Nggada is his interviews with the Fulani shepherds. Since shepherding is a daily task for many in that context, this perspective is unique to the East. He points out that Psalm 23 and other shepherding passages have an immediate application for eastern readers but are often lost on those in the West. Even though he concedes that there is a more proper understanding of shepherding, he still argues that the pastors in Nigeria lack materials that will help them apply this pastoring with their members. Therefore, he expands on the passages of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in hopes of training other pastors in connection with the shepherding motif; yet other prophets, such as Amos and Zechariah, have still been overlooked in the popular use of the shepherd metaphor.

The work of Nggada is helpful due to the eastern and western analysis in the exegesis of his work. Although his work addresses leadership, his unique perspective on eastern and western interpretations is helpful. However, because he does not address the theology of the prophets in the shepherd motif, there is still work to be pursued.

Wilhelm J. Koers Wessels aimed at teaching people about leadership from the book of Jeremiah in his journal article titled *Leader responsibility in the workplace: Exploring the shepherd metaphor in the book of Jeremiah*. He had three different styles in mind when he wrote,

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<sup>28</sup> Philip Asura Nggada, “Shepherd Motif in the Old Testament and Its Implications for Leadership in Nigeria” (University of Jos, 2012), 54, <https://irepos.unijos.edu.ng/jspui/bitstream/123456789/225/1/Shephard%20Motif%20in%20the%20old%20testament.pdf>.

“three aspects of leadership which emerge that I wish to address, namely: to lead people, to care for people and the less obvious third aspect of exercising justice and righteousness.”<sup>29</sup> The research on the shepherd motif related to leadership is one of the most widely used since it was a metaphor in the ancient Near East connected to rulers and deities. This journal essay emphasizes the teachings only of the prophet Jeremiah, probably due to its brevity. It is a helpful piece of research not because he speaks on the functional aspect of leadership but because he reveals the moral part of leadership. The implication is that the shepherd motif has contours of human nature and how they should behave. If there is a nature in how humans behave, what standards are they following, and whom are they following? In addition, the journal piece digs into the judgment aspect of actions and how God desires humanity to respond to caring for his people. The idea of the compassion of God flows from the piece on leadership. Koers concludes by connecting these ancient teachings with the business model today. This connection is an example of how researchers utilize the shepherd motif, but they are not necessarily focusing on the theology of the prophets and its canonical value.

John Paul Heil offers another shepherd narrative approach in the book of Matthew in his work titled *Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew*. He focuses on the O.T. shepherd motif as disclosed in the book of Matthew—passages that focus on the prophesied shepherd to come. His research highlights the expression of Matthew of Jesus as the shepherd referred to by Yahweh in Ezekiel 34. Heil writes, “the narrative strategy of Matthew’s shepherd metaphor is guided and unified by Ezekiel 34.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Wilhelm J. Koers; Wessels, “Leader Responsibility in the Workplace: Exploring the Shepherd Metaphor in the Book of Jeremiah,” *Koers* 79, no. 2 (2014): 2.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul Heil, “Ezekiel and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1993): 708.

Heil begins with Matthew 2 when King Herod hears the prophecy from 2 Samuel 5 and Micah 5. The narrative moves to chapter 9, where Jesus recognizes the lost sheep without a shepherd because the shepherds neglect their responsibility. Turning to Matthew 10, he points out that the disciples were sent to the lost sheep of Israel, connecting back to Ezekiel 34. Heil then reflects on the passage where the disciples are sent out like sheep among wolves, relating the promise of God to protect his sheep to a similar promise in Ezekiel. According to Heil, the narrative strategy claims, “Jesus authorizes his disciples to be his fellow shepherds, the term ‘shepherd’ is never explicitly applied to them. This enhances the status of Jesus as the shepherd upon whom they—and thus the readers—depend on both as his sheep and as his fellow shepherds.”<sup>31</sup>

Heil’s research is beneficial in demonstrating the narrative strategy in connection with the Messiah to come. Heil gives the reader an understanding of Jesus, connecting the Ezekiel passage to himself. Although it is a well-researched essay and analysis of the metaphor in Matthew, it does not contribute to understanding the theology the prophets were providing for their hearers in the Old Testament.

Blessing O. Boloje focuses on the shepherd-king metaphor in the book of Micah in his journal article titled *Micah’s Shepherd-King (Mi 2:12–13): An ethical model for reversing oppression in leadership praxis*. He emphasizes leadership, like many others utilizing the shepherd motif. His aims “allows a positive construct of a visionary leader, who is a passionate agent of restoration rather than an agent of exploitation, oppression, and bondage.”<sup>32</sup> His argument provides a snapshot of connecting the character of ancient deities and kings regarding

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 707.

<sup>32</sup> Blessing O. Boloje, “Micah’s Shepherd-King (Mi 2:12–13): An Ethical Model for Reversing Oppression in Leadership Praxis,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 2.

the shepherd metaphor. He calls for leaders today to follow the shepherd-leadership standards found in the book of Micah.

He supports his argument by examining the use of the shepherd motif with the deities and kings in the surrounding cultures in the Bible. It is helpful in the research to consider these reference points. How did the people of the day understand the use of this metaphor? How did it benefit the people in their understanding of how to relate it to the kings? These are some of the questions addressed for making sense of the usefulness of the shepherd motif in Micah.

After walking through the literary analysis, he offers an ethical model to counter oppression from bad leadership in the book of Micah. His research helps further the argument that character is attached to the shepherd metaphor. The ideal character will be explored more in developing the prophets' theology of how they were communicating about God.

Jonathan David Huntzinger wrote his dissertation on *The End of Exile: A short commentary on the shepherd/sheep metaphor in exilic and postexilic prophetic and Synoptic Gospel literature*. The research offers an overview of the shepherd metaphor in the exilic period with an eschatological look at the coming Messiah. The beginning of the research analyzes the use of metaphors and how they communicate ideas to people. Then he moves into the exilic period of the prophets using the metaphor in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. He advances the argument and speaks to the thematic use of the metaphor and its fulfillment in Christ.

One benefit is his analysis of a metaphor and how it functions for people. Another significance of his research for this study is the emphasis on the experience of the people during exile. Additionally, there is a focus on the Israelites' complete loss of leadership and misunderstanding of the hand of God in the deportation. The dissertation provides a perspective on the relationship between the leaders and the Israelites and the hope to come.

Huntzinger allows the reader to recognize that there are many essential aspects of the shepherd metaphor due to its prevalence within the exilic period, but his focus in the Old Testament is mainly limited to Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. He also develops some of the metaphors within the Apocrypha with Enoch. As with many others, he provides the literary background that deepens the understanding of the shepherd metaphor. His significant addition focuses on the effects of the exile and their hopeful eschatological look to a good shepherd.

The research of Jørn Varhaug, in his essay on *The Decline of the Shepherd Metaphor as Royal Self-Expression*, claims that the shepherd was “central to Assyrian and Babylonian ruling class identity, while absent as royal self-expression in the Persian, Achaemenid Empire.”<sup>33</sup> Shepherd images impact court life and are common in the ancient Near East.

Varhaug begins by analyzing Psalm 23 in light of the context of the ancient period. He shows that the shepherd metaphor was something the hearers were acquainted with due to their culture. He writes, “Consequently, when the shepherd metaphor was used to describe leadership, the metaphor source language was familiar among the Israelites, at least in pre-exilic times.”<sup>34</sup> The research provides a short survey of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian use of the shepherd motif and evidence that the contemporary audience understood its implications. However, Varhaug turns to the Greek and Roman times and reveals the absence of the shepherd metaphor in connection with kings, as in prior Egyptian and Mesopotamia eras. He further explains, “About three years ago, I found the large book of Plutarch on the parallel lives of the famous Greeks and Romans, two and two, compared. Here there are absolutely no instances of the

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<sup>33</sup> Jørn Varhaug, “The Decline of the Shepherd Metaphor as Royal Self-Expression,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 33, no. 1 (2019): 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 17.

shepherd metaphor. Also, an analysis of the Greek historian Thucydides and the Roman historian Livy show complete absence of this metaphor, though some of the earlier heroes are related to herdsmen.”<sup>35</sup> The research of Varhaug is beneficial because it raises the question of how the shepherd motif relates to each audience.

It is essential to note the different views the hearers might have heard and understood during different periods when encountering the shepherd motif. Varhaug writes, “In recent centuries, the rural pastoral reference of the metaphor has been more exclusive, while in the time prior to the Persian period when much of the Old Testament had its origins, the shepherd-image was a conventional part of royal self-presentation imposed upon the society through art, literature, and well-directed initiation-rituals.”<sup>36</sup> These ancient comparisons will assist in analyzing the theology of the prophets.

### **Research on the Theology of the Prophets**

Paul R. House, in his essay “The Character of God in the Book of the Twelve” that is in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, writes, “As is true in all compelling literature, the nature of a character in an Old Testament book is revealed through that character’s actions, thoughts, statements, and so on. The person’s character may also be revealed through what others in the text think or say about the person in question. It is also true that a character’s nature is developed by an author in tandem with the text’s major themes and events.”<sup>37</sup> House applies

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>37</sup> Paul R. House, “The Character of God in the Book of the Twelve,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). 126.



these factors and claims that the character of God unfolds alongside the major idea in the Book of the Twelve.

House attests that throughout history, scholars have systematized, utilized, and developed principles in methodology for theological contemplation. Although redactional issues are significant, he claims they should not be considered ultimate theological observations. Instead, he endorses the canonical approach for its coherence and ability to retain the individuality of the book.

House claims that observing the character of God through the development in the Book of the Twelve and the canonical approach helps assess the prophets' theology. He points to the marriage metaphor in Hosea to recognize the God who warns and loves. He assesses the book of Joel and demonstrates how the prophet shares the same desires of Hosea: the warning for repentance and hope for renewal on the Day of the Lord. As House speaks of Amos, he highlights the loving and faithful character of God and his sovereignty. As House advances through the character of God in Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi, he continues to weave a tapestry of warning, judgment, and renewal in the character of God. He expertly demonstrates that the prophets are describing the whole character of God, not just his judgment. House touches on the metaphor of God as Shepherd found in the book of Zechariah, a passage that connects to the restoration of Israel.

Although House provides an excellent argument for their view of the theology of God in the prophets, his essay is an overview that could flesh out some of the metaphors and passages. In addition, his study is limited to the Twelve. This research will springboard off the idea of the character of God but include all the prophets in light of the shepherd motif metaphor.

John Goldingay explores the theology of God in his book, *The Theology of Jeremiah*. It offers an exegetical background of the book of Jeremiah, along with identifying the book's major themes and the character of God revealed through the hearing of the scroll of Jeremiah. Goldingay attests that Jeremiah "provides a way into talking about what Yahweh is doing with Judah and what Judah is doing with Yahweh. And the scroll is organized in a way that helps people understand what Yahweh was doing with Judah and what Judah was doing with Yahweh."<sup>38</sup> Goldingay delivers a two-part message, focusing first on Jeremiah, the man and later on the "theology that emerges from the scroll as a whole, looking at what we learn about God, about Israel as the people of God about the nature of wrongdoing, about what it means to be a prophet, and about Jeremiah's threats and promises concerning the future."<sup>39</sup> The research impacts this study because he presents the notion that a reader will and can assess the character of God through hearing the prophets. Goldingay analyzes God being the King, Provider, Creator, and Lord, to name a few. He advances the theology of God by examining the people of God and how God views the nations. His assessment derives from the scroll of Jeremiah, and he contends that it is a testament to the theology of God and that people are still learning from it today. He writes, "It would be easy to imagine Jeremiah thinking that his life and ministry had been pointless. He had been a failure. But the very fact that we are reading the Jeremiah scroll now shows that it was not."<sup>40</sup> In other words, the testimony of Jeremiah is still teaching people today about who God is.

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<sup>38</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021). I.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Significance of Research Contribution

Although there is adept research on the shepherd metaphor in biblical literature, both regarding leadership and in connection with Christ, there is still a gap in assessing the contributing theology in the prophets. Understanding these contributions would benefit the field of research in three ways. First, there is a focus on the additional passages and the prevalence of the shepherd motif in the prophets. Second, elucidating the context and passages will contribute elements to the prophets' theology by utilizing the shepherd motif. Last, it will provide the church with a way to articulate some concrete characteristics of the nature of God in the Old Testament through the lens of the shepherd motif in the prophets.

## Methodology

The theological method affirmed in this research will uphold two presuppositions. First, Scripture is the authority and will be the reference point of truth. Though Scripture will be used to interpret Scripture in assessing the passages, this method will not eliminate the use of ancient writings that shed light on the use of words and definitions during that period. Second, God created the mind and granted it the faculties to reason through the Scriptures with the guiding work of the Holy Spirit.

The prophets reveal the books of the Bible God inspired, and a canonical reading best reveals the character of God in the shepherd motif. The term *canonical* means the passages assessed are in light of the whole context of the Old Testament. Paul House defines the canonical approach as “an analysis that is God-centered, intertextually oriented, authority-conscious, historically sensitive, and devoted to the wholeness of the Old Testament message.”<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> House, “The Character of God in the Book of the Twelve,” 127.

assessment of the Bible will be in what scholars consider its final form. Editorial and redactional issues will not be considered in depth unless they directly bear on the shepherd motif. The approach will develop the Old Testament narrative and consider the intertextual readings of the shepherd motif through the prophets. For this work, the exegesis in the passages will consider the historical context and what the passage meant first for its intended audience and then for people today. The readings of the shepherd motif will primarily focus on the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Zechariah.

### **Limitations**

The authors of the ancient writings are not available today. Therefore, the interpretive approach of this study falls within the traditions of evangelical Christianity. There is a limit to understanding the intent of the author with certainty. Due to these shortcomings, the research will focus on uncovering the most plausible answers in light of the Scriptures in the final form of the canon.

### **Delimitations**

Though several passages in the O.T. contain the shepherd motif, this paper will focus mainly on the shepherd motif in the prophets. This delimitation aims to examine whether the motif provides additional aspects of the prophets' theology and concrete pictures of the character of God. In addition, delimitation is necessary due to the length and purpose of the research. The shepherd motif has several symbolic elements regarding its meaning and purpose that extend far beyond the questions in this research. However, this research aims to connect the shepherd motif and the prophets' theology, implicitly or explicitly, regarding the nature of God.

## Definitions

Some terms will be essential to define in moving forward. The difference between a metaphor and a motif will be beneficial. For this research, a metaphor is a literary device, “usually picturesque, expressing ideas in visual images. It helps convey abstract ideas, many of which cannot be readily expressed without the use of metaphors, and it is a compact way to express thoughts and feelings.”<sup>42</sup> Motifs are patterns, central themes, and structures that repeat. Because the shepherd metaphor repeats throughout the prophets, its repetition refers to a motif or theme in the prophets.

## Summary

The research will uncover the prophets’ use of the shepherd metaphor and how the motif contributes to the theology of God. Chapter 2 will analyze what metaphors offer. “Metaphor makes us rethink the categories by which we organize our world. It causes us to look deeper and reconsider what reality is, not to see wrongly but to see more deeply.”<sup>43</sup> Chapter 2 will also provide the prevailing evidence of how the shepherd metaphor permeates its original setting in the ANE. Chapter 3 will explain the idea of motifs and analyze the prophets’ use of the shepherd metaphor. Chapter 4 will examine the metaphor, reading canonically through the prophets and providing many angles of understanding the abstract God in concrete realities. Chapter 5 will present the contribution of the theology of the Prophets through the shepherd motif summary. In addition, it will identify future areas of research. The motif will offer a deeper and broader understanding of the prophets’ theology.

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<sup>42</sup> Brent D. Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2002), 58.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin P. Myers, *A Poetics of Orthodoxy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 95.

The shepherd motif is examined throughout various studies in light of leadership rulers, kings, and Jesus. However, there is an absence of research focusing on the prophets' theology in the canonical readings of the shepherd. The results of the shepherd motif research will add to the portrait of God in the Old Testament. Therefore, readers will recognize the theology of the prophets through their development of God from the abstract to the concrete utilizing the shepherd motif. In turn, this will contribute to the nature of God in the Old Testament.

## CHAPTER 2: METAPHOR LANGUAGE FOR THE SHEPHERD MOTIF

### Understanding Metaphors

A metaphor is a literary device that directly compares two things. For example, this comparison: “the Lord is my shepherd.” In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson describe metaphors as “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”<sup>44</sup> Metaphors have been used throughout time, and metaphoric language is commonplace in the Old Testament in different ways. The study of metaphors in the Old Testament has increased in recent years. Mason Lancaster claims that “Metaphor studies have seen an explosion of interest in the past forty years, largely because of the ways that metaphor enables a fundamental reimagining of language and reality.”<sup>45</sup> In the surge of metaphorology, which is the study of metaphors, Lancaster claims several studies have been in the Psalter; however, metaphors in the Book of the Twelve have lagged behind. However, this metaphor study will explore the major and minor prophets.

Typically, metaphor analyses are individual or in a particular book, whereas this study will consider the shepherd in the prophetic books. The prophets’ theology regarding the shepherd motif spotlights the character of God. It is important to consider how metaphors were used in ancient history and how people interpreted them biblically. Understanding metaphors allows the modern reader to understand what he is reading. It is significant to identify why an author would use metaphors and understand the metaphor in its cultural context.

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<sup>44</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 13.

<sup>45</sup> Mason D. Lancaster, “Metaphor Research and the Hebrew Bible,” *Sage Journals* 19, no. 3 (June 6, 2021): 235.

In this chapter, the first objective is to provide a broad understanding of the importance of metaphors. Next, the shepherd metaphor is assessed in ancient Near Eastern writings. The analysis will provide insight into the ANE use of the shepherd metaphor. It will also reveal the prevalent use of the shepherd language within the writings of the gods and kings. Finally, the study will connect the character of the shepherd with the gods and kings in their relationship with the people. Ultimately, it will provide a springboard to understand the prophets' use of metaphor by peering through a window into the cultural milieu in which the ancients used the shepherd metaphor.

### **The Use of Metaphors**

Metaphors are prevalent in every language. They structure our language and also our thoughts. Amid attempting to understand language in biblical prophecy, Brent Sandy in *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks* discusses the development of metaphors and the assessment method. As with many researchers in the area of metaphors, he reaches back to Aristotle and swiftly moves to the advancement of metaphors, moving forward with the idea that metaphors are conversational seasoning.<sup>46</sup> In other words, metaphors add finesse or a “zing” to the conversation. Joseph Stern also attests, “Beginning with Aristotle (though this was hardly his full view) through the rhetorical tradition in antiquity and the Middle Ages, a metaphor was mainly viewed as a decoration or ornament—a matter solely or primarily of form—superadded to the content of language, which, it was thought, could always be extracted from the metaphor and then expressed literally.”<sup>47</sup> However, with more research in morphology becoming available

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<sup>46</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Josef Stern, “Knowledge by Metaphor,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2002): 189.



within the last fifty years, he now characterizes metaphors as advancing from seasoning to substance. He writes:

Metaphoric language is pervasive in the culture of communication as well as in the areas. A metaphor is usually picturesque, expressing ideas in visual images. It increases memorability of concepts and wording. It bonds speakers and hearers and authors and readers together as the creators of metaphor contemplate how hearers/readers will understand their intent, and hearers/readers reflect on the speakers meaning and craftsmanship. A metaphor helps convey abstract ideas, many of which cannot be readily expressed without the use of metaphor.<sup>48</sup>

Sandy emphasizes that language expresses an idea and that the writers using the metaphor are contemplating how the hearers will understand.<sup>49</sup> The implicit message here is that the authors of the Bible did not just want to entertain their readers with a pretty passage but intended to share their view of God and persuade others of these truths. The authors of the Bible—particularly the prophets—use the shepherd metaphor to instruct readers on how to conceptualize God.

### **A Figure of Speech**

Metaphors typically do not equal literal dictionary definitions. For example, in Shakespeare, “When Romeo says, ‘What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!’ he does not mean that Juliet is a literal flaming ball of gas. Sandy writes, “Literal translations are rarely helpful. Firsthand exposure to the culture is essential.”<sup>50</sup> Being acquainted with the cultural interpretations of the metaphors is helpful, especially when there is much distance and time between the writing and the reading time. Paul Ricoeur recognizes the significance of making sense of a metaphor in light of its culture. He writes, “a word receives a

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<sup>48</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

metaphorical meaning in specific contexts within which they are opposed to other words taken literally; this shift in meaning results mainly from a clash between literal meanings, which excludes a literal use of the word in question and gives clues for the finding of a new meaning which is able to fit in the context of the sentence and to make sense in this context.”<sup>51</sup> Most likely, the authors are progressing past the dictionary definition and bringing to light a tangible meaning. Words and metaphors can have different definitions and meanings in different cultures and times; therefore, it is always significant to consider the cultural meaning of the metaphor.

Writers use metaphors to tell truths, but on the surface, their words can sometimes sound like untruths. For example, the metaphor, “Bobby is locking horns with Jeff over the football game,” reveals that Bobby and Jeff are arguing. The statement sounds fictitious on the surface; however, it simply states that two people are arguing over the football game. Sandy explains, “There is a sense in which figurative language is always in tension with nonfigurative language because the former does not play by the rules of the latter.”<sup>52</sup> It is essential to understand that poetic and metaphorical language does not necessarily hold to the same rules as the dictionary reading of words. In addition, metaphorical language is constantly communicating beneath the surface.

As previously mentioned, articulating an abstract idea concretely is often difficult. Ambiguity is inevitable between the writer and reader if the reader does not share in the same world of communication. Metaphors are common for people who already understand the community and can identify the meaning of the metaphor. “Bridging the language and cultural

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics,” *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 99.

<sup>52</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 64.

barriers between the Bible and the twenty-first century is especially urgent for understanding Biblical metaphors.”<sup>53</sup> During ancient times, the hearers would have been able to understand the shepherd motif quite well since it was a well-known occupation. The ancients would have had the advantage of sharing the same language and culture to understand the metaphor, whereas today, the readers must enter the world of the Bible to appreciate and comprehend what the biblical writers were attempting to communicate.

Sandy provides several reasons why metaphors became indispensable for the poetry of the prophets: they conveyed abstract ideas, created a visual image, influenced the way people think, expressed ideas compactly, increased memorability, spoke to the right side of the brain, and carried persuasive power. Metaphors spoke to their hearts and depicted images of the character of God. The writers using the metaphor were attempting to persuade and elicit a response that motivated people to change their ways as they encountered God in new ways.

### **Expressing Knowledge Through Metaphor**

The prophets using the shepherd metaphor expressed an important aspect of their theological understanding of God. Stern contends that metaphors intend to make claims. He writes, “The overwhelming appearance is that we make assertions, defend our claims, and argue with metaphors in the same way we do with non-metaphorical language.”<sup>54</sup> The prophets knew people could relate to the familiar metaphor of the shepherd to recognize the character of God; the Israelites also knew the Hebrew Scriptures that spoke of Yahweh as Shepherd. Many of the Israelites would have remembered passages such as Psalm 23. Moreover, although many

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>54</sup> Stern, “Knowledge by Metaphor,” 192.

passages speak to Yahweh as Shepherd, Sandy notes, “Surprisingly little research has been done on metaphorical language in the prophets, given its transforming effect on the nature of prophecy.”<sup>55</sup>

As previously noted, metaphors can communicate an abstract idea toward a concrete thought by simplifying a complex idea. Stern affirms that metaphors are more than poetic dressing. He contends, “a metaphorical use or interpretation of language can convey a kind of information, or bear cognitive significance, above and beyond what we might all agree is what it says—by which I will mean its propositional content, the conditions under which it would be true (as uttered in a given context).”<sup>56</sup> He speaks of this as “knowledge by metaphor.”<sup>57</sup> The following section aims to examine the cultural context of the metaphor in an effort to hear the prophets’ claims about Yahweh.

### The Metaphor of the Shepherd in the Ancient Near East

In order to gain an understanding of the shepherd metaphor, this paper will now turn to consider the symbol in ancient times. In the ancient Near East, the metaphor of shepherd was ubiquitous. F. F. Bruce writes, “The portrayal of the ideal King as a shepherd is common form in ancient Near Eastern literature and farther afield too. Egypt and Greece, among other areas, provide ready parallels.”<sup>58</sup> Matthew Montonini writes, “Sheep were domesticated in the ancient

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<sup>55</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Stern, “Knowledge by Metaphor,” 188.

<sup>57</sup> Knowledge by metaphor is a blending of the decoration theory metaphor and the cognitive theory found in the Josef Stern reading, where the reader gains an understanding of what the communicator is expressing by being able to understand the metaphor. Stern uses examples such as Nathan and David to make further the point that David understood the gravity of his offense because he understood the metaphor.

<sup>58</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 100.

Near East in 7000 BC. They are mentioned more than any other livestock in the Bible, indicating their economic importance as a source of food, wool, and hide. With the primary responsibilities of leading and protecting their flock, the occupation naturally lent itself as a symbol for those in leadership and God.”<sup>59</sup> The shepherd metaphor naturally applied to the political and religious leaders since they were to care for and protect their people just as the shepherds of the day were to tend to their sheep. Even the symbols associated with the shepherd became substantial within the metaphor. Jennifer Awes Freeman notes, “the shepherd’s staff became a cultural symbol of guidance and protection that would be used for millennia. The fact that the positive symbolism of the shepherd was prominent even when shepherds themselves were not always viewed favorably demonstrates the ability of symbols to take on their own life and power beyond their quotidian origins.”<sup>60</sup>

The “Shepherd language was used in stock titles and epithets to define a king’s role as just ruler, benevolent provider and/or powerful defender.”<sup>61</sup> This metaphor was used throughout the ANE, including in Israel and the Hebrew Scriptures. Laniak writes, “Pastoral images conveyed notions of rulership—both divine and human—in a wide variety of historical periods, geographical regions and literary contexts in the Ancient Near East. Shepherd language was used in stock titles and epithets to define a king’s role as a just ruler, benevolent provider, and/or powerful defender. Ancient sources describe a country’s citizenry (or army) as a flock and their

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<sup>59</sup> Matthew Montonini, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, 2016th ed. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Jennifer Awes Freeman, *The Good Shepherd: Image Meaning and Power*, Kindle. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), 11–12.

<sup>61</sup> Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 49.

experience of plenty as green pastures.”<sup>62</sup> Viewing the context of the ancient world and how the surrounding nations used the shepherd metaphor can clarify how the prophets used it to reveal their theology of God. The following sections will analyze the shepherd metaphor in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel. It is to reflect the common use of the shepherd metaphor, not exhaustive.

### **The Shepherd Metaphor in Mesopotamia**

“In antiquity, the occupation of Shepherd was regarded as a manly and noble one. It required courage, endurance, and a great amount of practical wisdom. The image of the shepherd offered an apt and much-used metaphor for human rulers and gods.”<sup>63</sup> In the ANE, gods and rulers were recognized in the highest status. They were often the focus of shepherding metaphors because shepherds were identified as caring and overseeing their flock. “The tradition of shepherd rulers is evident as far back as written history.”<sup>64</sup> In extant literature discovered by archeologists throughout Mesopotamia, gods and kings were regularly associated with the shepherd metaphor.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>63</sup> K. Van der Toorn, “Shepherd,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. B. Becking and P. W. Van Der Horst, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 770.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 58.

## The Shepherd-Gods in Mesopotamia

Several recognized deities are associated with the shepherd in their epithets.<sup>65</sup> “Though ‘shepherd’ is not unusual as an epithet for Near Eastern gods, it has nowhere attained the status of an independent divine name.”<sup>66</sup> However, *Shepherd* is attached to several gods as an indication that they are faithful providers and keepers of the people. The role of the shepherd provides depictions and attributes for their gods.

The Sumerians were the first civilization in which writings related to the shepherd motif were discovered. The writings include several gods of the ancient Near East dating from about 3000 BC. No definitive canon exists, and gods can overlap in importance and duties. Observing the gods of the Eanna temple in Uruk for this study will be beneficial. For example, the goddess Sirtur was the sheep goddess, and her sons were Dumuzi and Gilgamesh, both shepherd-kings of Uruk. A Sumer myth, “The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi,” depicts a conversation between Dumuzi, the shepherd god, and Inanna. This example combines the shepherd and divine role:

Let his shepherd’s staff protect all of Sumer and Akkad.  
As the farmer, let him make the fields fertile,  
As the shepherd, let him make the sheepfolds multiply,  
Under his reign, let there be vegetation,  
Under his reign, let there be rich grain.<sup>67</sup>

Another example in the story of “Inanna and the King: Blessing on the Wedding Night” connects the staff and crook, which will become important symbols associated with the kings.

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<sup>65</sup> Timothy Laniak, in *Shepherds After My Heart*, makes the distinction between gods and kings even though some were considered demigods, he supplies an index of several that are not mentioned here and provides a springboard for ancient writings.

<sup>66</sup> Van der Toorn, Karl, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 770.

<sup>67</sup> Diane Wolkstein, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1983), 46.

Overall Sumer and Akkad give him the staff (and) the crook, May he exercise the shepherdship of the blackheads (wherever) they dwell, May he make productive the fields like the farmer, May he multiply the sheepfolds like a trustworthy shepherd.<sup>68</sup>

These two poems regarding Inanna narrate the honor of Dumuzi. “This is the Dumuzi known later in Assyro-Babylonian times as Tammuz, the shepherd king ritually lamented each summer when the fields were barren (Ezek. 8:14).”<sup>69</sup> It reveals the importance of shepherds and how the people perceived the gods who exemplified those roles as having the ability to protect and be found trustworthy.

Other ancient Mesopotamian gods include Enlil—later to become Elil—who associated with the wind, and two other supreme gods, Anu and Ea, who were known as rulers of the earth. The Akkadians, Assyrians, and Babylonians worshiped Enlil. He was associated with the Ekur temple in Nippur and identified with a shepherd. In the Sumerian literature titled “Enlil in the Ekur,” he is described as divine, “Your divinity can be relied on. You are your own counsellor and adviser, you are a lord on your own. Who can comprehend your actions? No divine powers are as resplendent as yours. No god can look you in the face.”<sup>70</sup>

The deities are seen as divine beings, and the shepherd relations synthesize an abstract world with the world of reality to supply concrete ways of understanding the celestial. The writings of Enlil identify the negative and positive aspects through the shepherd motif traits. Thorkild Jacobsen writes, “he allows the goddess to kill at birth, and he is behind the

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<sup>68</sup> Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts & Pictures*, 410. Often times in the transition of kings, the gods once served in the previous monarch developed a new name but kept the same qualities.

<sup>69</sup> Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart : Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 59.

<sup>70</sup> J.A. Black et al., “The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature” (University of Oxford, 1998), <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section4/tr4051.htm>.



miscarriages of cows and ewes.”<sup>71</sup> In the infamous *Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur*, Enlil is the overseer, and the ritual mourning is shaped by the image of the shepherd god Enlil and his fold. The poem, in parts, reads, ‘Enlil upon him whom comes from above verily hurled the flame...My city like an innocent ewe has not been..., gone is its trustworthy shepherd.’”<sup>72</sup>

In the reading of *Enlil in the E-kur*, Enlil is explained as the faithful shepherd:

Enlil, faithful Shepherd of the teeming multitudes, herdsman,  
leader of all living creatures, has manifested his rank of great  
prince, adorning himself with (1 ms. has instead: putting on) the  
holy crown. As the Wind of the Mountain occupied the dais, he  
spanned the sky as the rainbow. Like a floating cloud, he moved  
alone.<sup>73</sup>

Faithful Shepherd, faithful Shepherd, God Enlil, faithful Shepherd, Master  
of all countries, [faithful] Shepherd, Lord of all the Igigi deities, faithful  
Shepherd, Lord of the . . . , faithful Shepherd, The lord who drew the  
outline of his land, who . . .<sup>74</sup>

From this description, it is clear that Enlil is the herdsman and over all living creatures. He provides for the people and manages them as shepherds tend a flock. Once again, the shepherd is a physical image that relates gentle and human characteristics indicative of a loving caretaker.

During the Babylonian period, Tzvi Abusch describes Marduk as the ruler of the Mesopotamian universe. He writes, “Marduk’s earliest beginnings seem to be as the local god and patron of Babylon. In the Old Babylonian period, he was incorporated into the

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<sup>71</sup> Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 101, <https://archive.org/details/treasuresofdarkn0000jaco/page/104/mode/2up>.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel Kramer, *Lamentation Over the Destruction of Ur* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 47, <https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/as12.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Black et al., “The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.”

<sup>74</sup> Pritchard, *Ancient near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, 337.

Mesopotamian pantheon and considered the son of Enki/Ea and a member of the Eridu circle.”<sup>75</sup> Marduk was considered a hero in “The Myth of Marduk.”<sup>76</sup> In tablet seven, the story describes “Marduk as Nibiru,” which is thought to reflect the *summus deus*, known as the seat of the gods. The reader will recognize in the following quote that Marduk was not only associated with the shepherd but also noted as the shepherd of shepherds:

Because he split up the monster Tiamat . . . His name be Nibiru, he who  
stands in the center To the stars of the heavens he shall ordain their orbits,  
Like sheep, he should pasture the gods all together!<sup>77</sup>

Another Babylonian poem, “The Poem of Erra and Ishum,” informs people of historical events and reflects the significance of Marduk and the perpetual use of the shepherd and his symbol, the staff. “The poem is mainly a succession of long speeches describing the destruction of Babylonian cities in a combination of civil war and foreign invasion. The historical background is a long period of weak rule in Babylonia punctuated by violent disorder, which began with the Aramean incursions of the eleventh century and continued to the eighth century.”<sup>78</sup> This story depicts only gods, including “Erra, god of war, his minister Ishum, and Marduk, king of the gods which abdicates his throne for a time.”<sup>79</sup> Andrew George claims the poem is an allegorical reinterpretation of older stories in which the gods are waging war on humans, and in doing so, it reveals the condition of humanity. Their poem begins with an

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<sup>75</sup> T. Abusch, “Marduk,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. B. Becking, P. W. Van Der Horst, and K. Van der Toorn, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 543.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Carus, “The Fairy-Tale Element in the Bible,” *The Monist* 11, no. 03 (1901): 409.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>78</sup> Kennedy Hugh, “The Poem of Erra and Ishum,” in *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 47.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

incantation to Ishum, also known as Hendursanga. At the beginning of the poem, it reads, “King of all habitations, creator of the world [regions, ...] O Hendursanga, foremost son of Enlil [...!] Who bears an august staff, herdsman of the black-headed race, shepherd [of mankind,].”<sup>80</sup> The writing establishes the shepherd metaphor and uses the staff figure associated with the shepherding motif, which will be developed later in the paper.

The shepherd metaphor is prominent in the ancient documents portraying the character of the gods of the ancient Near East. “It is fascinating to find the ancient Mesopotamians assuming that these great deities were also their personal shepherd gods.”<sup>81</sup> The ancient writers expressed the idea that their god possessed the qualities of a shepherd, such as wisdom, care, and loyalty, among other characteristics. They were known to supply provisions and protect the people, the details of which will be discussed further in the chapter.

#### The Shepherd-Kings of Mesopotamia

The kings of Mesopotamia were also connected to the shepherd symbol and called shepherd-kings. Hallo recognizes the shepherd-king prevalence in ANE titles and epithets. Hallo states, “epithets are especially well represented in royal hymns and other purely literary genres; titles are better represented in building inscriptions and others which are royal inscriptions properly speaking.”<sup>82</sup> Further, Hallo explains that titles can transfer from king to king, but epithets were connected to the individual and typically would change from king to king and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>81</sup> Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart : Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 60.

<sup>82</sup> Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles*, 130.

dynasty to dynasty.<sup>83</sup> The reader will observe that the shepherd title was prevalent and passed on between kings, suggesting that the shepherd motif connects to an expected character.

Laniak claims, “The myths of Mesopotamian deities reflected the dynamic realities of emerging city-states and their rulers on earth. Human rulers were represented in royal inscriptions as historical recipients of shepherdship from the gods. They, in turn, ruled over their human ‘flock.’ In royal hymnody, kings emphasized their divine parentage.”<sup>84</sup> The word for shepherd transliterated is known as *sipa*. William Hallo claims “no survey of royal epithets would be complete without considering the one by which the king was most closely linked to his subjects...A frequent epithet in the royal hymns is also one of the few which repeatedly occur in the attributed position, i.e., before the name of the king.”<sup>85</sup> Hallo provides examples of some of the kings with the attributive *sipa* meaning shepherd, noted below:

Gudea – sipa zi  
Lipit-Istar – sipa sun  
Ur-Ninurta – sipa nig-nam-il  
Bur-Sin – sipa sa  
Enlil-bani – sipa nig-nam-sar-ra  
Zambia – sipa nit-tug  
Ur-dukuga – sipa nig-nam-tug  
Sin-magir – sipa u-a  
Sin-iddinam – sipa nig-gi-na  
Warad-Sin – sipa nig-si-sa  
Rim-Sin – sipa gu-kalam ki  
Dingiram – sipa zi<sup>86</sup>

Although it is hard to identify where the first use of the shepherd title originated, anthropologist in comparative religion Edwin James notes its early use. He speaks of the ruler Lugal-zaggisi of

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<sup>83</sup> Hallo, “Royal Titles from the Mesopotamian Periphery,” 130.

