The shepherd imagery in Zechariah 9-14[1]

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ABSTRACT

The shepherd image emphasises the shepherd's role as leader, provider and protector. In Zechariah 1-8 one finds references to specific leaders, for example king Darius, the high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel. Zechariah 9-14 has no reference to a specific leader. On the contrary, one finds 14 occurrences of the shepherd image as a reference to God or earthly leaders (civil and religious). The question posed by this article is: Which different perspectives are portrayed by this image? The use of the shepherd image in Zechariah 9-14 cannot be restricted to one perspective or meaning like in some Biblical passages (cf. Ps 23). The following perspectives are discussed: God as the good shepherd (Zech 9:16; 10:3b, 8); the prophet as shepherd (11:4-14); the three bad shepherds (11:8); the worthless shepherd, who deserts his flock (11:15-17); God's shepherd, his associate (13:7-9) and even a viewpoint that God is indirectly portrayed as an "uncaring shepherd" (cf. 11:4-17).

A INTRODUCTION

In Zechariah 1-8 one finds references to specific leaders like king Darius, the high priest Joshua and the governor Zerubbabel. However, Zechariah 9-14 has no reference to a specific leader. On the contrary, one finds 14 occurrences of the shepherd image[2] as a reference to God or earthly leaders (civil and religious). The question posed by this article is: Which different perspectives are portrayed by this image? I shall make a few brief remarks on the use of the shepherd image in the Hebrew Bible and the composition of the shepherd passages in Zechariah 9-14. Thereafter I shall focus on the different passages in Deutero-Zechariah where the stem h[r occurs.

B THE SHEPHERD IMAGE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

There are nearly 400 references to sheep and flocks of sheep in the Bible making it the most frequently mentioned animal in the Bible. The prominence of the sheep and shepherd imagery may be attributed to/caused by two factors: (1) the importance of sheep to the nomadic and agricultural life of the people in the

[1] A shorter version of this article was delivered as a paper at the SBL International Meeting in Rome, Italy (June 30-July 4, 2009).

[2] Scholars use different words when they refer to the shepherd: image (Boda 2004, Curtis 2006); symbol (Petersen 1995); motif (Klein 2008); metaphor (Craigie 1985). In this article we prefer to use the word image, but the other words could also be used.

Ancient Near East; and (2) the qualities of sheep and shepherds that made them good sources of metaphor for spiritual realities. Shepherds are depicted as providers, guides, protectors and constant companions of sheep. They were also figures of authority and leadership to the animals under their care (Ryken et al. 1998:782).

Biblical writings often picture civil and religious leaders as shepherds and the people as sheep. The first biblical example is Moses who is portrayed as a shepherd who led his people like a flock (Exod 2:15-3:1; Ps 77:20).[3] Moses' successor Joshua was designated to lead the people "so that the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep without a shepherd" (Num 27:17).[4] Foreign kings were also called shepherds (cf. Isa 44:28), but biblical writers were reserved in using the image for their own kings. David is the only Israelite king who is explicitly called a shepherd (2 Sam 5:2). No king after the collapse of the united kingdom was referred to as shepherd. The reason may be that several biblical passages criticise the kings for not acting as true shepherds or leaders (cf. 1 Kgs 22:17 = 2 Chr 18:16; Isa 56:11; Jer 10:21; etc.). Prophets, judges and other biblical leaders were also called shepherds (cf. 2 Sam 7:7; Am 7:15; Cornelius 1997:1144; Ryken et al. 1998:783).

Ecclesiastical satire (i.e. an attack on unworthy religious leaders) has been a common subgenre throughout the pastoral tradition. Ezekiel 34 may be labelled as a classical passage in this regard. This is an extended passage of satiric rebuke to selfish and unreliable leaders who did not care for the people of Israel. Prophets like Jeremiah and Zechariah also use religious satire referring to false shepherds (cf. Jer 3:15; 10:21; 23:1-3; 25:34-36; 50:6; Zech 10:2-3; 11:15-17; Smith 1984:264; Ryken et al. 1998:783).

One of the most well known images in the Bible is that of God as the good shepherd of his people. Besides Psalm 23 several other passages refer to God as the guiding, protecting, saving and caring shepherd (Gen 49:24; Ps 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:11; Jer 23:10; 31:10; 50:19; Ezek 34:22; Mi 2:12-13). The tradition of God as Israel's shepherd originated in the desert. God is often depicted with animals in his hand that cannot keep up (Gen 33:13; Isa 40:11; Ps 28:9; Smith 1984:264; Jonker 1997:1141; Ryken et al. 1998:784). Beyreuther (1981:565) says the following: "The acknowledgment that Yahweh as the shepherd of Israel grew out of the living religious ex-

[3] Gen 4:2 is the first reference in the Hebrew Bible referring to a shepherd. However, this verse does not use the Hebrew term h[r as an image or metaphor of a leader. It refers to the difference between Abel ("keeper of sheep") and Cain ("tiller of the ground").

[4] Biblical citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, unless mentioned otherwise.

perience of the people and is thus to be distinguished from the cold courtly style of the ancient East."

