

ZECHARIAH 11 AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SHEPHERDS

by
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Interpreters commonly regard Zechariah 11 as the most difficult chapter of the book and, often, as one of the most difficult of the OT.² The prophet's commissioned portrayal of two opposing shepherds and their fraught relationship to the flock poses several interpretative challenges. First, the chapter's focus on rival shepherds appears at first oddly out of place with the prominent themes of Zechariah 9–14, including the triumphant advent and accession of YHWH (9:1–10; 14:1–11), the deliverance of Jerusalem (9:11–17; 12:1–9; 14:12–15), and the redemption and re-gathering of Israel (10:6–12; 12:10–14). Second, the absence of historical clues renders uncertain whether the shepherds represent past, present, or future leaders. Third, the revelatory vehicle of the prophecy is unclear, whether allegory, vision, or prophetic sign-act. Fourth, the role of the prophet is cryptic, especially his actions toward the three shepherds destroyed in one month (v. 8), his alternation between divine and human agency (vv. 7–8, 10), his receipt and refusal of thirty pieces of silver as payment (vv. 12–13), and his apparent failure to execute parts of the shepherd portrayals (vv. 8, 15–17). Finally, the identification of several referents within the chapter remains puzzling, including the three annihilated shepherds, the buyers and sellers of the flock, and the two rival shepherds themselves.

The purpose of this essay is to re-examine the literary context of Zechariah 11 in order to discern its function in the book along with its

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²Samuel R. Driver, *The Century Bible: The Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: T. C. & E. C. Jack, 1906), 253; A. S. van der Woude, "Die Hirtenallegorie von Sacharja XI," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 12 (1984): 139; André Caquot, "Brèves remarques sur l'allegorie des pasteurs en Zacharie 11," in *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Mathias Delcor*, ed. A. Caquot, S. Légasse, and M. Tardieu, 45–55 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985), 45; Al Wolters, *Zechariah*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2014), 346. Delcor designates portions of chapter 11 "a veritable stumbling block for commentators" ("un véritable pierre d'achoppement [*sic*] pour les commentateurs") (M. Delcor, "Deux passages difficiles: Zach XII 11 et XI 13," *Vetus Testamentum* 3 [January 1953]: 67).

theological and prophetic implications.³ The author proposes that Zechariah 11 serves as the pivot of a chiasmic literary structure in Zechariah 9–14 focusing attention upon YHWH's wrath and judgment of the nation's apostate leaders due to their idolatry, abdication of godly oversight, and rejection of YHWH's rightful shepherd. Furthermore, as the literary crux between parts one (chapters 9–10) and two (chapters 12–14), Zechariah 11 provides decisive clues that the larger context of Zechariah 9–14 provides an outline of the future Messianic program for Israel's salvation in the eschaton. In this connection the chapter emphatically predicts Israel's coming rejection of the Messiah, who appears to the nation as the wise and sympathetic shepherd, and Israel's future acquiescence to the pseudo-messiah, the eschatological Antichrist, who will abuse and ravage the nation. Several corollaries arising from this interpretation will be defended, including a first-century A.D. milieu for fulfillment of some of the enigmatic portions of the prophecy as well as a nuanced portrait of the eschatological Antichrist as a Jewish political and military leader.

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF ZECHARIAH 9–14

The literary structure of Zechariah 9–14 divides clearly into two major parts, with the repetition in 12:1 of the opening rhetorical formula of 9:1: "The oracle of the word of Yahweh" (מִשְׁאֵל דְּבַר־יְהוָה).⁴ Thematic similarities affirm the literary integrity of the oracles, including the eschatological triumph of Judah (9:11–17; 12:1–9), the enthronement of YHWH (9:1–8; 14:1–9), the restoration of Israel to prosperity and prestige (10:8–12; 14:12–21), and the repudiation of false prophets and idolatry (10:1–3; 13:1–6).⁵ A few thematic differences distinguish the oracles, nonetheless. The second oracle (12:1–14:21) focuses attention more explicitly on Judah and the city of Jerusalem,⁶ on the eschatological day of YHWH (the phrase "on that day"

³This essay focuses on the canonical form of the book, assuming its literary integrity, without delving into questions of provenance. The author interprets the canonical book along traditional lines as coming from the hand of Zechariah the prophet likely around or soon after 480 BC (see Kenneth L. Barker, "Zechariah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, revised ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 8:726–27; Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 63).

⁴David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14, Malachi*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 24–25; Carol L. Myers and Eric M. Myers, *Zechariah 9–14*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 33. Cf. also the opening at Malachi 1:1.

⁵Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 310.

⁶Zech 12:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11; 13:1; 14:2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18–19, 21.

occurs at a rate of nearly once in every three verses),⁷ and on the coming spiritual renewal of the nation.⁸

Literary Units within Zechariah 9–14

Beyond the two major literary divisions of Zechariah 9–14, interpreters part company on how to arrange the prophetic discourses.⁹ Nogalski, Curtis, and Willi-Plein argue for six macro-sections, corresponding roughly to the chapter divisions.¹⁰ Redditt combines chapters 12 and 13 to produce five sections (9:1–17; 10:1–12; 11:1–17; 12:1–13:9; 14:1–21),¹¹ while Barker favors four sections, with two divisions per oracle (9:1–10:12; 11:1–17; 12:1–13:9; 14:1–21).¹² One of the most sophisticated proposals remains that of Lamarche, popularized by Baldwin and later modified by Clark.¹³ Lamarche offers a composite

⁷Zech 12:3, 4, 6, 8 [2x], 9, 11; 13:1, 2, 4; 14:4, 6, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21. Cf. 14:1 (“a day is coming for Yahweh”) and 14:7 (“a day known to Yahweh”).

⁸Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology*, revised ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 354–55; Paul L. Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament (Stuttgart, Germany: W. Kohlhammer, 2012), 93–94.

⁹Rex Mason laments his own futile attempts to organize the discourses: “I was almost in despair of finding any coherent and unifying theme in Zech. 9–14 at all” (“A Response,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner-Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9–14*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, 344–52, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 370 [London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003], 351).

¹⁰Ina Willi-Plein, *Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi*, Zürcher Bibel (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 152. Nogalski joins 11:1–3 to the end of chapter 10 to reach six divisions (*The Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary [Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2011], 821–22). Curtis identifies six major units (9:1–8; 9:11–17; 10:3–12; 11:4–16; 12:1–13:6; 14:1–21) but separates out five connecting poems that he argues serve as links among the units (9:9–10; 10:1–2; 11:1–3; 11:17; 13:7–9) (*Up the Steep and Stony Road: The Book of Zechariah in Social Location Trajectory Analysis* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 163).

¹¹Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 19. Hanson and Antti Laato propose the same basic units, although Hanson rearranges some of the material, carving out the taunt song of 11:1–3 and appending 13:7–9 to 11:4–17, while Laato considers 13:7–9 an independent unit (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 292–380; Laato, *Josiah and David Redivivus: The Historical Josiah and the Messianic Expectations of Exilic and Postexilic Times* [Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1992], 266).

¹²Barker, “Zechariah,” 8:788, 814. Katrina J. A. Larkin also proposes four divisions with slight modification (9:1–11:3; 11:4–17; 12:1–13:9; 14:1–21) (*The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* [Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994], 50–52). David A. Dorsey combines the third and fourth parts to arrive at three sections (9:1–11:3; 11:4–17; 12:1–14:21) (*The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 319). Wolters similarly sees three parts: 9:1–10:12; 11:1–17; 12:1–14:21 (*Zechariah*, 253).