<sup>84</sup> Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart : Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 61.

<sup>85</sup> Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal Titles*, 147.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Umma, who conquered cities and unified the Sumerians. The royal writings leave behind the story that the people that survived the flood were starting a new dynasty in which the ruler of Umma—named Lugal-zaggisi after assuming dominion—prayed and held the title of the shepherd.<sup>87</sup> James writes:

Only a remnant of the population, it was said, survived the deluge, and the kingship had to be started afresh by a second descent from heaven. Dumuzi alone continued the antediluvian regime in the legendary Second Dynasty of Erech; the ‘Shepherd’ par excellence was the historical ruler of Umma, Lugal-zaggisi, who at the end of the Early Dynastic period after he had attacked and subdued Lagash, introduced the new title ‘King of the Land,’ under the sanction of Enlil. As the ‘son born of Nisa-ba, fed by the holy milk of Ninhursaga, he assumed dominion over the entire country and prayed that he might fulfill his destiny and always be ‘the Shepherd at the head of the flock.’<sup>88</sup>

This exemplifies the significant connection between the king and shepherd and how the people would have understood the ideal king.

Another king that stands out as shepherd-king is Gudea of Lagash, who ruled from 2150–2155 B.C. He is known for building temples for gods and leaving statue images of himself in the temples. Jacobson writes of the ANE:

The ruler had to rely on messages from the gods in dreams or visions, on signs and portents, or on one of the traditional ways in which one could approach the gods and obtain—if one was lucky—an answer. Gudea, for instance, was told in a dream that he should rebuild Ningirsu’s temple. Not satisfied with his own powers of interpretation he took his dream to the divine interpreter of dreams, Nanshe.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> The section of the royal inscription can be accessed at <https://cdli.ucla.edu/tools/scores/Q001379.html> and its section is Q001379 127: sipa sag-gu4-gal2 which translates Lugal-zaggisi as a Proud Shepherd.

<sup>88</sup> E. O. James, “The Sacral Kingship,” in *The Ancient Gods* (Worcester, Great Britain: Ebenezer Baylis and Son Ltd The Trinity Press, 1920), 118, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.148943/page/n97/mode/2up>.

<sup>89</sup> Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, 84.

The Gudea cylinders describe Gudea receiving a dream and seeking direction from the gods. He believed the gods had chosen him to be the shepherd-ruler over the people. Below are a couple of excerpts telling of the vision of Gudea, “The Building of Ningîrsu's Temple” (Gudea, cylinders A and B). More importantly, this excerpt provides evidence of the shepherd king association with Gudea. Even further, Gudea is called the *true shepherd*.

124-131. His mother Nanše answered the ruler: "My shepherd, I will explain your dream for you in every detail. The person who, as you said, was as enormous as the heavens, who was as enormous as the earth, whose head was like that of a god, whose wings, as you said, were like those of the Anzud bird, and whose lower body was, as you said, like a flood storm, at whose right and left lions were lying, was in fact my brother Ningîrsu. He spoke to you about the building of his shrine, the E-ninnu."

173-195. The true shepherd Gudea is wise and able to realize things. Accepting what Nanše had told him, he opened his storehouse up and took out wood from it.

277-285. When you, true shepherd Gudea, really set to work for me on my house, the foremost house of all lands, the right arm of Lagaš, the Anzud bird roaring on the horizon, the E-ninnu, my royal house, I will call up to heaven for humid winds so that plenty comes down to you from heaven and the land will thrive under your reign in abundance.<sup>90</sup>

Rim-Sin of Larsahas was also referred to as a shepherd king from the Larsa Dynasty of 1822–1763 B. C. The prominence of his reign resounds in his conquest of Isin and his uniting of Babylonian territories. “His reign concludes the period of transition from the fall of Ur III to the rise of Babylon under Hammurabi (c. 2000–1792), characterized by the rivalry of the cities Larsa and Isin for the control of Mesopotamia and by the emergence of smaller independent kingdoms in the north, which successfully challenged attempts of centralization by Isin and Larsa kings.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Black et al., *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*.

<sup>91</sup> Gwendolyn Leick, *Who's Who in the Ancient Near East* (NetLibrary, Inc., 2002), <https://liberty.alma.exlibrisgroup.com>.

Marc Van De Mieroop describes Rim-Sin as one who implemented significant reforms that even Hammurabi affirmed during his reign.<sup>92</sup> He developed agriculture by managing the people overseeing the land and supervising the land operations. He promoted centralization and ultimately was defeated by Hammurabi. He, too, is referred to as a shepherd in the “Letter of Ninshatapada to Rim-Sin”:

1. Speak to my king!
2. To Rim-Sin, the young protector who soothes the heart of Enlil,
3. The faithful shepherd legitimately summoned by the great lord Ninurta  
in order to rescue the entire nation,
4. Wide of understanding, whose insight is surpassing, who gathers  
everything together,
5. Counsellor whose wisdom is soothing, whose full extent no eye can see,
6. Judge of righteousness, who loves the righteous man like Utu (himself)-
7. Say furthermore!<sup>93</sup>

Even some lesser-known kings, such as Ur-Ninurta, the sixth king of the dynasty of Isin, applied the shepherd metaphor in their writings. The Sumerian tablet (IM 55403) in Baghdad, Iraq, describes King Ur-Ninurta as a shepherd. Bendt Alster writes that the first composition “starts like a royal inscription, describing the election of Urnirurta as king (line 11: “shepherdship”) by Ninurta or possibly by Enlil (lines 12-17). From line 19 onwards, it continues as a religious treatise, according to which the pious man who pays attention to the worship of the gods will prosper.”<sup>94</sup> For evidence of the prevalence of the shepherd motif, only excerpts five through eleven are needed:

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<sup>92</sup> Marc Van De Mieroop, “The Reign of Rim-Sin,” *Revue d’Assyriologie et d’archéologie Orientale* 87, no. 1 (1993): 47.

<sup>93</sup> William W. Hallo, *The World’s Oldest Literature : Studies in Sumerian Belles-Lettres* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 381, <https://brill-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/view/title/14574>.

<sup>94</sup> Bendt Alster, “The Instructions of Urnirurta and Related Compositions,” *Gregorian Biblical Press* 60, no. 3 (1991): 142.

5. the one given wisdom by Enki,
6. the one ... by Nisaba,
7. the one who takes counsel with . . . Inanna,
8. in order to organize the plans of Shumer,
9. in order to abolish wickedness, to implement righteousness,
10. in order to settle the people in their dwelling place
11. in order to fasten the foundation of Urninurta's shepherd[ship]<sup>95</sup>

From 1728–1686 B. C., Hammurapi (often spelled *Hammurabi*) ruled as the sixth king of the Old Babylonian dynasty.<sup>96</sup> He was known as “the lawgiver” according to the Code of Hammurabi, discovered in the twentieth century. The code has a prologue and 282 laws chiseled in stone. The prologue reveals the association that Hammurabi had with the shepherd image, as noted below:

I am Hammurapi, the shepherd, selected by the god Enlil, he who heaps high abundance and plenty, who perfects every possible thing for the city Nippur, *the city known as band-of-heaven-and-earth*, the pious provider of the Ekur temple; the capable king, the restorer of the city Eridu, the purifier of the rites of the Eabzu temple; the onslaught of the four regions of the world, who magnifies the reputation of the city of Babylon<sup>97</sup>

Again, the shepherd metaphor is used further in the prologue:

The pious prince, who brightens the countenance of the god Tishpak, who provides pure feasts for the goddess Ninazu, who sustains his people in crisis, who secures their foundations in peace in the midst of the city of Babylon; shepherd of the people, whose deeds are pleasing to the goddess Ishtar, who establishes Ishtar in the Eulmash temple in the midst of Akkad the city’ who proclaims truth, who guides the population properly, who restores its benevolent protective spirit to the city of Assur<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 149–150.

<sup>96</sup> According to Pritchard there have been miscalculations on the dates, but this is the latest and most accurate located in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts & Pictures*, 155.

<sup>97</sup> Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 112.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 113.



In the Epilogue, Hammurabi again identifies himself as the shepherd-king.

The great gods have called me, I am the salvation-bearing shepherd, whose staff is straight, the good shadow that is spread over my city; on my breast I cherish the inhabitants of the land of Sumer and Akkad; in my shelter I have let them repose in peace; in my deep wisdom have I enclosed them.<sup>99</sup>

It is significant to recognize that in the time of the rise of Assyria in the thirteenth century, the kings continued to use the metaphor of the shepherd. The reason to recognize Assyria is its later connection with Israel and its capital city of Samaria. It will be the Assyrians that ransack Samaria. This identification between Assyria and Israel reinforces the idea that Israel was possibly influenced by the idea of the shepherd from the surrounding nations, but the shepherd motif in Israel will be developed in the next chapter.

The royal inscriptions connect the Assyrian King Shalmaneser I with the shepherd metaphor. Kirk Grayson writes, “With Shalmaneser, we find that the military narration continues to be relatively detailed.”<sup>100</sup> Among archaeological finds, “This is one of the longest and most interesting texts published in the volume. It is preserved in several exemplars inscribed in two columns on each side of stone tablets. The tablets describe the military activity of unprecedented detail, and in the format, it represents an early attempt to accommodate a lengthy description in a traditional form.”<sup>101</sup>

Note the following reading and the identification of the shepherd of all the settlements:

Shalmaneser, appointee of the god Enlil,

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<sup>99</sup> Translation by L. W. King from the *Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project*. <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp>

<sup>100</sup> A. Kirk Grayson et al., “Shalmaneser I: A.0.77,” in *Assyrian Rulers 3Rd and 2Nd Millenium* (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 180.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

holy vice-regent of the god Assur, appointee of  
the gods, prince, favourite of the goddess Istar,  
the one who keeps rituals and offerings pure, the  
one who makes abundant the presentation  
offerings for all the gods, founder of holy cult  
centres, builder of Ehursagkurkurra — shrine of  
the gods —, (and) mountain of the lands —,  
astonishing great dragon, shepherd of all the settlements,  
the one whose conduct is abundantly  
pleasing to Assur, valiant hero, capable in battles,  
crusher of enemies, the one who makes resound  
the noise of battle with his enemies<sup>102</sup>

During the time of the growth of Assyria, the “royal inscriptions utilized a major development: it was the first appearance of real annals. A gradual emergence of forerunners to this text genre began much earlier, as scribes added more and more military details to commemorative texts, and by the time of Tiglath-Pileser, full-fledged annals began to be written.”<sup>103</sup> Tiglath-Pileser I desired prosperity in the land, and he expanded territory, encouraged planting, and gathered livestock to be brought to Assyria. The shepherd metaphor continues to permeate the desire for the king to be identified with the character of the shepherd for the people to observe.

Note the two texts below:

Great gods, managers of heaven (and) underworld, whose attack means conflict and strife, who make great the sovereignty of Tiglathpileser, beloved prince, your select one, attentive shepherd, whom you chose in the steadfastness of your hearts; upon him you set the exalted crown, you grandly established him for sovereignty over the land of the god Enlil, to him you granted leadership, supremacy, valour, you pronounced forever his destiny of dominion as powerful and (the destiny) of his priestly progeny for service in Ehursagkurkurra<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>103</sup> A. Kirk Grayson, “Tiglath-Pileser I (1114–1076 BC): A.0.87.,” in *Assyrian Rulers Early 1st Mil. B.C. - II* (University of Toronto Press, 1991), 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442671072.10>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 13.

Tiglath-pileser, strong king, unrivaled king of the universe, king of the four quarters, king of all princes, lord of lords, chief herdsman, king of kings, attentive purification priest, to whom by command of the god Samas the holy scepter was given and who had complete authority over the people, subjects of the god Enlil, faithful shepherd, whose name was called over the princes, exalted bishop, whose weapons the god Assur has sharpened and whose name he has pronounced eternally for control of the four quarters<sup>105</sup>

Shamshi-Adad V (823-811 B. C.)—also spelled as *Samsi-Adad V*— king of Assyria and son of Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.), has also characterized himself as a shepherd. Kirk Grayson claims that “the reign of Samsi-Adad V began during a revolution against Shalmaneser III, his father, and Samsi-Adad V claims credit for putting down the revolt.”<sup>106</sup> King Samsi-Adad V ruled for such a short time that the royal inscriptions related to him were limited. However, a limestone stele of Shamshi-Adad V, discovered in Calah, recorded his military campaigns. The king begins the writing with honor to the god Ninurta.

To the god Ninurta, the strong lord, the majestic, the exalted, the noble, the warrior of the gods, the one who holds the bond of heaven and underworld, commander of all<sup>107</sup>

It later identifies his qualities and characteristics, including the connection with the shepherd metaphor.

Samsi-Adad, strong king, unrivaled king of the universe, shepherd of shrines, bearer of the just scepter, ruler of all lands, commander of all, eternal royal seed, (i 30) whose name the gods designated from ancient times<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>106</sup> A. Kirk Grayson, “Šamši-Adad V: (823–811 BC) A.0.103,” in *Assyrian Rulers of Early First Millennium* (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 180, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt2ts5c.11>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 182.

This inscription not only mentions the shepherd but also highlights the importance of the scepter.

Sargon II, king of Assyria, took over Samaria in 722 B.C after the death of Shalmaneser V. King Sargon II was attacked on different fronts by adversaries, and one of them, known as Yau-bi' di of Hamath, claimed he was the rightful king of Hamath. He carried out an insurrection against Sargon II. The research of Stephanie Dalley shows a connection between Assyria and Samaria; she writes, “Hardly surprising is it, in such circumstances, that Samaria scarcely considered itself subject to Assyria, threw off the recently imposed yoke of vassaldom, and joined an anti-Assyrian coalition which was led by Hamath under its king Yau-bi'di whose capital city lay about 220 miles away from Samaria. The coalition between Israel and Hamath was probably active around 720/719 B.C., possibly longer.”<sup>109</sup> This matter is only important due to the writings left behind by Sargon II regarding the way he depicted the character of Yau-bi' di of Hamath, using the shepherd metaphor to capture the encounters of the Israelites and other nations. Of course, identifying the writing does not imply the support of the character, only that Sargon II was utilizing the shepherd metaphor in his time, which would have also been the time of the Israelites. Some even suggest that Yau-bi' di of Hamath could be an Israelite name.<sup>110</sup> However, there is not sufficient support for this claim.

During this tumultuous time, King Sargon II disagreed with the assertion that Yau-bi' di should rule Hamath. He spoke of Yau-bi' di's authority as illegitimate, including a marked absence of an endorsement to be a shepherd of the people from the gods. Sargon II “vilified him

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<sup>109</sup> Stephanie Dalley, “Yahweh in Hamath in the 8Th Century Bc: Cuneiform Material and Historical Deductions1,” *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 1 (1990): 27.

<sup>110</sup> Mordechai Cogan and Dalley attests that the name Yau-bi' di is compounded with Yahweh , in addition to Dalley claiming both E. Meyer and W. F. Albright thought that he must have been an Israelite abroad. (Cogan; 156; Dalley, 27).

in his inscriptions as ‘a rebel’, ‘a low-class person, with no right to the throne, an evil Hittite,’ ‘unworthy of the palace,’ ‘whose lot had not been determined [by the gods] to shepherd people.’”<sup>111</sup> Sargon II determined to put in writing the illegitimacy of Yau-bi’ di, and he made sure in his inscriptions at Tang-i Var to indicate that he is the one who has been chosen by the gods and is the shepherd of the people.

- 1) The god Aššur ] ... king of al[l the ] Igīgū [gods and Anunnakū gods ...]
- 3) the god Marduk, lord of all, who provides [all] people with food ...;
- 4) the god Nabu, perfect heir ...;
- 5) the god Šin], lord of heaven and netherworld ...;
- 6) the god Šamaš, chief justice of heaven and netherworld ...;
- 7) the goddess [Iš]tar, who makes (men) ready for battle ...;
- 8) the divine Seven , who lead the gods (and) who [stand at the side of] the king , [their] favourite, in the place [of battle] and bring about (his) victory;
- 9) great gods, managers of heaven and [netherworld, whose attack means conflict and strife,
- 10) (the gods) who look for (and) appoint the king, [at who]se holy [com]mand they a[dd land] to land [and] make (him) greater [(than other rulers)]:
- 11) Sargon (II), great king, mighty king, king of the world, king of Assyria, viceroy of Babylon, king of the land of [Sumer and Akkad, favourite of the great gods,
- 12) perfect hero, ... man, pious [prince], marvelous man, ... shepherd ...
- 13) The gods Aššur, Nabû, (and) Marduk, the gods, [(my)] helpers, granted [me] a reign [without] equal and [have made] my good me reach the heights<sup>112</sup>

The son of Sargon the II, named Sennacherib, became king upon the death of his father. He reigned from 720-683 BC, and the ancient writings from his royal inscriptions contain the shepherd metaphor.

Sennacherib, great king, strong king, king of Assyria,  
unrivalled king, pious shepherd who reverses the great gods,  
guardian of truth, who loves justice, renders assistance,

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<sup>111</sup> Mordechai Cogan, “Restoring the Empire: Sargon’s Campaign to the West in 720/19 BCE,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 67, no. 2 (2017): 156.

<sup>112</sup> Grant Frame, “The Inscription of Sargon II at Tang-i Var,” *Orientalia* 68, no. 1 (1999): 33.

goes to the aide of the weak and strives after good deeds,  
perfect man, virile warrior, foremost of all rulers<sup>113</sup>

Sennacherib is mentioned in the Old Testament in 2 Kings 18:13 when he attempted to conquer Judah. The text states, “Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria, marched against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them.” This is a significant relation to the shepherd metaphor because the royal writing describes its use during the time of the exilic prophets in the surrounding nations.

### **The Shepherd Metaphor in Babylon**

During the rise of the Babylonian empire, the shepherd metaphor occurs in the inscriptions of the kings. King Nebuchadnezzar I and Nebuchadnezzar III are just two examples.

The following example is from the Babylonian inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar I:

When Marduk the great lord created me the legitimate son  
And to direct the affairs of the land, to shepherd the people,  
To care for the city, to rebuild the temples<sup>114</sup>

The following writing is from the Babylonian inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar III:

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, true shepherd,  
The darling and satisfaction of the heart of Marduk, grand  
Prince, beloved of Nebo, wise caretaker of Esagila and  
Ezida, skilled in the art of restoration, who rebuilds  
Sacred places, first-born son of Nabopolassar, king of  
Babylon [am I]. When Marduk, great lord, gave me far  
scattered peoples to shepherd and sent me in majesty

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<sup>113</sup> A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie R. Novotny, eds., “Sennacherib,” in *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704-681 BC)* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 32, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=3155654>.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Langdon, in *Building Inscriptions Of The Neo Babylonian Empire: Part 1, Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1905), 61, <https://archive.org/details/LangdonSBuildingInscriptionsOfTheNeoBabylonianEmpirePart11905/page/n7/mode/2up>.

to care for the cities and renew the sacred places<sup>115</sup>

The prophets in exile would have been familiar with these metaphors. The above research on the ANE reveals the prevalent use among the leaders and gods.

It is intriguing to note that the Old Testament book of Isaiah depicts Cyrus as a shepherd. “Cyrus was the king of the Persian empire in the sixth century BC, and the extraordinary prophetic claim here is that their incoming foreign ruler will serve YHWH’s purpose.”<sup>116</sup> The writing indicates Yahweh as saying, “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he will carry out all My desire.’ And he says of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”<sup>117</sup> The metaphor nuanced in another way appears in Jeremiah 43:12 regarding Nebuchadnezzar: “And I shall set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive. So, he will wrap himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself with his garment, and he will depart from there safely.” The implications of the shepherd in these passages will unfold further in the study.

These archaeological writings of the ANE gods and kings have provided ample evidence in the inscriptions to satisfy the prevalent use of the shepherd metaphor. James Swalm attests, “Because shepherding is one of the oldest occupations of humanity, the metaphor of the shepherd as a leader dates back thousands of years and is a universal image. Therefore, the shepherd-leader metaphor is an ideal vehicle through which to study leadership.”<sup>118</sup> Although

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Briggs, *The Lord Is My Shepherd* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 69.

<sup>117</sup> NASB, Isaiah 44:28.

<sup>118</sup> James E. Swalm Jr., “The Development of Shepherd Leadership Theory and the Validation of the Shepherd Leadership Inventory” (Regent, 2010), 1, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1216&context=jacl>.

one can clearly observe that leadership is attached to the gods extending leadership to the kings, the writers are also distributing a theology of anticipated character among the gods and the kings through this shepherd metaphor.

### **The Shepherd Metaphor in Egypt**

In his research of Egypt, Thomas Resane claims Egyptians viewed shepherds as lowly. He writes, “As the biblical history unfolded, cultivation took pre-eminence and shepherding fell from favor and was assigned to those in the low social ranks of society such as the younger sons, hirelings, and slaves (compare David in 1 Sam 16:11-13). Farmers such as in Egypt even hated shepherds (Gen 46:34).”<sup>119</sup> Although the Egyptians had a low view of shepherds and employed the shepherd metaphor less, they still depicted it in relationship with the gods and kings. Matthew Montonini reinforces the application of the shepherd metaphor; he writes, “Egyptian epithets using shepherd as a title for their gods and kings, (i.e., Pharaoh) are rarer than their Near Eastern neighbors, but the concept and the title are still utilized.”<sup>120</sup>

In Egyptian writings, Amun (also spelled *Amon* and *Ammon*) was the king of the gods and is later blended with Re, also spelled Ra, depicted as Amon-Re. He is referred to as shepherd, a fact noted by Walter Beyerlin in one of the Egyptian cultic hymns translated by Eugène Grébaud. It is a “Hymn to Amun” from the eighteenth dynasty, and the original is in the Cairo Museum. It demonstrates the shepherd metaphor:

Good Shepherd who appears in the white crown,  
Lord of the rays who makes brilliance,  
to whom the gods offer hymns,

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<sup>119</sup> K. T. Resane, “Leadership for the Church: The Shepherd Model,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 2.

<sup>120</sup> Montonini, “Shepherd.”



who extends his arm to the one he loves,  
whereas his enemy is consumed by a flame:  
... hail to you, Re, Lord of order,  
whose shrine is hidden, lord of the gods<sup>121</sup>

Another translation from John A. Wilson does not use the word *shepherd* but instead uses the items that would be representative of a shepherd and identifies the ruler as goodly:

Lord of the double crown when he receives the *ames*-staff,  
Lord of the *mekes*-scepter, holding the flail,  
The Goodly ruler crowned with the White Crown,  
The Lord of rays who makes brilliance,  
to whom the gods give thanksgiving,  
who extends his arm to whom he loves,  
but his enemy is consumed by a flame.<sup>122</sup>

In addition, there is also a prayer to Amun that provides an individual prayer of the people. The following strophe is a picture of the good shepherd in Egypt.

Amun, shepherd, early in the morning you care for your flock and  
drive the hungry to pasture. The shepherd drives the cattle to the grass.  
Amun, you drive me, the hungry one, to food, for Amun is indeed a  
shepherd, a shepherd who is not idle.<sup>123</sup>

There is further evidence of the shepherd metaphor in writings revering kings. The “Laudation of the King” refers to Amenhotep III of the Eighteenth dynasty. In it, he is described as the good shepherd.

He is one who taketh thought, who maketh wise with knowledge - his stride  
is swift, a star of electrum when he circles upon his horse, a victorious  
archer, shooting the target lo -- living captives, without his like, the good  
shepherd, vigilant for all people, whom the maker thereof has placed under  
his authority, lord of plenty, " beholding benefactions is his satisfaction,

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<sup>121</sup> Walter Beyerlin, “Egyptian Texts,” in *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Press, 1975), 13,  
<https://archive.org/details/neareasternrelig0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up>.

<sup>122</sup> Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*, 365.

<sup>123</sup> Beyerlin, “Egyptian Texts,” 40.

doing that which occurs is his thriving forever; loving examples of truth,  
rejoicing in plans<sup>124</sup>

And of Seti I:

Never was made the like of it by any king, save by the king, the maker of  
glorious things, the Son of Re, Seti-Merneptah, the good ~shepherd,~ who  
preserves his soldiers alive, the father and mother of all. They say from  
mouth to mouth: "O Amon, give to him eternity; double to him  
everlastingness."<sup>125</sup>

Merneptah's Speech

Lo, his majesty was enraged at their report, like a lion; people  
assembled his court', and said to them: "Hear ye the command of your  
lord; I give - - as ye shall do, saying: I am the ruler who shepherds  
you,"<sup>126</sup>

Egyptian writings focused “on respect for justice (social order) and on the king’s mercy  
(the epithet ‘good shepherd’ is employed). Both Pharaoh and gods are called shepherds.”<sup>127</sup> Even  
though it is rarer to observe the shepherd metaphor among the Egyptians, the previous evidence  
illustrates its use in the ANE, which relates to the Israelites.

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<sup>124</sup> James Henry Breasted, ed., “Amenhotep III Building Inscription,” in *Ancient Records of Egypt: Vol II The Eighteenth Dynasty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 365, [https://archive.org/details/ancient-records-of-egypt-historical-documents-from-the-earliest-times-to-the-per\\_20210309/page/365/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/ancient-records-of-egypt-historical-documents-from-the-earliest-times-to-the-per_20210309/page/365/mode/2up).

<sup>125</sup> James Henry Breasted, “Nineteenth Dynasty Seti I,” in *Ancient Records of Egypt: Vol III The Eighteenth Dynasty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 86, <http://etana.org/sites/default/files/coretexts/14898.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>127</sup> Bernard Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17-38) Against Its Historical Background* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 132.

## Further Considerations of the ANE Shepherd Metaphor

This chapter has provided evidence to reveal the prevalence of the shepherd metaphor in the ANE. By assessing the information in a comparison analysis, it can be helpful to understand the implications of the prevalent use of the shepherd metaphor. This section will attempt to establish some of its uses.

The first use of the metaphor was to take the abstract gods and kings and make them tangible. The people understood the operation of shepherds caring for their sheep, and the imagery personified the gods and kings. As noted, the shepherd occupation in antiquity was a prominent position, and in deploying this metaphor, the writers attempted to articulate the character of the gods and kings and liken them to caring shepherds. The second use was communicating a theology of the gods by the authors. The shepherd imagery expresses a particular position and character to the people. The authors of the ANE writing revealed that the gods delegated their authority, rule, and power to the kings over the people. At times the kings and gods would have been seen as inseparable. Karel Van der Toorn expounds on the shepherd metaphor: “the parallel between kings and gods need hardly be explained: the latter were simply more powerful.”<sup>128</sup> The research here confirms the prevalence and importance of the shepherd metaphor. Now the focus will turn to the ideas the ANE people associated with the shepherd metaphor regarding their gods.

By synthesizing an abstract world with reality, the ancient authors offered portraits of how they wanted their gods and leaders to be perceived. Thorkild Jacobsen wrote, “ancient Mesopotamian religion was conditioned to a pluralistic view, to polytheism and the multitude of

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<sup>128</sup> Van der Toorn, “Shepherd,” 771.

gods and divine aspects it recognized.”<sup>129</sup> He further notes that the gods became personal in their supernatural ability. Therefore, the authors aimed to explain the role of the gods and kings and how they perceived them—even to the point of recognizing symbols of the shepherd within the writings.

For instance, the rod and the staff are well-known apparatus accompanying shepherds. The rod is “a common article for smiting and beating, serves as a weapon used for shepherding sheep. It seems, in effect, to be the tool of choice with which a shepherd can variously point, encourage, and otherwise direct sheep.”<sup>130</sup> The “staff is a symbol of care for the sheep rather than a weapon against threats.”<sup>131</sup> The shepherd metaphor combines these symbols in describing the gods and kings.

Take the case of Dumuzi, for instance. The writings relating to Dumuzi contain references to being a shepherd and having a staff. He is considered a protector of Sumer and Akkad and served as a multiplier of the sheepfold. His touch brightened things perceiving him as a trustworthy shepherd. The shepherd metaphor connected Dumuzi with the concept of being a relatable protector. The idea here is not about shepherding itself; instead, the writer describes who Dumuzi is—what he is like and that he is trustworthy to be the god of the people.

The same is true of Enlil, the faithful shepherd and master of all countries. The descriptions here note the expected character of Enlil and that he is over all. Moreover, Lugal-zaggisi held the title of a shepherd, and Gudea was called the true shepherd. Rim-Sin was referred to as a faithful shepherd. Likewise, Hammurapi, the shepherd, was selected by the god

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<sup>129</sup> Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, 11.

<sup>130</sup> Briggs, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, 99.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Enlil; and Hammurabi, the shepherd of the people, was further described as having good deeds pleasing to the goddess Ishtar. Through the shepherd motif, depicted as one who knows the world; therefore, the people could seek him to understand their circumstances. The shepherd metaphor depicted the gods as protectors and caretakers to whom the people could look and pray.

The ANE authors attest that the gods had given them the task of shepherding the people. As noted earlier, Hallo states the word *sipa* is in the attributive form to the kings, such as Gudea—*sipa zi*. The attributive form can ascribe a particular characteristic. This implies an attribute to the gods or kings, ascribing character and particular beliefs to their leaders. “Since shepherding involved leading, protecting and feeding a flock, it is seen as a metaphor for the task of leadership.”<sup>132</sup> The leadership connotation of the shepherd metaphor implied that the shepherd was a good protector and ruler of the people. It was a natural step to equate the duties of a king to the duties of a shepherd.

In the data provided earlier, the reader observed descriptions of the kings, such as Shamshi-Adad V, which pictured a belief of his character. Of kings such as Samsi-Adad, there were images like “strong king” and “unrivaled” to promote certain desired beliefs about the king. There were phrases tied to the shepherd metaphor to cement how the people should view the kings, such as “king of the universe,” “shepherd of shrines,” “bearer of the just scepter,” “ruler of all lands,” and “commander of all the scepter,” all of which further instilled the ideas that the one who was ruling could provide for the need of the people.

The Assyrian and Babylonian kings implemented the same ideas in their writings to declare who their kings were and how they would function. In the shepherd metaphor, they would function as caretakers and protectors; they should be trustworthy and faithful in their

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<sup>132</sup> Montonini, “Shepherd,” 131.

character. The reader can witness this in the writings of Sargon II, which indicate first that he is the rightful king and shepherd, and second, that his son King Sennacherib was not only to be considered great, strong, and unrivaled but also a pious shepherd who was a guardian of truth, who loved justice, and who helped his people. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was portrayed as the true shepherd and imagined as the darling and satisfaction of the heart of Marduk, who gave him the scattered people to shepherd.

During the time of the Israelites, the Psalms depict leaders such as Moses and Aaron as being led by Yahweh as a shepherd: “You led Your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Psalm 77:20). Again, Israel is described as the sheep of Yahweh: “So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture, Will give thanks to You forever; To all generations, we will tell of Your praise” (Ps 79:13). Also, in Psalm 23, Yahweh is depicted as “my shepherd.” “Though metaphors are more than comparisons, they are not mysterious screens obscuring yet suggesting divine realities.”<sup>133</sup>

### Concluding Remarks of the Analysis of the Shepherd Metaphor

The ANE writers use the shepherd metaphor to personify and offer beliefs regarding their gods and kings. Of course, this does not mean that every detail of the experience of a literal shepherd should be attributed to the gods and kings but that the authors are communicating specific ideas of their gods and kings. The qualities, nature, function, and role of the shepherd were connected to the gods and the kings in different ways. Observing the prevalence of the shepherd metaphor in the ANE is a natural step for the prophets of Israel who shared in the

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<sup>133</sup> Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17-38) Against Its Historical Background*, 19.

culture to use the shepherd metaphor to develop a theology of Yahweh. In the Old Testament, the prophets advance the theology of the shepherd metaphor unlike any other.

### CHAPTER 3: ANALYZING THE SHEPHERD MOTIF IN THE PROPHETS

Chapter 1 offers the thesis that the prophets contribute to the OT view of God using the shepherd motif. Chapter 2 analyzes the shepherd metaphor and its prevalence in the ANE. Chapter 3 will elucidate the shepherd motif, indicate shepherd passages in the Pentateuch, describe shepherd symbolism, and expound on the motif of the shepherd metaphor in the prophets.

#### A Brief Look at Defining Motifs

When observing the shepherd metaphor within the Old Testament, it is significant to recognize the different patterns, often referred to as motifs. A motif “is identified as a recognizable pattern.”<sup>134</sup> William Freedman once wrote that the starting point of a motif is “a theme, character, or verbal pattern which recurs in literature or folklore... A motif may be a theme which runs through a number of different works.”<sup>135</sup> Scholars today are still discussing the interchange of motifs and themes. James Morgan writes, “motifs and themes often occur interchangeably in everyday speech and scholarly literature. In fact, motif and theme are generally considered the two most common forms of narrative repetition.”<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, a distinguishing mark can be made between the motif and themes. According to Morgan, motifs are typically concrete, but themes are more abstract and generalized. Robert Alter confirms the following:

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>135</sup> William Freedman, “The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 4, no. 2 (1971): 123. The article makes a significant point that motifs are more than just reoccurring words or verbal patterns. The words are groups or clusters telling something outside of itself. For example, it would be common for sheep to literally be pictured in the backdrop of many ancient agriculture stories. However, the reoccurring shepherds and sheep in the ANE are often times symbolic and communicating something specific to the reader.

<sup>136</sup> James M. Morgan, “How Do Motifs Endure and Perform?” *Revue biblique* 122, no. 2 (2015): 198.



motif as a concrete image, sensory quality, action, or object recurs through a particular narrative; it may be intermittently associated with a *Leitwort*; it has no meaning in itself without the defining context of the narrative; it may be incipiently symbolic or instead primarily a means of giving formal coherence to a narrative. He defines themes as an idea that is part of the value-system of the narrative— it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal, political, historiosophical, theological— is made evident in some recurring pattern. It is often associated with one or more *Leitwörter*, but it is not co-extensive with them; it may also be associated with a motif.<sup>137</sup>

Although motifs and themes vary slightly, existing scholarship uses the two interchangeably; therefore, this writer will use the words *motif* and *theme* interchangeably.

This research will focus on how the shepherd motif is an asset that contributes to the prophets' theology regarding the character of God. William Freedman observes, "It is not enough to show that an author has employed a motif or that one has found its way into his work without at least inquiring why or if its presence is an asset."<sup>138</sup> How are the prophets communicating their beliefs of God? How does the shepherd motif communicate the nature of God? The answers to these questions are implied in the writings of the shepherd motif. Before moving into the prophets, it will be beneficial to observe the shepherd motif in the Pentateuch since this would have been a basis for the prophets' understanding of God, even though the shepherd motif was not utilized to the same degree as in the prophets.

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<sup>137</sup> *Leitwort* was coined as a lead word that is sequentially or meaningfully repeated in a text. Robert Alter defines it as "Through abundant repetition, the semantic range of the word-root is explored, different forms of the root are deployed, branching off at times into phonetic relatives (that is, word-play), synonymity, and anonymity; by virtue of its verbal status, the *Leitwort* refers immediately to meaning and thus to theme as well." Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 2011), 120, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>138</sup> Freedman, "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," 123.

## The Shepherd Motif Before the Prophets

The Bible reveals the diffusion of this common metaphor in the ancient Near East. This does not necessarily imply that writers of Scripture were borrowing from the nations around them; instead, Israel was advocating characteristics of their God in the context of a larger world that offered other options to the one true shepherd.<sup>139</sup> These ideas in the surrounding nations and within early Israel will springboard into the prophets' use of the shepherd metaphor and how they laid out their theology of God. The following will offer a picture of the metaphor prior to the prophets in the Old Testament.

The shepherd metaphor is abundant in the Bible. Lynn Anderson claims it is stated over 500 times in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>140</sup> There are highlights of shepherds from the beginning pages of the Old Testament. The earliest account is in Genesis 4:2; Abel is known as “keeper of the flocks.” And later, the chosen people by Yahweh—such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses—are identified in Scripture as tending flock. In Genesis 48:15, Jacob blesses Joseph in prayer and identifies Yahweh as his shepherd. He states, “the God who has been my shepherd all my life.” Bernard Aubert identifies possible early shepherd language in Exodus 15:13, 17.<sup>141</sup> He writes, “In the song of Moses, the verbs describe God as leading his people out of Egypt to the mountain, possibly alluding to the shepherd motif. Jewish

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<sup>139</sup> Arnold and Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East*, 13. Due to the attacks on the Old Testament borrowing the stories from the ancient Near East, it is important to note this study is stating that the metaphor was common among all the ancients. Therefore, the prophets' were not necessarily borrowing from their neighbors to be like them, but rather they were utilizing a common language.

<sup>140</sup> Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep* (Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing, 1997), 12, <https://archive.org/details/theysmelllikeshe0000ande/page/10/mode/2up>.