There are at least two prominent Hebrew terms portraying the shepherd image, the stem h[r with its derivatives and the term ÷ax (flock, sheep).[5] The stem h[r occurs 175 times in the Hebrew Bible, 106 times in the classical prophetic books and 8 times in the Psalms. The term ÷ax (flock, sheep) appears 275 times in the Hebrew Bible, 64 times in Genesis, 16 times in the Psalms and 74 times in the classical prophetic books. The term ÷ax frequently[6] signifies the multitude of Israel. With Israel so frequently depicted as God's flock, it is no wonder that God is frequently known as the "shepherd" or "the one who shepherds the flock" (cf. Gen 48:15; Ps 79:13; 95:7; Isa 40:11; Ezek 34:14-15; Hos 4:16; Mi 7:14; Meyers & Meyers 1993:157).

Regarding the occurrence of shepherd imagery in Zechariah 9-14, the Hebrew stem h[r occurs fourteen times in Zechariah 9-14 and none in Zechariah 1-8. In ten instances the noun[7] h[r is used, four times in the plural form (10:3; 11:3, 5, 8) and six times in the singular form (10:2; 11:15, 16, 17; 13:7 [2x]). The verb h[r occurs four times in Zechariah, once in the Qal imperative (11:4) and three times in the Qal imperfectum (11:7 [2x]; 11:9). The Hebrew word ÷ax (sheep, flock) appears nine times in Zechariah. Most of these references are used together with the root h[r in the same literary context (10:2; 11:4; 11:7 [3x]; 11:11; 11:17; 13:7). There is only one occurrence where the noun is used without h[r. Zechariah 9:16 refers to God who will save them for they are the flock (÷ax) of his people.

In the next section I shall focus more on the shepherd passages in Deutero-Zechariah, but it is necessary to make a few remarks on the origin and composition of these passages.

C THE ORIGIN AND COMPOSITION OF THE SHEPHERD PASSAGES IN DEUTERO ZECHARIAH[8]

Most scholars agree that the prophet Zechariah was not responsible for the writing of chapters 9-14; therefore the author is unknown. Modern scholars distinguish between chapters 9-11 and 12-14 and refer to the authors as Deutero-Zechariah and Trito-Zechariah. The number of authors/redactors can even

[5] There are also other less frequently used terms like rd[(flock) and hmqm (flock, cattle).

[6] Cf. 2 Sam 24:17 = 1 Chron 21:17; Jer 23:1-3; Ezek 24:5; 36:37-38; etc.)

[7] Some scholars (cf. Jonker 1997:1139) may depict h[r (*rōʿeh*) as a Qal participium of the root h[r, but it is always used as a noun (cf. Cornelius 1997:1143-1144).

[8] It is not the aim of this article to provide a detailed and comprehensive study (e. g. a thorough redactional critical study) of the origin and compilation of the book. Only a few general remarks will be given.

be more. Rudolph (1976:161-164) refers to three separate collections (9:1-11:3; 11:4-13:9; 14:1-21) and Saebo (1969:313) believes there were four separate collections (9-10; 11; 12-13; 14) before the final composition of Zechariah 9-14. The dating of Zechariah 9-14 remains a challenge to researchers. Some scholars reckon it is impossible to date these chapters. Zechariah 9-14 offers no historical headings like Proto-Zechariah and theories range from the eighth century B.C.E. until the second century B.C.E. [9] Before 1980 the general consensus was that Zechariah 9-14 originated during the Hellenistic times. More and more modern scholars[10] agree that Zechariah 9-14 originated during the time of the Persian Empire with its long history of conflict between the Persians and Greeks – from the time of Darius' initial campaigns against Thrace and Macedonia in 516 B.C.E. until Alexander's campaigns beginning in 334 B.C.E. (Petersen 1995:4-5; Sweeney 2000:565).

The question still remains: Who was responsible for the shepherd material? Redditt (1989:638-640) argues that the redactor wrote the shepherd materials (10:1-3a; 11:4-17; 13:7-9) as well as 12:6-7; 12:10-13:6 which supplement the first account of an attack on Jerusalem (12:1-5, 8-9). This author/redactor and his community lived in Judah/Yehud outside of Jerusalem. His task was to reshape his inherited traditions in such a way as to keep them viable. Redditt's hypothesis is possible, but we have no real evidence to prove it.

1 Zechariah 11:17 and 13:7-9

There are at least two shepherd passages that received special attention from scholars during the years. Zechariah 13:7-9 constitutes the last of the shepherd passages and the *New English Bible* and several scholars argue that these verses would fit nicely at the conclusion of 11:17. The following reasons are given: (a) Zechariah 13:7-9 and 11:17 are written as poetry while the rest of chapters 12-14 are written in prose; [11] (b) The pericope seems misplaced. Its imagery and motifs are not integrally related to Zechariah 13; (c) There are direct similarities in content between 11:17 and 13:7-9 (e.g. the references to "sword" and "strike"; see Mitchell, Smith & Bewer 1912:316-317; Rudolph 1976:213; Mason 1977:110; Hanson 1979:368-369; Willi-Plein 1974:59). Those who transpose 13:7-9 and attach it to 11:4-17 understand the smitten shepherd in 13:7 to be the worthless shepherd of 11:17.