¹³Paul Lamarche, *Zacharie IX–XIV: structure littéraire et messianisme* (Paris: Librairie Lecoivre, 1961), 112–15; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press,

chiastic structure emphasizing judgment and salvation brought about by the triumph of the Messianic king on Israel's behalf:

- a Judgment and salvation of the neighboring peoples (9:1–8)
 - b Arrival and description of the king (9:9–10)
 - c War and victory of Israel (9:11–10:1)
 - d Presence of idols: judgment (10:2–3a)
 - c¹ War and victory of Israel (10:3b–11:3)
 - b² The shepherds rejected by the people (11:4–17)
 - c² War and victory of Israel (12:1–9)
 - b² YHWH's representative pierced; mourning and purification (12:10–13:1)
 - d¹ Suppression of idols and false prophets (13:2–6)
 - b³ Shepherd struck: people tested, purified, and returned to God (13:7–9)
 - c³ War and victory of Israel (14:1–15)
- a¹ Judgment and salvation of all nations (14:16–21)¹⁴

Owing perhaps to the complexity of the proposal, Lamarche has been criticized for depending too much on sense rather than literary markers and for manipulating the material to achieve a desired thematic emphasis.¹⁵ Recent interpreters have thus preferred Redditt's proposal that the key to the literary structure of Zechariah 9–14 lies in the so-called shepherd units appearing at critical junctures in the text.¹⁶ Redditt identifies three shepherd units centering around the depiction of the evil shepherd in the central chapter: 10:2–3a; 11:4–17; 13:7–9. In tandem he argues that Zechariah 11 presents not two shepherds, one good and one bad, but a singular evil shepherd in two phases.¹⁷

1972), 77–79; David J. Clark, "Discourse Structure in Zechariah 9–14: Skeleton or Phantom?" in *Issues in Bible Translation*, ed. Philip C. Stine (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 64–80.

¹⁴As outlined by Mark J. Boda, *Zechariah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 518.

¹⁵See Clark, "Discourse Structure of Zechariah 9–14," 66; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 33; Mike Butterworth, *Structure and the Book of Zechariah*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 130 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 166.

¹⁶Paul L. Redditt, "Israel's Shepherds: Hope and Pessimism in Zechariah 9–14," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (October 1989): 634–35; idem, "The Two Shepherds in Zechariah 11:4–17," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (October 1993): 680. See Boda, *Zechariah*, 520–21; Richard J. Bauckham, "Zechariah 11 and the Shepherd's Broken Covenant," in *Covenant in the Persian Period: From Genesis to Chronicles*, ed. Richard J. Bauckham and Gary N. Knoppers, 255–69 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 255.

¹⁷"The Two Shepherds," 676–77.

Redditt has provided an important insight concerning the centrality of the shepherd motif in Zechariah 9–14. The Qal participial form of רעה (“shepherd”) appears only in these literary units and connects clearly to the eschatological hope Zechariah offers for the renewed Davidic king who will regather the Jewish people and bring final salvation to Jerusalem.¹⁸ Yet Redditt’s conclusions expose a few shortcomings. First, Zechariah 11 likely depicts two shepherds rather than a single evil shepherd. YHWH commissions the first shepherd to protect the flock, which he seeks to do by pledging to care for the weak and by removing three destructive shepherds (11:7–8).¹⁹ The names of his staffs, Delight and Union, suggest likewise a positive role.²⁰ Furthermore, the first shepherd acts on behalf of or represents YHWH in some fashion, evident in his removal of the three shepherds (v. 8) and in the covenant he holds with all the peoples (v. 10).²¹ These clues suggest that the first shepherd is acting in a benign rather than sinister way.

Second, Redditt sets aside a crucial rhetorical marker in his classification of the shepherd pieces by overlooking the important transitions between poetry and prose within Zechariah 9–14, a key factor in determining textual boundaries.²² Studies that emphasize the discourse distinction between prose and poetry often build on the seminal work of Andersen, Forbes, and Freedman.²³ These scholars underscore the essential role of prose particles, namely, the relative pronoun אשר, the direct object marker את, and the definite article ה, in determining prose as over against poetry. In his later refinement of this method, Freedman proposes a rubric based on statistical frequency: (1) discourse with a prose-particle density under 5% is almost certainly poetry;

¹⁸The participial form of רעה appears in 10:2, 3; 11:3, 5, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17; 13:7 [2x]. The preterite form occurs in 11:7 [2x], 9.

¹⁹Mark J. Boda, “Reading Between the Lines: Zechariah 11.4–16 in Its Literary Context,” in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner-Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9–14*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, 277–91, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 370 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 281n14.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 282.

²¹Théophane Chary, *Aggée-Zacharie, Malachi* (Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 184.

²²Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 30–32; Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 183–206. Meyers and Meyers err in their statistical analysis, however, by surveying portions of text that are too large and remain on the chapter level, which tends to dilute the prose-particle density counts. In this respect, Curtis’s study hits closer to the mark.

²³David N. Freedman, “Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: An Essay on Biblical Poetry,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (March 1977): 5–26; *idem*, “Another Look at Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” in *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman*, 2 vols., ed. John R. Huddleston, 213–26 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:213–26; Francis I. Andersen and A. Dean Forbes, “‘Prose Particle’ Counts of the Hebrew Bible,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, 165–83 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983).

(2) discourse with a prose-particle density above 15% is almost certainly prose; and (3) discourse with a prose-particle density of 5–15% is hybrid and constitutes a form of “poetic speech” (often classified as “oracular prose” or “prophetic verse”).²⁴

Curtis has most consistently applied these criteria in Zechariah 9–14 to categorize the forms and textual boundaries of the oracles. He concludes that Zechariah 11 consists of two units of oracular prose (11:1–3, 17) with a prose-particle density of just over 11%, and that these oracular prose units frame the middle section, which consists of an ordinary prose narrative (11:4–16) with a prose-particle density of nearly 24%.²⁵ Curtis also suggests, although admittedly less due to its prose-particle density than to other rhetorical features, that 10:1–2 forms a distinct unit from 10:3–12 on the basis of its topic change and its hortative style of address.²⁶

Redditt’s analysis of the three shepherd units, as discussed earlier, fails to take account of the clear distinctions between poetic speech (10:2; 11:17; 13:7–9) and prose discourse (10:3; 11:4–16) within these larger sections. This conflation of forms undermines his study and suggests that the shepherd pieces may link to the rest of Zechariah 9–14 in a different fashion.

Literary Chiasm in Zechariah 9–14

Despite some disagreement with Redditt’s proposal, however, we may concur that he has advanced the discussion of literary structure significantly by identifying a simpler and more consistent chiasm in Zechariah 9–14, with its central focus on the shepherd portrayals:²⁷

- A 9:1–17, God’s Future Kingdom and Earthly King
- B 10:1–12, Judah, Ephraim, and the Exiles
- C 11:1–17, The Shepherd Narrative
- B¹ 12:1–13:9, The Future of Jerusalem and Judah, 1
- A¹ 14:1–21, The Future of Jerusalem and Judah, 2

Reventlow and Willi-Plein have adduced additional insights that build upon the strengths of Redditt’s proposed literary structure. These scholars underscore the prominent catchword connections between units (*Stichwortverknüpfung*), the distinction between poetic speech and prose narratives in delineating the literary structure, and the “hinge

²⁴Freedman, “Another Look,” 217–18.

²⁵Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 196–97.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 161. Curtis concludes that the prose-particle density in 10:1–2 is 8.3%, while in 10:3–12 it is 6.2%. Isolating vv. 2 and 3, however, the prose particle density of 10:2 is 14.3%, while that of 10:3 is 19%, giving slight evidence for a literary transition here.

²⁷Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 25.

function” (Scharnierfunktion) that chapter 11 serves as the pivot for the macro- and micro-portions of Zechariah 9–14.²⁸

Carefully correlating these insights, the discourses reveal a series of poetic speech or oracular prose units that bind the larger segments through the use of catchword links highlighting YHWH’s increasing hostility toward the shepherds:

Figure 1: Rhetorical Hinges in Zechariah 9–14

Rhetorical Unit	Literary Structure Markers	Catchword to Previous Unit	Catchword to Succeeding Unit	Prose-Particle Density
10:1–2	Imperative; Topic change; <i>Petubah</i> marker (BHS)	יהוה	רעה	8.3%
		(“YHWH”; 9:15–16; 10:1)	(“shepherd(s)”; 10:2, 3)	
11:1–3	Imperative; Topic change; <i>Setumah</i> markers (BHS)	לִבְנוֹן	אכל	11.8%
		(“Lebanon”; 10:10; 11:1)	(“devour”; 11:1; 11:9, 16)	
11:17	Woe oracle; <i>Setumah</i> markers (BHS)	צֹאֵן	עֵיִן	11.1%
		(“flock”; 11:4, 7, 11; 11:17)	(“eye”; 11:17; 12:4)	
13:7–9	Imperative; Topic change; <i>Setumah</i> markers (BHS)	נכה	יָד	22.8%
		(“strike”; 12:4; 13:6; 13:7)	(“hand, power”; 13:7; 14:13)	

Several supporting factors and conclusions emerge from an analysis of these proposed rhetorical hinges.