<sup>141</sup> The descriptions of Moses as a shepherd to the people of Israel through the Exodus are abundant with the words guiding, protecting, delivering, and gathering the scattered sheep. There are most likely more connections to be made with Moses; however, the concentration for this work is spotlighting the use of the shepherd language by the latter prophets. Therefore, the connections with Moses may not be as fleshed out as some readers desire.

interpretations of the exodus make these connections explicit.”<sup>142</sup> This pattern is developed in Psalms 80:1, where God is deemed “the Shepherd of Israel, who led Joseph.” In Psalms 77:20; 78:5-54, God leads the Israelites out of the Exodus; he is implicitly recognized as their Shepherd. The verses identifying God as the Shepherd of Israel connect the coherence of the shepherd narrative. In the Davidic shepherd tradition, “kings and gods alike were described repeatedly as shepherds because of their ruling positions; thus, kingship is rooted in the portrayal of rulership as typified in the figure of a shepherd. Likewise, to speak of YHWH particularly as a shepherd is to speak of YHWH’s kingship and kingdom.”<sup>143</sup> The Psalmist portrays Israel as his sheep: “God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?” (Ps 74:1) Repeatedly, Israel is described as God’s sheep: “So we, Your people and the sheep of Your pasture, Will give thanks to You forever; To all generations, we will tell of Your praise” (Ps 79:13).

The most thorough picture of Yahweh as the shepherd is in Psalm 23, where the Psalmist depicts Yahweh as “my shepherd.” This is quite meaningful. “Though metaphors are more than comparisons, they are not mysterious screens obscuring yet suggesting divine realities. For instance, when David calls the Lord ‘my Shepherd’ (Ps 23:1), he uses a metaphor readily understandable to his readers. It evokes more than the image of a king but communicates to the reader about God.”<sup>144</sup> These examples from early Israel provide insights into how the prophets

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<sup>142</sup> Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17-38) Against Its Historical Background*, 132.

<sup>143</sup> Young S Chae, “The Davidic Shepherd Tradition in the Old Testament,” in *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 21, [https://books.google.com/books?id=tliVZ-\\_MAOoC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=tliVZ-_MAOoC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>144</sup> Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17-38) Against Its Historical Background*, 19.

could have perceived Yahweh as a shepherd. The prophets acquired knowledge of God from the Pentateuch, laying the groundwork for applying the shepherd motif.

However, compared to the prophets, the shepherd motif almost seems absent from the historical books. According to Joel Willits, “it has been widely noted that the historians of ancient Israel, whose works are now a part of the biblical canon, avoided using the title “shepherd” both for the description of their patriarchs and their kings.”<sup>145</sup> The shepherd-king motif comes to light when used by King David in Psalm 23 and in the places regarding the exodus (77:20; 78:5-54). However, the shepherd is more broadly used in the prophets than in the Pentateuch or the Old Testament historical books. Willits writes, “In contrast with the historical books, the prophets are far less reluctant to use the shepherd imagery to describe their leaders.” It could have been due to the absence of poetry and imagery because the books had a different form. Regardless, the prophets would have been aware of the minor uses of the symbolism of the Shepherd of Israel associated with Yahweh. The Pentateuch shepherd language laid the groundwork for the imagery in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets.

### The Shepherd and Sheep

The shepherd motif does not provide an exhaustive symbol of God; however, it does enrich the theology of God. The reader will now observe some possible insights into the prophets’ understanding of the shepherd language in their milieu. Lawrence Porter writes, “If we are going to understand the meaning of this image in scripture and tradition, then we must know something about sheep and shepherding as it was practiced in biblical times, for the biblical

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<sup>145</sup> Joel Willits, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of “the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel”* (De Gruyter, Inc., 2007), 53, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=364702>.

image is based upon an intimate knowledge of the practices of shepherding.”<sup>146</sup> Thomas Golding further argues that a metaphor should first be understood at the literal level before identifying particulars of comparison derived from the metaphor.<sup>147</sup> He begins his analysis by stating, “The primary roles of a shepherd with his sheep were guiding, providing food and water, protecting and delivering, gathering scattered or lost sheep, and giving health and security.”<sup>148</sup> These are some of the characteristics that societies favored and desired for their leaders and kings. It is well known that sheep are dependent animals and need someone to help them locate food, water, and protection from wild animals. They tend to wander and become lost. It is not uncommon for a flock to scatter and separate from its shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd are prime targets for predators. There can easily be a sense of fear for the sheep. Porter describes sheep in this way:

The sheep is by nature a timid and defenseless animal; by that, I mean sheep have neither the speed nor the strength to protect themselves from predatory animals. Because of this, they are wary animals, easily frightened, and when frightened, they often react in ways that can be self-defeating. For example, at the approach of a predator, the sheep, if alone, often becomes petrified with fear, lays down, and shivers; if in a flock, sheep will readily scatter, or, worse, they may pile up against an obstruction causing some of them to smother.<sup>149</sup>

However, with the help of a good shepherd, the sheep can have a sense of peace. Sheep also have a good sense of the weather and seek shade in scorching conditions. Too, sheep can recognize green pastures and will readily look for food. The Israelites would have associated the protection

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<sup>146</sup> Lawrence B. Porter, “Sheep and Shepherd: An Ancient Image of the Church and a Contemporary Challenge,” *Gregorianum* 82, no. 1 (2001): 54.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas A. Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding, Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. January-March (2006): 21.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>149</sup> Porter, “Sheep and Shepherd: An Ancient Image of the Church and a Contemporary Challenge,” 55.

and provision of God with that of a good shepherd. The Pentateuch passages of Jacob and the Exodus depicts these images.

Good and bad shepherds existed in ancient history. Jonathan Huntzinger describes how all shepherds were viewed negatively due to dishonest shepherds. Bad shepherds were known to neglect the sheep, only care for themselves, and even embezzle money. Huntzinger writes generally of shepherds, “The stigma which was attached to shepherds was so offensive to civil and religious leadership that those who labored in such work possessed limited civil and religious rights. Shepherds were unable to serve as witnesses in legal proceedings because their testimony was regarded as untrustworthy.”<sup>150</sup> He claims that the biblical view of good and bad shepherds in the Bible accurately represents the shepherds’ day-to-day life during ancient times.

Shepherds were to keep the sheep well and care for their physical survival. They were expected to be strong and brave. Huntzinger states, “One of their primary responsibilities was to protect the sheep. They were expected to brave danger in defending the sheep from thieves and predatory animals. The wolf was especially feared for the threat it posed to the sheep, making it necessary for shepherds to carry weapons in the course of their work.”<sup>151</sup> Shepherds typically carried a rod and staff. The rod is a relatively short, club-like device used as a sheep counter and weapon. Golding states, “The basic meaning of the rod seems to be a club-like implement, wielded by a shepherd or king, implying either protection or discipline.”<sup>152</sup> The staff was longer and thinner, with a hook or crook at the end. The staff often aided in walking. The shepherd was

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<sup>150</sup> Jonathan David Huntzinger, “The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature” (Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 1999), 67. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304562288/78FF312D78634AEFPQ/1?accountid=12085>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>152</sup> Thomas A. Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. April-June (2006): 168.

also known to keep a leather bag carrying supplies and food on his journey. The shepherd also carried a sling with which to intimidate predators. The shepherd could easily make and carry this device; stones would have been effortless to find and use regularly. Of the sling, Golding writes, “a shepherd had time to master its use during the long hours spent alone with his sheep. And no matter where he went in the land, he could always find an unlimited supply of free and ready ‘ammunition.’”<sup>153</sup> These items demonstrate how shepherds protected and provided for the physical care of the sheep. Understanding the basic role of a shepherd in the ANE is beneficial when analyzing the shepherd motif in the prophets. The analysis of the shepherd language will prove to be valuable when examining the prophets.

## The Prophets’ Overview

### **The Role of the Prophet**

The role of the prophet is one called by God and given an oracle to deliver to the people. Abraham Herschel writes, “The prophet’s task is to convey a divine view, yet as a person, he is a point of view. He speaks from the perspective of God as perceived from the perspective of his own situation.”<sup>154</sup> The prophets of Yahweh were to align their message in light of the Mosaic Covenant. The prophets' message is often associated with a strong rebuke or bringing a word of hope to Israelites. But rarely do people discuss the prophets’ motif of the shepherd pertaining to the prophets’ theology. One way God reveals himself is through the prophets. J. Daniel Hays

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>154</sup> Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001) xxiii.

writes, “God reveals much about himself through the prophets. He is sovereign over all the world and in total control of history.”<sup>155</sup>

However, all prophets were not equally legitimate. Paul Redditt writes, “Prophets, like most other authorities, disagree at times, and those disagreements caused problems for the people of ancient Israel. In such cases, it would have been helpful to be able to distinguish true prophets from false.”<sup>156</sup> God provided criteria to determine the legitimate prophets. The Israelites’ Book of Law states that if the word of the prophet comes to pass, then the prophet would be considered legitimate (Deut 18:22). Though debates continue over some of the prophecies coming to pass in the messages of the prophets, that is not important to dissect for this research. However, it is necessary to recognize that both true and false prophets were identified in the Bible.

### **Time of the Prophets**

The major and minor prophets examined in this research expressed judgment and hope to the people of God. Daniel Hays attests that “The prophets lived in tumultuous times and spanned a period of about three hundred years, from around 750 BC to around 450 BC.”<sup>157</sup> Throughout the period of the major and minor prophets, the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians were in power successively. Before the Assyrian and Babylonian rule, Israel and Judah neglected the commands of God and participated in idolatry and syncretism. The Israelites were on the cusp of experiencing the fall of Jerusalem and entering a seventy-year Babylonian exile. Although they

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<sup>155</sup> J. Daniel Hays and Tremper Longman III, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2010), 23.

<sup>156</sup> Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 6.

<sup>157</sup> Hays and Longman III, *The Message of the Prophets*, 34.



will enter a time of exile, Yahweh declares through the prophets that he has not abandoned them and promises to return them to their homeland with the ruler Cyrus. The Israelites return to their land to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

### The Use of the Shepherd Motif in the Prophets

As previously mentioned, the shepherd metaphor emphasizes leadership and the fulfillment of eschatology. However, this work focuses on the theology of the prophets and what they were communicating about the character of God through the shepherd motif. The analysis will entail passages that will not only include the specific terms for “shepherd” or “shepherding” and will also examine passages where motifs and imagery associated with shepherding are employed. This section will first focus on the prophets and passages within their context.

The research focuses on four Hebrew words. The passage must contain one of the four words to receive attention; however, there is not enough space to cover all of them.<sup>158</sup> The Hebrew words are beneficial to identify and define. The main word רָעָה is transliterated *ra'ah*, which can mean “pasture, tend, graze, shepherd, pastor, ruler, teacher, shepherd, shepherdess or herdsman contingent on the context.”<sup>159</sup> The stem רעה is used one hundred and sixty-seven times in the Old Testament. The root form is a verb indicating the feeding and grazing of animals. When used symbolically, it referred to the actions of a shepherd feeding the people physical or spiritual nourishment. “In its participial form רֹעֶה, transliterated as *rō'eh*, it can mean shepherd”

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<sup>158</sup> Rudolph Kittle, *Biblia Hebraica* (Priv. württ: Stuttgartiae, 1937).

<sup>159</sup> F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 945.

since shepherds lead their flock to eat or graze.<sup>160</sup> In general, using the term רֹעֶה for *shepherd* implies caring, protecting, and feeding the flock like a shepherd or pastor. The word shepherd reflected how “rulers were described as demonstrating their legitimacy to rule by their ability to “pasture” their people.”<sup>161</sup> Both the verbal and nominal of the root form רָעָה can be found in the Hebrew Bible. When the placement for רָעָה is nominal, it describes the ruler or pastor. In the verbal phrase, the word describes what the ruler does, such as to pasture or feed. The shepherd concept is used in a literal and figurative sense. Understanding the literal and figurative language will develop a sense of responsibility to literal pastures or leading the people in righteousness, which will ultimately reflect on the character of God. The following chart provides a glimpse into several of the passages using different types of forms of רָעָה and its uses. It will be essential to recognize the shepherd (pastor, leader, god) and how he provides (to feed) for his people later in the shepherd motif passages of the prophets.

	Passage	Form of Word רעה	Meaning – to graze, feed, pasture, shepherd	Usage
1.	Isaiah 13:20	רָעִים	<i>A shepherd is tending his flock.</i>	Participle, plural
2.	Isaiah 40:11	כְּרֹעֶה	God, the <i>shepherd</i> , is caring for his flock.	Preposition and participle
3.	Isaiah 44:28	רָעִי	Cyrus, the <i>undershepherd</i> leading the Israelites.	Participle with suffix
4.	Isaiah 49:9	יִרְעֶוּ	The sheep will <i>feed</i> along the roads.	Verb, Imperfect, third person
5.	Isaiah 56:11	רָעִים	Bad <i>shepherds</i> are going their own way.	Participle, plural
6.	Isaiah 63:11	רָעִי	Moses, the <i>undershepherd</i> , is leading the flock.	Participle, plural
7.	Isaiah 65:25	יִרְעֶוּ	The wolf and the lamb will <i>graze</i> together.	Verb, imperfect, third person

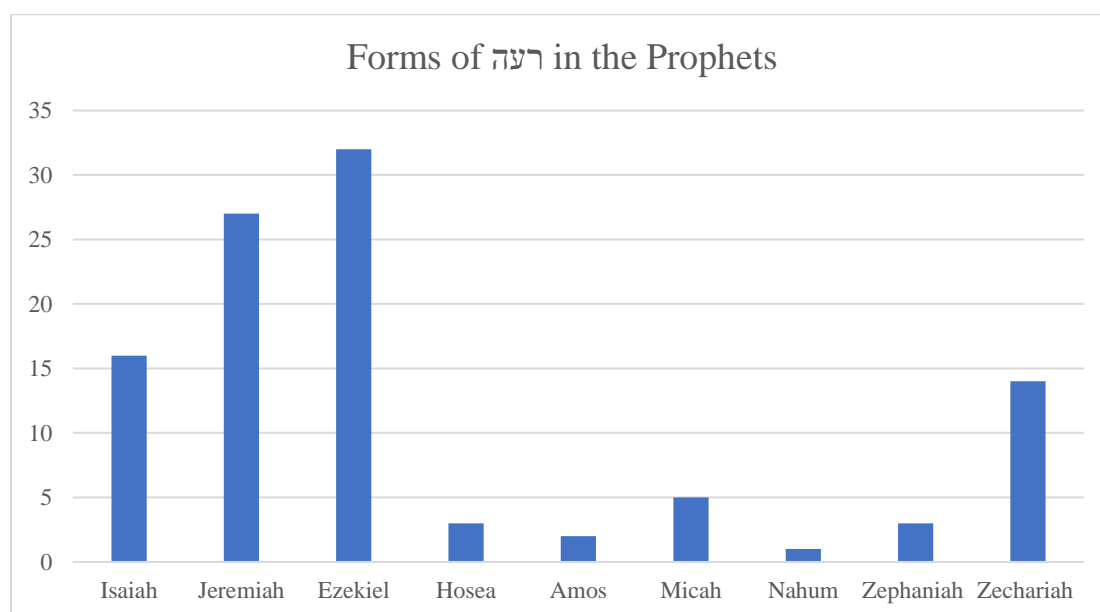
<sup>160</sup> L. Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Electronic Ed.: Logos, 1994-2000), 1248.

<sup>161</sup> Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 853.

8.	Jeremiah 3:15	רָעִים	The <i>undershepherds</i> are providing knowledge and understanding.	Participle, plural
9.	Jeremiah 10:21	הָרָעִים	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are scattering their flock.	Article, participle, plural
10.	Jeremiah 12:10	רָעִים	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are ruining the quality of the flock.	Participle, plural
11.	Jeremiah 22:22	כָּל־רָעִיךָ	God is driving out bad <i>shepherds</i> .	Participle, plural, second person
12.	Jeremiah 23:1	רָעִים	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are causing the sheep to perish.	Participle, plural
13.	Jeremiah 25:34	הָרָעִים	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are crying out under judgment.	Article and participle, plural
14.	Jeremiah 31:10	בָּרָעָה	God as a <i>shepherd</i> keeping the flock.	Preposition and participle, singular
15.	Jeremiah 33:12	רָעִים	The <i>undershepherds</i> resting their flock.	Participle, plural
16.	Jeremiah 43:12	הָרָעָה	A <i>shepherd</i> is wrapping his garment around him.	Article and participle, singular
17.	Jeremiah 49:19	רָעָה	Bad <i>undershepherd</i> leading the nations.	Participle, singular
18.	Jeremiah 50:6	רָעִיָּהֶם	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are leading people astray.	Participle, plural
19.	Jeremiah 50:19	וְרָעָה	Israel <i>grazing</i> on Carmel and Bashan.	Conjunction and perfect, third person
20.	Jeremiah 50:44	רָעָה	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are leading the nations.	Participle, singular
21.	Ezekiel 34:2	לְרָעִים	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> prophesying falsely.	Prepositional participle, plural
22.	Ezekiel 34:7	רָעִים	God's commanding the bad <i>undershepherds</i> to listen.	Participle plural
23.	Ezekiel 34:12	רָעָה	A good <i>shepherd</i> is caring for the sheep.	Participle, singular
24.	Ezekiel 34:18	הַמְרָעָה	Bad undershepherds are <i>feeding</i> on others' weaknesses.	Article and noun, singular
25.	Ezekiel 37:24	רוֹעָה	One <i>shepherd</i> is ruling over the nation.	Participle, singular
26.	Hosea 4:16	יֹרֵעַ	Rebellious Israel <i>feeding</i> in a pasture.	Imperfect, third person, singular
27.	Amos 3:12	הָרָעָה	A <i>shepherd</i> is revealing proof of an animal attack.	Article and participle, singular
28.	Micah 5:4	רָעִים	A good <i>undershepherd</i> rises to lead the flock.	Participle

29.	Micah 7:14	רָעָה	God is <i>shepherding</i> his people.	Imperative, second person singular
30.	Nahum 3:18	רָעִיף	Bad <i>undershepherds</i> are neglecting the flock.	Participle, plural, construct, second person
31.	Zechariah 11:15	רָעָה	A foolish <i>undershepherd</i> is dishonoring God.	Participle, singular
32.	Zechariah 13:7	עַל־הַצֹּעֲרִים	A <i>shepherd</i> scattering the flock.	Prepositional, participle

The following chart provides a glance at *ra'ah* in the Prophets for this research.



Although רָעָה is the initial stem to locate the shepherd language, the following words are also significant in the symbolism of the shepherd language. The word לָבָד refers to “lamb, lambs as grazing.”<sup>162</sup> The word צֹאן means “small cattle, sheep, goat, goats, flock and flocks. Metaphorically it refers to a collective group of people.”<sup>163</sup> The root word קָבַץ is “gather,” meaning assemble or collect the people. The root word פָּרַץ is translated as “scatter,” meaning to

<sup>162</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 461.

<sup>163</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 993. HALOT is used for the following Hebrew words and charts unless otherwise noted.

disperse. The root word רבץ, which is to “lie down,” indicates resting safely. The word נהל means to guide. These words are often in light of the people being cared for or neglected by the shepherds. These words have been used to identify passages representing the shepherd metaphor. The following is a chart demonstrating the repetition patterns throughout the prophets.

Passage	Hebrew Word	Definition
<b>Feed/Graze/Pasture</b> Isa 49:9 (Feed) Jer 3:15-17 Eze 34:2 Zeph 3:12-13 Isa 49:9 (Pasture) Jer 23:1-4 Jer 25:34-36 Jer 33:12 Jer 49:19-21 Jer 50:17-19 Jer 50:44-46 Hosea 4:16 Micah 2:12 Zeph 2:6-7 Zech 11:4 Isa 65:25 (Graze) Zeph 2:6-7	רעה ( <i>ra'ah</i> )	To feed, to tend, to shepherd  *only passages that directly relate to feeding, grazing, or pastures are included in this chart. See connections with shepherding on the previous chart.
<b>Flock</b> Jer 25:34-36 Jer 49:19-21 Jer 50:44-46 Eze 34:12 Micah 2:12 Micah 7:14 Zeph 2:6-7 Zech 9:16-17 Zech 11:4	צֹאן ( <i>son</i> )	Referring to several sheep
<b>Gather</b> Isa 40:11 Jer 23:1-4 Jer 31:10 Micah 2:12 Nahum 3:18-19 Zeph 3:19-20	קבץ ( <i>qbs</i> )	Assemble or collect the people,
<b>Scattered</b> Jer 10:21 Jer 23:1-4 Jer 31:10 Jer 50:17-19 Eze 34:12 Micah 4:6-8 Nahum 3:18-19 Zeph 3:19-20	פּוּץ ( <i>pws</i> )	Dispersed
<b>Lie Down</b>	רביץ ( <i>rbs</i> )	Rest in safety

Isa 13:20 Isa 11:6-9 Eze 34:11-16 Zeph 2:6-7 Zeph 3:12-13		
<b>Guide</b> Isa 40:11 Isa 11:6-9 Isa 49:9	נהל ( <i>nhl</i> )	To guide or move along

These Hebrew words will be recognized and connected to the shepherd motif throughout the prophets. The reader will recognize the prophets observed Yahweh as the measurement of a good shepherd leading his sheep to pastures, where the sheep lie down feeling secure and protected.

The leaders of Israel fall into the categories of kings, priests, and prophets, and they are also depicted as undershepherds. They were to instruct the Israelites in the Law of God and emulate his characteristics. It was the Lord who was anointing these undershepherds, and the idea is observed in 2 Samuel 5:1-3:

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, ‘Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’

Throughout the books of the prophets, the reader will observe that not all the undershepherds followed the heart of Yahweh but instead became bad shepherds leading the people astray. The shepherd language images will disclose the heart of God, reflecting his character.

## Isaiah

### Context of Isaiah

A popular verse of Isaiah immediately brings the shepherd motif to light. The author writes, “All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all to fall on Him” (Isa 53:5). The book of Isaiah includes fourteen additional references to the shepherd motif; therefore, it will be significant to assess these patterns of the shepherd and sheep language.

Before diving into a direct study of the passages containing the shepherd patterns, it would benefit the reader to understand the setting of Isaiah. Smith attests, “reading Isaiah’s messages in isolation from its historical context is comparable to overhearing a person talk on the phone without knowing who is on the other end of the line and what their situation is.”<sup>164</sup> He espouses the importance of analyzing the text in light of the historical background. The first half of the book of Isaiah mostly speaks to the Israelites' broken covenant with God and the judgment to come. In the second half, the author offers the future hope and restoration that will one day come to the people of Israel. The shepherd motif is only referenced twice in Chapters 1-39, but it is referenced six times in Chapters 40-66.

Regarding authorship, the chapters are highly debated. Some conservative scholars hold to an eighth-century date with Isaiah as the author, stating that the chapters predict what will come. Whether the book had one or two authors, most scholars attest to unity in themes, even though the unity may be based on redaction.

The opening passage of Isaiah introduces the period of his prophecies. Isaiah prophesied for more than sixty years during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of

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<sup>164</sup> Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 25.



Judah (Isaiah 1:1). The book of Isaiah is a proclamation given from God to the Israelites in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. Smith suggests the period is the reign of Uzziah due to references in chapter 2 referring to the strong military and wealth.<sup>165</sup> The people became self-reliant, abandoning God because of the prosperity of the time. Isaiah condemns the presence of idols and social oppression during the reign of Uzziah because he had left the high places up. At the same time, Uzziah attempted to usurp the priests of the temple and burn incense, leaving him contracting leprosy as a consequence. From then on, his son Jotham became a coregent and ruled the country with him.

Further disobedience of the Israelites included King Ahaz initiating the building of high places of Baal in Jerusalem and burning sacrifices to the gods. The alliance between Judah and Assyria mitigated the immediate threat to Judah, but the Assyrians had risen to power. Ahaz continued to lead the people away from God. During the tumultuous time of Judah, Samaria remained under attack. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser V destroyed Samaria. Shortly after (the records are not clear), Sargon II became king and took control of Samaria, the capital city of Israel, in 722 BC.

After the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah became king of Judah and sought to turn the people back to God. His initial thoughts were to protect the people by allying with Egypt and Cush; however, he realized his need to trust God. Nevertheless, shortly after trusting Yahweh, he reverted to allying with Babylon. The ministry of Isaiah most likely ends under Hezekiah and his son, Manasseh, as coregents.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 26.

## Shepherd Images

In the book of Isaiah, the shepherd language describes the results of people living in opposition to the commands of God. The prophet offers a concrete picture of God utilizing the shepherd language, stating that God is like a shepherd who gathers, carries, and leads his people. This affectionate picture displays personal care for his people. It demonstrates concern for the welfare of his people in exile. Because Yahweh is sovereign, he is able to lead his people out of exile, even using a non-Israelite king. Yahweh leads the people who have gone astray just as he led Moses and his people out of Egypt. The closing chapters of Isaiah portray the wolf and the lamb lying together on the holy mountain of God. The shepherd language reveals contributions to the character of God, sometimes through the explicit description and other times through comparison and contrasting ideas. The following is a brief observation of the focal passages utilizing shepherd language that uncovers the judgment of God, the caregiving of God, the delegation of God, and the redemption of God.

### Judgment of God

1. Isaiah 13:14 – People are a portrayal of sheep.  
Judgment has come, and there is no protection for the people.
2. Isaiah 13:20 –

### Caregiving of God

1. Isaiah 40:11 – God is a shepherd.  
God is like a shepherd who will care for his people.
2. Isaiah 63:11 – God, as the shepherd, leads them out of Egypt.  
The God who led the people out of the Exodus

### Delegation of God

1. Isaiah 44:28 – Cyrus is an undershepherd.  
God will utilize a non-Israelite undershepherd.
2. Isaiah 56:10-11 – People are watchmen (undershepherds).  
The undershepherds failed in their job of leading the people.

### Redemption of God

1. Isaiah 49:9 – People as sheep grazing  
God is sending a new shepherd to lead and guide the people
2. Isaiah 65:25 – People who will follow God as the lamb.  
There will be a holy mountain, and the wolf and the lamb will lie together.

## Judgment and Justice of God

Isaiah 13:14 and 13:20

The oracles in chapters 13 through 23 regard the destruction of several nations for their wrongful behaviors. God can wield judgment on the nations because he is the ruler of all and will deliver proper judgment on irresponsible leaders and nations. John Oswalt refers to God as the master of the nations, and his hand will overthrow national arrogance.<sup>166</sup>

In Isaiah 13, the author reveals Yahweh's plan for the nations. Isaiah is presenting an oracle concerning Babylon. Chapter 13 reflects the Babylonian period. John Watts contends, "The Medean overthrow of Babylon (Isa 13:13–20) would bring that system to an end."<sup>167</sup> Isaiah 13:14 is embedded in this section, proclaiming an eschatological look at "the day of the Lord." It describes the environment that is to come for the people. Isaiah utilizes the metaphor of the shepherd to reveal the judgment to come. The author writes in Isaiah 13:14:

And it will be that, like a hunted gazelle,  
Or like sheep with no one to gather them,  
Each of them will turn to his own people,  
And each of them will flee to his own land.

The people are dispersed because they lack a shepherd due to the judgment upon them. Peril and devastation surround them. In this instance, the shepherd reflecting a leader, will not be able to "gather" and care for the sheep because they are under judgment. "Gather" in the Hebrew קבץ meaning assembling the people or bringing them together, will be a reoccurring word in the shepherd motif. The sheep will be scattered, left to the vulnerabilities of predators and being

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<sup>166</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (ProQuest Ebook Central: Eerdmans Publishing, n.d.), 17f, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4860142>.

<sup>167</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, Revised. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 824.

captured or killed. The people will flee to one another, hoping for help, but they will find none. The judgment on Babylon has left the people in disarray.

In verses 17-22, Brevard Childs writes, “The claims of Babylon— its splendor, glory, and pride— are exposed as false. In full confidence, long before its demise is revealed for all to see, the prophet pronounces the imminent end of the oppressor.”<sup>168</sup> In Isaiah 13:20, the author furthers this idea by using the symbol of shepherds:

It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation;  
Nor will the Arab pitch his tent there, Nor will shepherds allow their flocks  
to lie down there.

The idea that the “flocks” will not “lie down” implies that safety and security no longer exist for the sheep. “Lie down” in Hebrew is רבץ meaning to rest. There is a reoccurrence of the words “lie down” regarding sheep in the motif. Sheep will not lie down unless they sense safety and security. The people of Babylon once rested in their military and power, but Isaiah is communicating that God can bring judgment on Babylon, and judgment will be imminent. Of the description from Isaiah, John Watts writes, “Babylon, whose very name conjures memories of glory and majesty, has become a symbol of destruction.”<sup>169</sup> The theology of the prophets continues to emerge in this shepherd language, revealing that God is over all things.

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<sup>168</sup> Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 125.

<sup>169</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, 254.

## Caregiving of God

Isaiah 40:11, 49:9 and 63:11

In chapters 40-66, the Israelites encounter challenges, such as the scattering of people in exile and Jerusalem lying in shambles. However, along with announcing woe oracles to Judah and Israel, the author begins to announce a message of hope.

Watts contends that chapters 40-54 are rich theological mines worth excavating repeatedly.<sup>170</sup> Watts titles his section for chapters 40-44, “Good News for Jerusalem.”<sup>171</sup> The prophet turns to a message of hope for the people. Yahweh is represented as a strong shepherd ruling and tending to his people. The shepherd image in Isaiah 40:11 sets within the beginning chapters a time of restoration. It states:

Behold, the Lord God will come with might,  
With His arm ruling for Him.  
Behold, His reward is with Him  
And His recompense before Him.  
Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,  
In His arm He will gather the lambs  
And carry them in His bosom;  
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

The full thrust of the message emerges in light of the return of God. Chapter 40 expresses an urgent call to go to Jerusalem and tell the Israelites Yahweh will be coming soon with might. Brevard Childs contends that verses 1-8 serve as a prologue and even goes so far as to put forth the much-debated claim that verses 9-11 are part of the prologue, serving as the climax. In addition, Childs argues for an intertextual reading to account for the influence of Isaiah 35:3-4. God is coming, and he will strengthen the weakened heart. Childs writes, “The message of the

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<sup>170</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 71.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

prologue is that, although the prophetic judgment has been fulfilled, Isaiah's word of future salvation is now about to be accomplished in the new things."<sup>172</sup> God is coming to save with reward and payback. The emphasis is on God arriving with salvation, which will be a new era of joy. His strength manifests as he leads his flock like a shepherd, carrying the weak in his arms.

John Watts et al. and Childs agree that the Isaiah 40:1-11 passage appears to be a prologue. He points out that "four times 'your God' / 'our God' appears, paralleled by six appearances of 'YHWH.' Especially v 9-10 'See! Your God! See! The Lord YHWH!'—emphasize the identification of the two titles."<sup>173</sup> The prophet urges people to look upon Yahweh because he is coming to tend to his people like a shepherd. The reader recognizes that the caregiving God is coming through the language of the shepherd metaphor.

The phrase "like a shepherd" in this passage derives from the Hebrew root word רעה. The word כְּרֹעֶה has the preposition *as* or *like* connected to it, which could mean similar to something. In this metaphorical sense, this idea attests to the care and comfort of the shepherd to his sheep. God is up close and personal, carrying them in his arms. Childs and Watts agree that God is *like* in qualities to a shepherd caring for his sheep. The prophet conveys God as coming for his people. The repeating idea of the shepherd "gathering them" reflects that the shepherd protects them from predators. God is יִקְבֹּץ, meaning "gathering" and making his people feel safe again. "Gathering" is a typical pattern throughout the shepherd language that signifies the sheep are watched over and protected by the shepherd. The clause "he will tend" is also based on the root word רעה in Hebrew. It is written in the Qal, imperfect form meaning the future tense of what will happen. The shepherd will "tend" or "pasture" his sheep, meaning he will provide for them.

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<sup>172</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 295.

<sup>173</sup> Watts et al., *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah*, 607.

Alec Motyer explains further the care of God demonstrated in this passage by stating, “Towards his people it is a power working by love: the care that tends, the gentleness that makes provision for the weak (the lambs) and that caters for particular needs (those that have young). This seems to be a contrast between the ‘ruling arm’ of 10 b and the gathering ‘arm’ of 11 b.”<sup>174</sup> But it is not. Instead, these particular actions display the characteristics of a good royal leader. The terms “carry them” from the Hebrew root נשא meaning to lift, reflects the personal affection Yahweh extends to his sheep. The root of “lead” in Hebrew is נהל meaning to guide. He will “lead” those with the young. The verb “lead” echoes Psalm 23 which uses the same root word, “he leads me beside still waters and he guides me in paths of righteousness.”

The picture presented by the prophets of Yahweh indicates that God has not forgotten his people and cares for them like a shepherd. This passage develops a broader view of God exhibiting the hope, care, and compassion he directs toward his people. Watts et al. attest, “the return of God promises pastoral, royal concern and care for all of them, particularly for the weak and needy, ‘his bosom,’ refers to the fold of the shepherd’s robe, which can be a natural pocket to shelter a lamb.”<sup>175</sup>

The language of Chapter 49 is of deliverance from captivity. It speaks of a servant that is the “chosen one” by the Lord. In Alec Motyer’s analysis, he titles Isaiah chapters 49-55 “The Greater Deliverance: The Work of the Servant.”<sup>176</sup> The portion of scripture spotlights a servant who is going to deliver the people of Israel. Watts et al. write, “These passages portray YHWH doing damage control in the wake of the crises. He sends the servant to restore Israel, who is not

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<sup>174</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 277, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=2030121>.

<sup>175</sup> Watts et al., *Isaiah 34-66*, 612.

<sup>176</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 348.

cooperating (49:5– 6). He approves the unexpected new ruler (49:7– 8; 52:13– 15).”<sup>177</sup> This is Yahweh’s ruler as is noted in the preceding verse 49:3 where he is called his “servant.” God works through this ruler, reflecting a compassionate ruler who will lead the people to water springs. The image is the care of the Lord for his people. The shepherd language occurs in Isaiah 49:9:

Saying to those who are bound, ‘Go forth,’  
To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves.’  
Along the roads they will feed,  
And their pasture will be on all bare heights.  
“They will not hunger or thirst,  
Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down;  
For He who has compassion on them will lead them  
And will guide them to springs of water.

This shepherd motif sits within the chapters of the restoration of the Israelites. God is leading the Israelites out of captivity through this servant laid out in further chapters. The author uses imagery to describe the servant and how God will be reconciled with his people. John Oswalt writes, “In particular, the Servant’s task is to be a representative of God’s ‘covenant’ to his people. Like a new Joshua, he will settle the people in a land of freedom and abundance, where the God of “compassion” will tend them as a shepherd tends his flock (Isa. 49:8– 11).”<sup>178</sup>

The prophet writes, “to those who are bound,” Yahweh says, “go forth.” He is setting them free. The root word is אָסַר “the word describes tying up or binding animals”<sup>179</sup> The words “they will feed” is again the root word of רָעָה; feed, graze, and drive out to pasture are all part of the shepherd imagery. The language represents that the people of Israel will be cared for: just as

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<sup>177</sup> Watts et al., *ProQuest Ebook Central*, 731.

<sup>178</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 466, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4860094>.

<sup>179</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 993.



sheep, they are “led” and “guided to springs of water.” This servant embodies Yahweh, who will lead the people as the shepherd leads. Laniak provides a description emphasizing how the shepherd leads with the sound of his voice. He writes, “One of the most striking characteristics of the shepherd-flock relationship is that control over the flock is exercised simply by the sound of the shepherd’s voice or whistle (John 10:3; Judg. 5:16; Zech. 10:8). Only a special bond between animal and human can explain this responsiveness.”<sup>180</sup> The imagery indicates not only that the people will be provided for but also that they will be led with a gentle hand. The shepherd will have pity or compassion on the people. Oswalt notes, “It is significant that the attribute of God to which the OT returns, again and again, is his compassion: his tenderness and his ability to be touched by the pain and grief of his people. His transcendence and almighty power are never forgotten, but it is his compassion to which they return with wonder again and again.”<sup>181</sup> He will nourish them so they will not be overtaken by the heat and scorched by the sun. God is a compassionate provider that will lead his people home to safety.

In chapter 63, God conveys to the Israelites that he alone can defeat all foes, and only when he intervenes will the people receive the salvation needed. In verse 11, the author reminds the people of what God did in the Exodus. He writes:

Then His people remembered the days of old, of Moses.  
Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His  
flock?

Childs observes, “The bridge back to God’s mercy is formed in v. 11 with the appeal to the memory of God’s former acts of intervention on Israel’s behalf in the traditions of the exodus. The plural object of the verse, ‘the shepherds of his flock,’ remains somewhat unclear, but from

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<sup>180</sup> Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, 57.