One must accept the fact that there are certain similarities between Zechariah 11:17 and 13:7-9. We can even agree with Cook (1993:456) that

[9] Cf. Hanson (1979:287-290), Redditt (1994:664-678; 1995:94-100) and O'Kennedy (2008:81-83) for a summary of the different viewpoints.

[10] Cf. Hill 1982; Meyers & Meyers 1993; Petersen 1995; Sweeney 2000; Clark & Hatton 2002; Merril 2003; Boda 2004; O'Brein 2004).

[11] Mitchell, Smith and Bewer (1912:254) reckon there is conclusive evidence that 9: 11-11:3 and 11:4-17 with 13:7-9 comes from different authors.

these chapters may have been originated together.[12] But, there is no compelling reason to rearrange the text. The following reasons support this viewpoint:

- Both passages can be typified as poetry, but there is an unevenness of the poetry in these verses. For example 11:17 consists of three bicola and 13:7-9a consists of two tricola (Cook 1993:456).
- The redactor/s shaping the final form of Zechariah 9-14 saw chapter 13:7-9 as the final instalment of a series of short redactional seams that reminded the people of the leadership crisis (Boda 2004:511-512).
- The distinction between the fate of the shepherd in 13:7 and 11:17 suggests a different identity (Meyers & Meyers 1993:384).
- Zechariah 13:7-9 fits nicely into its immediate literary context. There are several examples to support this: False prophets will be dealt with (vv 1-6) as well as false shepherds (vv 7-9); the mentioning of the house of David in 12:1-13:1 indicates that leadership is a key concern for the author/redactor; 13:7-9 foreshadows the remnant theme which will be taken up in 14:2 (Craigie 1985:217; Boda 2004:511-512). One good example is the comparison of the detail content of verse 5 with that of verse 7. Zechariah 13:5 draws upon the traditions of Amos and Cain. The phrase "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil" is a shortened version of Amos's denial to Amaziah that he was a professional prophet (Amos 7:14). Whereas Amos had claimed to be shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, the prophet in future would say that he was only a "tiller of the soil" that possessed the land since his youth. It is ironic that the statement in Amos 7:14 is intended to emphasise the credibility of Amos' prophetic message while the statement in Zechariah 13:5 uses the tradition to focus on the false prophet's lack of credibility. The phrase "tiller of the soil/ground" (hmda db[) also appears in Genesis 4:2 to describe Cain in contrast to his brother Abel who is described as "a keeper/shepherd of sheep". The comparison of the false prophets with Cain the "tiller of the soil" who killed his shepherd brother Abel prepares the reader for verses 7-9 which calls for the killing of God's shepherd (Redditt 1995:135-136; Sweeney 2000:694-695).
- No major ancient textual witness supports the rearrangement of the Hebrew text (Clark & Hatton 2002:335). Major textual traditions like the Septuagint, Syriac translation and the Qumran manuscripts support the arrangement of the Masoretic text.

The above-mentioned evidence illustrates that there is a connection between Zechariah 13:7-9 and 11:17 (and the rest of chapters 9-11). The different shepherd references cannot be studied in isolation, but are interrelated.

[12] Cook (1993:456) summarises his viewpoint: "In sum, it appears that 13:7-9 was, at its origin, connected to 11:4-17, but not necessarily as the original conclusion of 11:4-17, constituting one unified poem with it."

2 Zechariah 10:3a

Zechariah 10:3a is another focus point in the shepherd material. Some scholars and the text-critical apparatus of BHS suggest that this may be a later addition. There are a few differences between verse 3a and the previous verses: (a) In verses 1-2a the people had sinned by seeking help from unproductive forms of intermediation (*teraphim*, diviners and dreamers), but in verse 3a God promises judgment on the shepherds; (b) The object is singular in verse 2b (shepherd) as opposed to the plural object (shepherds and he-goats) in verse 3a; (c) The earlier simile focused on the plight of the people whereas God promises judgment in verse 3; (d) Verses 1-2 offers a retrospective view on the effects of improper intermediation, verse 3a is concerned with the future.

One may argue that verse 3a originated from a different author than verses 1-2. However, it concludes this section by linking past and future and by making known God's view of both people and leaders (Petersen 1995:73).

D DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON THE SHEPHERD IMAGE

Deutero-Zechariah may be a single literary unit with a specific focus, but there are different perspectives on the shepherd image. It ranges from God as the individual divine shepherd to a group of three corrupt human shepherds. The following discussion will be ordered thematically.

1 God as the good shepherd (Zech 9:16; 10:3b, 8)

There are at least three verses in Zechariah 9-14 that refer to God or twabx hwhy as the good shepherd (Zech 9:16; 10:3b and 8). The translation of Zechariah 9:16 has an effect on the understanding of the shepherd image. The NRSV of the Bible translates, "On that day the Lord their God will save them for they are the flock (÷ax) of his people;[13] for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land." This NRSV translation emphasises the reason why God will save them ("for they are the flock of his people"). The Masoretic text does not use the particle yk (for), but the particle k (as). According to 9:16 the main reason for God's saving act is not because they are his flock, but because he wants them to shine on the land like the jewels of a crown.