First, each of the units, apart from 11:17, begins with an imperative. Significantly, only fourteen imperative verb forms occur in Zechariah 9–14, with six occurring in the rhetorical hinges (10:1; 11:1, 2 [2x]; 13:7 [2x]).²⁹ The woe oracle of 11:17, although lacking an imperative, is likely to be construed as vocative oracle consisting of second-

²⁸Henning G. Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja, und Maleachi* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 100; Willi-Plein, *Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi*, 180.

²⁹The other imperatives occur in the shepherd narratives: 11:4, 12 [2x], 13, 15.

person elements.³⁰ In this way each of the rhetorical hinges functions as a form of direct address, with two of the units including literary apostrophe summoning “Lebanon” (11:1) and “the sword” (13:7) to take part in the judgment against the shepherds.³¹ As Wendland has demonstrated, exclamatory utterances or forceful expressions of this nature function to denote literary units in prophetic discourse.³²

Second, the rhetorical hinges move decisively toward divine judgment.³³ The hinges begin with a description of the scattered condition of the flock (10:2), and then proceed to a taunt song or call to lament (11:1–3). They culminate with a woe oracle pronouncing curse (11:17) accompanied by the announcement of judgment through exile and execution (13:7). In a similar vein, the hinges advance from generic, non-descript shepherds (10:2; 11:3) to the wicked shepherd (11:17) to “my shepherd” who is Yahweh’s associate (13:7–9), suggesting a heightening of intensity and significance. Moreover, the hinges suggest that the cause of divine judgment is grounded in the feckless shepherds’ idolatry. The first hinge links the divine action to the religious perversions of native shepherds who consult teraphim (תִּרְפִּים) and diviners (קוֹסְמִים) (10:2). Divine anger toward these pagan worship practices escalates in the fourth hinge with the curse upon the “illusory shepherd” (רֹעֵ הַאֲלִיל) (11:17), utilizing a term associated consistently with foreign gods and idol practices.³⁴ Likewise, as demonstrated by their development in

³⁰On the nature of woe-oracles as a form of direct address, see Delbert R. Hilliers, “*Hôy and Hôy-Oracles: A Neglected Syntactic Aspect*,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, 185–88 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 187.

³¹Leland Ryken defines *apostrophe* as “a figure of speech in which the writer or speaker addresses someone absent as though present and capable of responding”; often this address combines with personification in speaking to a nonhuman phenomenon as though it were human and able to react (*A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014], 27). Ryken notes that apostrophe belongs to the realm of fantasy or poetic license, evokes strong emotions, and occurs pervasively in Scripture.

³²Ernst R. Wendland, *The Discourse Analysis of Prophetic Literature: Determining the Larger Textual Units of Hosea and Joel* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1995), 41–43.

³³Boda, “Reading Between the Lines,” 290.

³⁴The term אֲלִיל appears 21 times in the OT to designate something that is worthless, illusory, or insubstantial, almost exclusively in the context of idolatry and false gods who are deemed non-entities (Lev 19:4; 26:1; 1 Chron 16:26; Job 13:4; Ps 96:5; 97:7; Isa 2:8, 18, 20; 10:10, 11; 19:1, 3; 31:7; Jer 14:14; Ezek 30:13; Hab 2:8; Zech 11:17). Isaiah shows the greatest fondness for the term, with half the OT occurrences. Schwertner notes that the designation of false gods as אֲלִילים underscores “the impotence and the insignificance of the strange gods” (*TDOT*, s.v. אֲלִיל, by S. Schwertner, 1:127). The use of this term, connected in the OT almost exclusively with idolatry and false gods, hints that demonic empowerment drives this false shepherd.

prose-particle density, the hinges move from structured poetic speech (10:1–2) to less-structured oracular prose (11:1–3, 17), concluding with ordinary prose as the final judgment is announced (13:7–9).

Third, the catchwords linking the hinges focus attention on divine hostility toward the shepherds. The catchwords begin by pitting “YHWH” (9:15–16; 10:1) against the “shepherds” (10:2, 3). Later the mention of the “flock” denotes the realm over which their power is brought to bear (11:4, 7, 11; 11:17). The other terms are active in nature, proceeding toward conflict and resolution by featuring words associated with conquest, “devour” (אכל) (11:1; 11:9, 16) and “strike” (נכה) (12:4; 13:6; 13:7), and military prowess, “eye” (עין) (11:17; 12:4) and “hand” (יד) (13:7; 14:13). The final hinge designates God as “YHWH Almighty” (יהוה צבאות) to underscore his supremacy over the ephemeral shepherds whom he removes and replaces.

Placing these rhetorical hinges within the framework of Redditt’s proposed chiasm produces the following literary structure for Zechariah 9–14:

- A 9:1–17, The Advent of Messiah, Divine Warrior and Conquering King
Rhetorical Hinge 1: 10:1–2, Failure of Idolatrous Shepherds to Sustain the Flock
 B 10:3–12, The Restoration of Israel, the Joyful and Victorious People
Rhetorical Hinge 2: 11:1–3, Call to Lament for the Decimated Land and Shepherds
 C 11:4–16, Rejection of the Good Shepherd, Rise of the Wicked Shepherd
Rhetorical Hinge 3: 11:17, Curse upon the Wicked Shepherd
 B¹ 12:1–13:6, The Triumph and Cleansing of Judah and Jerusalem
Rhetorical Hinge 4: 13:7–9, Execution of the Shepherd and Refinement of the Remnant
 A¹ 14:1–21, The Accession and Reign of Messiah, Divine Warrior and Conquering King

The focus of the chiasm thus centers on the pivotal chapter 11 and its prophetic depiction of two rival shepherds. Using this literary structure, we will focus on the centerpiece of the chiasm with its two sign-acts enacted by the prophet. We will also analyze briefly the second and third rhetorical hinges that frame the shepherd narrative.

CALL TO LAMENT FOR THE DECIMATED LAND AND MOURNING SHEPHERDS (11:1–3)

- ¹ Open your doors,³⁵ Lebanon,
 that the fire may consume your cedars.
² Wail,³⁶ cypress,³⁷ for the cedar has fallen,

³⁵Wolters argues for a singular sense of the dual form דלתות, “doors,” as referring to double panels, and translates the term “gate” (*Zechariah*, 350). I follow most English versions, however, in rendering it as the plural, “doors,” representing the figurative city gates protecting the impenetrable forest of Lebanon (cf. Deut 3:5; Isa 45:1).

whose magnificent trees are ravaged.
 Wail, oaks of Bashan,
 for the impenetrable forest has been felled.
³ The sound of the wailing shepherds,
 for their magnificence is ravaged!
 The sound of the roaring young lions,
 for the pride of the Jordan³⁸ is ravaged!

Whereas the previous chapters depict Israel's future blessing and flourishing, chapter 11 opens with a satirical elegy for the decimated land and its mourning shepherds (vv. 1–3). Proposals for the literary form of the unit have identified it conventionally as a “taunt/taunt song”³⁹ or a “lament/call to lament.”⁴⁰ Petersen argues that the classification of “taunt song” is preferable due to the lack of vocabulary typically associated with calls to lament and a freer literary structure.⁴¹ Boda is likely correct, however, that the structural and thematic elements in the passage are consistent with other OT calls to lament. Wolff has demonstrated that calls to lament consist of three elements: (1) an imperative call to lament, (2) an address in the vocative to those called to lament; and (3) the occasion for the lament introduced by the Hebrew particle כִּי.⁴² Here the cedars, cypresses, and oaks are called to lament

³⁶The catchword ילל, “howl, wail,” and its cognate יללה, “howling, wailing,” occur three times in this unit, out of 32 times total in the OT. The term is used often in the prophets to announce coming judgment against a nation (Isa 13:6; 23:1; Jer 4:8; Jer 25:34; Zeph 1:11).