<sup>181</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 43.

the larger context probably relates to Moses and Aaron.”<sup>182</sup> The shepherds Moses and Aaron would be considered the undershepherds of Yahweh that led the “flock,” referring to the nation of Israel out of the Exodus. The prophet utilizes the language of the shepherd in reflecting on the miraculous work of God in the Exodus. Oswalt outlines that Yahweh is reminding the people, “Although he would have been justified in wiping them off the face of the earth in response to their repeated breaking of the covenant, he did not do so. This idea is implicit in 63:11.”<sup>183</sup> The prophet reminds Israel of the character of God through the Exodus language, indicating that through the hand of Yahweh, he provided shepherds to lead them out. The shepherds oversaw the people, leading them out of slavery and bondage. In this context, verse 7 describes God as having compassion and loving kindness toward his people, Israel. The reflection passage of verse 11 describes God has continuing patience with them and appoints people as shepherds to lead them out of exile.

### **Undershepherds of God**

Isaiah 44:28; 53:6-7 and 56:10-11

The undershepherds in this section cover three distinct leaders, including King Cyrus, a shepherd under the tutelage of Yahweh, and bad shepherds that led the people astray.<sup>184</sup> The uniqueness of these shepherds reveals the sovereignty of God over all the undershepherds, not

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<sup>182</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 524.

<sup>183</sup> John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), 566, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5397443>.

<sup>184</sup> When King Cyrus took control of Babylon, he was expected to portray himself as the chosen by Marduk. This is reflected in the *Cyrus Cylinder*. Yet, Yahweh used Cyrus even though he associated the victory with Marduk. God seems to use human agents for his plans and purpose regardless of their allegiance. His plan was to free the Israelites from captivity, and he utilized the human shepherd leader king Cyrus to fulfill it.

just the nation of Israel. In addition, these three passages provide insights into the character of Yahweh in how he cares and provides for his people.

In Isaiah 44, the prophet expresses hope amid uncertainty. The restoration of Israel is coming, and God will use an unlikely instrument to fulfill his plan. In Isaiah 44:28, Cyrus the shepherd is introduced:

It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd!  
And he will perform all My desire.'  
And the declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,'  
And of the temple, your foundation will be laid.

As the Israelites have spent the previous chapters doubting the presence of God in Israel and inquiring about the defeat of the Babylonians, the prophet now not only attests that God is with Israel but also affirms that he is in control of the Babylonian conquest. He will restore his people and overthrow Babylon with Persia by using Cyrus. Childs claims, "The unit 44:24– 45:25 begins a new section of the prophetic message within chapters 40— 48. It announces Yahweh's sending of Cyrus to break the power of Babylon and redeem Israel, God's chosen, from captivity."<sup>185</sup> The prophet identifies Cyrus as a shepherd of Yahweh. This king is not only fulfilling the work of God, but he identifies him as a shepherd. Childs further states that this section is the climax of chapters 40-48. It calls Cyrus to conquer Babylon and shows that God is sovereign over the world. When observing the text in its final form, Childs contends, "there is a strong continuity of themes focusing on the creative power of Yahweh, his will in calling Cyrus to liberate captive Israel, and the futility of the enemy to resist the divine will. The power of God becomes a concrete picture through his shepherd Cyrus. In addition, there are linguistic ties linking the creative power of God (44:24; 45:11– 12, 18), the commissioning of Cyrus to rebuild

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<sup>185</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 349.

Jerusalem (44:28; 45:13), and the claims of Yahweh’s exclusivity (45:6, 14, 21– 24).”<sup>186</sup> The Hebrew root word יָצַר located in 44:24 and 45:18 has ties to the creative power of God, it means “to create or form by God.”<sup>187</sup> Oswalt concurs that this verse emphasizes that God made all things, not just Israel.<sup>188</sup> The prophet identifies God as the creator of all things, including Cyrus. The word בָּנָה in 44:28 and 45:13 means “to build especially of a temple,” correlating “to the temple of Yahweh.”<sup>189</sup> These patterns that Childs detects unify the theme of the overall power of God at work. The idea of the undershepherd Cyrus liberating the captives of Israel is consistent with Yahweh, in light of the Exodus, setting the captive free. Cyrus is performing all that Yahweh “desires.”

Though the prophet uses a thematic element of the shepherd that is common to the day, this is a unique instance since Cyrus is not a known follower of Yahweh. Now, the prophet argues that God is even using leaders not part of the Israel community. As an undershepherd of Yahweh, Cyrus will free the people of Israel from the oppression of the Babylonians. John Watts points out that Cyrus will execute the deliverance and rebuilding of Israel for Yahweh. He writes, “succeeding scenes interpret his role in restoring Jerusalem, building the temple, and freeing the captives. The prophet urges Israel to accept Yahweh’s arrangements and insists that Israel has not been displaced as Yahweh’s people because they now have a limited role.”<sup>190</sup> The scene reveals that the sovereignty of God is unmatched by any other god, and he rules over the

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 350.

<sup>187</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>188</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, cli.

<sup>189</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

<sup>190</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah*, 702.

national leader. Childs endorses Yahweh's power and the commissioning of Cyrus to fulfill the plans of God. The prophet explicitly states in the surrounding verses, "This is what the Lord says" (44:24), "I am the Lord who has made all things" (44:24). God is the one who "foils the signs" and "carries out the words of his servants" (44:25). He will restore his people. The prophet indicates the possession of the shepherd through the pronoun "My." According to Watts, the emphasis of the shepherd is on *my*. He expresses, "Cyrus is Yahweh's protégé who will *fulfill* his *pleasure*. The words are important: מִלֵּא "fulfill" is the verb from which "peace" come. נִפְּלָא "pleasure" is used to express Yahweh's will."<sup>191</sup> The author of Isaiah distinguishes Yahweh as the one who is fulfilling his plans through his shepherd Cyrus. This portrait by the prophet of the shepherd demonstrates that even though the ultimate and sovereign shepherd is God (40:11), he has undershepherds that he uses to fulfill his plans. The actions of God to save his people through Cyrus reflect his sovereignty and care for his people.

Childs recognizes Isaiah 53 as one of the most controversial chapters. He hears the chapter within its context but also relates the chapter to the whole of the canon.<sup>192</sup> Isaiah 53 interconnects with the suffering servant in Chapters 49; 50:6-8 and 53:3-8 which seems to infer a union between Chapters 49-55. Watts claims 52:13-57:21 consists of the restoration pains in Jerusalem.<sup>193</sup> Oswalt places this passage amid five stanzas, including the surrounding chapters, and declares that God is bringing justice through this servant.<sup>194</sup> Isaiah is making clear that the "arm of the LORD" will save his people through this servant that carries the burden of the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>192</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 410.

<sup>193</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, 222.

<sup>194</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 497.

people's iniquity, revealing their deviation from God. The context surrounding the shepherd imagery in Isaiah 53 is identified as the Servant song. Oswalt begins the literary structure in Chapter 52. The introduction of the song starts in 52:13-15, the rejection of the servant forms in 53:1-2, the servant carrying of the sins of the people forms in (53:4-6), and the result of carrying the sins results in atonement for the people in 53:7-9.<sup>195</sup> Yahweh is fulfilling his promise to save his people by sending the servant. The aim of analyzing the passage is not to provide solutions to whom the servant could be or why God chose the servant. Instead, it assesses how the author of Isaiah employs the shepherd motif to communicate and contribute to their theology.

The shepherd imagery emerges to describe the character of the people and their iniquity. It implies that Yahweh desires the righteousness of his people because he is righteous. Isaiah 53:6-9:

All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to his own way;  
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all  
To fall on Him.  
He was oppressed and afflicted,  
Yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth.

The sheep have “gone astray” in Hebrew תעה, meaning they have wandered away of their own accord. They have left the shepherd. The prophet contends that the people are responsible for their iniquity and have deviated from God. However, he had not forgotten them. Although the people lacked integrity and faithfulness to God, he remained faithful. The language exposes their sin, and the context displays his faithfulness because he sends salvation to his people (53:11).

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

Here the servant, the undershepherd, identifies with the pain of the people. He is “oppressed and afflicted.” He is one of them and becomes a sacrifice for the people, but unlike the unfaithful Israelites, this servant is faithful to Yahweh. Salvation is delivered through the image of a “lamb that is led to slaughter.” He is a lamb without resistance and lays down his life willingly. The solution for the iniquity of the people comes from the hand of God, who sent his servant, the lamb, to bear the sin of the people. Childs writes:

It was for “our sins” he was tortured; it was for “our iniquities” he was bruised. “The punishment that brought us peace was on him” and “by his wounds we are healed.” Second, it was God’s will and purpose that the servant was dealt this affliction. Not only did God allow it (the passive voice softens the theological tension), but God is understood as the active agent of his suffering: He was “smitten by God and afflicted” (v. 4); “Yahweh laid on him the guilt of us all” (v. 6). What occurred was not some unfortunate tragedy of human history but actually formed the center of the divine plan for the redemption of his people and indeed of the world.<sup>196</sup>

He was sending a servant that would take their punishment. God knows the sins of the people, and he can make restitution for their restoration. God is the shepherd who led his lamb to take away the iniquity of the sheep. The servant was metaphorically the perfect lamb because there “was no deceit in his mouth” (Isa 53:9). God is the one who sends restoration through this servant, which ultimately reflects his character to restore the sheep that have gone astray. He is reflective of a redeeming shepherd.

Now turning to the Israelite undershepherds of God who should display virtuous character, yet they are worthless shepherds. God desires their character to reflect his integrity as a good shepherd. The undershepherds of Israel were to instruct the people in the covenant laws that promoted righteous living. Oswalt contends that Isaiah 56-66 addresses the expected

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<sup>196</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 415.

righteous living among the people of God.<sup>197</sup> The leaders ignored the righteous path of the Mosaic Law to fulfill their greedy desires. Watts et al. attest, “The scene (56:10-11) takes serious note of those who are not “meek and mild,” who seek their own salvation by constant agitation and terror against the empire and by pagan practices that offend YHWH.”<sup>198</sup> A return from captivity will not ensure automatic righteousness in the leaders. The prophet reveals that useless leaders lack promoting the truth of God to the people.

The shepherd imagery in chapter 56:10-11 exposes the shepherds’ incompetence in leading the people in righteousness because they are self-seeking shepherds. Yet, God is the opposite of these shepherds (Isa 40:11). Isaiah 56:10-11 states:

His watchmen are blind,  
All of them know nothing.  
All of them are mute dogs unable to bark,  
Dreamers lying down, who love to slumber;  
And the dogs are greedy, they are not satisfied.  
And they are shepherds who have no understanding;  
They have all turned to their own way,  
Each one to his unjust gain, to the last one.

This chapter section is titled by Watts “The Dark Side of Jerusalem.”<sup>199</sup> He writes, “The optimistic tone of chaps. 54-55 has been shattered by the cynical taunts of 56:9-12. This scene takes serious note of those who are not ‘meek and mild,’ who seek their own salvation by constant agitation and terror against the empire and by pagan practices that offend Yahweh.”<sup>200</sup> Oswalt describes the picture of the shepherds as a portrait of fallen leadership. He writes, “They are stupid ‘shepherds,’ who are only interested in caring for themselves and have no concern for

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<sup>197</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 516.

<sup>198</sup> Watts et al., *ProQuest Ebook Central*, 350.

<sup>199</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, 251.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.



the flock. Clearly, this is the leadership of the nation, and with what follows, they are the religious leaders. The nation is in a desperate spiritual condition, and the leaders do not care.”<sup>201</sup> Childs provides a similar report, writing of the shepherds: “they are stupid and without sense. Verses 10 and 12 describe them as sleepy and lazy, thinking only of strong drink. This behavior thus allows the real enemies of Israel to indulge their insatiable appetite.”<sup>202</sup> These undershepherds do not care about Yahweh or the people. Motyer goes as far as saying this type of leadership reveals the cardinal sin of the shepherds. In examining the passage, he claims that “Isaiah puts his finger on the cardinal sin of the ruler: insatiable self-concern. It would be laughable were it not tragic to read side by side watchmen and blind, dogs and mute. They are unqualified (*knowledge*), unmotivated (*lie around*), insatiable (*never enough*), undiscerning (understanding, the ability to see to the heart of a thing).”<sup>203</sup> These bogus leaders allow the outside enemy to enter and devour the people because they do not care for them.

The fact that God is identifying and speaking of the bad shepherds' wretched behavior implies that God is omnipresent. The behavior of selfish shepherds starkly contrasts the shepherd in Isaiah 40:11, imagery where the shepherd will tend his sheep. God desires faithful leaders because he is faithful. In chapter 56, the prophet expresses prevalent wickedness; further, he writes in chapter 57 that there will be peace for righteous people. This passage extends the idea that God judges all, and his plan will come to pass. For the righteous, they are not alone, and they can trust that God is faithful to right these wrongs of the leadership. The contrast between

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<sup>201</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 523.

<sup>202</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 465.

<sup>203</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 399.

the evil shepherds (56:10) and Yahweh as a shepherd (40:11) refines the understanding of a good and faithful shepherd.

## **Mercy and Redemption of God**

Isaiah 11:9 and 65:25

The shepherd images reveal aspects of the mercy and redemption of God. Yahweh brings promises to his people, informing them of their future hope. Scholars parallel the two passages of Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:25 that demonstrates an eschatological kingdom of Yahweh. Chapter 11 reveals a ruler from the line of Jesse, a “shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse” (Isa 11:1), and “the nations will resort to the root of Jesse” (Isa 11:10). Oswalt describes the new kingdom, “In place of the craven and petty house of David, or the arrogant and oppressive empire of Assyria, here is a king in whose hands the concerns of the weakest will be safe. The Davidic ruler will usher in a reign of safety and security to which the weary exiles may come streaming in return.”<sup>204</sup> The “wolf,” which is a predator of the “lamb,” is observed as laying together. “Hurt” and “destruction” are absent from “My holy mountain,” referring to the mountain of God. The “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:6-9 states:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little boy will lead them.  
Also the cow and the bear will graze,  
Their young will lie down together,  
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den.  
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord

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<sup>204</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (ProQuest Ebook Central: Eerdmans Publishing), 1597x, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4860142>.

As the waters cover the sea.

Unlike the bad shepherds in Isaiah 56:10 who “know nothing” and are neglectful, the future kingdom will be filled with the “knowledge of the Lord.” The messianic figure rules with peace and safety. The prophet expresses that the kingdom of Yahweh is without evil and corruption. Chapter 10 describes the atrocities of the Assyrians and how they “enacted unjust statutes” (Isa 10:1). However, God is sending a messianic figure to the remnant of Israel to rule with justice, “with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the humble of the earth” (Isa 11:4). Through the shepherd imagery the prophet is displaying the rule of God depicts hope and a future.

Isaiah notes that a time is coming when the Hebrew people will be made new. The character of Yahweh reveals his desired peace for his people in the future of Israel in the parallel passage of Isaiah 65:25:

The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm on all My holy mountain,” says the LORD.

Oswalt explains that it is not a new heaven and earth in the apocalyptic sense, but the people will be made new.<sup>205</sup> Although the key messianic figure is missing, it does not necessitate being unpredictable of an eschatological kingdom. Smith claims, “God explains this new setting by describing a state of complete harmony and oneness among animals that formerly were enemies.”<sup>206</sup> Whether it is apocalyptic or a future for the exiles, it describes the merciful and redemptive heart to restore his people to a place of peace and safety. Yahweh reveals how good

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<sup>205</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 40-66*, 585.

<sup>206</sup> Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: Isaiah 40-66* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 724.

this restoration will be, and the author of Isaiah utilizes the lamb and wolf to demonstrate its extent. The lamb will no longer fear the wolf; there will be harmony. Watts explains the proverbial extremes of the wolf and lamb by saying, “the wolf is aggressive and voracious, the latter weak and helpless, the wolf’s natural food.”<sup>207</sup> He also connects the lion and snake to remind them of the peaceful element of the created order prior to the fall. The new order is a place of extraordinary peace.

Although the Israelites are rebuked in Isaiah for their rejection of Yahweh, destruction is not the end but restoration for those who return to him. The mountain pertains to the holy mountain of God, where peace reigns. The writer of Isaiah depicts the presence of God as a place of peace in chapters 65 and 11. The prophet utilizes concrete images of the shepherd language to provoke the peace that will come when God is ruling. He is the one who can bless them with peace.

## **Summary**

In summary of the Isaianic passages, the literature provides at least nine depictions of the shepherd imagery. The repeating illustrations provide different angles of the prophets’ view of the character of God. The shepherd language describes people as lambs and sheep, leaders as undershepherds, and God as a shepherd. The prophet expresses the expected behavior of the people of God through the emotional experience of hungry and thirsty sheep, wandering sheep, and undershepherds who disregard their responsibilities. He also promotes the idea of Yahweh caring for his people like a shepherd. All the images expose Israel as disobedient, which infers Yahweh desired leaders of integrity, care, nurture, and protection. These ideas are indicative of

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<sup>207</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, 355.

Yahweh and are clarified in the prophet stating, “Yahweh is like a shepherd who will care for his people” (Isa 40:11). The context of these passages expose the heart of the people, and the passages are implicitly speaking to the expectations God has for his people. The prophet reveals the peace and comfort to come in the kingdom of God as he describes, “the wolf and the lamb lie together” (Isa 63:25). These concrete pictures provide the people with the care of Yahweh. Isaiah 40:11 provides a rich and beautiful picture of Yahweh as a shepherd. The intangible God is becoming tangible through the prophet’s use of the shepherd motif. Observing the metaphor reveals how the picture communicates underlying truths of God to the people: either reminding the people whom God is or reaffirming the faithfulness of God.

## Jeremiah

### Context of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah, associated with Jeremiah the prophet, brought the message of judgment and grace. His assistant Baruch, son of Neriah, served as a scribe writing down the speeches of Jeremiah (Jer 36:4). The reason and arrangement of the book are not chronological or always clear. Although the flow of the book is not sequential, there are a few helpful indicators within the text, such as poetic writing style and prose, to help the reader make sense of the book’s anthology.<sup>208</sup> The book entails speeches and oracles to Judah during the Babylonian empire.

The first chapter of Jeremiah reveals Yahweh calling him to be a prophet during the reign of Josiah. His ministry spans from the reform of Josiah to Nebuchadnezzar’s two invasions of

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<sup>208</sup> Peter C. Craigie, Paige Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 33, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Judah in 597 and 586 BC and the aftermath of the exile.<sup>209</sup> The prophecy of Jeremiah encompasses the time of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. During this era, God used Babylon to bring judgment on the people of Israel, who had turned to idolatry and rejected Yahweh. F. B. Huey Jr. writes, “When Jeremiah realized what was to be, he unflinchingly warned his people that judgment was imminent. The Lord wove Jeremiah’s ministry and message into the fabric of his world.”<sup>210</sup>

After Josiah, his sons ruled first Jehoahaz and then Jehoiakim. Once Babylon rose to power, Judah became a vassal. Nebuchadnezzar was content with them being a vassal, but Jehoiakim rebelled in paying an annual tribute to Babylon, and he was replaced with Jehoiachin. It was not long till Nebuchadnezzar had control of Jerusalem and started to deport the people of Judah, and he replaced Jehoiachin with Zedekiah for Jerusalem to be a compliant vassal to Babylon. However, when Zedekiah revolted, Nebuchadnezzar decimated Jerusalem and took people off in chains, exiling the leaders of Jerusalem. A remnant of the people of God went to Egypt in hopes of escaping Nebuchadnezzar’s control.

Many of the kings of Judah and religious leaders are confronted for abandoning the covenant of Yahweh. The leaders were representing God, and they were to teach his ways, as noted in Deuteronomy 17:18-20:

Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.

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<sup>209</sup> Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 841.

<sup>210</sup> F. B. Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 1993), 19.

Jeremiah indites these undershepherds of Yahweh who fail to institute his laws in the land. The shepherd imagery displays the bad kings and religious leaders in the following passages, illuminating the heart of the shepherd, Yahweh.

### **Shepherd Images**

The theme of the book of Jeremiah is covenants. The Israelites were breaking their covenant with God, rejecting him and following their own way of living (Jer 1:16). The Israelite leaders were speaking of their own accord instead of following the council of the Lord, which led the people astray (Jer 23:22). The prophet identifies the poor leadership as being bad shepherds. Jeremiah is replete with the patterns of the shepherd images regarding leaders. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the reader will observe the hand of Yahweh working through human leaders for his purpose. Barnard Aubert states, “The use of the motif in Jeremiah is varied and manifold. One dominant aspect of the motif concerns the leaders of Israel and their failures. Pastoral imagery describes the prophet and other leaders of the people.”<sup>211</sup> The following passages briefly overview the connections between shepherd imagery and human leadership. Most often, readers focus on the warnings of bad leadership that leads people away from following Yahweh, which is central to understanding leadership. However, it is also stating something significant about God. The comparison and contrast of bad leadership in the verses bring to light the character of Yahweh as he judges the bad shepherds and provides hope for new shepherds. It reveals the heart of God for his people (Jer 3:15).

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<sup>211</sup> Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17-38) Against Its Historical Background*, 138.

### Caregiving of God

1. Jeremiah 3:15 – Leaders as shepherds  
God is revealing his new shepherds and a new government to benefit his people.

### Bad Undershepherds of God

1. Jeremiah 10:21 – Leaders of Judah as shepherds  
These are corrupt leaders following their own knowledge.
2. Jeremiah 12:10 – Leaders as shepherds  
The leaders have corrupted the land.
3. Jeremiah 25:34-36 – Leaders as shepherds  
Yahweh is bringing judgment to the leaders and people.
4. Jeremiah 43:12 – Babylonian king as a shepherd  
God directs the course of events utilizing the Babylonian king to bring judgment.
5. Jeremiah 49:19 – Shepherd as a god or ruler  
No leader can stand against the power of Yahweh.
6. Jeremiah 50:6 – Shepherds as bad leaders, lost sheep as people straying  
God is identifying the bad shepherds as leading the people astray.
7. Jeremiah 50:19 – The flock as Israel, pasture as the land restored  
God is going to punish the Assyrians and Babylonians and restore Israel.

### Justice of God

1. Jeremiah 22:22 – Leaders as shepherds  
The leaders and people disobeying Yahweh receive consequences.
2. Jeremiah 23:1-4 – Leaders as shepherds  
God rebukes the bad shepherds and emphasizes the replacement of caring shepherds.
3. Jeremiah 50:44 – Shepherd as the leader of Babylon  
What ruler or god is like Yahweh? He is all-powerful and brings judgment to Babylon.

### Mercy and Redemption of God

1. Jeremiah 31:10 – Yahweh as a shepherd  
God is providing hope of restoration like a shepherd.
2. Jeremiah 33:12 – Shepherds as shepherds  
There will be a restoration for the people on the land.

These passages, for centuries, have been developed for instructional leadership roles.

There is also the prophets' development of the shepherd imagery highlighting the heart of God from the beginning pages of Jeremiah as he calls for "new shepherds" (Jer 3:15) to the ending pages where he declares a shepherd coming who "is the shepherd who can stand before Me" (Jer 50:44). Jeremiah is vocalizing the current corruption of leaders in Judah in light of a righteous shepherd. There will be a future day when Yahweh restores all things "after his own heart" (Jer 3:15), and the leaders will be indicative of the nature of God.



## Caregiving of God

Jeremiah 3:15

In Jeremiah, chapters 2-24 are a collection of sermons, poetics, and prose oracles.<sup>212</sup> Joel Willits recognizes that “Jeremiah is the most prolific user of the imagery, and the emphasis is most often on the bad shepherds of Israel.”<sup>213</sup> It makes sense because the leaders have strayed from Yahweh. The shepherd language mentions at least thirteen times describing behaviors of people in the community of Judah and the thrust of the motif regarding the bad shepherds.

Jonathan Gan connects the shepherd leaders in chapter 3 to Jeremiah 2:8, which states:

The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’  
And those who handle the law did not know Me;  
The rulers also transgressed against Me,  
And the prophets prophesied by Baal  
And walked after things that did not profit.

Gan writes, “it provides such context by signifying the meaning of ‘shepherds’ as ‘leaders,’ who are the rebellious leaders/rulers destroying Israel, and the future rulers who are obedient to Yahweh will restore Israel.”<sup>214</sup> Chapter 2 consists of an indictment of the people of Judah, who have turned away from Yahweh. He is now bringing a case against the people and the leaders through the prophet. Peter C. Craigie et al. claim that it was not the leaders alone that went astray but also the people. They write, “Neither the people nor the priests had continued to seek the Lord in worship or prayer, and all had been fellow conspirators in the fall from faith.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 43, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>213</sup> Willits, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King : In Search of “the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,”* 53.

<sup>214</sup> Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible*, 65.

<sup>215</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 78.

Chapter 3 has been identified as an oracle calling for the repentance of Judah. Though the section breakdown is debated—as is the establishment of either prose or poetic writings—scholars generally agree that the passage serves as a call to repentance and Yahweh bringing in new shepherds. The author of Jeremiah begins to utilize the shepherd metaphor in chapter 3:15-17, which states,

Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you knowledge and understanding. And it shall be in those days when you become numerous and are fruitful in the land,” declares the Lord, “they will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’ And it will not come to mind, nor will they remember it, nor miss it, nor will it be made again. At that time, they will call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the Lord,’ and all the nations will assemble at it, at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord; and they will no longer follow the stubbornness of their evil heart.

The prophet speaks positively of new shepherds “after” the heart of Yahweh. The future leaders will reflect the character of Yahweh, which contrasts with the evil leaders. It is significant to emphasize because the replacement shepherds will usher in a new government exhibiting the “heart of God.” The shepherds of Yahweh demonstrate actions that “feed” the people with “knowledge and understanding.” As a result, the people will be “fruitful in the land.”

Given that the bad shepherds are opposed to the “heart” of Yahweh, then it implies they are starving the people of the “knowledge and understanding” of Yahweh. The bad shepherds represent corrupt leadership. They are stubborn denoting hard-heartedness. The Hebrew word רָע translated as “evil,” depicts “a wicked and morally depraved, worthless disposition.”<sup>216</sup>

Yahweh brings judgment in the passage to restore those willing to repent. After repentance, there is a restoration where new shepherds and a new government will be instituted. Longman notes that “the restoration was promised if only the people would repent, and would

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<sup>216</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

include good government, with the cities and districts properly represented and the rulers wise and godly men.”<sup>217</sup>

After Yahweh rebukes Judah and the people repent, He declares, “I will give you shepherds’ with the implication that he has the power to set up and establish these shepherds. These will be shepherds that listen and teach the understanding of God, for they will be “after my own heart” (3:15). The heart of God is reflected in the actions of his good shepherds. The people will no longer follow what is in their hearts, nor will they follow the knowledge and understanding around them. Instead, they will follow the “knowledge and understanding” of God. The shepherd imagery passages to follow will explicitly highlight the actions of the evil leaders and implicitly spotlight the good characteristics of God. The people of Judah have left the teachings of Yahweh, leading them to follow after other gods. But it is God that will restore and set up people with hearts that follow him.

### **Bad Undershepherds**

Jeremiah 10:21; 12:10; 43:12; 49:19-21; 50:6-10; 50:19

Although God desired his people to seek righteousness for their good and the good of their community (Deut 6:24-25), they did not. Instead, Israel was attracted to seeking wisdom, power, and wealth like the nations around them. According to Craigie et al., in Chapter 10, the shepherd motif sits within a section of lament over the people following after the ways of the other nations around them.<sup>218</sup> God provided the knowledge and understanding for living, but the people neglected him. The people were to follow their shepherd-leaders who were to lead them

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<sup>217</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 80.

<sup>218</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 212.

in righteousness; instead, they led them astray. The repeating idea of the shepherds lacking knowledge indicates their pursuits of following their own desires and the ways of the nations surrounding them. They “have not sought the Lord” reveals their hardheartedness. Now the people are “scattered.” It comes from the Hebrew root פָּרַץ meaning the people were dispersed. The good shepherds were known for gathering their flocks; therefore, the implication reveals that the flock is unprotected and vulnerable to predators. Jeremiah 10:21 states,

For the shepherds have become stupid  
And have not sought the Lord.  
Therefore, they have not prospered,  
And all their flock is scattered.

Craigie et al. further writes, “Responsibility for the coming invasion/deportation is laid at the feet of the community leaders because they have failed to inquire of the Lord. The shepherds (kings) are accused of failing to seek an oracle from the Lord to help them govern. As a result of their failure, the flock is scattered (an image of deportation).”<sup>219</sup> It is significant to restate that the kings would have directly represented the god of the society they served. The leaders were to act characteristically on behalf of their god.

These actions of the Judean kings were in opposition to the actions and heart of Yahweh. God is full of wisdom (Pro 8:14), but these leaders are abandoning the counsel of God given to their ancestors. They rejected the Law of God that instructed, “Observe them (the laws) carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation (Israel) is a wise and understanding people.’ What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?” (Deut 4:6-7). The kings of Judah were to be reflective of the actions

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 212.

of Yahweh, bearing an extension of his heart, but they are stupidly leading in their own self-interest, opposite of the interests of God.

The author of Jeremiah offers more uses of the shepherd imagery to identify bad leadership in opposition to Yahweh. The context is partly laments and complaints of Jeremiah with the response of God. Craigie et al. refer to chapters 11-13 as “Why Judgment,” in which Jeremiah elaborates on why the people are in judgment.<sup>220</sup> The period warns of the fall of Jerusalem. Judah is deciphering their challenging circumstances. Craigie et al. breaks down the unit into four subsections: Jeremiah and the covenant, the men of Anathoth, the sorrow of God, and the symbolism and sin.

It is important to recognize that the first subsection reveals that the people of Judah have broken their covenant with God. In the second subsection, Jeremiah laments either the threat on his life or the fact that God is allowing this suffering on the people of Judah (11:18-12:6). According to Craigie et al., the third subsection could be “a response lament, containing a lament by the Lord over the sin of his people and what this forces him to do. In this divine lament, we get a rare glimpse of the sorrow that evil causes God.”<sup>221</sup> In chapter 12, in verse 7 of the third subsection, the reader can hear the heart of God: “I have forsaken My house, I have abandoned My inheritance; I have handed the beloved of My soul over to her enemies.” Of this passage, Longman states, “verse 7 concludes when Yahweh says that he will not simply abandon them, but will allow their enemies to prevail over them. We can feel the torment of God in this decision as he describes his wayward people not only as his inheritance but as the one I love.”<sup>222</sup> Chapter

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>222</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 165.

12:7-13 appears to be a complaint of God in poetry form. It could be the period just prior to the Babylonian invasion.

The prophet frames the sorrow of God through the shepherd language as rulers outside of Judah are invading the land, leaving it desolate. Like the bad shepherds of Israel, these shepherds are ruining the land as opposed to prospering the land as God would do. These images depict another picture of bad shepherds, yet God uses the situation as judgment for Judah. This is the tragedy of rejecting God. Jeremiah 12:10 states:

Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard,  
They have trampled down My field;  
They have made My pleasant field  
A desolate wilderness.  
It has been made a desolation;  
Desolate, it mourns before Me;  
The whole land has been made desolate,  
Because no one takes it to heart.

The agriculture of the land God gave to his people is being invaded due to the disobedience of Judah. In this context, the “shepherds” seem to refer to the Babylonian invaders or foreign rulers.<sup>223</sup> Reading further in verse 12, the phrase “For the sword of the Lord is devouring” affirms that the judgment of God is taking place on the people of Israel. Longman states in verse 12, “The point is that God is behind the enemy army that is in actuality the tool of his judgment.”<sup>224</sup> In verse 14, it states that the “wicked neighbors” are doing harm by bringing “desolation” upon Israel. F. B. Huey writes, “Though other nations would be used as God’s instrument of judgment on Judah, it was ‘the sword of the Lord’ that was bringing calamity on

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<sup>223</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 234.

<sup>224</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 167.

the nation.”<sup>225</sup> The shepherd's picture communicates the judgment of God on Israel by utilizing the other leaders of the nation.

However, Yahweh still loves his people, and this love is further evidenced in verse 15, that states, “And it will come about that after I have driven them out, I will again have compassion on them; and I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land.” Longman notes that the last subsection uncovers that God is bringing judgment on Israel in verses 10-12, but in the next few verses, he is looking beyond judgment and to salvation. Within this context, the shepherd imagery highlights rulers (Babylon) as destroying his land and people. God is going to judge the bad shepherds (Jer 12:14). They are the “wicked neighbors” that will soon receive his judgment. The shepherds (Jer 12:10-14) display evil actions of power and control in destroying Judah. God utilizes the Babylonians to discipline Judah, indicating he is sovereign. He is the Shepherd of all shepherds. Yahweh bends them in his will. He is a different kind of shepherd than the “wicked” ones, and he brings justice for the good of the community. The author espouses Yahweh is righteous in his judgment, “But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously, Who tries the feelings and the heart” (Jer 11:20).

The backdrop of the next shepherd image is during the exile after the assassination of the Judean governor Gedaliah, whom the Babylonian king appointed. The people are asking Jeremiah whether they should remain in Judah under the rule of Babylon or flee to Egypt. Jeremiah asserts that the remnant in Judah should remain. In Jeremiah 43, the people disobey the command of the Lord to stay in Judah, and they flee to Egypt; Jeremiah is with them. No one is sure whether he was forced to flee with them or if he felt that he had an obligation to stay with them. Once in Egypt, Jeremiah gave a symbolic act to voice the fate of the exiles in Egypt. The

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<sup>225</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 142.

Babylonians, the ones they feared in Judea, were about to strike them in Egypt. The chapter ends with a shepherd metaphor indicating the repercussion since the people rejected the command of God to stay in Judah (verse 7). Jeremiah 43:12 states:

And I shall set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive. So he will wrap himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself with his garment, and he will depart from there safely.

God is using this undershepherd to bring judgment. King Nebuchadnezzar (43:10), the shepherd of Babylon, is understood as the “he” that will invade Egypt. Jeremiah indicates that Yahweh is over all things and directs the course of events taking place. Yahweh executes his justice through all his servants, and all nations are under his rule. The word in Hebrew נָחַץ translated as “wrap,” means “to wrap oneself with a garment” or to delouse something.<sup>226</sup> A passage in Isaiah carries the same connotation as to delouse, meaning to seize something, “Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. He will *seize* firm hold on you” (Isa 22:17). Huey attests that this act reveals that God is going to bring Nebuchadnezzar to overtake Egypt. He writes, “Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Egypt would be as effortless as a shepherd wrapping a garment around himself.”<sup>227</sup> The Babylonian king will experience little resistance in overtaking Egypt. Keown et al. has a similar view of the passage. They write, “The latter portion of v 12 describes Nebuchadnezzar engaged in a ‘delousing’ of Egypt, with a probable reference to the Judean exiles. The shepherd is pictured as ‘picking clean’ his cloak, or removing the vermin that would infest it.” The shepherd image reflects the victory the Babylon king will have over Egypt, but it also connects Yahweh as the one directing even the shepherds that oppose him. The passage

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<sup>226</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>227</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 364.



directly links the king as a shepherd emphasizing the sovereignty of Yahweh over all nations: the good and the bad shepherds. The significance of the shepherd passages continues to contribute characteristics of Yahweh.

Jeremiah 50 provides a tapestry of the shepherd motif. The author articulates the judgment on Babylon and the restoration of the exiled people of God. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the writer displays his realization that God has used Babylon to bring judgment on Israel and that Babylon would now be judged for their sins (Jer 50:2). Yahweh is speaking, and he will use the Persians to bring down the Babylonians. The shepherd trope will be at the forefront again in Jeremiah 50:6-10:

‘My people have become lost sheep;  
Their shepherds have led them astray.  
They have made them turn aside on the mountains.  
They have gone from mountain to hill,  
They have forgotten their resting place.  
All who found them have devoured them;  
And their adversaries have said, ‘We are not guilty,  
Since they have sinned against the Lord who is the habitation of righteousness,  
The Lord, the hope of their fathers.’

Wander away from the midst of Babylon  
And go out from the land of the Chaldeans;  
Be like male goats at the head of the flock.  
For behold, I am going to rouse and bring up against Babylon

The sheep have become lost because the shepherds were not following Yahweh. Longman writes, “These verses play on the image of the people of God as a flock of sheep. They are lost sheep because their shepherds have let them down.”<sup>228</sup> The shepherds should point to God as their security and the One who would fulfill their needs. But instead, the shepherds “led them astray,” following after other gods. The going from “mountain to the hill” carries connotations of

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<sup>228</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 455.

illicit worship. The Hebrew word גִּבְעָה translated as “hill,” is negatively associated with the worship of foreign gods. Keown et al. write, “The references to mountains and hills as the places to which the flock had been led astray recall the scenes of sacrifices and worship in Hosea on the tops of the mountains” (Hos 4:12-13).<sup>229</sup> Deuteronomy 12:2 also states, “You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.” Jeremiah expresses that the Israelites had “forgotten their resting place.” The Hebrew word רִבְצָם means “resting place or bed” (Isa 65:10).<sup>230</sup> A dwelling place where danger is absent. The resting place would be to dwell with Yahweh. A good shepherd provides safety for the sheep to lie down. Huey points out that the deceptive shepherds had “encouraged the people’s participation in idolatrous practices that were abhorrent to God. They forgot their own ‘resting place,’ probably a figurative reference to the temple.”<sup>231</sup> The Israelites were being “devoured” (v. 7) by their adversaries but took no responsibility because they had sinned against Yahweh. The LORD is referred to as the “habitation of righteousness,” which the Hebrew word for “habitation” נֶחֱלֶה could be referred to as a grazing place or settlement. And “righteousness refers to the holiness of Yahweh. The Israelites threw off the righteousness of Yahweh and the “hope of their fathers.” Therefore, the adversaries declared “we are not guilty” because they sinned against their God. But God is also executing judgment on the Babylonians.