Zechariah 10:3b illustrates the contrast between the human shepherds mentioned in verse 3a and God as shepherd: "[F]or the LORD of hosts (twabx hwhy) cares for his flock (rd[), the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war-horse." There is an interesting word play in Hebrew between verse 3a and 3b.[14] The same Hebrew word dqp is used in both these sentences. Many English translations and commentators translate the verb dqp in verse 3a as "pun-

[13] In the BHS text there is no verb, merely the two words "flock of his people" (Clark & Hatton 2002:255).

[14] Cf. also Jer 23:2 for the same dual use.

ish/judge" and "cares for" in verse 3b (cf. CEV; NIV; NRSV; Smith 1984:262).[15] There is a slight difference between 9:16 and 10:3 in the use of different words as subject and object. In Zechariah 9:16 God as subject is typified as µhyhla hwhy (YHWH their God) while Zechariah 10:3 uses the epithet twabx hwhy ("Lord of hosts or YHWH of all powers"). The flock is also described with different Hebrew words, namely the more commonly used term ÷ax (9:16) and the lesser used term rd[in Zechariah10:3.[16]

The third example is an indirect reference to God as shepherd, because the words "shepherd" or "flock" are not used. Zechariah 10:8 refers to God who will gather the people of Ephraim/Israel: "I will signal (qrv) for them and gather (Åbq) them in, for I have redeemed them, and they shall be as numerous as they were before." The verb qrv can also be translated as "whistle". It may describe the sharp clear signal the shepherd used in calling his sheep (cf. Judg 5:16), but is not commonly used in the prophetic books.[17] God had scattered Ephraim by means of the Assyrian Empire. Zechariah 10:8 portrays God as a shepherd whose sheep know him (even in exile) and will answer his call (Redditt 1995:121; Klein 2008:299).

It is interesting to note that all the above verses do not use the Hebrew root h[r, but rather describe what God is doing as shepherd: save ([vy) his flock in 9:16; cares (dqp) for his flock in 10:3b; and gather them in (Åbq) and redeemed them (hdp) in 10:8. Four different Hebrew verbs are used to describe the actions of God as shepherd.

2 Lack of a shepherd (10:2b)

In the previous discussion I focused on the divine shepherd. The first reference to a human shepherd in Deutero-Zechariah occurs in 10:2b. Unfortunately this verse does not mention a specific shepherd, but refers to a total lack of a shepherd: "Therefore the people wander like sheep (÷ax); they suffer for lack of a shepherd (h[r)." It was not the case that the people had no leaders at all, but that they were not real leaders of God that could be labelled as shepherds. It is surprising that in 10:2b the author/redactor does not even want to use the term "shepherd", but in the very next verse the bad leaders are called shepherds.

[15] Meyers & Meyers (1993:178) translate the verb into "attend". "….and I will attend to the he-goats. For Yahweh of Hosts has attended to his flock."

[16] The Hebrew term ÷ax occurs 274 times in the Hebrew Bible while the term rd[occurs 41 times. There is only one occurrence of rd[in the book Zechariah.

[17] If one studies the use of the verb qrv in the prophetic books the following observations can be made. In most instances the verb means "to hiss" (Jer 19:8; 49:17; 50:13; Ezek 27:36; Zeph 2:15), but besides Zech 10:8 there are two instances in Isaiah where qrv can be translated into "whistle". Isaiah 5:26 and 7:18 rather refer to a beckoning signal of God when he summons the nations against Zion (O'Connell 1997:252-253; personal conversation on 01/07/2009 with Michael Stead).

This may indicate a difference in the use of the singular and plural term. Perhaps the singular noun refers to a true prophet who as in Jeremiah 23:4 would be a legitimate leader and protector of his flock (cf. Meyers & Meyers 1993:194).

3 The shepherds who do not care for their flock (10:3a)

I have already discussed the second part of Zechariah 10:3 (cf. section D subsection 1). Verse 3a does not focus on God as shepherd, but says the following: "My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders/he-goats (µydwt[)." The Hebrew phrase ypa hrj are intense words describing the burning or hot anger of God against the shepherds that led to their punishment. The divine anger expressed by this idiom, is with only two exceptions directed at Israelites. The shepherds mentioned in Zechariah 10:3a are clearly leaders of some description and scholars offer the following hypotheses:

- The Davidic governor and his officials in the late sixth century (Hanson 1979:329-331).
- Israelite leaders who falsely claim to speak for God (Meyers & Meyers 1993:196).
- Leaders within the community itself (Petersen 1995:73).
- Persian overlords of the province Yehud (Sweeney 2000:669).
- Local leaders of Yehud (O'Brein 2004:245).

The text provides no specific detail about the shepherds, but the use of the words ypa hrj may provide us with a clue. If God's burning anger is almost always kindled against Israelites, it is unlikely that "shepherds" in this context should be understood as representing foreign leaders (Meyers & Meyers 1993:194).