³⁷The term קרושׁ has traditionally been interpreted as denoting one of two families of conifers, either the cypress/juniper family or the pine/fir family. While the pine/fir option is favored by the Vulgate and some interpreters (NET, KJV; Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 284), Wolters argues that the lexical data decisively favors the cypress/juniper denotation (*Zechariah*, 352).

³⁸The idiomatic גִּיאֵן הַיַּרְדֵּן, “pride of the Jordan,” refers to the thick vegetation that once grew in the Jordan Valley on both sides of the river. In ancient times lions and other nonextant animals inhabited the area (see Nelson Glueck, *The River Jordan* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946], 63, 120). Jeremiah depicts this lush vegetation in his oracle against Edom: “A lion coming up from the thick undergrowth along the Jordan [גִּיאֵן הַיַּרְדֵּן] scatters the sheep in the pastureland around it. So too I will chase the Edomites off their land” (Jer 49:19, NET).

³⁹Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 78; Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 194; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14, Malachi*, 80; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8/9–14–Maleachi*, KAT 13 (Gütersloh, Germany: Gerd Mohn, 1976), 200 (*Spottlied*); Karl Elliger, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951), 148; Larkin, *Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 103; Rex Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 103.

⁴⁰Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 922; Boda, *Zechariah*, 637; Marvin Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 676.

⁴¹Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14, Malachi*, 80.

⁴²Hans W. Wolff, “Der Aufruf zur Volksklage,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964): 51.

(ליל, v. 2), addressed directly (v. 2), and provided the motivation as the felling of the majestic forest (v. 2). In that vv. 1 and 3 exhibit some variation from the traditional lament form and that a tone of sarcasm pervades the unit, this call to lament is likely intended as hyperbole.⁴³

Another significant interpretive question surrounds the imagery of the trees, whether figurative (depicting foreign/domestic leaders) or literal (representing trees native to ancient Israel). In favor of the former understanding, the Lebanon cedar can symbolize in the OT nations such as Assyria (Ezek 31:3, 16–17) or human kings (2 Kgs 14:9; Isa 14:8; Ezek 17:3; Amos 2:9).⁴⁴ The shepherds and trees would thus represent political or social leadership, whether past Judahite kings or the Persian political/priestly leaders.⁴⁵

Here, however, the call to lament more likely concerns an actual devastation of the land, as evident from several factors. First, the juxtaposition of trees/landscape (arboreal and geographical terminology) and shepherds/young lions (demographic and faunal terminology) hints at a distinction in purview of the referents depicted. To understand the two referent groups as both symbols of leadership would involve an unwarranted shift in imagery from plants to humans/animals within the same unit. The relationship between the deforested land and the wailing shepherds seems rather to be that of realm to ruler, thus underscoring the utter demise of the source providing the leaders' sustenance and protection.

Second, the sequence and physical orientation of the terms suggests that the actual landscape of Israel is in view. As Wolters observes, the tide of judgment proceeds from the highest elevation in the north (Lebanon), some 8300 feet above sea level, to the eastern border (Bashan), down to the nethermost regions of the south (the Jordan's Rift Valley) ending in the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth.⁴⁶ This prophecy of the land's decimation connects best to the first-century Roman incursion during the Jewish revolt in A.D. 66–70 culminating with the destruction of the temple.⁴⁷ Josephus records the devastation wrought by Vespasian and Titus during the Jewish wars, reportedly

⁴³See Redditt, *Zechariah* 9–14, 78.

⁴⁴Bautch, "Zechariah 11," 257.

⁴⁵Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 286; Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 103; Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 103; Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 236–37; G. Coleman Luck, *Zechariah*, revised ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 100.

⁴⁶Wolters, *Zechariah*, 356; cf. Dennis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (New York: Harper, 1957), 9, 202; Charles Feinberg, "Exegetical Studies in Zechariah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 102 (January 1945): 56.

⁴⁷Feinberg, "Exegetical Studies," 57; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 10:591; David Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah* (1918; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1975), 382.

culminating in the death of approximately 1.1 million Jews.⁴⁸

THE REJECTION OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE RISE OF THE WICKED SHEPHERD (11:4–16)

⁴ This is what YHWH my God says: “Shepherd the flock destined for slaughter.⁴⁹ ⁵ Those who buy them slaughter them and are not held liable. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise YHWH, I’ve become rich!’ Their shepherds have no pity on them. ⁶ Indeed, I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land,” declares YHWH, “but rather⁵⁰ I am about to consign each person into the hand of his neighbor⁵¹ and into the hand of his king. They will batter⁵² the land, and I will not deliver it from their hand.”

⁷ So I began to shepherd the flock destined for slaughter, especially⁵³ the afflicted⁵⁴ among the flock. I took for myself two staffs. One I named

⁴⁸Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War, Books 1–7*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray et al., LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930–65). As Josephus notes in his preface: “The war of the Jews against the Romans [was] the greatest of not only of the wars of our own time, but, so far as accounts have reached us, well-nigh of all that ever broke out between cities or nations” (*J.W.*, 1.1).

⁴⁹The construct *plus* genitive phrase צֹאן הַהֲרָגָה (“flock of slaughter”) is a genitive of purpose or destination, hence “the flock destined for slaughter” (Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 11)

⁵⁰The *waw* + *hinneh* particle are functioning here in an adversative sense (see Arnold and Choi, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 161).

⁵¹Baldwin suggests an emendation of רֵעֵהוּ (“his neighbor”) to read רֵעֵהוּ (“his shepherd”) as more properly parallel to מֶלְכֻּוֹ (“his king”) (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 180; cf. also Robert L. Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization: A Fresh Look at Zechariah 11:4–17,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 [2007]: 740). The emendation appears unlikely, however. The more difficult reading of the MT is preferred, as the phrase is a merism denoting horizontal and vertical oppression (Boda, *Zechariah*, 662).

⁵²The Piel *wegatal* 3cp from כָּתַת, meaning “to crush to pieces, to beat or hammer to pieces” (*HALOT*, 507; *DCH*, 4:478). In contemporary idiom, the conquerors will smash the land to bits.

⁵³I translate the MT’s לָכֵן as asseverative (cf. Larkin, *Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 111; Caquot, “Brèves remarques,” 49), designating those among the flock to whom the shepherd paid particular concern, viz., the afflicted. The Gospel writers similarly present Jesus as paying close attention to the suffering and to the common people of Israel (Matt 4:24; 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; Mark 6:34; 12:37; John 10:26–27), frequently evoking the language of shepherding and sheep.

⁵⁴Thomas J. Finley argues to emend the MT out of preference for the LXX reading (εἰς τὴν Χαναανῖτιν; to the Canaanite people/land) (“The Sheep Merchants of Zechariah 11,” *GTJ* 3 [Spring 1982]: 51–65), a move favored by many interpreters (Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 180; Hanson, *Dawn of the Apocalyptic*, 59–60; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 87; Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 76; Douglas R. Jones, “A Fresh Interpretation of Zechariah IX–XI,” *VT* 12 [July 1962]: 253; Gilles Gaide, *Jérusalem, Voici ton Roi* [Paris: Cerf, 1968], 101; Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8/9–14–Maleachi*, 202; Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 195). The term Χαναανῖος denotes “belonging to the land or people of Canaan, Canaanite” (BDAG,

Delight and the other I named Union. Thus I shepherded the flock. ⁸ I wiped out⁵⁵ the three shepherds in one month, for my soul grew impatient with them, and their soul despired me. ⁹ I said, "I will not shepherd you. The one that is going to die, let it die, and the one that is going to be wiped out, let it be wiped out. May the survivors consume one another's flesh!" ¹⁰ I took my staff named Delight, and I broke it in pieces to annul my covenant that I had made with all peoples. ¹¹ So it was annulled on that day, and the afflicted among the flock who were observing me thus knew that this was the word of YHWH. ¹² I said to them, "If it seems good in your eyes, give me my wages. But if not, don't." So they weighed out my wages—thirty pieces of silver.⁵⁶ ¹³ Then YHWH said to