Yahweh instructs the people to flee Babylon, “Wander away from the midst of Babylon” (verse 8). The writer of Jeremiah utilizes the goat image to provide the picture of the goat

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<sup>229</sup> Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 365.

<sup>230</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>231</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 410.

rushing ahead of the sheep upon the opening of the gate. The Hebrew word for “male goat” is עֲתוּדִים referring to “the leading male goat of a flock” that will rush out in front.<sup>232</sup> Figuratively the “male goat” represents a strong leader (Ezek 34:17; Zech 10:3). For the Israelites, the “male goat reference instills a sense of urgency to remove themselves from the plundering that was coming upon Babylon. This message reveals that the downfall of Babylon is coming and concludes that the Lord has not forgotten Judah—nor does Babylon have any power over Yahweh. He is righteous and faithful to his people. He desires righteousness and faithfulness from them. They should find their rest in God alone by worshipping him. A lost sheep is in a dangerous position, but Yahweh wants their protection. The shepherd language reveals the righteousness and the protection that God desires for his flock.

Advancing further into the chapter in Jeremiah 50:17-19:

Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven them away. The first one who devoured him was the king of Assyria, and this last one who has gnawed his bones is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Therefore this is what the Lord of armies, the God of Israel says: ‘Behold, I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of Assyria. And I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and his desire will be satisfied in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead.

The reader can observe that Assyria and Babylon are the lions scattering the flock. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers state, “The king of Assyria consumed Israel, and Nebuchadnezzar gnawed the remains” (Jer. 50:17).<sup>233</sup> Now the time has come, and Yahweh will punish Babylon.

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<sup>232</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>233</sup> Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*.

## Judgment and Justice of God

Jeremiah 22:22; 23:1-4; 25:34-36; 49:7-11; 50:44

In Jeremiah 22, the author continues using the shepherd metaphor in oracles against the last four kings of Judah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Jeremiah denounces the leaders of the monarch (21:1-22:30) due to their desire to attach themselves to other nations and their abandonment of Yahweh. The prophet provides specific behavior Yahweh would expect of the kings; he writes, “Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer 22:3). Yet, they fail to uphold the instructions of God. Throughout the chapter, the writer addresses different kings, and he puts forward the shepherd imagery in the tone of judgment in Jeremiah 22:22:

The wind will sweep away all your shepherds,  
And your lovers will go into captivity;  
Then you will certainly be ashamed and humiliated  
Because of all your wickedness.

Longman keeps verses 13-23 together and contends that the writer of Jeremiah is addressing Jehoiakim, while Craigie et al. separate verses 20-23 due to the two imperatives in verse 20: “Go up to Lebanon and cry out.” They argue that the oracle is against the personified Jerusalem. Either way, the verses in 22 indicate the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. Huey also analyzes verses 20-23 together, claiming verse 20 “addresses all the people rather than to the kings. The people are told to look around to discover that all their ‘allies’ had been crushed.”<sup>234</sup> They served other gods and were crushed because they did not repent. In the end, there were no allies with Judah. Ultimately, the wind will drive away the shepherds, who seem to be leaders from Judah

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<sup>234</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 208.

from the 22:6-7 passage. There is a wordplay in assonance between the root word of wind and shepherd in the Hebrew תִּרְעָה-רוּחַ (*wind shall shepherd*). The prophet refers to the wind as discipline resulting in calamity and destruction. Yahweh brought judgment on the shepherds due to their poor leadership. Craigie et al. states, “The reference to the wind shepherding the shepherds provides a link with 23:1-4, a passage concerned with the shepherds (leaders) who have not properly discharged their responsibility.”<sup>235</sup> Two indicators could connect the shepherd patterns in chapters 22 and 23, the identical introduction words that set up the judgment passages against the shepherds, such as “*woe*” (22:13 and 23:1) and “*therefore*” (22:18 and 23:2).

Kenneth Bailey claims Jeremiah 23 is the reflection of Jeremiah reshaping Psalm 23 to formulate hope amid defeat. He aims to emphasize the *good* actions of the shepherd in each shepherd motif he analyzes. He writes, “This retelling of the national story as a good shepherd saga required some dramatic changes and additions to the collection of images that make up the psalm.”<sup>236</sup> He compares the language of the good shepherd in Psalm 23 to the language in Jeremiah. Bailey identifies that the theme of deliverance from fear in Psalm 23 is the same idea the author of Jeremiah is expressing in what he calls “Jeremiah’s good shepherd psalm.”<sup>237</sup> The possible comparison between Psalm 23 and Jeremiah 23 is the faithfulness God demonstrates as a shepherd.

When moving into the shepherd metaphor in Jeremiah 23, there is a specific indictment against the shepherds. Of this, Nggada writes, “these verses fall within the literary units of the oracle of judgment upon the rulers of Judah who corrupted Israel or God’s flock. The verses also

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<sup>235</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 364.

<sup>236</sup> Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 66.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

give a future restoration of the children of Israel from exile and the enthronement of a Davidic king who is ideal and would care for the flock of Israel.”<sup>238</sup> Jeremiah 23:1-4 states:

Woe to the shepherds who are causing the sheep of My pasture to perish and are scattering them! declares the Lord. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: ‘You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not been concerned about them; behold, I am going to call you to account for the evil of your deeds,’ declares the Lord. ‘Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,’ declares the Lord.

The bad shepherds are *שֹׁמְרֵי* “*scattering*” the sheep, which leaves them vulnerable to danger.

Again the root of the Hebrew “*scatter*” is *פָּרַץ* meaning dispersed by defeat, to break or cast abroad.<sup>239</sup> It is another repeated word in the shepherd motif. It is mentioned at least seven times in the researched passages of the prophets.<sup>240</sup> The leaders of Israel are identified as bad leaders that result in scattered sheep (Jer 10:21; Jer 23:1-4). Israel is also scattered by Babylon, who destroys Judah (Jer 50:17-19). Other nations are scattered because of the neglect of their leaders (Nah 3:18-19). When God brings judgment on the nations, the people are scattered because the leaders have fallen, but Yahweh also gathers the sheep (Jer 31:10; Eze 34:12; Mic 4:6-8; Zeph 3:19-20). The shepherds are supposed to provide security, protection, and green pastures for the sheep to flourish.

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<sup>238</sup> Nggada, “Shepherd Motif in the Old Testament and Its Implications for Leadership in Nigeria,” 162.

<sup>239</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*.

<sup>240</sup> The root word *פָּרַץ* meaning “*scatter*” is tied into the shepherd language, but it is not exclusively connected to it. It is located in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and a few minor prophets. The prophets also use the verbiage for the judgement of God on his people for disobedience.

Yet, these bad shepherds have “*scattered*” the flock leaving them open to dangerous attacks. They are also under threat of hunger, thirst, and overexposure to the sun. Gan writes, “The failure of good leadership in Israel explains the existence of its social dysfunction, moral deterioration, and national destruction. The national leaders, shepherds, did not care for the flock, the people of the nation, and the instructions of Yahweh were not properly imparted to strengthen the morality of the people.”<sup>241</sup> The leaders are responsible since they were supposed to be familiar with the covenant and lead the nation as God instructed. Longman contends, “The oracle demands that the king take care of the vulnerable, which includes victims of crimes (the one who has just been robbed), the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. It was the king’s duty to protect those who could not protect themselves and also create a society that was harmonious for law-abiding citizens.”<sup>242</sup> The way to lead Judah was to follow Yahweh and him alone. However, instead, the leaders were self-reliant. The author of Jeremiah presents the “woe to the shepherds” pertaining to the leadership of Israel due to their failure to lead. These are the individuals that have been given the responsibility to care for the people of God. However, instead they have “scattered” and “driven them away.” The Hebrew word נָדָה is repetitious in the shepherd motif. It carries the idea of being removed forcefully or figuratively referring to the dispersion of Israel in the exile. The people are “terrified” and “missing.” Huey identifies a conflict in verses 2-3, in which it seems that the shepherds have “driven them.” The following verse exclaims God has “driven them” out of the country. Huey writes, “Both statements are correct. They describe Judah’s punishment from both human and divine perspectives.”

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<sup>241</sup> Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible*, 66.

<sup>242</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 233.

Although the author of Jeremiah is presenting a “woe” to punish the leadership, he is also developing the notion that there is hope for the remnant. In contrast to the bad shepherds who “scattered the sheep,” Yahweh is going to “gather” the sheep, which is the Hebrew root word קבץ. It means to collect or assemble lambs by the shepherd or to bring together the scattered people. The prophet uses it to demonstrate safety, protection, and restoration.<sup>243</sup> The renewal involves replacing the bad shepherds with good shepherds to lead them. As a result, the sheep will neither be “terrified” nor “missing.” Huey writes, “The Lord would assume the role of the shepherd and gather the remnant of his flock from all the places he had driven them.”<sup>244</sup> The renewal will take place only after the judgment on evil. Then God will restore the remnant with undershepherds that will care for the people.

The implicit message of Jeremiah is that God is personally intervening and delivering judgment due to the lack of obedience among the shepherds of Judah. The shepherds had the knowledge and instruction of Yahweh to follow in the Torah, yet they rejected it. They neglected the people and led them into evil ways. The writer of Jeremiah advocates that God’s sovereign plans will be coming to pass. The message contends that God will bring judgment, but in the very next breath, promises to send faithful shepherds to protect his remnant. Bailey contends that although Psalm 23 does not mention bad shepherds, it resembles the good shepherd, the theme of deliverance, and bringing back Israel. God is good and faithful to his people.

The following use of the shepherd motif unfolds in the chapter context of an oracle condemning all the nations that will drink the cup of wrath. God will use Babylon to discipline the nations and Israel, but they, too, will receive judgment in the end. Israel will experience the

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<sup>243</sup> The Hebrew word קבץ is connected with the sheep language, but not limited to the shepherd imagery. It offers a concrete picture of Yahweh restoring his people with his protection.

<sup>244</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 211.



judgment of seventy years in exile under the rule of the Babylonians. Yahweh will “roar mightily against his fold” (Jer 25:30), revealing the anger of God toward his people. The following verses picture the shepherds and masters of the flock crying out from the judgment to come. The passage states in Jeremiah 25:34-36:

Wail, you shepherds, and cry out;  
Wallow in the dust, you masters of the flock;  
For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions have come,  
And you will fall like a precious vessel.  
There will be no sanctuary for the shepherds,  
Nor escape for the masters of the flock.  
Hear the sound of the cry of the shepherds,  
And the wailing of the masters of the flock!  
For the Lord is destroying their pasture,  
And the peaceful grazing places are devastated  
Because of the fierce anger of the Lord.  
He has left His hiding place like the lion;  
For their land has become a horror  
Because of the fierceness of the oppressing sword  
And because of His fierce anger.

It seems there is a move from judgment on the nations in verse 30 to his people. Longman states, “Here the shepherd clearly refers to the leaders, political and religious, of God’s people (the flock).”<sup>245</sup> The phrase in Jer 25:34, “masters of the flock” in Hebrew אֲדִירֵי הַצֹּאן, only appears in this pericope. The word אֲדִיר can refer to rulers and royalty.<sup>246</sup> The leaders are crying out in distress. The time has come for the shepherds who have led the people astray to receive their judgment.

Regarding these shepherds, Longman writes, “Their job was to keep God’s people pure and on the path of godliness, but they did just the opposite.”<sup>247</sup> There will not be a hiding place

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<sup>245</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 263.

<sup>246</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 424.

<sup>247</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 263.

from the judgment that is coming. Throughout this passage, there is judgment for the wrongdoer, but there is also a voice of protection, meaning God is willing to discipline the people and purge the bad shepherds to restore his people. The passage indicates that these shepherds were slaughtering others, and now the shepherds face judgment. “For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions have come” (Jer 25:34). The talionic justice is brought against the shepherds. The prophets had the way of God in the Torah and could have communicated it to the people, yet they did not. The author of Jeremiah is communicating that Yahweh honors what he states: he will hold the shepherds accountable for their heinous acts toward the people of God.

The passage of Jeremiah 49:7-11 is an oracle to the Edomites. The Edomites had a volatile relationship with Judah, and ultimately they attacked Judah (2 Chr 28:17). The prophets speak against the judgment of the Edomites in Isaiah 34:5-6 and Mal 1:4. In addition, Jeremiah demonstrates the judgment of Yahweh over the Edomites through shepherd language. The writer is comparing Yahweh to a Lion and the Edomites to sheep. The “lion” in ANE symbolizes victory because they are the most prevailing carnivores. In ancient Israel, lions found a natural habitat in the thickets of the Jordan River. Sheep were prey for lions, and the imagery reflects it in Jeremiah 49:19-21:

“Behold, one will come up like a lion from the thicket of the Jordan to a perennially watered pasture; for in an instant I will chase him away from it, and I will appoint over it whoever is chosen. For who is like Me, and who will summon Me into court? And who then is the shepherd who can stand against Me?” Therefore hear the plan of the Lord which He has planned against Edom, and His purposes which He has in mind against the inhabitants of Teman: they will certainly drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; He will certainly make their pasture desolate because of them. The earth has quaked at the noise of their downfall. There is an outcry! The noise of it has been heard at the Red Sea.

Longman writes, “The Edomites are like the young of the flock of sheep. Edom has no leader who can function as a shepherd and stave off God the lion. Edom, the pastureland will be

destroyed. The cry of these mutilated sheep will be heard even at the Red Sea, to the south of Edom.”<sup>248</sup> The author of Jeremiah expresses that there is none comparable to God and that he is ruling over all nations. As sheep are dragged off, so too will the Edomites be destroyed. Keown, Scalise and Smothers contend that the destruction comes from their pride and trust in deceptive deities. They argue, “The incomparable LORD, the divine warrior, is described as effecting complete devastation on the kingdom of Edom” and “the oracle stresses his sovereignty.”<sup>249</sup> The three questions from the passage—“who is like me?”; “Who will summon me?”; and “Who can stand against me?”—underscore the idea of the sovereignty of God. Yahweh is accomplishing his purpose through the nations and nature. He is incomparable.

The next passage represents Yahweh ushering in judgment on Babylon. God judges all evil shepherds and leaders, not just Israel. The ability to judge all nations naturally implies the sovereignty of Yahweh. Even though God used Babylon to discipline Israel, he brought justice to the atrocities of the Babylonian leaders.

Moving to the end of the chapter, Jeremiah 50:44-46 states:

Behold, one will come up like a lion from the thicket of the Jordan to a perennially watered pasture; for in an instant I will chase them away from it, and I will appoint over it whoever is chosen. For who is like Me, and who will summon Me into court? And who then is the shepherd who can stand against Me? Therefore hear the plan of the Lord which He has planned against Babylon, and His purposes which He has in mind against the land of the Chaldeans: they will certainly drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; He will certainly make their pasture desolate because of them. At the shout, “Babylon has been conquered!

The beginning of these verses mirrors 49:19-21, the passage directed to Edom. The questions of incomparability are laid out again: “Who is like Me? Who will summon Me? Who can stand

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>249</sup> Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, 331.

against me?” Walter Brueggemann states, “Therefore, even mighty, pretentious Babylon must heed the ‘plan’ and ‘purpose’ of YHWH, which is precisely to dismantle the mighty power of Babylon. The nation must be terminated because it has ‘arrogantly defied’ the rule of YHWH (Jer. 50:29), and this defiance will not go unchecked. This ‘formula of incomparability’ is a proper starting point from which to discern the claim of YHWH that dominates the rhetoric and the faith of the Book of Jeremiah.”<sup>250</sup> God is the lion in the passage, and he is going to chase out Babylon. No other leader wields this type of power. Longman writes about Babylon, “It has no leader (shepherd) who can resist him as he directs the Persian army toward them. Many will die (the young of the flock will be dragged away), and the pasture (Babylon) will be destroyed. And the rest of the earth will tremble since a great nation like Babylon has not been able to defend itself.”<sup>251</sup> Great Babylon is going to fall because Yahweh is bringing justice. The author of Jeremiah has not been speaking of some generic God but of One who is sovereign over the nations and one that brings justice for his people.

## **Mercy and Redemption of God**

Jeremiah 31:10; 33:12

The message in the scroll of Jeremiah now shifts to offer comfort and hope for the people of God. In chapters 30-33, Brown and Ferris claim, “There is nearly universal agreement in grouping these chapters together, the clear thematic emphasis being one of comfort and consolation. While Judah’s present struggles are certainly not minimized, and while there are

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<sup>250</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 44, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>251</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 461.

still references to difficult days ahead, the great emphasis is on healing and restoration.”<sup>252</sup> The people of Israel have been “scattered” by God with the exile, but hope is to come. It is no surprise for the prophet to express poetic words of comfort using the gentle and strong imagery of a shepherd “gathering” his flock. God affirms to the people that he is the shepherd who will restore his people dispersed by exile. Longman calls this section “The Book of Consolation.”<sup>253</sup> The writer uses the shepherd motif in these chapters to describe the coming solace. Written in Jeremiah 31:10:

Hear the word of the Lord, you nations,  
And declare it in the coastlands far away,  
And say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
And He will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.

The Lord is faithful and will “gather” his flock. The hearer understands Yahweh “scattered” in judgment, but now he is “gathering” the people. Salvation is coming from Yahweh. The commands “declare” and “say” call the people to “listen” and “be informed.”<sup>254</sup> Keown et al. claims this is consistent verbiage with watchmen or messengers calling on the nations to hear and recount to the distant coastlands that God has saved Israel.<sup>255</sup> The salvation imagery is presented through the lens of how a shepherd cares for his flock. It is a resounding call of the faithfulness of God to his people that will take heed. Huey writes that the actions of the Lord “on

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<sup>252</sup> Michael L. Brown et al., *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, UNITED STATES: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 415, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=6166864>.

<sup>253</sup> Longman III, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 294.

<sup>254</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>255</sup> Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, 112.

Israel's behalf would demonstrate to all his compassionate grace as well as his sovereign power and holiness. Thus, the same one who scattered his people was to regather them.”<sup>256</sup>

The following verse emphasizes Huey's points: “For the Lord has ransomed Jacob and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he” (Jer. 31:11). The ideas of “ransomed” and “redeemed” are the result of Yahweh having mercy on a people who once rejected him. He will not only “gather” but “will keep,” *שָׁמַר* meaning “take care of, preserve, protect.”<sup>257</sup> The same wording appears in Psalm 12:8, “You, Lord, will keep them; You will protect him from this generation forever.” Yahweh demonstrates the character of a “shepherd” who “preserves” the sheep. He once scattered in judgment but now, in compassionate grace, regathered his remnant and proclaimed it to the nations. His judgment results from the choices of the leaders and the people going astray, yet God is compassionate; rather than relinquishing his people, he is regathering, ransoming, and redeeming them.

The next appearance of the shepherd language is found in the “Book of Consolation.”<sup>258</sup> The idea of restoration for Jerusalem surrounds the text of Jeremiah 33:12:

This is what the Lord of armies says: ‘There will again be in this place which is waste, without man or animal, and in all its cities, a pasture for shepherds who rest their flocks. In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, in the areas surrounding Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flocks will again pass under the hands of the one who counts them,’ says the Lord.

In this futuristic scene that describes plentiful land, the writer provides a tangible way to explain how the Lord is at work for the good of his people and that the land will be restored. Hope

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<sup>256</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 272.

<sup>257</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>258</sup> Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, 169.

resides in the idea that “There will again” be coming days that “will again” be filled with hope. The repeating idea of “once again” is also in Jer 31:4; 31:5; 32:15; 33:10; 33:13. Keown et al. write of the shepherd image, “The image makes sense if shepherds and flocks represent leaders and people as they frequently do in the OT. This salvation promise echoes Jeremiah 23:3 but describes the shepherding in vivid terms.”<sup>259</sup> The prophet informs the people that God is omniscient and has the knowledge of what is to come. Peace and rest await the remnant. The imagery shows that sheep will be led to plentiful places to eat and can lie down and rest without fear of predators. The prophet is voicing pictures of what people regularly observe in their world. The explicit portrait of the flocks being counted is part of what they would see among the shepherds. The shepherd is keenly aware of all the sheep, and none will be lost; he is counting מונה the sheep. The image of Yahweh counting is observed in Psalm 147:4, “He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them.” Huey writes, “Each night when the shepherd brought his sheep to the fold, he would count them to see that all were there.”<sup>260</sup> The sheep will all be counted by the hand of the shepherd. Yahweh is all-knowing, and he has brought judgment and ushered in a new era of hope.

## Summary

In summary, there are at least thirteen passages of the shepherd motif in the book of Jeremiah. The patterns have focused heavily on how Yahweh works through human leadership. Most often, the people following the human leaders believe the leaders are an extension of the gods ruling. The instructions and characteristics of the leaders are to be leading as the

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>260</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 300., 300.

mouthpiece of their god. Therefore, the constant rebuke by Yahweh of the bad shepherds implicitly speaks to his good character. The bad shepherds are not extending Yahweh's knowledge or ethics but airing their own knowledge. In Chapter 3, the author claims there will be new shepherds coming that are “after the heart of God” (Jer 3:15). Amid the rebukes directed at the bad shepherds, Jeremiah likens Yahweh to the caring shepherd that gathers his sheep (Jer 31:10). Both the leadership of Israel and other nations are compared to bad and good shepherds leading their sheep. Through the imagery, the author is disclosing the sin of Judea, who will be judged. Yahweh uses the Babylonians in his plan. Ultimately all the nations will also be judged for their cruelties. Yahweh exposed the bad shepherds and claimed that he would send good shepherds to the people that returned to his ways. The good shepherds will teach them knowledge and understanding as contrasted with the old leaders who have followed their knowledge. The author is communicating from the teachings of the Torah and encouraging the people of Judah that God is going to ransom and redeem his people. Throughout the book, the bad shepherds lead the people astray. The prophets articulated these truths through shepherd patterns to bring together the immaterial and material world. The true shepherd will gather and care for the remnant, for those willing to turn back to him. The bad shepherds have starved the sheep of care, protection, and knowledge of Yahweh. Through the shepherd motif, the writer of Jeremiah is reproving the bad shepherds, which displays the contrasting character of God. But the author also reveals that God knows and sees the behavior because he is omniscient. His judgment demonstrates his righteousness. His compassion is reflected when he gathers the sheep to restore them to faithful shepherds after his own heart.



## Context of Ezekiel

According to Lamar Cooper, Ezekiel identifies himself as one who “was chosen to announce the words of God to unwelcome ears as the nation faced imminent destruction and captivity at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.”<sup>261</sup> Ezekiel preached for approximately twenty-two years, carrying a difficult message of judgment and hope during a time of defeat. He was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, a temple priest most likely deported in the Babylonian exile. His ministry occurred during tumultuous times, and “he saw himself as being in a world that needed God, a prophet to the nations as well as to Israel/Judah.”<sup>262</sup>

The unrighteous features of the people and leaders of Israel required a righteous and holy God to respond. Ezekiel was concerned with the righteousness of Yahweh and how his people Israel had abandoned their commitment to their God. After an initial thirty-three chapters of judgment, Ezekiel turns as Yahweh extends a voice of hope for his people. Unfortunately, the shepherds are leading the people astray and incapable of the holiness of Yahweh. Leslie Allen claims, “As heir of a prophetic tradition of a stark sequence of judgment and salvation in Yahweh’s dealings with the covenant people, he was able to envision a return to the land by historicizing the tradition. Darkness was to be followed by the dawn of a new and far better day.”<sup>263</sup> A hopeful future was on the horizon for his people. Block contends, “Ezekiel’s understanding of the sequence of events involved in Israel’s restoration was conventional, being patterned after common ancient Near Eastern judgment-restoration traditions. Since the sequence

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<sup>261</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr. *The New American Commentary Ezekiel*, (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994) 29.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>263</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ezekiel 1-19* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 25.

of human sin-divine wrath-divine abandonment-disaster-exile in the prophet's earlier oracles of judgment followed established patterns, this observation should not surprise one."<sup>264</sup>

The book attains a chronological order except in the oracles against the nations in sections 25-32. John Taylor attests, "In its structure, however, if not in its thought and language, the book of Ezekiel has a basic simplicity, and its orderly framework makes it easy to analyze."<sup>265</sup> Cooper divides the contents of Ezekiel into chapters 1-3, pertaining to the call and commission; chapters 4-24, pertaining to the judgment and fall of Judah; chapters 25-32, pertaining to an interlude of messages of judgment against the nations; and chapters 33-48, pertaining to messages of hope regarding Israel.<sup>266</sup> Daniel Block echoes the analysis of hope in his commentary title on chapters 33-48: "Positive Messages of Hope for Israel: The Gospel According to Ezekiel."<sup>267</sup> He identifies these oracles as salvation oracles, stating that they announce a deliverance from a difficult situation and a restoration of peace. The prophet Ezekiel weaves the nature of God through different images in the book. The focal point for this work extracts the shepherd motif and assesses the theology of the prophet.

## Shepherd Images

Isaiah (40:11) and Jeremiah (31:11) associate the character of Yahweh with a shepherd, and Ezekiel perpetuates the same idea. All three provide passages illustrating the actions of bad shepherds and their severe consequences. Ezekiel provides the most detailed actions of poor

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<sup>264</sup> Daniel I Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 169, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4860089>.

<sup>265</sup> John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Illinois, United States: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 16, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>266</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 39.

<sup>267</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, 169.

leadership and explicitly offers the hope of Yahweh arriving to save his people. Although the shepherd imagery is limited to Chapters 34 and 37, its depth must be assessed in sections. The following provides a layout of the sections and flow of the shepherd motif.

#### Bad Undershepherds of God

1. Ezekiel 34:1-6 – Leaders as shepherds  
The leaders receive accusations exposing their poor leadership.
2. Ezekiel 34:7-10 – Leaders as bad shepherds  
An indictment of the bad shepherds, but God will rescue his sheep.

#### Caregiving of God

1. Ezekiel 34:11-16 – Yahweh, the shepherd  
God will rescue the flock.

#### Judgment and Justice of God

2. Ezekiel 34:17-22 – Israel as the flock with a new shepherd to come  
God will rescue the flock, judge the bad shepherds and send a new shepherd

#### Mercy and Redemption of God

1. Ezekiel 34:25-31 – People as sheep  
God is their shepherd, providing a secure place to live
2. Ezekiel 37:24-26 – King will be the one shepherd  
God is revealing the one shepherd to come

Shepherd is mentioned thirty-two times in Ezekiel 34. Before exegeting the sections, comparing and contrasting the Bad Shepherds vs. Yahweh as Shepherd will be beneficial. Following the chart, the passages will be an analysis of the passages.

Passages	Actions of the bad shepherds	Passages	Actions of Yahweh
Ezekiel 34:2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shepherds feed themselves and do not feed the sheep</li> <li>• Eat the fat</li> <li>• Slaughter the fat ones</li> <li>• Clothe with wool</li> </ul>	Ezekiel 34:11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will search for my sheep</li> <li>• I will seek them</li> <li>• As a shepherd among <i>scattered</i> sheep, I will seek them out and I will rescue them</li> </ul>
Ezekiel 34:4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They do not strengthen the weak</li> <li>• The sick people are not healed</li> <li>• The injured people are not bound up</li> <li>• The strayed people have not been brought back</li> <li>• The lost people are not sought</li> <li>• These shepherds rule with force and harshness</li> </ul>	Ezekiel 34:13-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will bring them out and <i>gather</i> them</li> <li>• I will feed them on the mountains</li> <li>• I will feed them with good pasture</li> </ul>

Ezekiel 34:5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sheep became <i>scattered</i> because there was no shepherd</li> <li>• They became food for wild beasts</li> <li>• They wandered over the mountains and on every high hill</li> <li>• (repeated) They were <i>scattered</i> with none to search or seek them</li> </ul>	Ezekiel 34:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep</li> <li>• I myself will make them lie down</li> </ul>
Ezekiel 34:8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sheep have become prey</li> <li>• The sheep have become food for all the wild beasts</li> <li>• There was no shepherd</li> <li>• The shepherds did not search for the sheep</li> </ul>	Ezekiel 34:16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I will seek the lost</li> <li>• I will bring back the strayed</li> <li>• I will bind up the injured</li> <li>• I will strengthen the weak</li> </ul>

Ezekiel 34 and 37 are the only two chapters of Ezekiel that will be examined for this research. Chapter 34 is among the most popular regarding poor shepherd leadership and expected future leadership. Joel Biwul attests, “The shepherd metaphor is nowhere more graphically presented in the prophets than in Ezekiel 34.”<sup>268</sup> His analysis describes chapter 34 as the “prophetic metaphor.”

Scholars generally agree that Ezekiel would have been familiar with Jeremiah 23:1-2 as a source for the shepherd metaphor.<sup>269</sup> Just as Jeremiah rebuked the shepherds in Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel clearly indicts the leadership of Israel for neglecting the people. The leaders’ inability to care for the people ultimately results in the people sinning against God. Allen states, “Responsibility for the deportation of 597 B.C. and the flight of refugees from Judah to

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<sup>268</sup> Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor*, 193.

<sup>269</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ezekiel 20-48* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 164.

neighboring states is laid at the palace door,”<sup>270</sup> meaning the leadership of Judah had failed their people. Joel Biwul contends that Ezekiel uses shepherd imagery to illuminate the results of a nation rejecting God. He asserts, “Ezekiel’s intention by using the shepherd metaphor was to make a public spectacle of Israel’s political wheel without Yahweh. He did this by revealing the weakness and imperfection of Israel’s human shepherds to allow for his projection of the ultimate strength of Yahweh as the only true Shepherd of national Israel.”<sup>271</sup> This metaphor highlights the bad leadership and spotlights who God is and how he desires to care for his people. He will save them.

### **Bad undershepherds of God**

Ezekiel 34:1-6; Ezekiel 34:7-10; Ezekiel 34:17-22

The shepherds of Israel were terrible shepherds who abused the people. They were consumed with caring for themselves. Ezekiel writes in 34:1-6:

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘This is what the Lord God says: “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should the shepherds not feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you searched for the lost; but with force and with violence you have dominated them. They scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every animal of the field and scattered. My flock strayed through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.”

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>271</sup> Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor*, 80.

Clearly, the leadership is self-focused, mistreating the sheep by not feeding them. John Taylor describes the shepherds this way: “They had exploited the people as if the flock belonged to them, the shepherds. But the people were the Lord’s flock (my sheep, 6), and the kings ruled them by the Lord’s appointment (my shepherds, 8).”<sup>272</sup> Ezekiel is instructed twice to “prophesy,” indicating a strong indictment of the shepherds. The call of Yahweh permeates the chapter with descriptive words, such as “says, declares, and hear.” Daniel Block categorizes Ezekiel 34 as the “announcement of deliverance, the nature of deliverance and the goal of deliverance”<sup>273</sup> Due to the similarities in the structure and style between this passage and Jeremiah 23, Block notes that Ezekiel probably had Jeremiah 23 before him, or at least was alluding to this passage.<sup>274</sup> Like the accusation of the shepherds in Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel condemns them for their dishonesty and immorality.

The shepherds are charged with three crimes that are layered with offenses against Yahweh. First, the Shepherds are only concerned with feeding themselves. Second, the shepherds cut the wool and only clothed themselves, not caring for the sickly or strengthening them. The Hebrew word חִלְהָה, meaning sickly, depicts “falling sick or to be ill.”<sup>275</sup> The image alludes to the lack of care in the shearing process. “This is natural in a pastoral economy, but Ezekiel’s figure assumes the forceful removal of wool, making it look like the sheep are left naked before the elements.”<sup>276</sup> Third, they “slaughter” the sheep for their own purpose. The

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<sup>272</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 214.

<sup>273</sup> Daniel L. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1997) 273.

<sup>274</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, 169.

<sup>275</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>276</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, 283.

Hebrew word זָבַח: connotes butchery that represents the most blatant violation of the shepherd's role, presumably judicial murder.<sup>277</sup> According to William Brownlee, these passages could be labeled Ezekiel's poetic indictment.<sup>278</sup> In verse 6, the high hills refer to the high places of false worship, reflecting the indictment. Brownlee refers to Jeremiah 50:6-7: "to support this idea 'My people have become lost sheep,' their shepherds have led them astray. They have made them turn aside on the mountains; they have gone along from mountain to the hill and have forgotten their resting place."<sup>279</sup> Jeremiah 50:6-10 the references of the "mountains" and the "hills" to be interpreted as the "high hills" of illicit cults, and the "mountain" as their resting place as referring to the temple mount, the place of true worship. However, some recognize these verses as a scattering of sheep in the high mountains left unprotected by their shepherds. These shepherds were the antithesis of the defining points of a good shepherd.

The shepherds were not strengthening the sickly, healing the diseased, binding the injured, or having concern for their flock, and many were going astray. Lamar Cooper argues, "For lack of positive moral or spiritual leadership, the people wandered from the Lord and became prey to idolatry and immorality."<sup>280</sup> The character of Yahweh lies in opposition to these bad shepherds.

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>278</sup> William H. Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Poetic Indictment of the Shepherds," *Harvard Theological Review* 51, no. 4 (n.d.): 191–203.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 300.

The shepherds became the predator instead of the protector. The sheep became plunder. The Hebrew word  $\text{לָבַד}$  means “plunder or spoil.”<sup>281</sup> The flock became plunder to malicious shepherds and foreign adversaries. Ezekiel 34:7-10 states:

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, certainly, because My flock has become plunder, and My flock has become food for all the animals of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: This is what the Lord God says: Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them stop tending sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will save My sheep from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.

Unlike the bad shepherds, Yahweh tends to his flock (Isa 40:11). The sheep under care should be protected, indicating that these bad shepherds do not follow God. The bad shepherds do not “search” for the flock. John Taylor notes, “Because of all this, God declares that he is against the shepherds, even though they ruled by his dispensation. Having failed in their responsibilities, they would no longer be allowed to rule; the flock would be taken out of their care, and they would be deposed from office.”<sup>282</sup> God is going to save his sheep from the “mouth” of the predator.

In further verses, the Lord judges and delivers the remnant. Yahweh has stopped addressing the corrupt shepherds and is now speaking to the flock. He is not only going to bring justice to the poor leadership, but he is ushering in justice between the people. These are top leaders in society, such as the elders and officers of the people. Ezekiel 34:17-22 states:

“As for you, My flock, this is what the Lord God says: ‘Behold, I am going to judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. Is it too little a thing for you to feed in the good pasture, that you must

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<sup>281</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>282</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 215.



trample with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or too little for you to drink the clear waters, that you must muddy the rest with your feet? But as for My flock, they must eat what you trample with your feet, and drink what you muddy with your feet!” Therefore, this is what the Lord God says to them: “Behold, I, I Myself will also judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Since you push away with your side and shoulder, and gore all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, therefore, I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plunder; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

“Rams” figuratively refer to a leader or mighty man, and “male goats” reference people of character or strong position. The fat sheep are most likely lay leaders in the community. The judgment of all these leaders dominates this section. The weak of the flock were oppressed, and the Lord opposed the greedy ones dominating the feeble for gain. Lamar Cooper writes, “The Lord would oppose those who were ‘greedy for unjust gain’ and who took advantage of the weak. Like a shepherd who must judge between sheep to be bred or sold or butchered, the Lord will judge between people who need his care and those who deserve his judgment.”<sup>283</sup> The unjust and self-serving leaders are guilty and receive just punishment from Yahweh. It seems the community leadership has displayed these actions during the time in exile. Yahweh is here to “save My flock” and this poor leadership will no longer exploit them.

## Caregiving of God

Ezekiel 34:11-16;

Therefore, Yahweh intervenes “in a welcome contrast to a succession of unworthy shepherds who enriched themselves at the expense of the flock.”<sup>284</sup> Ezekiel states that Yahweh

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<sup>283</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 302.

<sup>284</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Development of Old Testament Theme*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf, 1968) 102.

will deliver his people from the corrupt shepherds: “I will deliver” (v. 10). In this next section, the nature of deliverance brings salvation to his flock.<sup>285</sup> Ezekiel 34:11-16 says:

For the Lord God says this: “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and look after them. As a shepherd cares for his flock on a day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing place will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in a good grazing place and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will feed My flock and I Myself will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord God. “I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will eliminate. I will feed them with judgment.