The use of "shepherds" in Zechariah corresponds with other prophetic passages. In Jeremiah 23 the promise of future faithful shepherds is followed by the promise of a Davidic heir called Branch, a name that features prominently in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. Ezekiel also refers to the leaders of the community as "shepherds" and promises the return of the scattered sheep to their land (O'Brein 2004:245). Isaiah places "he-goats" (µydwt[) in parallel with kings (14:9) while Zechariah 10:3a employs µydwt[as a synonym for shepherd (Merril 2003:238).

4 Wail of the shepherds (11:3)

In this discussion I focus on the shepherd image or metaphor referring to divine and earthly leaders. The question in Zechariah 11:1-3 is whether these verses refer literally to the different trees (cedar, cypress, oak), the shepherds and lions, or whether these verses must be understood symbolically. Verse 1 may refer to the demographic expansion into the wooded uplands of Lebanon and

Gilead. That condition would involve the deforestation of those areas. The idea of cedars being burned ("Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars!") refers to the destruction of Israel by its enemies (cf. also 9:4). The portrayal of shepherds losing their pasturage fits nicely into this literal understanding (Meyers & Meyers 1993:238-248).

Verses 1-3 may also be understood symbolically. Then the cedars represent the supreme political power/s of the world, often as they are about to fall (cf. Isa 2:6-21; 10:5-34; 14:2-23; Jer 21:11-14; Ezek 31:3-18; etc.) In this context the shepherds and lions may refer to the lowest tier of leadership, the bureaucrats whose livelihood is cut off by the fall op imperial power. The Hebrew noun hmav (roar) indicates the cry of an animal, but it is commonly used in a figurative sense to describe the noise of invaders (Isa 5:29; Jer 2:15) or wicked rulers (Ezek 19:7; 22:25) (Meyers & Meyers 1993:246; Sweeney 2000:676; Boda 2004:460).

Most scholars accept the figurative reading of Zechariah 11:1-3, but both readings (literal and figurative) make sense. In the light of the immediate literary context one must accept the fact that "shepherds" in 11:3a refer to leaders. According to Meyers & Meyers (1993:247) the word "shepherd" is frequently used as a metaphor for leaders in prophetic language, but the word "lion" (11:3b) is not the usual term of reference. The word "shepherd" usually occurs as an explicit reference to leaders, but there are at least two instances where rypk (young lion) refers to rulers: Ezekiel 19:5-6 and Nahum 2:12 (Merril 2003:252).

5 The prophet as shepherd (11:4-14)

Zechariah 11:4-14 constitutes a prophetic sign-act[18] or enacted prophecy akin to cases we find in the Book of Ezekiel. Zechariah 11:4 and 7[19] clearly

[18] In Zechariah 11:4-16 three possible sign-acts can be discerned. This form typically consists of three sections: exhortation where God commands an action (11:4, 13a, 15); execution where the prophet describes his compliance (11:7-12, 13b, 14); and an explanation where God interprets its significance (11:6, 15). See Boda 2004:461.

[19] There are a few translation "problems" in verse 7. The text-critical apparatus of BHS suggests that the MT be changed from "therefore the afflicted (ones) of the flock" to "to the merchants of the flock" (yyn[nkl) in order to make more sense. This emendation is suggested in the light of the LXX translation eis thn Canaanitin. The term "Canaan" or "Canaanite" refers several times in the Hebrew Bible to the merchants (cf. Job 41:6; Prov 31:24; Ezek 17:4; Hos 12:7; Seph 1:11; Zech 14:21; see Petersen 1995:87). Some scholars and translations accept this emendation (NRSV; Meyers & Meyers; Petersen), but the MT can make sense even if it is difficult to translate the particle ≠kl (Merril 2003:256). The Qumran manuscripts correspond with the MT. The translation of the NRSV says: "So, on behalf of the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staffs; one I named

state that the prophet functioned as a shepherd. The prophet was commissioned to be a shepherd, because their previous shepherds had no pity on their flock (v 5). Their only interest in the sheep was to enrich themselves. Zechariah 11:4 introduces the Lord's command to Zechariah to pasture God's flock, the nation of Judah ("Thus said the Lord my God: Be a shepherd (h[r) of the flock (÷ax) doomed to slaughter."). The prophet's task seems from the beginning to be a dismal one since the flock entrusted to him is described as "doomed to slaughter". Verse 4 does not clearly state why the flock has been assigned to slaughter although the literary context suggests the reason. The symbolism of the chapter portrays the judgment God intends to send against Judah for the sin against the Lord. The identification of the prophet as shepherd reflects a departure from the significance of the shepherd image in earlier biblical texts. In previous texts the shepherd image was used as metaphor for the king or some primary ruler (Craigie 1985:208-209; Sweeney 2000:678; Klein 2008:322-323).

The two names of the staffs ("Favour" and "Unity") mentioned in verse 7 are significant. There is some debate over the precise meaning of these two implements, but everyone agrees that the names suggest a positive role for this shepherd. The staff called µ[n (Favour/Grace) which is linked to verse 10, is most likely a reference to God's use of nations to bring blessing and favour upon Israel. The staff called µyIbj (Unity/Union) which is linked to verse 14 is most likely representative of the peaceful redistribution of the land in the restoration phase (Ezek 47:13).