1077). Under the terms קַנְעָן ("Canaan") and קַנְעִי ("Canaanite"), BDB list the glosses "trader, merchant" and suggest this meaning derives from the fact that "Canaanites, esp. Phoenicians, were traders" (488). They identify this connotation in several verses: Ezek 16:29; 17:4; Zeph 1:11; Prov 31:24; Zech 14:21 (cf. that DCH assigns the meaning only to Hos 12:8; Zech 14:21; Prov 31:24; Job 40:30 [4:437–38]). The variant reading in the LXX appears to derive in part from a conflation of the Hebrew words קַנְעִי לְכָן and is favored in the tradition of the RSV ("those who trafficked in the sheep"), NRSV ("sheep merchants"), and ESV ("sheep traders"). Several reasons, however, may be adduced for preferring the MT as it stands. (1) The MT reading appears in all manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. (2) Citations of this text among the writings of the Qumran community support the MT (CD 19.9 [B]; 4Q163, 21.7; 4Q154^a). (3) The LXX is not merely a conflation of the Hebrew words; it also omits the MT's הַצֹּאֵן ("the flock") and is probably best translated "into/unto the Canaanite land" (cf. NETS "I will tend the sheep of slaughter in Chanaanitis"). In addition, it is unclear in what capacity Zechariah would be tending the flock to or on behalf of the Canaanites/ traders. (4) The term קַנְעִי rarely means "merchant," and this meaning should not be assigned unless clear contextual considerations warrant it. (5) The syntax of the MT is admittedly difficult but can be explained. The syntax presupposed by the LXX, however, is also problematical, as קַנְעִי is not agentive and would not likely function as the *nomen regens* governing an objective genitive. (6) The reading of the MT is more likely to have given rise to the LXX reading, since קַנְעִי appears in 14:21, than the converse and is thus preferred as original (see Wolters, *Zechariah*, 368; Willi-Plein, *Haggai, Sacharja, Maleachi*, 184–85; Boda, *Zechariah*, 657; Larkin, *Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 111; Butterworth, *Structure of the Book of Zechariah*, 209).

⁵⁵Hiphil preterite 1cs from כָּחַד, "to make disappear, hide, efface, destroy" (HALOT, 469; DCH, 4:382). When used with people as the object, the term frequently denotes wiping out or complete removal (Exod 23:23; 2 Chron 32:21; Ps 83:5).

⁵⁶Much controversy surrounds the nature of the thirty pieces of silver, especially whether the sum constitutes an exorbitant payment (Sweeney, *The Minor Prophets*, 681; Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 86; Webb, *Zechariah*, 151; Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 184) or an insultingly low one (Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 97; Pettersen, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 250; Feinberg, "Exegetical Studies," 66). Related is the question whether the phrase "magnificent sum" is sarcastic or not. Interpreters who argue that the payment is considerable observe that the annual temple tax was 60 shekels (Lev 27:3–4), the bride price for a defiled virgin 100 shekels (Deut 22:19), and the remuneration for an ox-gored slave 30 shekels (Exod 21:32), suggesting that the shepherd receives a high wage for his brief service. Interpreters who espouse a paltry sum point likewise to the remuneration of 30 shekels for the slain slave in contrast with the customary redemption price for an adult Israelite male of 50 shekels (Lev 27:3). The variance insinuates that the people esteem the shepherd lower

me, “Throw it to the artificer⁵⁷—this magnificent sum at which I was valued by them!” So I took the thirty pieces of silver, and I threw them to the artificer at the house of YHWH.¹⁴ Then I broke in pieces my second staff named Union to annul the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵ Then YHWH said to me, “Take likewise the implements of a foolish shepherd¹⁶ for I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those being wiped out. He will not seek out the young, he will not heal the broken, he will not sustain those who remain standing. He will consume the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.

The prophet now enacts his portrayal of the shepherds. A key interpretive question is whether his ensuing actions consist of an allegory/parable,⁵⁸ vision,⁵⁹ or prophetic sign-act.⁶⁰ After establishing the

than the value of an adult male (a woman was valued at 30 shekels) and merely in terms of the compensation for a dead slave (technically this comparison is flawed, however, as the thirty shekels in the case of the slave should probably be understood as relating to the economic value of his service over the course of his servitude, not the value of his life *per se* [see Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 265–66]). A few compare the apparently similar phrase “30 pieces of silver” in other ANE writings as an idiom for an insultingly low wage (Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 97), but this evidence seems inconclusive (Wolters, *Zechariah*, 380–81). Given the royal connotations of the shepherd, the wages may reflect contempt for his office. Comparison may be made to the tax assigned by the Persian-period governor of 40 shekels in Neh 5:15, although it is unclear whether this was a daily allotment (so ESV “their daily ration”) or a yearly assessment (so Baldwin). If the former, this adds credence to the view that the wage payment is derisively low. In any case, the people’s payment suggests that they have reduced the value of his services to that of an economic transaction and that they wish to suspend any additional relations with the shepherd, signaling that they have rejected his oversight.

⁵⁷Many suggest a revised understanding or emendation of the MT’s יִצָּר, traditionally rendered “potter” (cf. Matt 27:10). Foster advocates that the term denotes a metalworker (“Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization,” 751), perhaps one who fashions idols (Stead, “The Three Shepherds,” 162), on the basis of a long-standing tradition that the terminology refers to a foundry on the premises of the second temple (Charles C. Torrey, “The Foundry of the Second Temple at Jerusalem,” *JBL* 55 [1936]: 247–60). Related to this proposal is the emendation to אוֹצָר, “treasury,” perhaps reflected already in the Syriac Peshitta (R. C. Dentan, “The Book of Zechariah: Chapters 9–14,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, 12 vols. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1956], 6:1105). These theories are largely conjectural. I follow the MT given the lack of compelling external evidence and have translated the term to reflect a skill fabricator of metals or earthenware (cf. Sweeney, *The Minor Prophets*, 681; Wolters, *Zechariah*, 383).

⁵⁸Woude, “Die Hirtenallegorie,” 139; Driver, *The Minor Prophets*, 253; Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 132–34; Lester V. Meyer, “An Allegory Concerning the Monarchy: Zech 11:4–17; 13:7–9,” in *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaardsdam*, ed. Arthur L. Merrill and Thomas W. Overholt, 225–40 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1977), 226; Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 89; Caquot, “Brèves remarques,” 45; Dentan, “The Book of Zechariah,” 6:1102.

⁵⁹Charles Feinberg, *God Remembers: A Study of the Book of Zechariah* (New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1965), 201; Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 333; Moses

nature and implications of the shepherd portrayals as sign-acts, we will address in succession several other interpretive questions emerging from the passage, including the significance of consigning the flock to decimation (vv. 6, 8–9), the identity of the three shepherds (v. 8), the meaning of the annulment of the covenant with the all the peoples (v. 10), the wisdom context for the shepherd portrayals (vv. 7, 15), and the character and identity of the foolish shepherd (vv. 15–17).

The Nature of the Prophetic Sign-Act

Several factors indicate that the episodes represent a prophetic sign-act rather than a vision or allegory. First, the features of these narratives fit the formal criteria of the prophetic sign-act. Friebel has identified these threefold criteria as follows: (1) a divine order that the prophet perform a specific action (exhortation); (2) the report of the prophet's compliance with the command (execution); and (3) the interpretation of the significance of the action (explanation).⁶¹ In Zechariah's sign-acts, Friebel's criteria may be matched to YHWH's command for Zechariah to take up the equipment of a shepherd (exhortation) (vv. 4–5, 13, 15), the report that the prophet carries out the command (execution) (vv. 7–14), and the disclosure of the meaning of the actions (explanation) (vv. 6, 16).