John Taylor points to God as the shepherd who would right the wrongs. He writes, “God represents himself as taking on the role of Shepherd to his people. His job will be to find the straying, to rescue the lost, and to feed and tend the whole flock, giving particular attention to the weak and ailing members.”<sup>286</sup> Cooper states, “Ezekiel 34:11-16 abounds in first person promises. While there is some overlap and repetition, there are twenty-five such promises in this and the following paragraphs of the chapter.”<sup>287</sup> God demonstrates the character of a good shepherd and what it looks like to tend a flock with justice and righteousness. The author of Ezekiel is rendering the idea that God is personally involved, as the use of “I will” indicates. He claims he will “search, seek, gather, and feed” his sheep. He will “bring back the stray, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.” He will place his sheep in good pastures where they will lie down because they are no longer afraid of wild beasts. Ezekiel stated the same characteristics of

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<sup>285</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Ezekiel 20-48, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990) 138.

<sup>286</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 215.

<sup>287</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 301.

Yahweh using the “gathering” and “scattered” sheep language, “I will *gather* you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been *scattered*, and I will give you the land of Israel” (Eze 11:17). The imagery of a good shepherd is to care and restore his flock, this is the opposite of the behavior of the bad shepherds. God does work through human shepherds, but they are to be an extension of his character and ruling.

## **Redemption of God**

Ezekiel 34:25-31; 37:24-26

The last section transitions into a covenant of peace. The covenant will grant Israel peace and rest. Yahweh is freeing his people from exile and revealing the characteristics of the coming Davidic shepherd. The sheep will lie securely, and the bars of the yoke of sin that has enslaved them will be broken. Ezekiel 34:23-31 says:

Then I will appoint over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken. “And I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful animals from the land, so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will make showers fall in their season; they will be showers of blessing. Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its produce, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have saved them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be plunder to the nations, and the animals of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. Then they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord God. “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are mankind, and I am your God,” declares the Lord God.

Darrel Bock states it this way: “In Ezekiel 34:25-31, David is the one shepherd of the people. Thus, this period involves the rule and activity of one promised to come from David. Here the ‘covenant of peace’ discusses a secure life in a fruitful land. Again, the imagery recalls the promises to Abram and David.”<sup>288</sup> These things are coming to pass to honor the name of the Lord and make all know him.

The description of the effects of Yahweh’s covenant of peace is intentionally repetitious.

- A      peace with the animals (vv. 25b-d)
- B      blessing of the vegetation (vv. 26–27c)
- C      deliverance from oppression (vv. 27d–28a)
- A’     peace with the animals’ (vv. 28b-d)
- B’     blessing of the vegetation (vv. 29a-b)
- C’     deliverance from oppression (v. 29c)<sup>289</sup>

In this tender covenant relationship, Yahweh remains faithful to honor his name. He desires the nations to know him. He is the one true God and the deliverer.

The following passage in Ezekiel, which contains the shepherd motif, sits within a chapter that describes Yahweh restoring Israel. The focus will only be on Ezekiel 37:24-26:

And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes and follow them. And they will live on the land that I gave to My servant Jacob, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and My servant David will be their leader forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them.

The restored nation will be under “one shepherd,” solidified by a covenant of peace between Israel and Yahweh. God is restoring them to walk with him once again. Taylor contends, “The

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<sup>288</sup> Darrell L. Bock, J. Lanier Burns, Elliott E. Johnson, Stanley D. Toussaint, ed. Herbert Bateman IV, *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999) 192.

<sup>289</sup> Block, Daniel I., *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997) 305.

quality of permanence attaching to this future reign and expressed in the repeated phrase *forever, forevermore* ( 25, 26, 28) is a strong indication that Ezekiel is here thinking not so much of a line of Davidic kings, as he had known them in the past, but of a supernatural kingly being in whom would be concentrated all the qualities of wisdom, enduement with the Spirit, righteousness and peace that were expected of God's anointed ruler."<sup>290</sup> The shepherd motif once again clearly communicates that a good shepherd is coming to the restored nation.

The coming king will be a human king with one flock that will "follow him." In John, Jesus alludes to Ezekiel 34:24 when he states, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd." The people will walk in the "ordinances" and "statutes" of Yahweh. The messianic passage presents shepherd leaders as an extension of the work of Yahweh. The Messiah will lead them to the land of God, and he will be their king forever under a new covenant. He is setting up a new covenant with a people that will hear and listen to the shepherd-king of God. Daniel Block explains, "First, the nation will have a new commitment to the will of Yahweh, the divine patron. The triad of expressions, follow my laws, observe my decrees, and put them into practice, captures the essence of the response of faith to the privilege of being Yahweh's people."<sup>291</sup> The covenant anticipates events and promises never realized in the first return of the exile. Cooper writes, "Prophecy often had an immediate, limited fulfillment, but also a long range more complete fulfillment."<sup>292</sup> King Cyrus would execute the immediate fulfillment for the exiles in the return to Jerusalem. However, Ezekiel indicates a king beyond the exiles' immediate

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<sup>290</sup> Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 234.

<sup>291</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, 51.

<sup>292</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 327.

freedom. The shepherd imagery communicates that the shepherd leaders of Yahweh follow his statutes and rule with his heart. A new shepherd-king is coming to rule in the righteousness of God.

Even though Ezekiel's use of the shepherd motif is limited to only two chapters, Ezekiel offers one of the most descriptive pictures of irresponsible leaders in Scripture—one which has often been the focus of leadership. However, the reader has observed the significance of who God is and what he is doing in the shepherd motif. He is impeaching the human shepherds that have failed to mimic or imitate his characteristics in caring for his people. Yet, he is preparing for a messianic figure that will be a protector rather than a predator. He will “feed the hungry, bring back the stray, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. Unlike the bad shepherds, God states, he will “search” for his “scattered” sheep to “rescue” them. The sheep will be “fed” and “lie down.” God is the judge, deliverer, savior, and redeemer who restores his people. He is sending a new shepherd-king to care for his people.

The author of Ezekiel is laying out the characteristics of the shepherd leader who represents the heart of Yahweh. Reflect again on a paraphrase of Ezekiel 34:23-31 which highlights the main characteristics of God in italics. These qualities outline the shepherd that represents Yahweh: Then Yahweh will appoint over them *My servant, a Davidic shepherd*, He will *feed them* and be their shepherd. *And I, the Lord, will be their God*. And I will *make a covenant of peace* with them and *eliminate harmful animals* from the land, so that they *may live securely*. I will make them and the places around *My hill a blessing*. The *tree of the field will yield its fruit* and the earth will yield its produce, *I will break the bars of their yoke and save them* from the hand of those who enslaved them. *No one will make them afraid. They will be My people*, As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are mankind, and I am your God.

Ezekiel provides a futuristic view of a shepherd to come. The author of Ezekiel is declaring a theology about Yahweh and his desires for his future representative.

### The Use of the Shepherd Motif in the Minor Prophets

The books of Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah utilize the shepherd motif. The following is a brief historical background before advancing into the shepherd patterns. Hosea prophesized to Israel during the pre-exilic period against Samaria, the capital city, regarding their unfaithfulness to God. Hosea is a book filled with oracles regarding the blessings and curses of Israel deriving from the Mosaic Law. Douglas Stuart writes, “understanding the message of the book of Hosea depends upon understanding the Sinai covenant.”<sup>293</sup> Hosea is warning the people of the judgment to come for their idolatry.

Amos prophesized to Israel in the Northern Kingdom of Bethel. During this time, the kings were Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel. Assyria was the dominant empire at the time. In this pre-exilic text, the people of God had followed the way of other nations. Jeroboam did not follow in the way of God but allowed idol worship and injustice in the Northern Kingdom. Billy Smith and Frank Page state, “The shrines at Bethel, Dan, Gilgal, and Beer-sheba had constant streams of worshipers bringing growing numbers of sacrificial animals. Amos showed God's disapproval of such religious activities by announcing God's judgment upon the religious sites, by giving counsel to stay away from the sites, and by declaring God's rejection of their religious activities.”<sup>294</sup> During this time, there was moral and social

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<sup>293</sup> Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 6.

<sup>294</sup> Billy K. Smith and Frank Page, *The New American Commentary: Amos, Obadiah and Jonah* (B & H Publishing Group, 1995), 22, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=673065>. Created from liberty on 2022-04-05 10:51:49.

deterioration: the people were indulging in sexual immorality, while the weak were oppressing the poor. Their outward worship was contrary to the way they were living.

Micah was a prophet in the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The milieu of the time included the people of Judah breaking their covenant with God by succumbing to idolatry, living luxuriously, and oppressing the poor. Yet, the Israelites continued to take sacrifices to the temple as if they were pleasing Yahweh with their outward offerings.

The book of Nahum is an oracle against the Assyrian empire regarding the injustice of the empire to Israel. After the Assyrian empire arose, Judah became a vassal, and Assyria imposed taxes and oppression on people. Assyria had dominated the people of Judah. Moreover, they were filled with idolatry, pride, violence, and greed. Many people would call Nahum a book of hate, but Barker claims it reveals the sovereignty of God and justice for all nations. The judgment of God is delivered because of the wickedness of the Assyrians, not simply because they are Judah's enemies but because they are an enemy of the righteousness of God.<sup>295</sup>

The message of Zephaniah was delivered during the reign of King Josiah. The author addresses the unrighteousness of the people and the coming judgment of Judah. Zephaniah preaches about the Day of the Lord and the humble worship God desires for his people. The people of Judah do not care for the oppressed among them. The author highlights that wealth and power do not gain status with God; however, caring for people is significant

Zechariah opens with the Persian reign of King Darius at the end of the seventy years of exile. The message of the prophet instructs the people of Yahweh to reject the ways of their ancestors who walked in disobedience to God and turn back to him. The ones in exile repent and

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<sup>295</sup> Kenneth L. Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (B & H Publishing Group, 1998), 140, accessed April 6, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central., 140



humble themselves before God. The last few chapters turn to the temple with eschatological meanings. The book then depicts a humble, messianic king riding a donkey. Alan Fuhr and Gary Yates indicate, “the message of Zechariah is that Yahweh would bless his people as they rebuilt the temple and would empower Joshua and Zerubbabel as they led this rebuilding project.”<sup>296</sup> The new kingdom will have a righteous shepherd. The latter chapters of the book reflect the shepherd motif and include eschatological events.

#### Shepherd Images in the minor prophets:

##### Judgment of God

1. Hosea 4:16 – Lord as a shepherd and people as sheep  
The question reveals that God will not shepherd an unfaithful people.
2. Amos 3:12 – Israel as the flock  
Israel will not survive the coming attack.
3. Nahum 3:18 – The shepherds are bad leaders  
The leaders have abandoned the ways of God.
4. Zechariah 11:2-3 – The people are sheep  
The people wander because there is no shepherd.
5. Zechariah 11:15-17

##### Bad Shepherds of God

1. Zechariah - 10:2-3 – God is the shepherd, and people are the flock  
Yahweh is restoring his people.

##### Caregiving of God

1. Micah 7:14 – Yahweh as a shepherd  
Calling on God to lead the people.
2. Zechariah 9:16-17 – God is the shepherd  
The people are the flock.

##### Mercy and Redemption of God

1. Micah - 2:12 – The remnant as sheep  
Yahweh will restore the sheep.
2. Micah 4:6-8 – Remnant as sheep  
Yahweh will gather his people.
3. Micah 5:4-6 – Messianic ruler is the shepherd of his flock  
The new ruler will care for the people.
4. Zephaniah 2:6-7 – God is the shepherd of the sheep  
Yahweh is leading his people to restoration.

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<sup>296</sup> Richard Alan Fuhr, Jr. and Gary E. Yates, *The Message of the Twelve* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2016), 270.

5. Zephaniah 3:12-13 – Remnant are sheep  
God is leading them to a place of safety and security.
6. Zephaniah 3:19-20 – Remnant are the sheep  
God will restore the people to himself.

#### Restoration of God

1. Zechariah 13:7-9

### Judgment of God

#### Hosea 4:16

Although the book of Hosea is not awash in shepherd imagery, it does carry a hint of the shepherd language in Chapter 4. The writer of Hosea presents the case that the people of Israel and Judah have broken their covenant with God. Hosea condemns the people for rejecting god and following false gods in this poetic style. Dearman writes, “It is possible that the indictments in 4:1– 19 reflect an understanding of the Mosaic period and, more particularly, traditions now contained in Exod. 32– 34 about idolatry and the breaking of covenant faithfulness.”<sup>297</sup> The book of Hosea is an example of knowing Yahweh desires covenant obedience. The people have refused the ways of God. Hosea reveals the thoughts of Yahweh, stating, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6), and the verses through 19 render the charges against the people. Chapter 4 clearly turns from the marriage metaphor to the abandonment of God. The shepherd language in the poetry of Hosea is in verse 16 through a simile that deploys the stubbornness of Israel and likens Yahweh to a shepherd. However, the stubbornness of Israel presents a problem if they were in an open pasture. Dearman writes, “Although the feeding opportunities would be good for the cow (she needs it to produce milk and to bear calves), her

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<sup>297</sup> Andrew J. Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 116, accessed April 3, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

recalcitrance would make it a disaster. Context is the clue that the verse concludes with a rhetorical question.”<sup>298</sup> Hosea 4:16 states:

Since Israel is stubborn  
Like a stubborn cow,  
Will the Lord now pasture them  
Like a lamb in a large field?

This literary device is meant to evoke feelings that cause the people of Israel to recognize the gravity of their sin against Yahweh. The reference to “cow,” sometimes translated as “heifer,” stems from the Hebrew word פרה. The word describes the evil “women of Bashan” (Amos 4:1). Israel represents the same characteristics, and the idea is cemented with the verb “stubborn” to imply rebellion. The people are worshipping other gods as opposed to following Yahweh. Hosea contends that now that you have prostrated yourselves to other gods, you want the Lord to shepherd you like a lamb. James Mays contends, “The cult of Israel’s shrines is to be avoided because those who assemble in them are stubbornly committed to their folly. Like a balky cow which always bucks and plunges in the direction opposite to that in which she is pushed, Israel perversely resists every attempt of Yahweh to guide them.”<sup>299</sup> Mays further notes that the Lord could be responding as if the people were calling on Yahweh in the cultic worship, and his response reflects on the fact that they cannot be pastured like a shepherd pastures lambs due to their stubbornness to follow. Here one can observe that God loves his people enough to allow them the choice to follow him. People are not robots, and the author reminds Israel that their stubborn hearts have prevented them from being led by their shepherd, Yahweh. He desires to lead them like a lamb, but they are too stubborn to follow. Hosea reveals the character of the

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>299</sup> James L. Mays, *Hosea: A Commentary* (Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1969), 78.

justice of Yahweh. The people cannot live a life of debauchery and receive the blessings of Yahweh.

In summary, Hosea only uses the shepherd imagery one time explicitly. In its use, the author is exposing the heart of the people of Israel who have rejected Yahweh. The lamb depicts a docile attitude toward the shepherd. The people of Israel will only find rest in a good shepherd, but they are unwilling to follow. This dynamic implies that they have the freedom to reject God, but God is a God of justice and must address the actions of the people.

Amos 3:12

The shepherd language is used only in one verse of the book. Amos utilizes the shepherd metaphor to provide a visual picture of judgment. Amos 3:12 states:

This is what the Lord says:  
‘Just as the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a  
piece of an ear,  
So will the sons of Israel living in Samaria be snatched away—  
With the corner of a bed and the cover of a couch!’

The listeners would have understood Amos's comparison by using the *as/so* formula. Smith and Page reach into Exodus 22:10 to reveal what the audience would have understood in the comparison. They write, “A shepherd who attended sheep for other owners had to give an account for missing animals. Such a shepherd would count himself fortunate if he could find the evidence sufficient to convince the owners that a lion had ravaged the flock. In that case, he would not have to pay for the loss of the animal.” Therefore, “a couple of legs” or “piece of an ear” would have averted the responsibility of the shepherd but would also mean the lion was successful in the attack. The Lord is saying that Israel will not survive the destruction to come. Only bits and pieces will remain to bear witness to their destruction.

In summary, the author of Amos employs the shepherd motif. The concrete image attests that judgment is coming. Israel has sinned, and God has judged his people for idolatry and social injustice. The passages indicate that the people lack righteousness; therefore, God is bringing justice.

Zechariah 11:2-3; 11:4-17

Zachariah 11 is one of the most debated and controversial chapters in the book.<sup>300</sup> The whole chapter indicts the bad shepherds that rejected the way of Yahweh. Redditt and Utzschneider attest that the cedars, shepherds, and lions could symbolize rulers.<sup>301</sup> Although there is complexity over its poetic or literal nature, the passage highlights the failure of the shepherds to guide the people of Israel. In Zechariah 1-2, Lebanon is judged and lamented over.

Zechariah 11:2-3 states:

Wail, juniper, because the cedar has fallen,  
For the magnificent trees have been destroyed;  
Wail, oaks of Bashan,  
Because the impenetrable forest has come down.  
There is a sound of the shepherds' wail,  
For their splendor is ruined  
There is a sound of the young lions' roar,  
For the pride of the Jordan is ruined.

The shepherds are the leaders wailing from judgment due to their neglect of Yahweh. "Wail" in Hebrew is נִלְלָה, referring to deep mourning. There are different interpretations of verse 3, but it does seem to be drawn from Jeremiah, which states, "There is a sound of the shepherds' wail,

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<sup>300</sup> The task of understanding the text is underscored by scholars in almost every commentary on Zachariah 11. George Klein contends that deciphering between figurative and literal language is a considerable challenge. Mark Boda claims 11:1-3 functions as a redaction. He further states that form critics disagree on whether it is a lament, taunt, or a call to lament.

<sup>301</sup> Paul L. Redditt and Paul L. Utzschneider, *Zechariah 9-14 : English First Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2012), 79. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1810143>.

For their splendor is ruined” (25:34). Lebanon was known for its cedar trees which was a source for Solomon’s temple. Boda notes, “Solomon’s palace is called “the house of the forest of the Lebanon” in 1 Kgs. 7:2; 10:17, 21; 2 Chr. 9:16, 20.”<sup>302</sup> However, cedars and oaks also carry a negative connotation relating to pride and arrogance in Isaiah 2:12-13. The cedars seem to be the rulers or maybe religious leaders. Zechariah delineates Bashan, where there is “wailing of the shepherds.” The description communicates that their habitat has been destroyed, and the thick Jordan is desolated. Klein says, “not only will the shepherds wail, but the lions in the thicket surround the Jordan roar their pain and displeasure over what the Lord has done to them.”<sup>303</sup> “In the thicket” refers to the habitat of the resting place for the lion. The lions have lost their habitat, which could be the defeat of the kings, but again. “One would expect shepherds to bewail the loss of pastureland or their flocks to wild animals, but the text says they were bewailing the destruction of their ‘glory.’ This term alerts the reader that these are not ordinary shepherds, but something else.”<sup>304</sup> Verses 1-3 seems to express the downfall of leaders and rulers.

Zechariah 11:4-16 is recognized as a turning point because of the statement, “This is what the Lord my God says: ‘Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter’” (v 4). The repetition of pronouns in the passage implies divine agency. A typical prophetic structure follows the announcement with a sign-act, including exhortation, execution, and explanation. God has called the prophet to take the role of a shepherd symbolically. It appears that he is representing the leaders of God’s people. Zechariah 10:1-3 mentions the worthless shepherds, “therefore the

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<sup>302</sup> Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 494.

<sup>303</sup> George Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 33.

<sup>304</sup> Paul L. Redditt and Paul L. Utzschneider, *Zechariah 9-14 : English First Edition* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2012), 79. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=1810143>.

people wander like sheep. They are wretched because there is no shepherd.” In Zechariah 11:4, the bad leaders do not care for the flock and are “doomed to slaughter.” Boda believes the clues from Ezekiel 34:1-31 and 37:15-28 shed light on understanding the identity of the leaders.<sup>305</sup> For example, *הִשְׁחָרֵף* meaning *slaughter*, in both Ezekiel 34:3 and Zechariah 11:7 carry the same vocabulary phrase “doomed to slaughter.” The character of the worthless shepherds in Ezekiel also matches the language in Zechariah.

The shepherds have “no compassion” for their people. The shepherds were unwilling to do what was costly to them, and they were unwilling to do what was right for the people. In turn, Yahweh will not pity them but will send judgment. Zechariah 11:5-6 reflects the lack of compassion or pity of the shepherds:

And their own shepherds have no compassion for them. For I will no longer have compassion for the inhabitants of the land,” declares the Lord; “but behold, I will let the people fall, each into another’s power and into the power of his king; and they will crush the land, and I will not rescue them from their power.”

The drama is complex and challenging to resolve at times. The message displays two staffs named “Favor” and “Union” and “tended the sheep” (Zech 11:7). It seems optimistic that Yahweh will now bless the people. The signs of hope show the shepherd removing terrible shepherds, “In one month I destroyed the three shepherds” (Zech 11:8). Yet, the people rejected this leadership, and they “detested” him. Therefore, the prophet states, “So I said, “I will not be your shepherd” (Zech 11:9).

Moreover, the prophet breaks the staff named “favor” to show the people that they have a broken covenant with Yahweh (Zech 11:10). The message of the passage expresses; the rejection of the words of Yahweh, and in turn, the people of Israel have broken their covenant with God.

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<sup>305</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 500.

Yates and Fuhr write, “Though the people had initially responded favorably to the calls of Haggai and Zechariah to rebuild the temple, they had not been willing to follow other directives from the prophets.”<sup>306</sup> They even further display their disrespect when the prophet asks, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages” (Zech 11:12). The people attempt to pay the prophet the wage of an enslaved person and insult him. Because of this, he took the “silver and threw them to the potter.” He then broke the second staff called “Union,” signifying the termination of the “brotherhood between Judah and Israel” (Zech 11:14). Almost every scholar mentions the similarity between Ezekiel and the unification of the staffs and Zechariah with the brokenness in the staffs. Smith states, “These were to be the objectives of the new David, according to Ezek 37:16-28. But whereas Ezekiel saw the staffs as indicators of saving events, the prophet in Zech 11 sees them as symbols of doom and judgment.”<sup>307</sup> Instead of harmony and peace, there would be destruction. God offers hope of a new covenant in Ezekiel 34:25, but in Zechariah 11:10 and 14, he broke the covenant.

Many scholars affirm the good shepherd as the messianic leader in 11:4-14. Abernethy and Goswell contend, “In Zechariah’s time, there is ambiguity as to who the shepherd will be, but he appears to be a Davidic royal figure.”<sup>308</sup> The main thrust of the passage in the context of Zechariah appears to be the rejection of God as their shepherd. However, there are later patterns

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<sup>306</sup> Fuhr, Jr. and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 290.

<sup>307</sup> Ralph L. Smith, *Word Biblical Commentary: Micah to Malachi* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 271.

<sup>308</sup> Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, “The Sprout, the Divine Shepherd, and the Messenger in Zechariah and Malachi,” in *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 175.



of messianic connections to the betrayal of Christ (Matt 26:15) and the national rejection of Christ.<sup>309</sup>

In verses 15-16, Yahweh gives the people what they want: a worthless shepherd who will not care for or tend to them. “Worthless” in Hebrew is רָעָל meaning a foolish shepherd who does not care for the people. Gan identifies this shepherd as “worthless,” which implies that he displays no morality, is disobedient to Yahweh, and unrepentant.”<sup>310</sup> This shepherd will not feed the hungry, heal the broken, or protect the sheep but instead will leave the sheep helpless and defenseless.

The people and the wicked shepherds will ultimately receive judgment from God. The Hebrew root רָעַל in Isaiah 59:16 is the same as in Zechariah 11:17. In Isaiah, the arm of Yahweh can carry the lamb (Isa 40:11) and protect the lamb. The actions of the caring arm can rescue and strengthen the lamb (Eze 34:12). The punishment for this worthless shepherd will result in his “arm” being “totally withered,” whereas the arm of the Lord is strong and saves (Isa 59:16; 63:5). It states in Zechariah 11:17:

Woe to the worthless shepherd  
Who abandons the flock!  
A sword will be on his arm  
And on his right eye!  
His arm will be totally withered,  
And his right eye will be blind.

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<sup>309</sup> The Gospels make further connections of the struck shepherd from Zechariah 13:7 to Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. The idea of piercing/striking of the shepherd resulted in the scattering of the flock, but God will bring them back together in his kingdom. The Gospels indicate that this suffering shepherd-king is either a type or prophecy of Jesus. In either case, this portrait of the scattered sheep and pierced shepherd is connected to the Messiah within the books Matthew and Mark.

<sup>310</sup> Jonathan Gan, “The Metaphor of the Shepherd In Zechariah 11:4–17” (University of South Africa, 2010), 74, accessed January 2, 2021, [http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4867/dissertation\\_gan\\_j.pdf](http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4867/dissertation_gan_j.pdf).

The focus of these passages offers a portrayal of bad shepherds that were to carry out the covenant God had with his people. The bad shepherds shed light on the differences between a good shepherd. Yahweh is the good shepherd that instructed through the covenant he made with his people, but the bad shepherds did not care for their people and instead used them to pave their way to false prosperity. The prophets repeatedly describe Yahweh as a caring and good shepherd, but the people continually reject him.

### **Bad Undershepherds of God**

Nahum 3:18-19

Bad undershepherds are not limited to Israel and its religious leaders. God desires good leadership in all nations, and he cares about all nations. He is over all the nations. The rulers and leaders of the nations answer to him. Nahum 3 identifies that the reality of destruction was sure for the Assyrians, “Woe to the bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage”(1:1). Assyria was ruthless and built on bloodshed, and now the judgment of God was coming. The Lord is against their “sorcery,” “witchcraft,” and their oppressing nature on people. The Assyrians will “go into hiding” (3:11) from the obliteration of Yahweh. Nahum calls Assyria to prepare for battle, “draw water for siege, strengthen your defense” (3:14); however, Assyria has no defense against Yahweh. The book of Nahum references the shepherd motif through the leadership of human agents. These are bad shepherds; they are “sleeping,” and their people are “scattered” without a shepherd. Nahum 3:18-19 states:

Your shepherds are sleeping, O king of Assyria;  
Your officers are lying down.  
Your people are scattered on the mountains  
And there is no one to gather them.  
Nothing can heal your wound;  
Your injury is fatal.

In this passage, the “sleeping shepherds” are the leaders of the nation of Assyria, and Nahum explicitly names the king of Assyria for the first time in the book. The verse identifies “officers lying down,” the scattering of people, and the absence of a shepherd to “gather them.” Renz explains, “The terms used are ambiguous, probably deliberately so, as sleep may refer to neglect of duties or the sleep of death. Thus, slumber is used for inattentive watchmen (Isa 56:10) as well as for people dying (Ps 76:5); similarly, at rest may hint at staying put (Judg 5:17) or at inhabiting the world of the dead (Job 26:5).”<sup>311</sup> The nation is powerless to help the city. The people are “scattered,” and the death of the king is imminent. Yet there is a distinction between the “scattered” Assyrians and the “scattered” Israelites. Yahweh judges the Israelites, but they receive the hope of restoration, unlike the Assyrians, who receive no hope. Nahum 1:2 says of the enemies of God that “He reserves wrath for His enemies.” And 3:15 announces the hope of peace for Israel, “Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good news, Who announces peace!” Nahum implicitly indicates that Yahweh expects each nation to rule in righteousness, but the shepherds of Assyria have ruled in opposition to God. As a result, he now will bring judgment to the nation.

In summary, Assyria has embraced wickedness and corrupt leadership. The nation of Assyria opposes Judah, and Nahum is writing to espouse that God knows of their wickedness and that judgment will bring destruction upon them. Yahweh implemented judgment on Israel and Assyria, yet Israel received the hope of restoration. The author of Nahum uses the shepherd motif to describe the nature of the nation of Assyria, and it implicitly recognizes the sovereignty and righteousness of God.

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<sup>311</sup> Thomas Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2021), 168, accessed April 6, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

## Zechariah 10:2-3

The beginning of Chapter 10 shifts to spotlight the idolatry that results in judgment. The opening verse reminds the people to “Ask for rain” from the Lord. Ralph Smith argues, “The prophet is admonishing his hearers to ask for rain of Yahweh (v. 1), who controls the clouds.”<sup>312</sup> Idols have always been a snare to the people of Israel. The Israelites participated in idolatry, such as Baalism, and verse 1 could put stress on the rebuke of idols.<sup>313</sup> Therefore, the people should pray to the Lord, rejecting the diviners and idols who cannot deliver them. The people are following other gods and are aimless because the shepherds have neglected their responsibility of leading the people in the statutes of Yahweh. Zechariah 10:2-3 and states:

For the household idols speak deception,  
And the diviners see an illusion  
And tell deceitful dreams;  
They comfort in vain.  
Therefore the people wander like sheep,  
They are wretched because there is no shepherd.  
“My anger is kindled against the shepherds,  
And I will punish the male goats;  
For the Lord of armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah,  
And will make them like His majestic horse in battle.

The people of Yahweh do not have good shepherds to guide and direct them, so the sheep are “wandering.” Klein attests, “The prophet likened the result of false prophecy on the welfare of the nation to the wondering of a flock of sheep.”<sup>314</sup> The idea of “wander,” the Hebrew word נסע reflects an uprooting, tearing out, or departing. The people of God are not rooted in Yahweh because the leaders have not guided them. The “male goats” in Hebrew עֲתוּדִים indicates leaders of

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<sup>312</sup> Smith, *Word Biblical Commentary: Micah to Malachi*, 261.

<sup>313</sup> George Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008), 285.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

a strong position. The shepherds of the religious community and male goats of the political sphere have shirked the responsibility of teaching the law. Now the Lord is angered, Boda explains: “Yahweh’s stance towards these shepherds and he-goats is clearly negative, and the verbs used in the first two lines highlight a progression in divine discipline from the initial phase of Yahweh’s anger in the first line to his punishing action in the second.”<sup>315</sup> Yet, Yahweh “visits” the people. The phrase “he visits” in the Hebrew is of the root word פקד meaning to attend, care or search out. God will judge the corrupt rulers because he cares for his people. Yahweh is visiting his flock, and Smith writes: “He will turn the frightened, passive, shepherdless sheep into an active, proud, brave war-horse.”<sup>316</sup>

### Caregiving of God

Micah 7:14

Turning to Micah 7, the beginning vocalizes laments of a corrupt society, “The godly person has perished from the land” (7:2). Allen attests that the chapter bears the likeness of a psalm, and it probably became a community liturgy.<sup>317</sup> Micah is expressing the decadent culture as it weighs heavy on him. There is a crying out to God and recognition of his discipline to come, but salvation will come after the discipline. Micah is the voice of God to the people, and he exemplifies supplication to Yahweh as a mediator. In verses 8-20, it seems to be a community lament to Yahweh looking to him to lead his people, “He will bring me out to the light” (7:8).

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<sup>315</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 610.

<sup>316</sup> Smith, *Word Biblical Commentary: Micah to Malachi*, 264.

<sup>317</sup> Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), 330, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=669493>.

Then, a calling for the shepherd-king to lead Israel once again. Micah turns to supplication for Jerusalem and Judah in 7:14:

Shepherd Your people with Your scepter,  
The flock of Your possession  
Which lives by itself in the woodland,  
In the midst of a fruitful field.  
Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead  
As in the days of old.

The rod or staff was an instrument that a shepherd would use to protect his sheep. It was also used to count sheep. Because the Hebrew word for the instrument, *טֹבֵּעַ* meant administering discipline, protection, or rule, it became a symbol of authority to the one holding it.<sup>318</sup> In the text, the instrument symbolizes protecting, and over time, it became stylized as the scepter.<sup>319</sup> The “flock” refers to his people calling the shepherd to rule them again. The “flock,” meaning Israel, belongs to him. They are living in the “woodlands,” probably referring to a controlled land but surrounded by a “fruitful field.” It was reminiscent of the land Israel once had with fertile grounds for bearing foods which was a sign of blessing, but the Assyrians had taken over their land. Barker explains that “lives by itself in the woodland” could be “referring to their restricted territory since the Assyrians occupied and used the best land. The Hebrew for ‘forest’ is given a negative nuance in 3:12 (‘thickets’). So ‘in fertile pasturelands’ may mean ‘in the midst of fertile pasturelands’, with the best land all around them but in the hands of others.”<sup>320</sup> “Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead” is a recollection of the fruitful land the Israelites once controlled but now belongs to the reigning empires. Micah reflects on the ideas of “the old days,” reminiscing of a time when the people experienced good leadership. He perhaps refers to Moses here since verse

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<sup>318</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>319</sup> Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 121.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

15 depicts the Exodus language when Micah answers the prayer. He clearly sees God as hearing his prayer and having all knowledge of the past and present. Micah is implying the omnipresence of God and his personal relationship to hear his prayer.

In summary, the shepherd motif is utilized in all three salvation oracles in Micah. The theology of the prophets pours through the language explicitly and implicitly. This theology describes who God is and what his future plans will be. The shepherd motif's language permeates the shepherd passages in Micah. The language of assemble, gather, scatter, flock, afflicted, limp, scepter, and shepherd all bring to light Yahweh as the shepherd and his use of human agents. He is the measurement of what a shepherd should be. In Micah, he has not forgotten his people, but instead, they will return to him and be restored in a manner beyond their imagination. The shepherd is coming and will rule all the nations for the good of the people.

#### Zechariah 9:16-17

The shepherd motif is woven throughout passages between Chapters 9-11 and then one small but highly discussed verse in Chapter 13. Mark Boda explains, "The shepherding/flock frame is evident throughout Zechariah 9-14, especially in sections which serve to structure the various prophetic units."<sup>321</sup> Chapter 9 voices an oracle regarding the nations' judgment; the author says, "The pronouncement of the word of the Lord is against" (9:1). God is righteous and over every nation. In verse 8, Israel hears the victory of the Lord over the nations, "And no oppressor will pass over them anymore, For now I have seen with My eyes." The eschatological passage of the promise land ushers in a new coming king and kingdom. Verses 11-17 describe

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<sup>321</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 608.

the kingdom to come where God “sets the prisoner free” and “restores” them. The language of the shepherd motif embedded in Zechariah 9:16-17 portrays God as the savior:

On that day the Lord their God will save them,  
as the flock of his people;  
for like the jewels of a crown  
they shall shine on his land.  
For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!  
Grain shall make the young men flourish,  
and new wine the young women.

The root word for “save” is *נצח* meaning to save or bring someone in distress to a safe place or pasture. According to Rex Mason, the framework of the chapter is a call for deliverance for Israel. He writes, “This is an announcement of deliverance and final victory; Zion is spoken of, and Ephraim is given a place, although here it is Judah with which Ephraim is paralleled rather than Jerusalem.”<sup>322</sup> As the message advances the idea of deliverance, the shepherd motif indicates God as the shepherd who will save his flock. They are the “jewel of his crown.” He is good because he cares and saves his people. Paul House contends, “Yahweh will be their shepherd, which means Israel will prevail over the leaders of other lands. No one is capable of frustrating the sovereign shepherd’s purposes, a fact Ezekiel 34:11-31 declares in an earlier passage that connects the Lord’s shepherding of Israel, the Davidic ruler, and Israel’s ultimate restoration.”<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, eds., *Bringing Out the Treasure* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 46.

<sup>323</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, UNITED STATES: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 391, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=5630189>.



## Mercy and Redemption of God

### Micah 2:12

The shepherd passages included in Micah fall under the chapters considered salvation sections that bring hope after a declaration of judgment. In Micah 2, the author exposed the wrongdoing of the people of Israel as well as false prophets (Micah 1:1; 1:6). The oracle addresses opponents of Micah. Allen Leslie argues that the opponents are the landowners and false prophets who are allied together.<sup>324</sup> It is interesting to note that Dempster identifies the opponents as false prophets. He writes, “it is most likely that they are false prophets who cannot accept Micah and his colleagues’ messages of doom. The text begins and ends with reference to Micah’s prophetic opponents (2:6, 11). They challenge his message of doom (2:6– 7a) with three statements, but Micah counters their attack (2:7b– 9), which adduces further evidence of the rapacious behavior of the greedy Israelites. He then continues his offensive by issuing commands to these covetous criminals to leave the country (2:10) while sarcastically commenting on the false prophets’ “prosperity gospel” (2:11).”<sup>325</sup> It is noteworthy that Micah is following up his indictment of the bad prophets by utilizing the shepherd motif to identify God as the good and compassionate shepherd. This is the same idea in Ezekiel 34, in which Ezekiel condemns the bad shepherds, only to follow up with the good shepherd being Yahweh. In Micah, the author transitions from judgment to the hope and salvation of Yahweh, depicting him as a compassionate and redeeming shepherd in 2:12:

I will certainly assemble all of you, Jacob,  
I will certainly gather the remnant of Israel.  
I will put them together like sheep in the fold;  
Like a flock in the midst of its pasture

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<sup>324</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 255.