Unfortunately the positive picture of verse 7 is soon spoiled. He got rid of the three bad shepherds (v 8) and announces his intention to resign and describes the impact of this decision on the community as a whole (v 9). The prophet's verbal notice in verse 9 is followed by two symbolic gestures, the breaking of the first (v 10) and second staff (v 14). The breaking of the staff called "Favour" indicates that his (and God's) commitment to µym[h-lk (all the people/nations)[20] has ended and the covenant has been annulled. In verse 14 the shepherd proceeds to break the second staff called "Unity", annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel. The hopes of a united kingdom are shattered (Graigie 1985:209; Boda 2003:282-283).

Favor, the other I named Unity, and I tended the sheep." An alternative translation can be suggested if one do not want to emendate the MT: "I shepherded the flock destined for slaughter, therefore/especially the afflicted of the flock. I took two staffs; one I named Favor, the other I named Unity, and I shepherded the flock."

[20] Boda (2003:283) reckons that these words refer to the buyers and sellers of 11:5. Some scholars will say that it refers to the gentile "nations" while other say that it refers to the peoples or tribes of Israel (cf. Clark & Hatton 2002:295).

6 The three bad shepherds (11:8)

Baldwin (1972:181) describes verse 8 as "the most enigmatic in the whole Old Testament". Zechariah 11:8 is, at first glance, surprising. The reader expects the shepherd to care for his flock. Instead, the text portrays that the shepherd has been active with other shepherds, but not with sheep (Petersen 1995:940). Zechariah 11:8 refers to the three "bad" shepherds ("In one month I disposed of the three shepherds, for I had become impatient with them, and they also detested me.") It is uncertain whether the three shepherds of verse 8 are the same as the selfish shepherds mentioned in verse 5, but it is a strong possibility. Scholars have several divergent hypotheses concerning the identity of these three shepherds:[21]

- Saul, David and Solomon (Otzen 1964:156).
- Zechariah, Shallum and Menahem (Maurer 1840; Hitzig 1881).[22]
- The final three kings in Judah's history, namely Jehoiakim, Jehoiakin and Zedekiah (Merril 2003:258).[23]
- Second century Tobiads Simon, Menelaus and Lysimachus (Sellin 1930:562).
- Seleucus IV (187-175 B.C.E.), Heliodorus (175 B.C.E.) and Demetrius (175 B.C.E.) (Mitchell, Smith & Bewer 1912:307).[24]
- Antiochus III, Seleuchus IV and Heliodorus (Mitchell, Smith & Bewer 1912:307).[25]
- Seleucid kings such as Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.E.), Antiochus V (164-161 B.C.E.) and Demetrius (cf. Klein 2008:330).
- The three Persian monarchs Cyrus, Cambysus and Darius (Sweeney 2000:677-678).
- Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.[26]
- Three categories of kings, prophets and priests (cf. Redditt 1993:677).
- The priests Jason (174-171 B.C.E.), Menelaus (171-161 B.C.E.) and Alcimus (161-159 B.C.E.) (Oesterley 1932:258-259).
- The priests Jason (174-171 B.C.E.), Menelaus (171-161 B.C.E.) and Lysimachus (161 B.C.E.) (Baldwin 1972:182).

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[21] As early as 1912 Mitchell, Smith and Bewer (306-307) found at least forty different conjectures identifying the three shepherds in 11:8.

[22] As referred to in Mitchell, Smith & Bewer (1912: 307).

[23] Jehoiakim died in 597 B.C.E., his son Jehoiachin was deported three months later, and his brother Zedekiah was captured and blinded eleven years after that (2 Kgs 24:1-25:7). See Merril 2003:258.

[24] According to Mitchell et al. (1912:307) the three shepherds are doubtless three kings, and since this gloss is later than the original parable, presumably kings of Syria.

[25] Mitchell et al. regard these three kings as another option.

[26] Primary source uncertain. Cf. reference in Smith (1984:270).

- Apostate priests in the time of Judas Maccabaeus (Treves 1963:196-207).
- False prophets with whom the true prophet of the chapter is struggling (Meyers & Meyers 1993:265).

It is very difficult to evaluate all these different hypotheses. There are prominent scholars who ignore any speculation about the three shepherds and/or consider that it is a "futile search" (cf. Petersen 1995:94; Redditt 1995:125). Several commentators believe that 11:8a may be an interpretive gloss by someone in the Maccabean period relating the events of chapter 11 to the happenings of his own time (Baldwin 1972:183; Mason 1977:107; Smith 1984:270).

Scholars who try to "solve" this issue start with the reference to the duration of one month and the number of three shepherds. If one thinks of a literal period of one month there are not many options for the identification of the three shepherds. One thinks for example of Elah, Zimri, Tibni and Omri of Israel (1 Kgs 16:8-20) or Zechariah, Shallum and Menahem (2 Kgs 15:8-16) (Merril 2003:257). Most scholars agree that the reference to "one month" cannot be taken literally, but as a code for a short period of time. They also argue that the "three shepherds" must be taken symbolically, perhaps representing all of the shepherds collectively (cf. Baldwin 1972:183; Smith 1984:467; Meyers & Meyers 1993:265; Boda 2004:464; Klein 2008:333; et al.).