Second, prophetic sign-acts rarely, if ever, occur in visions but rather denote actions exhibited before the community. Friebel concludes that “unless there are textual or exegetical factors which would dictate otherwise, it is assumed that all of the prophetic sign-actions were both actually performed, as well as done so in the presence of audiences.”⁶² Given the public nature of the prophetic sign-act, it is likely that Zechariah portrays these actions in the presence of an audience.

Third, nearly all interpreters see Zechariah's symbolic breaking of his second staff (v. 14) as connecting in some way to Ezek 37:15–28, in which Ezekiel joins together two staffs to symbolize the future reunification of Ephraim and Judah.⁶³ Ezekiel's actions are assuredly done in

Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1919), 247.

⁶⁰Anthony R. Petterson, *Behold Your King: The Hope for the House of David in the Book of Zechariah* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 170; Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 343; Boda, *Zechariah*, 648–49; Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 80.

⁶¹Kelvin Friebel, “A Hermeneutical Paradigm for Interpreting Prophetic Sign-Acts,” *Didaskalia* 12 (Spring 2001): 28. Cf. Boda, *Zechariah*, 648–49. Occasionally reports of sign-acts also include a statement concerning eyewitnesses, a promise that the portrayed action will certainly take place, or an explicit statement about the relationship between sign and referent.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 28.

⁶³Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 106; Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 90; Hanson, *Dawn of the Apocalyptic*, 343. Risto Nurmela rates the literary connection between Zech 11:7 and Ezek 37:16 (connecting thereby to the context of vv. 15–28) as a “sure allusion” (*Prophets in Dialogue: Inner-Biblical Allusions in Zechariah 1–8 and*

public as YHWH addresses there the anticipated questions spectators will ask (vv. 18–19). Since Ezekiel displays his sign-act before an audience, Zechariah would most likely act out his “counter” sign-act in public also.

Fourth, Zechariah’s previous sign-act whereby he fashions a crown to place on the head of Joshua, the high priest (Zech 6:9–15), is probably a public act. There YHWH commands the prophet to display the crown in the temple as a memorial (6:14), indicating that the community is aware of his actions. The nature of this previous action hints that the prophet’s portrayal of the two shepherds in Zechariah 11 also occurs before the community.

The Messianic Overtures of the Prophetic Sign-Acts

Given the identification of Zechariah’s actions as prophetic sign-acts, his activities may be compared to other sign-acts in the OT prophetic corpus. The prophetic sign-act is fairly common to OT prophecy, as in Isaiah’s garb as a prisoner of war (Isa 20:2–4), Jeremiah’s pottery smashing (Jer 19:1–15) and iron shackles (27:2–11), and Ezekiel’s model of the besieged city (Ezek 4:1–3), hole dug through the wall of his house (12:1–16), and tossing of shaved hair into the wind (5:1–12). Although Zechariah’s sign-acts deviate in some ways from the typical sign-acts, in that his execution of the foolish shepherd sign-act is not narrated explicitly and that elements of his sign-acts such as the annihilation of the shepherds appear to depict features that are solely rhetorical, comparison with other prophetic sign-acts provides several clues to the significance of his actions.

First, the enactment of sign-acts implies that Zechariah is portraying future, eschatologically-oriented events rather than acting out past or present events, whether prior to the Babylonian captivity or within the Persian period. Although a matter of debate, it is best to understand prophetic sign-acts as intrinsically pointing forward, from the perspective of the prophet, to future events that YHWH intends to bring about, often with present implications for the prophet’s audience.⁶⁴ Friebe has countered this notion by suggesting that several prophetic sign-acts relate, from the prophet’s perspective, to past events in Israel’s history, such as Hosea’s marriage to Gomer (Hos 1:2–3), Jeremiah’s spoiled garment (Jer 13:1–11), and Ezekiel’s sin-bearing on behalf of the people (Ezek 4:4–5).⁶⁵ He affirms that all sign-acts constitute prophecy but that not all these prophecies concern future events. This understanding appears to fall short under scrutiny, however, and fails to align with the context of Zechariah 9–14. The examples

9–14 [Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1996], 142).

⁶⁴Georg Fohrer, *Die symbolischen Handlungen der Propheten*, 2nd ed. (Zürich: Zwingli, 1968), 110.

⁶⁵“Hermeneutical Paradigm,” 33–45.

Friebel provides admit of differing interpretations, especially Ezekiel's sin-bearing sign-act, a notorious crux.⁶⁶ Each of the sign-acts that he mentions, in fact, offers contextual clues that it relates to future events for the nation of Israel with present implications for the prophet's audience (Hos 1:4–7; Jer 13:9; Ezek 4:5–8). Woude contends likewise that the context and genre of Zechariah 11 demand a future purview: "The remaining prophecies of the book...are on the whole eschatologically oriented and above all use the genre of symbolic action, which always relates to the future and does not speak to a historical review."⁶⁷ That Ezekiel's sign-act in Ezekiel 37 portrays a future, eschatological event hints that Zechariah's event is to be discerned in a similar fashion.

Second, the prophetic sign-acts focus attention not upon the identity of the items populating the scene, as in the vision reports, but upon the nature and force of the actions the prophet portrays.⁶⁸ This observation indicates that more consideration is to be given to the roles played by the prophet (good shepherd/wicked shepherd) and especially to the actions he takes in those roles (appropriating the equipment, consigning the flock to destruction, breaking the staffs, throwing down the silver) than to the identity of the properties by which he achieves these tasks (e.g., the equipment, staffs, and silver pieces). Such a realization suggests that Zechariah's actions present the forceful, decisive actions of supreme exemplars of the shepherding role. The actions thus represent heightened conduct from apotheosized shepherds rather than the actions of generic shepherd-leaders from Israel's history. These ultimate shepherd-figures dictate the destiny of the nation. This is the only prophetic sign-act in Scripture depicting the role of shepherds—most other sign-acts portray climactic events related to the judgment, exile, or restoration of the nation—and thus its uniqueness hints that singular archetypes of the nation's leaders (supremely good vs. supremely evil) are in view.

Third, the context of Zechariah 9–14 suggests that the shepherd sign-acts represent the culmination of the Messianic agenda advanced in the surrounding chapters. Laato, who sees the sign-acts as Messianic and eschatological, argues along these lines: "The Messiah spoken of in these texts is no concrete historical figure of the postexilic period, but an eschatological portrait of a figure whom YHWH would raise up for his people in order to put into effect the prophetic programme outlined in 9:1–11:3."⁶⁹ Redditt contends that Zechariah 9–14 revolve around three major themes: a new David, a new union of the northern and

⁶⁶See Lamar Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 94–95; Iain Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 89–90.

⁶⁷"Die Hirtenallegorie," 140 (author's translation).

⁶⁸Boda, *Zechariah*, 382.

⁶⁹Laato, *Josiah and David Redivivus*, 283.

southern peoples, and a revitalized Jerusalem at the center.⁷⁰ The intersection of these themes is a prominent feature of OT Messianic contexts (Isa 2:1–4; 4:2–4; 9:1–7; 11:1–16; Ezek 11:14–21; Hag 2:1–9; Zech 6:9–15).⁷¹ Given the entrance of the Messianic king in the first portion of Zechariah 9–14 (9:9–10) and the central literary role of Zech 11:4–16 as the hinge in the literary chiasm, the first shepherd sign-act of 11:4–14 presents the focal point of these chapters as the advent of the Messianic royal figure to the nation of Israel. Moreover, if the first shepherd represents Messiah, the illusory shepherd of the second sign-act likely represents his eschatological counterpart, as Laato avers: “Zech 11:15–17 should be interpreted in the light of 11:4–14. The worthless shepherd is described as the opposite of the good shepherd, indicating that the passage presents the anti-type of the eschatological group’s Messiah. The worthless shepherd subsequently becomes a model for the Antichrist.”⁷² Baron concurs that these shepherds present, respectively, the greatest and basest shepherds in the nation’s history: “Just as the Good Shepherd, whose part the prophet acted in the first part of the chapter, is in the highest and truest sense none other than the Messiah, so the ‘foolish’ shepherd is in the last resort none other than the one who is in every sense his opposite—the personal Antichrist, under whose brief reign all Israel’s previous sorrows and sufferings shall reach their climax in the great tribulation.”⁷³ So then, the breaking of the first shepherd’s staffs (Zech 11:10, 14) signifies a momentous turning point in the ministrations of the shepherds. His climactic falling out with the flock represents a decisive turn in God’s relationship to the nation, signalled by a change in tone in Zechariah 12–14.