<sup>325</sup> Stephen Dempster, *Micah* (2017: Eerdmans Publishing, 2022), 71, accessed April 7, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

They will be noisy with people.

In this salvation oracle, God is going to “assemble,” which in Hebrew is written **אָסַף אֶת־עַמּוֹ**. The construction is repetitious, emphatically claiming Yahweh is bringing together a scattered people; it reflects the heart of God to care for the remnant. The following verse articulates the idea of the shepherd “gathering” his people. Scattering and gathering are repeating words to note the characteristics of the faithfulness of God as a shepherd, unlike the bad shepherds, who are only recognized as scattering the sheep. The Lord is going to gather his remnant after the exile. Dempster portrays the shepherd “as the good shepherd, God will decisively and forcefully collect his ‘flock’ within the walls of the enclosure of exile. Then he will break open their prison walls, leading his people into a new exodus. He is their true king, and a true leader is not interested in exploiting them; he wishes to liberate them!”<sup>326</sup> The idea of “putting them together” from the verb **אָסַף** underscores the idea that God is able to bring the remnant together. Allen Leslie attests, “The imagery of sheep and shepherd reassuringly brings the chaos in which Judah finds itself into the orbit of God’s traditional role concerning his people. They are like a flock of frightened sheep. Men, evidently not their shepherds but strangers, have sent them bleating and scurrying away; they threaten the flock. This reference to turmoil echoes a term characteristic of OT laments.”<sup>327</sup> Although judgment is sure to come, the salvation of God is sure to follow. The idea of the sheep in the fold is a picture of people gathered and protected by the shepherd. The sheep enter pastures that entail feeding and care. The last verse is curious regarding the people being “noisy,” potentially because they will all be together, perhaps due to the considerable commotion

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>327</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 261.

of excited people conversing freely. Ultimately, the divine shepherd will gather and lead his remnant out of exile and into his land.

Zephaniah 2:6-7; 3:12-13; 3:19-20

The shepherd motif explicitly uses the writing of Zephaniah. The first passage appears within an oracle of judgment on the nations. However, God is also proclaiming mercy for Israel in the shepherd language. Interestingly the nations listed are the ones that were enemies of Josiah.<sup>328</sup> The Lord pronounces these nations' destinies, specifically the Philistines, in 2:4-7. The section begins with a “woe,” indicating a prophetic judgment. Zephaniah pronounces the fate of four Philistine cities. The urban development of the “seacoasts,” referring to a region, will be replaced with “grazing places” and “pastures” (2:6). Most likely, the destruction of the cities will cause it to be like the countryside. Yahweh will give the “coast” to the “remnant.” The Hebrew word for “remnant” is שְׁאֲרִית conveys people that survived the exile or the ones that remained faithful to Yahweh. The shepherd motif in Zephaniah 2:6-7 demonstrates God caring for the remnant:

So the seacoast will become grazing places,  
With pastures for shepherds and folds for flocks.  
And the coast will be  
For the remnant of the house of Judah,  
They will drive sheep to pasture on it.  
In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening;  
For the Lord their God will care for them  
And restore their fortunes.

The passage details the aftermath of the destruction appearing in the preceding verses and leaves room for speculation regarding precisely what is meant. Regardless, God has announced that he will eliminate the Philistines, and the sea coast will become a place where one would find flocks,

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<sup>328</sup> Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 421.

maybe implying that industrial life is no more. The picture provides thoughts of judgment that leave behind desolation of the land since the once urbanized cities have become like the countryside. The region will have “pastures” (2:6) in Hebrew נָחַל indicating the seacoast as an area of land where the remnant of Judah will be placed. The word “fold” in Hebrew גִּנְרִיה defined as a wall of stone, implies protection for the “flock.” In that pasture or region, the “they will lie down” in Hebrew יִרְכְּצוּן means to rest in security. The sheep that lie down are neither hungry nor in fear. The same root word for “lie down” רָבַץ is also used in the infamous Psalm 23:2. The shepherd provides food and security for the sheep to feel secure enough to “lie down in green pastures.” Zephaniah further develops the motif by stating, “God will care for them.” The word describes God as paying attention to the person or being mindful of them. He will “restore their fortunes,” depicting a return of things. Yahweh has not abandoned his people; he is assuring the people of Judah that there will be a place for them again. After judgment, the caring and compassionate shepherd is there to restore his people.

The next chapter expresses the language of the shepherd, including repeating words such as “feed,” “lie down,” “scattered,” “gather,” and “limp.” The text addresses the sins of the people of Judah and declares judgment is imminent, yet there is also hope for the remnant. As the people hear the oracle, when life seems hopeless, Yahweh provides hope for his people using the language of the shepherd motif. The beginning verses entail the coming judgment “Woe to her who is rebellious and defiled, The oppressive city! She obeyed no voice, She accepted no discipline. She did not trust in the Lord” (3:1). The passage identifies the leaders as “evening wolves” and the prophets as “arrogant,” “treacherous men” that “profane the sanctuary” (3:3-4). In contrast to the religious leaders, Yahweh is “righteous” and “does no wrong” (3:5). The prophet reminds the people of the good of God and how he destroys the oppressive nations, but it

fell on deaf ears of Jerusalem, except for the remnant. Zephaniah calls for the remnant to “wait” (3:8) on the Lord who is bringing judgment on Judah, but there is a hopeful future for them. In judgment, Yahweh will “remove from your midst, your proud, arrogant ones” (3:11), but he will leave the remnant. Zephaniah contrasts the judgment in verse 11 with the remnant in verse 12. He voices the deliverance using the shepherd patterns in Zephaniah 3:12-13 states:

But I will leave among you  
A humble and lowly people,  
And they will take refuge in the name of the Lord.  
The remnant of Israel will do no wrong  
And tell no lies,  
Nor will a deceitful tongue  
Be found in their mouths;  
For they will feed and lie down  
With no one to frighten them.”

This judgment will not end his people. Instead, Yahweh desires a restored relationship filled with righteousness. The remnant of Israel has returned to Yahweh, and they “are no longer doing wrong,” implying that they are now doing what is right. They are being cared for by the shepherd and “fed” where they will “lie down.” The sheep feel safe and secure in their environment because they have a faithful shepherd. Barker writes, “The last phrase came from shepherding. Sheep eat only when they feel safe and unmolested.”<sup>329</sup> Therefore, the sheep feel a sense of security, providing a picture of restoration to Yahweh. The safety from evil being extinguished is highlighted in 3:15:

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has cleared away your enemies.  
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall never again fear evil.

The last phrase, “you will never again fear evil,” and Psalm 23:4, “I will fear no evil,” have a similar sense of the presence of Yahweh removing evil. Both texts use the same root word in

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 453.

Hebrew for “evil,” רע meaning “wicked,” “calamity,” or “bad things happening.” The language of Zephaniah 3:15 echoes a sense of security with the presence of Yahweh. It seems to have the connotation of the shepherd language.

The restoration of the shepherd is developed further in verses 19-20 declaring the future of Israel. Yahweh “will save those who limp” and “gather the scattered.” Zephaniah 3:19-20 states:

Behold, I am going to deal at that time  
With all your oppressors;  
I will save those who limp  
And gather the scattered,  
And I will turn their shame into praise and fame  
In all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you in,  
Even at the time when I gather you together;  
Indeed, I will make you famous and praiseworthy  
Among all the peoples of the earth,  
When I restore your fortunes before your eyes,  
Says the Lord.

The tender picture of “saving those who limp” conjures up images of Micah 6:4 as Yahweh assembles the “limp” sheep. These are the ones who have been injured in exile. God will “gather the scattered” and turn their woes into praise. Ultimately, he will “restore their fortunes.” The word “restore” in Hebrew is שׁוּב meaning to go back, reestablish, or return something. It could be that he is restoring the land but in light of “fortunes,” meaning the liberating power of the Lord in releasing his people.<sup>330</sup> Liberating the people from exile could be the emphasis here. Ultimately, it reveals that the shepherd is the restorer of things, the psalmist states, “he restores my soul” (Ps 23:3) and “the law of the Lord is perfect in restoring the soul” (Ps 19:7). Yahweh likened it to the shepherd will “gather,” heal and “restore” his people.

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<sup>330</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

In summary, the book of Zephaniah offers several images of the shepherd motif. The people of Israel hear the judgment of the nations around them and the judgment they will experience for their rejection of Yahweh. But the remnant is also hearing the hope that follows the judgment. They hear the voice of the shepherd declaring he will “gather the scattered,” heal the “limp,” and “restore” the soul. The shepherd motif provides language to express the tenderness and sovereignty of the Lord over the nations. It speaks of the hope of God for those who repent and the restoration that he desires.

### **Restoration of God**

Micah 4:6-8

In prior shepherd passages, words such as “assemble,” “scatter,” and “flock” have been associated with the shepherd motif. These same words are signified in the shepherd text in Micah. The author of Micah 4:1-5 relates the condemnation to come on the leaders of Jerusalem but follows it with a ray of hope from God. Allen identifies the section as such: “The unit, which is metrically irregular, falls into two sections of three lines each, linked by the themes of sheep imagery, kingship, and Jerusalem. The end of the first section is marked by the final thought of everlastingness.”<sup>331</sup> At the end of Chapter 4, a salvation oracle appears, displaying the compassionate shepherd motif. The people are viewed as weak and without a shepherd in the language. The people are identified as “limp” which in Hebrew root form is צלע means “lame,” someone who has been injured and afterward walks unevenly.<sup>332</sup> God is saving the injured ones

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<sup>331</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 282.

<sup>332</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

as he does in Zephaniah 3:19 where he saves the “lame” and “gathers the outcast.” The people have been “driven away” in the Hebrew root נָדַח meaning to “scatter” or to allow one to be led astray; seduced.”<sup>333</sup> Although Yahweh afflicts them for their disobedience, he has not abandoned them. God is still pursuing to restore his people. God will “gather” as is consistent with his character in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Isaiah voices the same idea of the coming shepherd who will “tend, gather and gently lead his sheep” (40:11). Micah resonates with similar ideas of the shepherd in 4:6-8 states:

On that day,” declares the Lord,  
“I will assemble those who limp  
And gather the scattered,  
Those whom I have afflicted.  
I will make those who limp a remnant,  
And those who have strayed a mighty nation,  
And the Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion  
From now on and forever.  
As for you, tower of the flock,  
Hill of the daughter of Zion,  
To you it will come—  
Yes, the former dominion will come,  
The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.”

“His hearers present a pitiable spectacle: they are like limping sheep that have strayed from the flock. The community has disintegrated, and they have lost that sense of solidarity and security which is the foundation of normal living.”<sup>334</sup> The message of the prophet relates to the hurt of the people in the midst of judgment due to their rejection of God. The “limp” and the “scattered” with weary hearts have been exiled but are about to receive a word which they will tangibly understand. Yahweh is bringing together the “limp” and the “strayed.” He will reign over them, the restored remnant forever.

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<sup>333</sup> Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

<sup>334</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 283.



The oracle projects a new Jerusalem where Yahweh settles with the people. Dempster claims, “it presents a new Jerusalem, whose center is the temple, the source of world peace, and it is the antithesis of the old Jerusalem, the source of bloodshed and war. It is also the exact opposite of Babylon and its notorious tower.”<sup>335</sup> The reigning of the Lord on Mount Jerusalem reflects the temple where the ark of the covenant signified the presence of God between the two cherubims. The sovereign God, Yahweh, will reign over Israel again, and it will be greater than what the Israelites experienced in the past. Kenneth Barker explains, “The Lord will rule over the restored faithful remnant and strong (or populous) nation in Mount Zion, the site of the temple that contained the ark of the covenant, representing the Great Shepherd-King's earthly throne.”<sup>336</sup> The watchtower was a fortified place for the people to watch over and protect.<sup>337</sup> The “tower of the flock,” like a watchtower, was referring to Jerusalem being restored and strong again. The “former dominion” reflected on the past which will be renewed one day. Jerusalem had experienced victories with King David—what may be considered glory days. Also, there was a time of peace during the erection of Solomon’s temple, which stood as an honored monument. However, after the destruction of the temple, it no longer held the beauty of the glory days with Solomon. Yet, the author of Micah declares that the city will be restored one day. God, full of compassion and faithfulness to his covenant, overflows through the shepherd imagery.

Micah 5:4-6

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<sup>335</sup> Dempster, *Micah*, 99.

<sup>336</sup> Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 82.

<sup>337</sup> Alexander T. Desmond, David W. Baker, and Bruce Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 194, accessed April 6, 2022, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Before assessing Micah 5:4, it is helpful to consider the surrounding verses. Advancing from chapters 4 to 5, Bateman IV et al. observe twin themes. They write, “Micah 4:9-10 and 2-3 share twin themes where Micah 4:9a lamented removal of Davidic kingship from Jerusalem, while 5:2 celebrates its return.”<sup>338</sup> The passage of Micah 5:1-4 opens the chapter with the judgment coming to Jerusalem (5:1), but Micah 5:2 celebrates the return of the Davidic ruler. The next verse is one of the most familiar verses (5:2) because of its relationship to the fulfillment of the coming Messiah. Barker says, “There is a near consensus that the ruler is none other than the Messiah. All the ancient Jewish interpreters regarded the ruler as the Messiah.”<sup>339</sup> Micah presents the messiah as an ideal David. Bateman IV et al. claim the phrase “from you will come forth one who will rule over Israel” (5:2), signifying an ancestral origin (Gen 35:1; Jer 30:21).<sup>340</sup> In verse 3, “He will give them up until the time” is related to the defeat of the king in Zion and the citizens in exile and then it depicts a birth of a new Jerusalem “when the kinsman return.” Reaching back into 4:7b-8, Micah predicts the transformation of the weak nation to a strong nation with a new ruler. Then Micah begins to describe the character of the new ruler. As noted above in Micah 4:8 and below in 5:4, both relate the Davidic ruler through the shepherd motif:

And He will arise and shepherd His flock  
 In the strength of the Lord,  
 In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.  
 And they will remain,  
 Because at that time He will be great  
 To the ends of the earth.

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<sup>338</sup> Herbert W. Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston, *Jesus The Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2012), 123.

<sup>339</sup> Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 88.

<sup>340</sup> Bateman IV, Bock, and Johnston, *Jesus The Messiah*, 125.

The shepherd is in motion as “he will arise,” meaning he is not sitting but moving to “shepherd” his flock. The hearers would have understood this image to be tender and caring. The shepherd will have “strength” that emerges from Yahweh. James Swalm argues, “Micah saw the strength of the shepherd proceeding from the strength of the Lord. God not only wants His human shepherds to lead the people as he also gives them the strength to accomplish it.”<sup>341</sup> The Israelites had been placing their trust in idols and other nations. They trusted horses and other nations' military might rather than Yahweh (Isaiah 31:1-3). Swalm attests that Micah could have been revealing that the people were placing their trust in military power over a leader who places his strength in the Lord, but a shepherd will one day come who will place his strength in the Lord.

A human king that represents Yahweh is coming to shepherd the flock. Alexander Desmond et al. write of the shepherd that Yahweh is sending to his people: “the Shepherd-King who, by faith in God, extends his rule to the ends of the earth so that his people live securely.”<sup>342</sup> The coming one will “shepherd his flock” in the “strength of the Lord.” Both the use of the shepherd motif and the connections to the kings of the day work together to present an image of the ideal king. As Allen claims, this king will not prey on human weakness; instead, he is worthy of the throne, one who rules in the strength of Yahweh.<sup>343</sup> The expected human ruler will be the shepherd-Messiah “in the name of the Lord.” As observed in the other prophets, God has human agents representing his character and rule. The ruler is to implement actions that imitate Yahweh. This ruler will “arise,” tend, feed, and care for the flock. By his protection, they will live in peace

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<sup>341</sup> Swalm Jr., “The Development of Shepherd Leadership Theory and the Validation of the Shepherd Leadership Inventory,” 30.

<sup>342</sup> Desmond, David W. Baker, and Bruce Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 198.

<sup>343</sup> Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 294.

and security in the land. This great ruler will provide for his people even “to the ends of the earth.” This phrase implies an eschatological view of this new kingdom. By sending this ruler as a shepherd the people can trust, Yahweh is delivering his people. The people will see Yahweh through the shepherd.

#### Zechariah 13:7-9

Chapter 13 resonates with the sounds of grace. Israel's repentance after the exile leads to a cleansing and a washing away of sin after the exile. Klein writes, “A future kingdom characterized by a spirit of grace and supplication’ and cleansing ‘from sin and impurity’ holds no place for idolatry and false prophecy.”<sup>344</sup> As noted earlier in Zechariah 10:2, the people's troubles extended from lacking a shepherd. Yahweh is eliminating the idols of the land and removing the false prophecy. The forgiveness of God has come upon the land. The idea of impurity removal displays divine forgiveness (Ezek 36:26). Fuhr and Yates write, “The Lord would particularly expunge two sins from his people: idolatry and false prophecy (vv. 2-6).”<sup>345</sup> There will be such a hatred of the two sins that the people will “pierce” anyone who participates in them again (v 3). The false prophets will carry such shame that they will remove their “hairy robes” (v 4) that identified them as a prophet (2 Kings 1:8). In pagan ritual worship, it appears they took part in cutting their arms for the gods (1 Kings 18:28). Now they are ashamed and desire to coverup the cutting by stating, “I was wounded at the house of my friends.” (v 6). Repentance will come but after judgment. In verse 7, Yahweh’s shepherd has been rejected, and by this, the people are “scattered.” This results in two-thirds of them will perish; however, the

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<sup>344</sup> Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah*, 375.

<sup>345</sup> Fuhr, Jr. and Yates, *The Message of the Twelve*, 297.

third will be purged in the fire and refined as silver. These will be the people of Yahweh.

Zechariah 13:7-9:

“Awake, sword, against My Shepherd,  
And against the Man, My Associate,”  
Declares the Lord of armies.  
“Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered;  
And I will turn My hand against the little ones.  
And it will come about in all the land,”  
Declares the Lord,  
“That two parts in it will be cut off and perish;  
But the third will be left in it.  
And I will bring the third part through the fire,  
Refine them as silver is refined,  
And test them as gold is tested.  
They will call on My name,  
And I will answer them;  
I will say, ‘They are My people,’  
And they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”

Klein states that Zechariah could be reflecting on Isaiah 53:10 with the judgment of God in mind. But the emphasis seems to be on the sheep, Klein attests: “Israel will face scattering because of her rejection of the Lord’s shepherd. However, Israel’s refinement is promised in vv. 8-9 places the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in a distant eschatological epoch.”<sup>346</sup> Yahweh is purifying his people and testing their heart “through the fire.” Fire is figurative to prove the genuineness of a person, as fire proves the genuineness of gold. The same connotation is echoed in the voice of Job as he stated, “When He has put me to the test, I will come out as gold” (23:10.) Also, noted in the Proverbs, “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the Lord tests hearts” (17:3). Yahweh is “refining them as silver,” and “testing them as gold is tested.” These people are the people of God who will follow in his ways. The restoration of God will come through judgment and refinement.

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<sup>346</sup> Klein, *The New American Commentary: Zechariah*, 388.

Moreover, in the passage, the shepherd represents Yahweh. The unidentified shepherd is highly debated. Many readers view the shepherd text as prophetic or typological because of how the New Testament uses the verse in Matthew and Mark. Matthew states, “Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matt 26:31). Klein suggests Jesus is clearly equating himself with the shepherd and expands his view of “My Associate” as being in close relationship with Yahweh. However, the figure in Zechariah could simply be an appointed representative of Yahweh that rejected the law of God. Now judgment has come, and the people will be “scattered.” Jesus applied the text to his crucifixion to indicate that the disciples would scatter in fear, but unlike the bad shepherd in Zechariah, Jesus was the good shepherd the people rejected. He was willing to lay down his life to save his people.

## **Summary**

In summary, the books of the prophets employ the shepherd motif, which demonstrates Yahweh using human agents to govern his people. The language also contributes truths about the nature of God. Also observed is the future hope of an ideal shepherd. The rest of this work will draw on the prior passages to extrapolate truths regarding the characteristics of Yahweh. It also reveals him as a shepherd and judge—a God who is faithful, incomparable, and compassionate.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SHEPHERD MOTIF IN THE PROPHETS**

### **The Prophets' Theology in Light of the Shepherd Motif**

The message of the prophets conveys both the judgment and the compassion of God. Many observe the judgment in the pages of the prophets, but at the same time, one cannot ignore the comfort, compassion, or faithfulness of God evident in the image of the shepherd motif. He judges, restores, binds up the broken, heals the limp, and seeks and searches for the lost sheep. There are repeating images that emerge in the shepherd motif, including “flock,” “shepherd,” “gathering,” “scattering,” “feeding,” and “lying down.” The movement of the shepherd motif classifies the characteristics into four main categories: the caregiving of God, the delegation to human shepherds, the judgment and justice of God, and the mercy and restoration of God. The four categories develop in the individual books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the minor prophets. The development of the categories infer themes of judgment, restoration, faithfulness, sovereignty, incomparability, and Compassion.

The shepherd language infers two significant points. First, it portrays aspects of the judgment and mercy of God. Second, it reflects how God governs and uses human agents for his plans and purposes. Yahweh represents what is good, and when reprimanding foolish leaders, his goodness is highlighted. Observing Yahweh in the portraits of judgment, restoration, sovereignty, incomparability, faithfulness, and compassion strengthens the view of a good shepherd. These aspects of his nature contribute to what makes Yahweh the good shepherd. This takes on special significance when it comes to analyzing the nature of God through the shepherd motif. Observing parts that contribute to understanding the whole of the character of God also prevents an imbalanced view of Yahweh.

At this point, it would be good to consider the previous chapter and remember that the following scriptures must be considered in light of their context. The prophets' context and words provide us with their theology of God. Daniel Hays claims, "The prophets are powerful and inspiring. Their criticism of sin and injustice is harsh, scathing, and unyielding. Yet their words to the faithful are gentle and encouraging."<sup>347</sup> The Scriptures were written for the reader to know and understand God and his desires for his people. In the book of Isaiah, God is compared to a shepherd who tends, gathers, carries, and gently leads his flock (Isa 40:11). Judgement extends from Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34 because the shepherds of God are not imitating these characteristics of a good shepherd. The minor prophets usher in the justice of God, as well as prepare the people for a messianic figure that will fulfill the role of a good shepherd for the people of God. As John Walton puts it, "the Old Testament is not written to us, but it is written for us."<sup>348</sup> Through it, readers can grow in their understanding of God. The prophets describe Yahweh in many different facets. The image of marriage, for example, describes God and his relationship with his people through the voice of Hosea. So, too, the prophets use the shepherd motif to reveal the character of God in the Old Testament.

The prophets' use of the shepherd motif can shape how the reader thinks about the nature of God. This research has specifically considered the benefit the shepherd motif provides from the prophets as they communicate their theology to readers. Golding writes, "Figures of comparison are like lenses through which concepts can be viewed in fresh ways, so that a reader's understanding of a particular concept can be expanded and enriched. The shepherd-

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<sup>347</sup> Hays and Longman III, *The Message of the Prophets : A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, 22.

<sup>348</sup> John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 5.



sheep figure is one “lens” through which to view God and human leaders.”<sup>349</sup> Most prophets were inexperienced in shepherding; therefore, utilizing the shepherd motif would have called for attention to accuracy in knowledge. John Huntzinger writes, “It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all the biblical writers who made use of the shepherd /sheep imagery had expert knowledge of shepherds or sheep. Yet, for this very reason, it is to be expected that care was exercised in the use of the vocabulary and images drawn from this field in the service of the metaphor.”<sup>350</sup> The development of the shepherd moves through the prophetic books flowing from Isaiah to Zechariah. The uses reveal God being likened to a shepherd, utilizing undershepherds, condemning the disobedient shepherds, impeaching shepherds, and instating futuristic shepherds. The message of judgment, justice, mercy, and restoration are all aspects laced throughout the shepherd motif. Throughout history, when examining the shepherd motif, most researchers have focused on the implications of leadership and eschatology; however, this research will center on the implications of the prophets’ theology.

The people believed that they could know spoke by Jeremiah and he attested, “let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me (God), that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord” (9:23-24). In using the shepherd motif, they are doing more than simply communicating leadership principles or articulating a coming future, though both are important. These truths of the prophets’ theology contribute to a grand theology of God, drawn from the passages assessed in Chapter 3, sometimes stated implicitly but other times explicitly. Through

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<sup>349</sup> Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding, Part 1,” 28.

<sup>350</sup> Huntzinger, “The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature,” 68.

the lens of the shepherd motif, during the pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic periods, the inferences of the prophets' theology contribute to an overall understanding of the character of God that conclude the following themes of judgment, restoration, sovereignty, incomparability, faithfulness, and Compassion.

### **Characteristic Themes of Yahweh from the Prophets' Use of the Shepherd Motif**

The prophets were perceived as ones delivering the very words of Yahweh, as they had been taught in Deuteronomy, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen; to him you shall listen” (18:15-20). Therefore, hearing the words of the prophets can be equated with hearing the heart of Yahweh. John Goldingay writes about Jeremiah’s theology, saying, “It was Yahweh who gave him his overall perspective on Judah, his awareness that Yahweh was going to bring disaster to it because of its rebellion, and his conviction that in due course Yahweh would restore his people. And it was Yahweh who was behind his individual messages.”<sup>351</sup> Therefore, it follows that whenever they are speaking in their role as a prophet, they are presenting theology. Walton attests, “the Old Testament is God’s revelation of his plans and purposes, and that through that revelation we should be able to come to some basic understanding about God, it is then logical to conclude that the most important message of the Old Testament is found in what it teaches us about God.”<sup>352</sup> God is the ideal shepherd—frequently called the “Good Shepherd” in Bailey’s book.<sup>353</sup> The prophets expand the

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<sup>351</sup> Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, 5.

<sup>352</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*, 29.

<sup>353</sup> Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 23.

actions of God to demonstrate why he is good. This research extracts consistent actions of Yahweh throughout the prophets that accentuate his goodness. It is wise for readers to recognize that researchers and writers extrapolating theology from the Scriptures are only adding to theology. John Walton writes, “When we throw our hats into the ring of comprehensive theologies, it is not because we have everything figured out. We simply have a few more tidbits to add to the discussions of those who have gone before us.”<sup>354</sup> Although the following conclusions regarding the characteristics of God demonstrated through the shepherd motif are not exhaustive, Yahweh reveals who he is through the prophets’ voices. Through the shepherd’s language, the reader will observe that he is not only the good shepherd who guides his sheep to peace but themes that spotlight his greatness.

### **God as Shepherd**

Isaiah is explicit as he likens God to a shepherd (40:11). Within the verse alone, God “tends his flock, gathers his lambs and leads his ewes.” The development of God as shepherd expands in Chapter 49:9 as Yahweh “leads” his flock and “guides them to springs of water.” It builds even further in Jeremiah as God is identified as “gathering the remnant of his flock” (23:3) and he “brings Israel back to his pasture” (50:19). In Ezekiel, Yahweh “will search for his sheep and seek them out” (34:11). He will find the lost (34:16). He “will care” for his sheep. There will be feeding on the holy mountains by streams of water (Eze 34:14). The shepherd will “bind the broken and strengthen the sick” (34:16). Yahweh will lead his sheep to rest (34:15). In Micah, God states, “I will put them together like sheep in the fold” (2:12). Micah calls to him in reference to a shepherd, “Shepherd Your people with Your scepter” (7:14). Yahweh expresses himself as a shepherd

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<sup>354</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*, 1.

through the voice of Ezekiel saying, “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord God” (Eze 34:31). These examples are actions and declarations that identify Yahweh as the measurement of a good shepherd. Some of these images are echoed in Psalm 23 (note the chart below). However, the prophets have expanded the good qualities of a shepherd.

Psalm 23	The Shepherd in the Prophets	The Flock
“The Lord is my shepherd.”	Isa 40:11 – He is “Like a shepherd.” Jer 31:10 – He will “keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.” Eze 34:12 – “I will care for My sheep.” Eze 34:17 – “As for you, My flock” Micah 4:6 – “I will assemble the lame, And gather the outcasts. Micah – “Shepherd Your people with Your scepter, The flock of Your possession.”	
Provides my needs – “I will not be in need.”	Isa 40:11 – He will “tend his flock.”	Isa 49:9 – “they will not hunger or thirst.”
“He lets me lie down in green pastures.”	Jer 50:19 – “I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on.” Eze 34:14 – “I will feed them in a good pasture...they will lie down.” Zeph 2:7 – “In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the Lord their	Zeph 3:13 – “For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble.”

	God will care for them And restore their fortune.”	
“He leads me beside quiet waters.”	Isa 49:9 – “will guide them to springs of water.”	
“He restores my soul.”	Isa 40:11 – “He gathers his lambs.” Jer 23:3 – “I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock.” Eze 34:16 – “I will seek the lost, bring back.” Eze 34:10 – “I will deliver My flock.”	Isa 49:9 – “Go forth.”
“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”	Isa 40:11 – “He gently leads his ewes Isa 49:9 – “He who has compassion on them will lead them.” Eze – 34:15 “I will lead them.”	Eze 37:24 – “they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes.”
He protects – “I fear no evil.”	Isa 40:11 – “carries them in his bosom.”	Isa 65:25 – “The wolf and the lamb will graze together.” Eze 34:25, 28 – “they may live securely” “no one will make them afraid.”
“I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”		Eze 37:26 – “will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.”

Through exposing the bad shepherds in the prophets, the actions of the good shepherd shine forth. It is unnecessary to “gather the scattered,” “seek the lost,” or “bind the broken” in Psalm 23 since the Lord is the shepherd. However, the prophets enlarge the beauty of Yahweh as a shepherd when bad shepherds rule the people. Although the shepherds in the prophets should

have represented Yahweh through their neglect, God intervened with judgment and voiced that he would send shepherds after his own heart. The second significant point of the shepherd language identifies the characteristics of God.

## **God Is Judge**

Through the shepherd language, the actions of Yahweh indicate he is the judge of all nations who advocates justice. When extrapolating actions that reflect the reality that “God is Judge,” the reader can draw conclusions about his nature from his decisions. Both what Yahweh does and how he relates to humanity describe who he is. He is ushering in justice when leaders have oppressed the people; however, the inferences about God can be limited. Through a canonical approach of intertextual readings, one can identify several characteristics of God that contribute to the whole of who he is. Renz contends that while the reader can draw conclusions from the actions of God, there are nevertheless limitations to comprehending the extent of his ways. He writes, “YHWH is portrayed as constantly acting in character, but the point at which patient restraint gives way to powerful intervention is unknown.”<sup>355</sup> Therefore, readers must recognize that while some beneficial conclusions can be drawn about the nature of Yahweh and contribute to understanding his character, some inaccessible knowledge remains.

Through the prophets, God is proclaimed as judge, and the shepherd language is woven throughout many of the judgment oracles. Bruce Waltke contends, “Judgment oracles typically consist of an address, an accusation, and a judicial sentence. The content derives from the Mosaic covenant.”<sup>356</sup> Yahweh is the one who provides a verdict on the morality of the people,

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<sup>355</sup> Renz, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 68.

<sup>356</sup> Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 830.

and he has the authority to enforce the consequence. Paul House argues, “Yahweh has the right to judge all the nations, and he has a special opposition to the prideful and self-confident kingdoms.”<sup>357</sup> God not only extends his justice to the people of Israel in the shepherd language, but he also determines decrees over the nations. Randy Beck describes the judgment of God in this way: “The divine judge, like human judges, investigates and evaluates conduct, measuring human acts against applicable laws. Like human judges, he fashions punishments and rewards to accomplish justice in light of the conduct disclosed.”<sup>358</sup> Even though this research contends that God is judge, the researcher is not proclaiming that the actions of Yahweh are right or wrong: rather, the prophets were proclaiming through both the shepherd imagery and the context that he is a judge able to exercise discernment over the nations. When examining the shepherd motif, God can be seen both judging and punishing Israel for their wrongs, just as he does all nations who do not promote justice.

The context in Isaiah Chapter 13 is “the day of the Lord” (Isa 13:9) regarding Babylon. Isaiah’s warnings that judgment is coming are wrapped in shepherd language: “like a hunted gazelle, or like sheep with no one to gather them, each of them will turn to his own people, and each of them will flee his own land” (Isa 13:14). Because judgment has come from Yahweh, the people are now as sheep without a shepherd. The rulers that led them will be no more. The people are confused and helpless, and the government they once had is destroyed.

Jeremiah uses shepherd language to describe the behavior of the leaders: “the shepherds have become stupid and have not sought the Lord” (10:21). This text sits amid Jeremiah speaking to Jerusalem regarding the exile. In the next sentence, the reader will observe that “they

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<sup>357</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 281.

<sup>358</sup> Randy Beck, “God the Judge and Human Justice,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 32, no. 1 (2017): 33.

have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered” (10:21). The implication is that as judge, God has evaluated Judah’s conduct and enforced the coming judgment of the exile. The connotation of scattered in many verses communicates that the shepherds have abandoned the flock. The shepherds were supposed to lead the people with the instruction of Yahweh, but they disregarded the way of God. Paul House contends that the religious leaders of this day were so corrupt that they could not apply the covenant of God to the lives of the people.<sup>359</sup> In this passage, Yahweh judges the religious leaders for their conduct and failure to lead the people as he commanded. Going further, he condemns other nations for oppressing people and espouses judgment so severe that the leaders will be mourning (Jer 25:36-37). The people will not be able to escape the judgment of Yahweh on the nations. Jeremiah continues to advance the idea that God sees the disobedience of the people of Israel as they flee to Egypt; however, he has commanded them to stay. Again, the Lord demonstrates judgment infused with the shepherd imagery (43:12). God is continuing to measure their actions in relationship with their disobedience, which is indicative of him being judge.

Jeremiah continues the call that God is forwarding justice, furthering the shepherd imagery when he states, “Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven them away” (Jer 50:17). The verse advances the judgment of God invoked in Israel and soon to be enforced on Babylon. Yahweh defeats Babylon, as seen in Jeremiah 50:45:

Therefore hear the plan of the Lord which He has planned against Babylon,  
and His purposes which He has in mind against the land of the Chaldeans:  
they will certainly drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; He will  
certainly make their pasture desolate.

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<sup>359</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 341.



The Lord is destroying Babylon, dragging off the flock, and laying the pastures to waste. The shepherds are expected to protect the sheep, but in this case, God is the lion dragging off the sheep because he is executing justice against the Babylonians.

Ezekiel announces judgment against the shepherds for their disobedience to Yahweh. God identifies their unethical behavior and invokes their removal from leadership positions. Ezekiel writes in 34:10:

This is what the Lord GOD says: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them stop tending sheep.”

Allen describes the removal, noting the importance of the shepherd imagery surrounding the judgment, “Nothing less than their removal from their royal post would transpire in view of their general self-seeking and in particular the suffering and fatality of their subjects at their hands. They are ironically portrayed as wild animals, a travesty true of shepherding.”<sup>360</sup> God is judging the actions of the shepherd leaders, and they have failed to uphold justice. Further down in the chapter, he states, “I will feed them with judgment” (34:16). Yahweh will right the wrongs that the bad shepherds have committed. Instead of feeding them in fields of green, he will feed them with judgment. God’s character is displayed as seeking the good of humanity by disciplining leaders so that they provide peace for their people. However, their corrupt actions provoke Yahweh to step in and judge. Ezekiel 34:20-22 states:

Behold, I, I Myself will also judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Since you push away with your side and shoulder, and gore all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, therefore, I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plunder; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

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<sup>360</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ezekiel 20-48*, 162.

The prevalence of the shepherd motif and justice in this chapter conjures up immediate images of right and wrong. Allen writes, “The promise of justice, which dominates the oracle at beginning, middle, and end, has two connotations, retribution for the guilty and vindication for their victims.”<sup>361</sup> The God of justice has stepped in to bring about good that the bad leaders had abandoned.

Much like Ezekiel, Amos proclaimed the wayward acts of Judah, particularly related to their religious activities. On the outside, the people appeared to be very religious. In reality, they were immoral. God is depicted as the roaring lion bringing judgment because the people are rejecting him. Amos writes, “The Lord roars from Zion...And the shepherds’ pasture grounds mourn” (1:2). This picture portrays the strength and force of God, and the lion is an enemy to the shepherd. Here the shepherds are mourning due to the lion ravaging their fields. Judgment is at hand. Later, Amos furthers the picture of judgment by stating, “the shepherd snatches from the lion’s mouth a couple of legs or a piece of an ear” (Amos 3:12). He implies that Israel will see the judgment and the destruction of the Lord.

The shepherd motif in Zechariah likewise portrays the judgment of the Lord. The prophet writes, “My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the male goats” (Zech 10:3). The verses here encapsulate judgment against the shepherd leaders of Judah. The description of the leaders as “male goats” is intended to be unflattering. These leaders are abhorrent, and God will soon dismantle their rule.