I have mentioned earlier that more and more modern scholars accept the fact that Zechariah 9-14 originated during the time of the Persian Empire (cf. section C). The literary context may point to the understanding of the shepherds as the foreign rulers of Judah and Jerusalem who will be punished for their threats against the city and its people. A reference to the destruction of the three shepherds probably refers to the demise of the first three Persian kings namely Cyrus, Cambysus and Darius. There is not much textual evidence to support this hypothesis, but the reference in Isaiah 44:28 may provide some evidence. This is the only verse in the Hebrew Bible where a specific foreign king (i. e. the Persian king Cyrus) is described as a "shepherd" (Sweeney 2000:677-678).

There will still be uncertainty for the years to come, but everyone agrees that these three shepherds refer to leaders who detested God or became unfaithful to him. Klein's viewpoint (2008:333) summarises the opinion of many modern exegetes: "Consequently, it is best to treat v. 8 as a symbolic action in which the three shepherds metaphorically represent the host of faithless shepherds who exploit the Lord's flock for their personal advantage."

7 The worthless shepherd, who deserts his flock (11:15-17)

I have already focused on three possible perspectives in Zechariah 11: the shepherds with spoiled glory (v 3); the prophet as shepherd (vv 4 and 7); three bad shepherds (v 8). Zechariah 11:15-17 sends the shepherd metaphor in a new direction. These verses describe the rise of a new leader who will not care for the sheep and portray the complete fulfilment of the word of God in 11:6. The removal of the good shepherd in 11:9 represented the first instalment of the fulfilment (Boda 2003:283). The character and deeds of the new shepherd is explained in detail: "For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs" (11:16). The qualities of the new shepherd are exactly those denounced in Ezekiel 34:1-10.[27] Many Jewish scholars identify the shepherd of verse 16 as Herod the Great, the wicked king who ruled Judah from 37-34 B.C.E.. Other possible figures like Ptolemy IV (222 B.C.E.), Peka, Alcimus the high priest (164 B.C.E.) or any other high priest were also suggested (cf. Mitchell, Smith & Bewer 1912:315; Mason 1977:109; Meyers & Meyers 1993:284). We can only speculate about the identity of the worthless shepherd, because the text provides us with little persuasive evidence.

Zechariah 11:17 concludes with a woe oracle[28] written in poetry:

> Oh, my worthless[29] shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be completely withered, his right eye utterly blinded!

The adjective "worthless" (לִילָא) differs from the אָוְלַי of verse 15, but correspond to the term used in Isaiah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel to refer to worthless gods (cf. Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10, 11; 19:1, 3; etc.). According to Sweeney (2000:682) the oracle clearly refers to the present ruler who is to be deposed, not to the coming ruler who will show mercy. Verse 17 states that a sword will strike his right arm and that his right eye will be blinded. This statement probably takes up the prophecy concerning Cyrus in which God mentions the intention to hold Cyrus's right arm so that he will subdue nations (Isa 41:13). It may

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[27] Hanson (1979:344) believes that Zechariah 11:7-17 is a conscious polemic against those who were building their leadership claims on Ezekiel's vision.

[28] There is a certain ambiguity about the place of this woe oracle in a symbolic-action or prophetic sign-act report (Petersen 1995:99).

[29] The term לִילָא (worthless) is a substantive that occurs in this singular form only here and in Isaiah 10:10. In neither instance should the text be emended as it is frequently suggested. The text-critical apparatus of BHS suggests that one should read אָוְלַיָה (cf. also Peshitta and the Targum) to bring it in line with verse 15. Rudolph (1976:202) believes that לִילָא functions as a genitive substantive so that "worthless shepherd" could read "shepherd of worthlessness".

also relate to Isaiah 41:2 in which God describes the victor (i.e. Cyrus) who "makes them like dust with his sword" (Sweeney 2000:682-683).

The question still remains: Is the worthless shepherd (v 17) the same as the shepherd who does not care for his flock (v 16)? There is no direct evidence in the text that forces us to believe otherwise. The text refers to the worthless shepherd and immediately describes what makes him worthless. One slight problem is the different Hebrew words used to describe "worthless". This should not to be a problem if one accepts the fact that the author/redactor could have used different words to explain the intensity of his worthlessness or foolishness. Perhaps the author/redactor deliberately wanted to create assonance by using the words ylwa (v 15) and lyla (v 17) (cf. Petersen 1995:100).