Fourth, Zechariah introduces the report of his sign-act with an unusual phrase that occurs in no other introduction to a prophetic sign-act: “This is what YHWH my God says” (v. 4). The phrase “YHWH my God” (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי) occurs thirty-five times in the OT, mainly in the Psalms and historical narratives, and almost exclusively in the context of prayer.⁷⁴ Mason has demonstrated that the phrase seldom occurs in prophetic literature, appearing most often in the Psalms

⁷⁰Redditt, “The Two Shepherds,” 680.

⁷¹On the nature of these passages as Messianic, see Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

⁷²Ibid., 286. Cf. also A. S. van der Woude, *Zacharia* (Nijkerk, The Netherlands: G. F. Callenbach, 1984), 221.

⁷³Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 417.

⁷⁴The total of 35 eliminates a few instances in which יְהוָה is followed by אֱלֹהֵי, but the Masoretic punctuation or context suggests a nominal clause or separates the words into different phrases. See Num 22:18; Deut 4:5; 18:16; 26:14; Josh 14:8, 9; 2 Sam 24:24; 1 Kgs 3:7; 5:18, 19; 8:28; 17:20, 21; 1 Chron 21:17; 22:7; 2 Chron 2:3; 6:19; Ezra 7:28; 9:5; Ps 7:1; 13:3; 18:28; 30:2, 12; 35:24; 40:6; 104:1; 109:26; Jer 31:18; Dan 9:4, 20; Jon 2:7; Hab 1:12; Zech 11:4; 14:5.

where the special relationship between YHWH and the worshipper is emphasized (Ps 7:1; 13:3; 18:28; 30:2).⁷⁵ At times the phrase appears in a potentially adversarial context in which the speaker seeks to establish his intimate relationship to YHWH as over against others' relationship (Balaam [Num 22:18]; Moses [Deut 4:5]; Joshua [Josh 14:8]; David [2 Sam 24:24]; Solomon [1 Kgs 3:7; 2 Chron 2:4]; Ezra [Ezra 7:28]). Most often the phrase occurs in prayers or discourses from theocratic leaders, such as prophets, priests, and kings, in which a grave threat from physical death, enemies, or religious apostasy has imperiled the petitioner or the nation, prompting the supplicant to beseech God for deliverance (cf. 1 Kgs 8:28; 17:20–21; Ezra 9:5; Ps 7:1; 13:3; 35:24; Dan 9:4; Jon 2:7; Hab 1:12). The use of this phrase in Zechariah 11 suggests that the prophet is commissioned to portray a shepherd-role fraught with potential hostility from enemies and one in which the portrayed shepherd sustains a particularly close relationship to YHWH (cf. also the depiction of the shepherd in 13:7 as "the man of my community/society" with the phrase "YHWH is my God" in 13:9). Such a tenor accords well with a Messianic reading, especially when silhouetted with other OT texts in which the foretold Messiah encounters aggressive opposition from adversaries, as in portions of the Psalms (Pss 22, 69) and in the Isaianic Suffering Servant passages (Isa 49:7; 50:6; 53:2–3).⁷⁶

Fifth, several factors within the sign-acts indicate that the prophet is representing the divine realm rather than acting in a merely human capacity. He speaks of annihilating three shepherds in one month (v. 8), of breaking the covenant that he had made with all peoples (v. 10), and of the magnificent sum at which he was valued by the people for his wages (v. 13). These factors have led many interpreters to conclude that the shepherd represents YHWH himself.⁷⁷ Adopting a Messianic interpretation of the sign-acts resolves these tensions, however. In these tasks, the prophet forcefully portrays the coming Messiah, who appears to the nation on YHWH's behalf as his designated agent and is summarily rejected.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Rex Mason, "The Use of Earlier Biblical Material in Zechariah 9–14: A Study in Inner-Biblical Exegesis," in *Bringing Out the Treasure: Inner-Biblical Allusion in Zechariah 9–14*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Michael H. Floyd, 3–208, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 370 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 96.

⁷⁶See Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology 9 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 110–11.

⁷⁷Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10:591; Julia M. O'Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 250; Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8/9–14–Maleachi*, 205; Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 147.

⁷⁸Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8/9–14–Maleachi*, 206.

Sixth, intertextual links between Ezekiel and Zechariah highlight the Messianic reading as the most consistent approach. Many scholars recognize Zechariah’s literary dependence on Ezekiel 34 and 37 in both vocabulary and imagery, as evident in the charts below.⁷⁹

Figure 2: Conceptual Links Between Ezek 37:15–23 and Zech 11:7–16⁸⁰

<i>Ezekiel</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>
Ezekiel takes two sticks	Zechariah takes two staffs
Stick 1 is named “For Judah”	Staff 1 is named “Delight”
Stick 2 is named “For Joseph”	Staff 2 is named “Union”
Ezekiel joins the two sticks	Zechariah breaks the two staffs
A new Davidic shepherd-king is appointed over them	An illusory shepherd-king is appointed over them
Similar vocabulary: לקַח (“take”) (Ezek 37:16, 19, 21; Zech 11:7, 10, 13, 15); אֶחָד (“one”) (Ezek 37:16, 17, 19, 22, 24; Zech 11:7, 8); עֵץ (“stick”) (Ezek 37:16, 17, 19, 20) מַקֵּל/ (“staff”) (Zech 11:7, 10, 14)	

Figure 3: Verbal Links Between Ezek 34:2–4 and Zech 11:15–17⁸¹

Hebrew Term	Gloss	<i>Ezekiel</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>
בָּקַשׁ	(“seek”)	Ezek 34:4	Zech 11:16
רָפָא	(“heal”)	Ezek 34:4	Zech 11:16
שָׁבַר	(“broken”)	Ezek 34:4	Zech 11:16
הַבְּרִיאָה	(“the fat/choice [one]”)	Ezek 34:3	Zech 11:16
הוּא רָעִי	(“woe to the shepherd[s]”)	Ezek 34:2	Zech 11:17

⁷⁹Boda, “Reading Between the Lines,” 285–88; Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Rebuilding with Hope: Haggai and Zechariah*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 138; Hanson, *Dawn of the Apocalyptic*, 344–45; Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 89–90; Chary, *Aggée–Zacharie–Malachi*, 193; Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 106; Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 118–23; Nurmela, *Prophets in Dialogue*, 136–42. *Contra* Meyer, who downplays the connection (“Allegory Concerning Monarchy,” 230).

⁸⁰Modified from Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, 90; Nurmela, *Prophets in Dialogue*, 142.

⁸¹Modified from Nurmela, *Prophets in Dialogue*, 142.