In the Prophets, Judah and Israel received the instruction of Yahweh through the covenant of Moses, but they rejected his way. God had delegated authority to the leaders, often portrayed as shepherds of the people, but they shirked that responsibility and oppressed the

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

people instead. The leaders were to provide justice for their communities but failed to promote lawfulness in the land. The prophets spoke on behalf of Yahweh, using the shepherd motif to express emotions of peace and war amid rampant injustice. From the prophets, God is shown as the judge over all creation—a judge who would execute justice and enforce it for the ultimate good. The picture of this justice is woven through the images of the shepherds, the sheep, and their predators.

### **God and Human Agents**

One theme that flows through the idea of the shepherd language is the use of human agents. The rulers and leaders of Yahweh are utilized to fulfill the plans and purpose of Yahweh. Isaiah demonstrates the sovereign and purposeful rule of Yahweh through Cyrus. The author writes, “Is it I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd!’” (44:28). Cyrus is the ruler of Persia, and there is no evidence of him having a covenant with God as the people of Israel did. Yet, Yahweh uses Cyrus to free the Israelites from exile. Even if a redactor wrote after the fact of Cyrus, the theology of this shepherd motif indicates that Yahweh is ruler over all mankind but fulfills his purpose through human agents. God does not relinquish any power, nor does he force his way through leaders. He guides his shepherds to achieve his end. John Watts says, “Yahweh yields nothing in the claim that Cyrus belongs to him. He is Yahweh’s shepherd.”<sup>362</sup>

The author of Jeremiah identifies shepherds that will have the heart of God and feed the sheep his knowledge and understanding. He writes, “Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you knowledge and understanding” (3:15). Yahweh is conveying that he is the one who provides shepherds for the people to feed them the knowledge and

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<sup>362</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, 156.

understanding needed to flourish in a society. The knowledge of God was written in the Scriptures. Walton claims that the actions of God ‘are mediated to us through the literature of Scripture serving as the primary way by which we can experience or perceive God.’<sup>363</sup> Yet, there were shepherds that did not follow God, as noted in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. They “have become stupid” and have “not sought the Lord.” Why would they seek the Lord? Because he knows all and lays out his plans and purpose for men to know and follow him.

God used the rulers of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians to fulfill his plan of restoration. The shepherd motif sheds light on the purposes of God that reveal his sovereignty. To say that God is sovereign is to understand him to be the supreme ruler over all things. John Goldingay writes, “If Yhwh is Lord, that implies being sovereign: over nations, over governments, over the heavenly powers that other people reckoned controlled the world, over the world itself and over human life.”<sup>364</sup> Any power or rule that a king or leader holds is under the rulership of Yahweh. John Walton writes, “In the ancient Near East, the gods sometimes revealed the answers to oracular questions posed through divination and thereby gave verdicts or direction, but they never offered an account of their plans and attributes to the extent we find in the Old Testament (especially the Prophets).”<sup>365</sup> Through the prophets, God reveals the consequences of his expectations being unmet and his instructions neglected. The people of Yahweh know the covenant regarding his rule from Exodus 34:6-7.

The message of Isaiah 13:20 is related to what is to come from the rule of Yahweh due to the disobedience of the people. The author of Isaiah 13:20 writes, “It will never be inhabited

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<sup>363</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*, 46.

<sup>364</sup> John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 71.

<sup>365</sup> Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief*, 43.

or lived in from generation to generation,” “Nor will shepherds allow their flocks to lie down there.” God is revealing what is to come through the language of the shepherd motif. Both Brevard Childs<sup>366</sup> and Paul House write of the sovereignty of God observable in Isaiah 13-27. House states, “This judgment segment places Israel’s relationship to the Lord squarely in history and at the same time reveals that Israel’s God rules all creation.”<sup>367</sup>

The leaders have failed, but the Ruler of all creation has not failed and will bring new shepherds that will lead to knowledge and understanding. The author of Jeremiah writes, “Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard” (12:10). The implication here is that the land belongs to Yahweh because he is the creator and ruler of all. In approaching the shepherd language in chapters 18-20, Goldingay writes of the sovereignty of God in Jeremiah:

God has told him what he intends to do, and Jeremiah passes on the information. Jeremiah’s messages are announcements that God is in a position to make through Jeremiah because he is in a position to decide what happens. An invader will march into Judah, besiege Jerusalem, and devastate it. Yahweh is the sovereign Lord, and he can make things happen.<sup>368</sup>

Jeremiah states, “The wind will sweep away all your shepherds” (22:22). Apparently, the shepherds are weak and have disgraced Judah with their lack of leadership. The wind will collect the bad leaders and drive them away, revealing their shame. God is proclaiming his rule over the leaders. Yahweh’s rulership is expressed in many instances: “My flock,” “I Myself will gather,” and “My flock out of all the countries” (Jer. 23:1-4). Through this language, the prophet communicates that the flock of Judah belongs to Yahweh. His rulership extends even beyond

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<sup>366</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 116.

<sup>367</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 275.

<sup>368</sup> Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, 43.

Judah into bringing judgment on Egypt: “he wraps himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself with his garment” (43:12). According to Huey, the idea of the passage is that God will use Nebuchadnezzar to overtake Egypt.<sup>369</sup> The one who is ruler over all creation can destroy any nation at his will. Jeremiah also uses shepherd language to demonstrate destruction against Babylon: “wander away,” “be like male goats at the head of the flock,” and “for behold, I am going to rouse and bring up against Babylon” (50:8-9). In this way, the writer of Jeremiah conveys the coming judgment on Babylon.

But of these passages of Jeremiah 3:15 and 23:1-4 that envision a renewal of Davidic kingship. Abernathy and Goswell write, “after a dark era when shepherds were sinning against God (Jer 2:8), 3:15 expects a time when the Divine King will designate shepherds who will care for the people by maintaining justice and by guiding them to live before God as their King.”<sup>370</sup> In chapter 23 he is going to “set shepherds over them that will care” for his people. God will reverse the circumstances to bring in a new order of shepherds.

Ezekiel also delivers his message by using the shepherd motif framework, detailing the ruling ability of Yahweh with “I will” statements. “I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be prey” (34:22). God has the ruling power to rescue and safeguard his people. Another statement that indicates safety for his people would be, “I will make with them a covenant of peace” (Eze. 34:25), which will allow them to “dwell securely.” Amid nations rising with power and bringing destruction to Israel, Yahweh would appear defeated by the other gods. However, God contends through the prophet that he can save his flock. He further states, “I will provide for them renowned plantations” (Eze. 34:29), and there will no longer be hunger or suffering from the

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<sup>369</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 264.

<sup>370</sup> Abernathy and Goswell, *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament*, 105.

nations around them. In these statements, God lays out his plan and reveals his sovereign ability to perform it.

The ending of the text explicitly reveals that Yahweh is God, and Israel referred to as sheep, are his people. “And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God” (Eze. 34:31). The sovereign God has communicated here that the people will be secure again by his hand, implying that what he says is the final word on what is to come.

The Ezekiel shepherd motif discloses an important point. Yahweh uses human agents to shepherd his people, and he will raise up a shepherd who will be their leader forever: “they shall all have one shepherd” (37:24) and “shall be their prince forever” (37:28). God’s plans will be executed throughout eternity, implying his sovereignty. There will be a ruling shepherd that is good for humanity, and his rule will last forever. In these instances of the shepherd metaphor, Yahweh is not limited to being a good shepherd. He is also a sovereign shepherd.

Along these same lines, Micah 5:4 announces a shepherd coming in the “strength of the Lord.” He “will be great to the ends of the earth.” Many scholars and Jewish researchers equate this shepherd with the Messiah.<sup>371</sup> The shepherd is unique because he is not limited to a particular area. Instead, he will be great to “the ends of the earth,” implying universal rulership. As Alexander Desmond argues, “Verse 4 connects the peace and security of the flock with the Messiah’s universal conquest of hostile forces.”<sup>372</sup> The reader can observe in verse 5 that this shepherd has the power and rule to deliver peace, “And he shall be their peace.” The shepherd will not depend on anyone but instead will rule the flock with peace and security. True safety will be found within his bounds and through no one else because he has sovereign rule. In Micah

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<sup>371</sup> Barker, *The New American Commentary: Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 88.

<sup>372</sup> Desmond, David W. Baker, and Bruce Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 202.

7:14, Micah prays to God as shepherd over his people, remembering the mighty works of Yahweh through the miracles of Moses. During that time, Moses stood before Pharaoh, conveying that God had power over everything. Micah was now requesting the shepherd to act, as he knew he had the power to do, as ruler of all. God is going to bring judgment, but in Micah 5:2-3 he is also raising up a son from the line of David to rule over his people (Isa 9:6-7).

Abernethy and Goswell state of Micah 5:4, “In the wider context of Micah’s prophecy, the meaning must be that YHWH, the royal shepherd (see 2:12-13; 4:6-7; 7:14), will rule his people through this human agent, whom he empowers and to whom he gives authority (‘in the strength of the LORD,/ in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God,’ 5:4).”<sup>373</sup>

Likewise, Zechariah reveals that God is the shepherd who will save his people (9:16-17). The people are his crown jewel, and they will see that Yahweh will make his sheep shine in the land (9:16). Throughout the prophets, the people have been led astray due to shepherds that lack the heart of God. Yet, God is faithful to his people. His salvation demonstrates his goodness and beauty to the people of the land. Paul House argues, “There is no doubt that these chapters agree with the portrait of the coming Davidic descendant already drawn in Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah...His coming extends hope to many nations, since the extent of his kingdom will include all of creation. This person will truly be a universal master.”<sup>374</sup> Although worthless shepherds will receive judgment (Zech 11:17), Micah 9:9-10 claims a “king is coming.” Yahweh will continue to use human rulers after his heart (Jer 23:15; Ezek 34:23). Although the immediate fulfillment of the kind could have been Zerubbabel, the Gospels indicate a messianic fulfillment. Zechariah's author describes Yahweh's plans, and his rule will extend to all creation. He will

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<sup>373</sup> Abernethy and Goswell, *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament*, 156.

<sup>374</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 391.



bring judgment on the bad shepherds that have failed to represent him and usher in a Davidic ruler after his heart.

### **God Is Incomparable in His Ways**

According to the theology of the prophets, Yahweh is inimitable, the God who is unequaled. John Goldingay writes, “The fact that Yhwh cannot be imaged coheres with Yhwh’s nature as the real, living, active, speaking creator God, who is like no other.”<sup>375</sup> He is the God who speaks to his people, and he has knowledge beyond any person or god, unmatched in his power and perfect justice. Karl Jacobson claims, “the human language is certainly inadequate to express the wonder and grandeur of God's essential being.”<sup>376</sup> However, the shepherd motif in the prophets contributes significant insight into Yahweh's incomparability.

Jeremiah expresses an oracle concerning the impending downfall of Edom. Yahweh is bringing judgment, and while describing what is to take place, the Lord asks, “who is the shepherd who can stand against me?”

Jeremiah 49:19-20 states:

For who is like Me, and who will summon Me into court? And who is the shepherd who can stand against Me? Therefore, hear the plan of the Lord which He has planned against Edom.

Walter Brueggemann says the anticipated answer in Jeremiah to the three “who is like” questions has a sweeping answer of “No one.” He reaches back to the history of Israel recorded in Exodus 15:11: “Who is like You among the gods, Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness?” This is

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<sup>375</sup> Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 40.

<sup>376</sup> Karl N. Jacobson, “Proclaiming the Incomparable God in the Register of Lament,” *Word & World* 1, no. 39 (2019): 40.

the Israelites' victory song after the exodus from Egypt. Brueggemann connects this event with the incomparability found in the prophet of Jeremiah. He states, "These are the astonishing acts of transformation that exhibit Yahweh's enormous, unfettered power."<sup>377</sup> The three questions together contend that there is no shepherd, no leader, and no ruler who can prevent the plans of the Lord. The prophets are offering a picture of an incomparable God who is able to bring justice to all nations. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers write, "The incomparable LORD, the divine warrior, is described as effecting complete devastation on the kingdom of Edom."<sup>378</sup> The passage indicates that nothing can prevent the destruction from coming. Jeremiah reinforces the idea in Jer 50:44-45:

For who is like Me, and who will summon Me *into court*? And who then is the shepherd who can stand against Me?" Therefore, hear the plan of the LORD which He has planned against Babylon, and His purposes which He has in mind against the land of the Chaldeans: they will certainly drag them off, *even* the little ones of the flock; He will certainly make their pasture desolate because of them.

In Chapter 49, the passage refers to Edom, but in Chapter 50, Yahweh speaks against Babylon. Huey contends that since the sins of Babylon are similar to Edom, the punishment was the same.<sup>379</sup> But the text is establishing more than the judgment of God: it is also indicating that there is none like God, and he rules over all the nations.

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<sup>377</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament : Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, ed. Rebecca J. Kruger Gaudino (1517 Media, 2005), 140, ProQuest Ebook.

<sup>378</sup> Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, 331.

<sup>379</sup> Huey, Jr., *The New American Commentary: Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 417.

## God Is Faithful to His Covenant to Restore After Judgment

Even though the prophets deliver a message of despair to Israel and Judah, they also remind the people of the hope and faithfulness of God. Block affirms this truth by reaching back into the book of Leviticus. He writes, “The covenant curses in Lev. 26:40–45 held out the prospect of such a renewal after judgment, and the compassionate character of Yahweh and his fidelity to his covenant necessitated it”<sup>380</sup> The covenant stated, “But *if* they confess their wrongdoing...then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham.” Walter Brueggemann writes about the prophets, “Given the destruction, displacement, and deportation, they shared the conviction that the failure of Jerusalem was not the end of the matter. They reached the conviction that God’s will extended beyond destruction into a newness that was grounded only in God’s own fidelity.”<sup>381</sup>

The book of Jeremiah offers even further evidence of the faithfulness of God. Jeremiah calls for repentance, even while Judah is full of idolatry. Jeremiah instructs the people to return to the Lord. He lays out what God will do if they return to him, using the shepherd motif: “I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). Instead of destroying his people utterly, God took pity on them and made provisions for them to repent. In hopes of their return, he was willing to provide new shepherds with a favorable government. Discussing this passage, Craigie et al. state that “restoration was promised, if only the people would repent, and it would include a good government, with the

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<sup>380</sup> Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, 169.

<sup>381</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *From Judgment to Hope: A Study on the Prophets* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 21, ProQuest Ebook Central.

cities and districts properly represented and the rulers as wise and godly men.”<sup>382</sup> God will be faithful to fulfill and secure the needs of the people. He will gather his remnant, as Jeremiah expresses: “Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply” (Jer 23:3). His people have broken the covenant, but God remains faithful to the words spoken in Leviticus.

Ezekiel further advances the idea of the faithfulness of God to the remnant, particularly in Chapter 34, in which the “I will” statements are numerous. As the shepherds were starving the people of the instruction of the Lord and at the same time exploiting the people, Yahweh condemned the bad shepherds and followed up with him as the shepherd. He is the shepherd who will save the oppressed because he is the faithful shepherd.

“As I live,” “I will demand My sheep,” “I will save My sheep,” “I Myself,” “I will care for My sheep,” “I will rescue them from all places,” “I will bring them out from the peoples,” “I will feed them on the mountain,” “I will feed them in good pasture,” “I Myself will feed My flock,” “I Myself will lead them to rest,” “I will seek the lost,” “and the strong I will eliminate,” “I am going to judge,” “I Myself will also judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep” and “I will judge between one sheep and another” (Eze 34).

The “I will” statements indicate that Yahweh is with his people. He sees the atrocities of the bad shepherds and where they have led the people. No longer will he allow the corrupt shepherds to rule his people. Instead, as the faithful shepherd, he will intervene and rescue them. In this passage, the reader can hear the echoes of Isaiah 40:11, “He will tend his flock.” Allen writes, “Yahweh’s traditional covenant role as royal ‘shepherd’ of his people, to whom the kings were responsible as undershepherds, drove him to intervene against them.”<sup>383</sup> After judgment on the depraved

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<sup>382</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, 110.

shepherds, God will restore his people. House writes, “God’s specific action to restore begins with an exchange of leaders. The nation’s leaders (‘shepherds’) are corrupt, so Yahweh will take charge of gathering the sheep from abroad.”<sup>384</sup> Yahweh continues to demonstrate faithfulness to his people in Ezekiel, even to the extent of replacing the old covenant with a new covenant. Ezekiel expresses, “I will make a covenant of peace with them” (Eze 37:26). Yahweh’s new covenant demonstrates that faithfulness to his people is part of his character. House writes, “A new covenant of peace becomes the fulfillment of the older covenants of promise. What human beings could not do, the Lord has accomplished.”<sup>385</sup> Ezekiel’s “I will” statements represent a faithful God who desires good for his people. Though the people cannot sustain their faithfulness to Yahweh, he remains faithful to them.

Micah calls out for Yahweh to “shepherd Your people with Your scepter” (Micah 7:14). Then he reaches back into the time of “Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old” (Micah 7:14), reminiscing of a time when the leaders were faithful to God as he is faithful to his people. Again, Micah indicates that such faithfulness is delightful among the people. When Yahweh rules with his scepter, all is well.

The shepherds of the surrounding nations are just as incompetent as those in Israel. Nahum depicts them with the same image of uselessness as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. He writes, “your shepherds are sleeping, Oh king of Assyria; your officers are lying down” (Nahum 3:18). Yahweh makes the necessary judgment on the nations and the crooked Israelite leaders. Yet, he will not leave the story there, as noted at the end of Ezekiel, just as in Zephaniah and Zechariah. God will

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<sup>383</sup> Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Ezekiel 20-48*, 164.

<sup>384</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 341.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

protect his sheep, Zephaniah writes, “for they will feed and lie down with no one to frighten them” (Zeph 3:13). There will be a new time after judgment in which the remnant will be safe again under the care of the faithful shepherd. In Zechariah, he attests, “they will call upon My name, And I will answer them” (Zech 13:9). Yahweh is faithful to hear and answer his people who have returned to him. In his faithfulness, God will establish a new shepherd ruler that will bring good to his people.

### **God Is Compassionate to Restore**

If powerful human leaders do not care for those under them, why would the God who created the world be concerned with any small person on the earth? Only a compassionate God would care about humanity. The Hebrew word for *compassion* means “to greet with love or to take pity.”<sup>386</sup> Even though the pages of the prophets are filled with the judgment of the exile, they are also filled with the compassion of God. Heschel writes, “The words of the prophet are stern, sour, stinging. But behind his authority is love and compassion for mankind.”<sup>387</sup> Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah speak explicitly about the compassion of God. Isaiah writes, “For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted” (49:13). Jeremiah depicts the heart of God regarding his people in exile in this way: “And after I have plucked them up, I will again have compassion on them, and I will bring them again each to his heritage and each to his land” (Jer 12:15). Likewise, Micah demonstrates compassion in signs of forgiveness: “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot” (Micah 7:19). The prophets illustrate compassion through actions that demonstrate both forgiveness and salvation to God’s people. The shepherd motif is a tangible display of Yahweh, the compassionate shepherd.

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<sup>386</sup> “Logos Bible Software,” n.d.

<sup>387</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 14.

The thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah depict God's verdict on his people, who are sent into exile for their abhorrent idolatry and immorality. However, hope saturates the last half of Isaiah; in that hope, the reader will see a compassionate God. In Chapter 40, the writer expresses the desire for the comfort of God to rest on the distressed people. The picture in Isa 40:11 of the shepherd emerges after the people have experienced the repercussions of their rejection of God. Yahweh has taken pity on them and desires their restoration. The imagery is soft, overflowing with compassion and care. For a shepherd to tend his flock implies his care for them. They were once scattered in exile, but now he is there to gather the lambs with his arms. He is close and personal, gently leading the young.

The picture of Yahweh is as the benevolent shepherd with compassion for his people. Isaiah features this aspect of his character by employing the shepherd motif (Isa 49:9-10). The people will find their provision in God, and they will not hunger or thirst. John Watts explains, "These steps would mean that released captives and returned exiles would have a place to go and an opportunity for livelihood with legal rights to homestead ancient areas without being harassed by other claimants to the land."<sup>388</sup> The writer captures vivid scenes that instill hope for the future, and he reminds the people of Yahweh's compassion for them. They will be safe, led by the compassionate shepherd. He will guide them by the waters. He remembered them; he would feed and care for them. The feeding could include spiritual growth in the Lord and physical provision. The spring waters could imply places of rest and renewal. Waters were used for drinking, cleansing, and refreshment. The people hearing Isaiah would perceive that these verses are embedded in a chapter reminding the people that the Lord has not forgotten them, and the picture of the shepherd evokes that tender care.

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<sup>388</sup> Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, 188.

Isaiah highlights humanity's culpability. Man has both rejected God and sinned against him. In the shepherd motif, it is revealed, "all of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isa 53:6). There is no reason for Yahweh to care for his people, but like a shepherd, he searches and saves his sheep. This passage further states, "the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa 53:6). Although this statement has a fuller fulfillment in the New Testament, it demonstrates that God had such compassion and mercy on his people that he was going to restore them. Because of their prevalent sacrificial system, the people hearing the message would have most likely understood this as substitutionary atonement; however, most likely, they would not have understood it to the degree of the New Testament fulfillment.<sup>389</sup>

Jeremiah announces judgment on the shepherds, even while Yahweh implicitly demonstrates compassion for his people. He reverses bad shepherds' care and undertakes it himself. Jeremiah writes, "you have scattered My flock...and have not been concerned about them" (Jer 23:2). Then Jeremiah indicates that God says, "I will gather the remnant," and "I will bring them back." Wilhelm Wessels attests, "The 'I' referred to is YHWH, who intercedes and takes control of the turnaround process. The leaders (shepherds) have failed the flock, and for that reason YHWH will attend to them in the negative sense of the word by punishing them. However, in verse 3, YHWH states that circumstances are about to change because he will take control of matters."<sup>390</sup>

In this reversal, the reader observes what "ought" to be the role of the leadership. However, this passage speaks of who Yahweh is. He states that the leaders should have cared for the people, and God is communicating his care and compassion to them. Further compassion is

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>390</sup> Wessels, "Leader Responsibility in the Workplace: Exploring the Shepherd Metaphor in the Book of Jeremiah," 3.



extended in Jeremiah 30-33, called The Book of Consolation earlier. Encapsulated are words of comfort that also signify the compassionate shepherd gathering the scattered flock and shepherding them (Jer 31:10). The salvation image seen here implies the compassion of the Lord for his people. He is redeeming the people who had abandoned him for other nations and their gods. The sounds of restoration and hope flow from the compassion of Yahweh. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers highlight this dynamic by titling chapters 33:1-26-40:13 “More Promises of Compassion.” Tucked in these salvation passages is a shepherd’s depiction of what happens to the remnant after repentance. Jeremiah 33:12 states: “There will again be in this place which is waste, without man or animal, and in all its cities, a pasture for shepherds who rest their flocks.” These vivid scenes inform the future peace and rest that will come from the protection of the shepherds. These are the new shepherds that Yahweh is bringing to replace the corrupt leadership. God’s compassion is implicit in the lips of Jeremiah as he expresses, “My people have become lost sheep; Their shepherds have led them astray,” and “all who found them have devoured them, and their adversaries have said, we are not guilty,” (Jer 50:6-10). Jeremiah points out that Yahweh’s people are not only lost but are also being devoured. But the Lord is revealing his care for them. He notes that while judgment will be brought upon the Babylonians, the restoration will be extended to Judah.

Ezekiel exposes the bad shepherds of Judah by analyzing their poor behavior. These images are both an implicit picture of God's presence and a picture of compassion for the oppressed. Joel Biwul writes, “For Ezekiel, exilic experience has a positive side to Israel’s national survival in view of its future restoration on the ground that Yahweh’s shepherd character of compassion makes him a forgiving Yahweh. The future restoration of Israel indicates that it is

predicated upon his compassionate and forgiving nature, his enduring covenant.”<sup>391</sup> Yahweh’s desire is for his shepherds to feed and care for the people, but they have failed by “feeding themselves” and starving the flock (Eze 34:2). The leaders ignored the responsibility of caring for their sheep. They did not “strengthen the sickly” nor “heal the diseased” or “bind the broken” (Eze 34:4). The lost sheep became food for every animal of the field (Eze 34:5-6). Yahweh uses the shepherd motif to accuse the leaders, expressing compassion for the exploited people. The passage exposes the leaders for stealing from the people and dishonestly filling the judicial rooms to their advantage.

The people are distressed and unprotected by their rulers, but the picture of God as a shepherd shows that he does not leave his people abandoned or destroyed. Instead, he states, “I will save My sheep from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them” (Ezekiel 34:10). Christopher Porter points out that the indictment turns from the bad shepherds to God as a shepherd as Jeremiah states, “This oracle then turns to its salvific component, where Ezekiel pictures YHWH taking over as the shepherd for the flock, drawing a strong contrast with the unjust actions of the false shepherds.”<sup>392</sup> God desires to deliver his people out of his compassion for them. Jeremiah writes of Yahweh, “As a shepherd cares for his flock on a day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day” (Eze 34:12). He further states, “I will gather,” “I will feed,” “I will lead them to rest,” “I will seek the lost,” “I will bind up the broken,” “I will strengthen the sick” (Eze 34:13-16).

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<sup>391</sup> Biwul, *A Theological Examination of Symbolism in Ezekiel with Emphasis on the Shepherd Metaphor*, 85.

<sup>392</sup> Christopher Porter, “Of Sheep, Shepherds, and Temples: A Social Identity Reading of the Good Shepherd Paroemia on the Way to a Destroyed Temple,” *Conspectus* 32 (October 2021): 164.

Rebuilding and renewing are resounding proclamations to the people in exile. Jeremiah conveys for Yahweh, “then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have saved them from the hand of those who enslaved them” (Eze 34:27). He encourages them through the language of the shepherd, declaring that the people “will not be afraid,” nor “will they be devoured,” and they will have an “established planting place” because “they are his sheep” (Eze 34:28-30). There will be a new institution, and new rulers solidified by a covenant of peace. Jeremiah writes, “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd” (Eze 37:24) and “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them” (Eze 37:26). The reader observes that this new establishment flows from the compassion God has for his people. They will no longer be taken advantage of or abandoned but will be cared for under a new ruler and covenant.

Micah shares some of the same descriptions of Yahweh. As Blessing Boloje argues, “Micah’s shepherd-king metaphor imagines a restoration of fortune under the leadership of a coming eschatological shepherd-leader allowing a positive construct of a visionary leader, who is a passionate agent of restoration rather than one who is an agent of exploitation, oppression, and bondage.”<sup>393</sup> By the judgment of God, the reader can sense the love of protection God has for his people and his compassion on them. Stephen Dempster writes, “this God is not a dispassionate, distant figure but one who suffers the pain of the victims, is furious with their oppressors (an implication of the many judgment speeches and also Micah) and is exasperated with his people because of their failure to respond to his grace. This is surely a god like no other, a transcendent one—‘high and lofty’ (this is Isaiah’s way of describing transcendence in Isa 6:1), but also

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<sup>393</sup> Boloje, “Micah’s Shepherd-King (Mi 2:12–13): An Ethical Model for Reversing Oppression in Leadership Praxis,” 1.

concerned with matters of mundane reality like fairness and equity, poverty and wealth, widows and orphans.”<sup>394</sup> The act of forgiveness and restoration does not rest on the ability of the people, but instead, it is the hand of God that moves to restore. He desires to “assemble those who limp,” and “gather the scattered” (Micah 4:6). The new shepherd will “arise and shepherd the flock in the strength of the Lord” (Micah 5:4). The ideal king is coming forth, and Micah conveys that this action results from the compassion of Yahweh. He writes, “Shepherd Your people with Your scepter, the flock of Your possession” (Micah 7:14). A few verses later, Micah recalls why Yahweh would save his people. He writes, “He does not retain His anger forever.” Why? “Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us,” and the result of his compassion will cause him to “cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

Zechariah provides an interesting outlook on the compassion of Yahweh. For a moment in this account, it seems he has no compassion for his people. Zechariah writes, “And their shepherds have no compassion for them. For I will no longer have compassion for the inhabitants of the land” (Zech 11:4-5). For a time, Yahweh allows his people to experience the lack of compassion from the bad leaders and the consequences of their sins. The God of compassion is also a just God, and justice in the land allows people to flourish. Justice alongside compassion presents a full picture of the love of Yahweh. Therefore, God hands his people over to judgment; but before the book of Zechariah closes, he writes, “They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘The Lord is my God’” (Zech 13:9). The statements related to the Lord ceasing to have compassion on his people are stated in hopes that they would return to him. When they return, he extends his compassion to restore the flock to fields of green with a new shepherd to tend his sheep.

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<sup>394</sup> Dempster, *Micah*, 9.

## **Summary: The Shepherd Motif Contributes to the Character of God**

The prophets have contributed to the character of God by filtering events through the lens of the shepherd motif. First, they voice Yahweh several times as shepherd, and second, the language describes actions to draw out the character of God. The patterns describe God as a shepherd. God is viewed as a judge over all his people, the rulers, and the surrounding communities. Everyone is under judgment. Because he is sovereign over all the nations, his rule is not restricted to Israel but extends to Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and every other nation to the ends of the earth. In the language of the shepherd, Yahweh is shown to be an incomparable God. He is the ideal shepherd of all shepherds. His faithfulness flows from the pages of the prophets. Even when his people and leaders are unfaithful, he demonstrates himself as the faithful shepherd who locates the lost and brings them back to the good pastures. The prophets expose the bad shepherds by comparing and contrasting God as shepherd. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, and Zechariah voice God as a shepherd and the one sending a Davidic ruler after his heart. Through these messages, the character of God is expanded. He brings judgment. He is a compassionate shepherd who loves to restore a repentant people. God is the good shepherd and the shepherd who rightly judges his people. He is the sovereign, incomparable, faithful, and compassionate shepherd. Thus the theology of the prophets enlarges the view of the good shepherd, increasing the readers' understanding of the whole character of Yahweh.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

### Contribution to the Field of Theology

As the research has already mentioned, several dissertations, journals, and books have been written on the implications of bad shepherds, mainly referring to the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. Many more articles have been written on the shepherd controversy in Zechariah regarding the fulfillment of prophecies. Examples of these books are located in the literature review in Chapter 1. However, to this writer's knowledge, nothing surfaced on the prophets' contribution to understanding the nature of God by utilizing the shepherd motif.

Typically, when the shepherd metaphor in the Old Testament is examined in light of the character of God, it is almost exclusively limited to Psalm 23. This study, however, has attempted to examine how the prophets conveyed the theology of God through the lens of the shepherd motif. First, the study had to work from the research to understand the shepherd metaphor in the ancient Near East. Although several studies in this area are available, this writer provided a detailed account of the shepherd metaphor in light of the ANE and their deities and leaders. Now, this research provides a one-stop shop for researchers to gather several sources and gain an understanding of the use of the shepherd metaphor in the ancient Near East. Second, an overview exegesis of the forty-two passages that entailed the words related to shepherding were presented. Although there could be more, this writer focused on passages with the Hebrew word *shepherd*. Third, the most significant asset is the contributions to the nature of God through the lens of the shepherd motif from the prophets.

The most recent works related to the shepherd motif focused on identifying passages regarding leadership and highlighting the good shepherd in John 10. However, this particular work has broadened the scope of the discussion to enlarge the understanding of Yahweh in the

prophets. As it appears in the prophets, the shepherd motif provides a fuller vision of the good shepherd. It also shows what makes him the ideal shepherd. There are different facets of vivid shepherd imagery to delineate God, Judah, Israel, bad leaders, good leaders, provision, destruction, judgment, and restoration. The shepherd language conveys a tangible picture of the relationship between God and humanity. The prophets also use the shepherd language to express, both implicitly and explicitly, God as judge over all mankind, God as sovereign over all the nations, God as incomparable in all his ways, God as faithful to all his promises, and God as compassionate to restore his people. These aspects of his nature developed through the prophets provide a fuller view of the character of God.

#### The Shepherd Motif Contributes to the Character of God in the Prophets for the Church

The requirement for the dissertation is to contribute something to the academic field, which was the goal in approaching the research. However, a natural outcome is that it will also offer something of value to the local church. In light of the church, the shepherd motif offers a fuller picture of who God is. Understanding God's character in the prophets' theology can enrich believers' Christian walk. As the research notes, God is perceived as bringing justice to the people. These passages demonstrate what makes God the good shepherd. He is a good shepherd because he is faithful to his people and brings judgment because he is just. His compassion drives him to save his people. He is the incomparable shepherd, ruler, and leader of leaders. The following is a chart of the passages exegeted in Chapter 3, but much more could be written of this work.

Major Prophets	Minor Prophets
1. Isaiah 5:16-17; 2. Isaiah 13:14,20; 3. Isaiah 40:11; 4. Isaiah 44:28; 5. Isaiah 49:9; 6. Isaiah 53:6; 7. Isaiah 56:10-11; 8. Isaiah 63:11; 9. Isaiah 65:25  10. Jeremiah 3:15; 11. Jeremiah 10:21; 12. Jeremiah 12:10; 13. Jeremiah 22:22; 14. Jeremiah 23:1-4; 15. Jeremiah 25:34-36; 16. Jeremiah 31:10; 17. Jeremiah 33:12; 18. Jeremiah 43:12; 19. Jeremiah 49:19; 20. Jeremiah 50:6; 21. Jeremiah 50:19; 22. Jeremiah 50:44  23. Ezekiel 34:1-6; 24. Ezekiel 34:7-10; 25. Ezekiel 34:11-16; 26. Ezekiel 34:17-22; 27. Ezekiel 34:25-31; 28. Ezekiel 37:24-26	29. Hosea - 4:16  30. Amos 1:2; 31. Amos 3:12  32. Micah - 2:12, 33. Micah 4:6-8, 34. Micah 5:4 – 6; 35. Micah 7:14  36. Nahum 3:18  37. Zephaniah - 2:6-7; 38. Zephaniah 3:12-13  39. Zechariah - 10:2-3; 40. Zechariah 11:3-5; 41. Zechariah 11:15-17; 42. Zechariah 13:7-9



### **Further Development on the Promises of God in the Shepherd Motif**

Something significant emerged while researching the prophets' theology through the shepherd motif lens. Lamar Cooper pointed out that there are at least twenty-five promises of God in Ezekiel 34:11-16.<sup>395</sup> There was no development in this area throughout the research for this work. Further, Paul House describes the Book of the Twelve as “The God Who Keeps Promises.”<sup>396</sup> His *Old Testament* Theology work laid more groundwork for development in this area. These prophets spanned over three hundred years. He claims reading the Twelve offers a “full portrait of the God who keeps promises.”<sup>397</sup> One could extrapolate the shepherd motif material to include the major and minor prophets to pursue the implications of the promises of God mentioned by Cooper. If there are twenty-five in Ezekiel, then a researcher could examine the shepherd motif of the Old Testament and gather the promises of God to identify what that might indicate for the believer. What might it indicate for the New Testament? What might that indicate for the Gospels? What might that indicate for the claims of Jesus?

### **Further Study in Yahweh as Shepherd vs. the ANE Gods as Shepherds**

Another assessment that could be developed is a study of the characteristics of the ancient Near East gods compared to Yahweh. The study of chapter 2 implanted the questions of the personal relations between the gods and humanity. In the pages of the prophets, the Mosaic covenant reminds the people of God's relationship with them. Then it is further expressed in the

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<sup>395</sup> Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*, 301.

<sup>396</sup> House, *Old Testament Theology*, 346.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 347.

shepherd motif. The tenderness of the shepherd to the people. How did the ancient Near East gods view themselves? Were the shepherd-gods considered sovereign like Yahweh? Were the shepherd-gods considered all-powerful? Were all leaders under a particular law? Were the shepherd-gods considered compassionate? Were the shepherd-gods willing to restore their people? What distinguishes Yahweh from the other shepherd-kings?

### **Further Development on the Words Associated with Shepherd**

For the research of this work, four words were used to locate particular passages; these included shepherd, flock, lamb, and small cattle. While reading and writing, there were other repeating words and scenery. For example, there is probably more to tease out in springs of water, green pastures, mountains, and desolation of the lands for the sheep. Although there was a short exegesis on some of those ideas, it seems there is a connection to what the new shepherd ruler will provide in the new kingdom. There could be something to what the prophets are communicating about the kingdom of God to come.

### **Final Considerations**

In the current culture, there is a decline in reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, regarding the prophets. The shepherd motif provides a tangible view of how the prophets' theology contributes to God's nature. The parallel challenges in the church today are remarkably similar to the times leading up to the exile of Israel and Judah. The people of God during ancient times were following blind leaders. Therefore, the people of God followed the ways of the false gods and ultimately oppressed the people. The Israelites were syncretistic, and there was an absence of the instruction of God from the leaders. It is only through the new covenant and the new shepherd that was sent that mankind will be able to walk in safety in the

green pastures and rest in his kingdom. Yahweh has announced, “I Myself will feed My flock and I Myself will lead them to rest” (Ezekiel 34:15). He is the incomparable, faithful, and compassionate shepherd according to the prophets' theology.

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