8 God as "uncaring shepherd" (11:4-17)

I have mentioned (cf. section E subsection 5) that Zechariah 11:4 and 7 refer to the prophet as the shepherd, but according to O'Brein (2004:250-251) several clues suggest that the shepherd also represents God. Zechariah 11:10 blends the prophetic and divine persona. While the prophet speaks in the first person in 11:7-9, in chapter 11:10b the "I" must be understood in different ways ("annulling the covenant which I had made with all the peoples"). On the level of the narrative, the annulled covenant refers to the promise that the prophet had made to watch the sheep, but was broken. On the symbolic level the covenant refers to the Mosaic promises; therefore the "I" signifies God. The verb rrp used in verse 10 for "breaking" the covenant is used in the Bible both in the context of breaking the covenant between humans and the divine (Lev 26:15, 44; Deut 31:16; Jer 14:21) and also in the context of the breaking of agreements made by humans (Num 30:9, 13; 1 Kgs 15:19). The commitment of the prophet-shepherd and of God to the sheep have ended. These clues suggest that the actions of the prophet symbolise God's intentions toward the people (Craigie 1985:209; O'Brein 2004:251).

There is a lack of information about the specific identity of the shepherds; therefore one must rather shift away from determining the identity of the shepherds to the message of the larger unit. Petersen (1995:100) argues that Zechariah 11 refers to God's abandonment of his people, because he avoids direct control and raises up a shepherd who does not care for his sheep. According to this understanding one can say that in 11:4-17 God is indirectly portrayed as an "uncaring" shepherd. However, one must acknowledge that this viewpoint is not the main focus of Zechariah 11.

9 God's shepherd, his associate (13:7-9)

In verse 7 one finds the last references to the shepherd imagery in Zechariah 9-14: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate, says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered;

I will turn my hand against the little ones." Both phrases use the possessive pronoun (*my* shepherd and *my* associate), emphasising the close relationship between God and the one who is struck by the sword (Boda 2004:512). The Hebrew word tym[(associate, fellow, relation, neighbour) is relatively rare in the Hebrew Bible, appearing elsewhere only in the book of Leviticus.[30] In Leviticus it is used with second- or third person possessive suffixes, in several legal contexts concerning relationships between two parties. It sometimes convey the meaning "relative" (18:20), but more often it conveys the meaning of another member of the community and is translated into "neighbour". This word supposes a close relationship between God and the shepherd (Meyers & Meyers 1993:386; Clark & Hatton 2002:336).

The phrase "my shepherd" is used to indicate leadership on two other occasions in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 44:28 refers to the Persian king Cyrus whom God raised to carry out all his purposes. Ezekiel 34:8 contains a reference to "my shepherds" as the prophet attacks the leadership of the day who do not search for God's flock and do not feed them (Boda 2004:512-513). It is interesting to note that this terminology is never used for "prophets" (Meyers & Meyers 1993:385). The designation "my associate" draws upon the notion that God's chosen king is to be designated as God's son (Ps 2:7; 89:26-27; 2 Sam 7:14) (Sweeney 2000:696).

I have discussed the close relationship between God and his shepherd, but the question remains: Can one identify this shepherd? Scholars have the following viewpoints concerning the identity of "my shepherd":

- Priestly leader (Hanson 1979:338-358).
- Divinely ordained monarch (Klein 2008:386).
- A Davidic leader (Curtis 2006:217).
- Royal ruler (Meyers & Meyers 1993:386).
- Some scholars believe there is a close relationship between "my shepherd" and the "pierced one" in 12:10. Both figures serve God faithfully and the death of both evokes mourning (Curtis 2006:217; Klein 2008:387).
- Close relationship between the shepherd in Zech 13 and the servant in Isaiah 53 (cf. Klein 2008:389).

It is very difficult to identify the shepherd of 13:7, but there is a possibility that this shepherd figure is placed within the context of a more positive messianic expectation (as in Zech 3:8; 6:12-14; 9:9-10; 10:4) (Cook 1993:461).

Scholars must also acknowledge the fact that verses 7-9 do not merely focus on the shepherd. It begins with the sword's attack on the shepherd (v 7),

30 Cf. Lev 5:21 (2x); 18:20; 19:11, 15, 17; 24:19; 25:14 (2x), 15 and 17.

but the attention is turning away from the shepherd. Zechariah 13:8-9 focuses on the outcome for the sheep (Klein 2008:388).

E SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above discussion has led the author to arrive at the following preliminary conclusions:

- Deutero-Zechariah has one of the most frequent occurrences of "shepherd" passages in the whole Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew stem h[r (shepherd) occurs fourteen times in Zechariah 9-14 and the noun ÷ax (sheep, flock) nine times.
- The use of "shepherds" in Zechariah corresponds with other prophetic passages (cf. Ezek 34; Jer 23).
- It is very difficult (perhaps impossible) to identify the different human shepherds, but all the scholars agree that the shepherd passages refer to leaders of the community. This fact indicates that there was an emphasis on leadership during the time of Deutero-Zechariah.
- Some passages in the Bible focus on one aspect of the shepherd imagery (cf. Ps 23). Zechariah 9-14 portrays a rich variety of perspectives on the shepherd imagery:
    - God as the good shepherd (Zech 9:16; 10:3b, 8)
    - The shepherds who do not care for their flock (10:3a)
    - The prophet as shepherd (11:4-14)
    - The three bad shepherds (11:8)
    - The worthless shepherd, who deserts his flock (11:15-17)
    - God as "uncaring shepherd" (11:4-17)
    - The "good" shepherd, God's associate (13:7-9)

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