Boda has argued persuasively on the basis of these connections that the prophet's use of Ezekiel offers important clues to the significance of the shepherd sign-acts, one that emerges from careful consideration of the context of Ezekiel.⁸² He posits that the contexts of Ezekiel 34 and 37 intersect in language and imagery at two key points: Ezek 34:22–25 and Ezek 37:23–28. In these analogous trajectories God will save his flock (Ezek 34:22; 37:23) and appoint his servant David over them as prince (34:23; 37:24), designating him as “one shepherd” (רֹעֶה אֶחָד) (34:23; 37:24). This is followed by the establishment of a covenant of peace (34:25; 37:26) so that YHWH is Israel's God and they his people (34:24, 31; 37:25). Yet Boda finds a discordant note with the rise of the wicked shepherd. This apparent discrepancy resolves itself in understanding that the nation's rejection of its Messiah would lead to judgment and the postponement of the kingdom. The similarities in theme, in fact, point to a Messianic reading with regard to Zechariah's first shepherd. The coming Messiah will be a Davidic descendant (Ezek 34:23; 37:24; Zech 9:9) who actualizes the fulfillment of the Messianic program foretold in Zechariah 9–10. The nation rejects him, however, leading to their consignment to judgment and the eventual rise of the anti-Messiah who seeks to destroy the flock. Rudolph concurs with such a conclusion: “[The first shepherd] is YHWH's agent on earth, and by the considerable dependence of the vision on Ezek 34 there can be no doubt that by it only the Messiah can be meant (Ezek 34:23; 37:24).”⁸³

The Rejection of the Shepherd and Delivery of the Flock to Decimation (vv. 6, 8–9)

Given the Messianic reading for which we have argued, further insight into the nature of the fraught relationship between the good shepherd and the flock follows. The judgment inflicted upon the antagonistic leaders and complacent flock includes delivering the people to their own demise by the decimation of foreign oppressors (v. 6). This consignment to punishment arises from the open hostility between the good shepherd and the rival shepherds as well as the apathy of the flock in preferring abusive shepherds over YHWH's appointed shepherd (vv. 8–9). This predicted enmity between the Jewish people and their future Messiah finds a counterpart in Jesus' seven pronouncements of woe invoked against the scribes and Pharisees at the opening of his fifth and climactic discourse in Matthew 23:1–25:46.⁸⁴

⁸²Boda, “Reading Between the Lines,” 286–87. Although Boda does not adopt a Messianic reading of the sign-acts, his insights are important to the arguments we are advancing here. He concludes: “The good shepherd is identified as a Davidic descendant who will be רֹעֶה אֶחָד, uniting the tribes once again” (287).

⁸³Rudolph, *Haggai–Sacharia 1–8/9–14–Maleachi*, 205 (author's translation).

⁸⁴On the seven woe judgments, see Jeannine K. Brown, *Matthew*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 271; Charles Talbert, *Matthew*,

Jesus's serial announcements of judgment conclude with the climactic verdict: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matt 23:37–38).⁸⁵ Jesus' decree is understood generally to predict the Roman destruction of the city and temple in A.D. 70.⁸⁶ This connection aligns with the purview of Zechariah's sign-act, which is best understood as foretelling the future animosity between the Messianic shepherd and the flock. This animosity would lead to divine punishment through Rome's devastation of the land (including its timber), siege of Jerusalem, destruction of the city and temple, and massacre of the Jewish populace in A.D. 66–70.⁸⁷

The Identity of the Three Shepherds (v. 8)

The identification of the three shepherds whom the first shepherd removes in one month (v. 8) remains a nearly insoluble difficulty; thus any proposals must be tentative and derived only from careful consideration of the context. Several questions emerge from the enigmatic phrase, including whether the numbers three and one are to be taken literally or symbolically. If the latter, the numbers would likely symbolize completion (entailing either "full removal" or "all the shepherds") and a short period of time, respectively. In addition, the definite article prefixed to הִרְעִים ("the shepherds") has led to conjecture over whether the shepherds were known to Zechariah's audience. Mitchell observed over a century ago that more than forty suggestions had been offered for their identity, spanning the time of the exodus to the first-century Roman conquest.⁸⁸ Baldwin offers a lengthy analysis of their possible identity but concludes that speculation along these lines is fruitless.⁸⁹

Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 258–59; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 552–58; Ben Witherington, *Matthew*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2006), 428–33. On the literary structure of Matthew in relation to the Gospel's alternating narrative and discourse portions, see Wilhelmus J. C. Weren, *Studies in Matthew's Gospel: Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting*, Biblical Interpretation Series 130 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 14.

⁸⁵Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural citations are from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

⁸⁶Brown, *Matthew*, 271; Turner, *Matthew*, 561.

⁸⁷Homer Heater, Jr., *Zechariah*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 93; Baron, *Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 416; Feinberg, "Exegetical Studies," 57; Unger, *Zechariah*, 193.

⁸⁸Hinckley G. Mitchell, *Haggai and Zechariah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 306.

⁸⁹Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 181–83. So Redditt, "The Two Shepherds," 682.

Perhaps the most traditional interpretation is that the shepherds represent the three classes of leaders in ancient Israel: prophets, priests, and kings.⁹⁰ Stead has recently produced additional evidence from Jeremiah to support this view.⁹¹ He argues that the intertextual link between Jeremiah 23:1–4 and Zechariah 11 suggests that these three classes of leaders, featured prominently in the discourse flow of Jeremiah 22–23, must be in view in Zechariah as they were removed from leadership in the period of one month at the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. according to Jeremiah 52:6, 12. Attractive as Stead's thesis appears, a few difficulties challenge his reading. First, this understanding requires that the sign-acts represent past events from the prophet's perspective, a view against which we have marshalled several lines of evidence. Second, in ANE texts and the OT generally, the shepherd metaphor relates consistently to kings or other high-ranking officials in their leadership capacity, rarely to prophets (Jer 17:16; Hos 12:12–13) and never to priests.⁹² It appears unlikely, therefore, that the priests, with respect to their cultic office, would be in view as part of the shepherd group.

In keeping with the Messianic reading, a preferable solution presents itself. The three shepherds may represent the three rival factions of the Sanhedrin.⁹³ Drawing from the primary evidence of Josephus and the NT, Twelftree has evinced that the Sanhedrin consisted of three parties: the chief priests, who were the key leaders (Matt 27:41; Mark 14:53; Josephus, *J. W.*, 2.301, 316–42); the scribes, professional expositors and teachers of the Law (Acts 5:34; 23:6; Josephus, *J. W.*, 2.411); and the elders, leading men selected from the community (Matt 26:3; 27:1; 28:11–12; Josephus, *J. W.*, 2.316, 410).⁹⁴ These officials receive repeated censure in the Synoptic Gospels for their relentless hostility toward the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ (Matt 16:21; 27:41; Mark 8:31; 11:27; 14:43, 53; 15:1; Luke 9:22; 20:1; 22:66). The leaders of the Sanhedrin would here be designated as shepherds principally in their ruling capacity as the governing body of the Jewish people in Jerusalem and not with respect to their cultic service or other duties. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 the vestiges of the

⁹⁰Feinberg, *God Remembers*, 206–7; Luck, *Zechariah*, 102; Baron, *Visions and Prophecies*, 397.

⁹¹Michael R. Stead, "The Three Shepherds: Reading Zechariah 11 in the Light of Jeremiah," in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, ed. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, and Gordon J. Wenham, 149–63 (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 152–56.

⁹²See Foster, "Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization," 738.

⁹³Close to this view would be E. Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Andover, MA: W. F. Draper, 1868), 416; Merrill F. Unger, *Zechariah: Prophet of Messiah's Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 195.

⁹⁴*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, s.v. "Sanhedrin," by Graham H. Twelftree, 730.

Sanhedrin reassembled in Jamnia, although never to exert the same authority as before.

The Breaking of Staffs and Annulment of the Covenant and Brotherhood (vv. 10, 14)

Another major interpretive question surrounds the breaking of the staffs in Zech 11:10, 14 and the reported significance of these actions. Many interpreters find in the first action an alleged nullification (פרר, “break”) of the covenant (בְּרִיתִי, “my covenant”) between YHWH and Israel, with the term “peoples” (הָעַמִּים) referring to the clans or tribes of Israel.⁹⁵ This view faces serious challenges, however. First, given the intertextual links with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this understanding is implausible in the light of these latter prophets’ forceful affirmations that God’s covenant with Israel cannot be revoked nor his purposes for their salvation frustrated. Jeremiah attests, for example: “Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: ‘If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the LORD, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever’” (Jer 31:35–36 [ESV]). The prophet applies similar language to YHWH’s covenant with David and the Levites: “This is what the LORD says: ‘If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant—and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me—can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne’” (Jer 33:20–21).

Likewise, Ezekiel affirms that even death cannot thwart YHWH’s plans to save and regroup the nation of Israel:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my

⁹⁵Caquot, “Brèves remarques,” 52; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 270–71; Webb, *The Message of Zechariah*, 147–48. A few variations of this view include Baldwin’s suggestion that “peoples” refers to the diaspora of Israel (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 184), Redditt’s proposal that עַמִּים is simply an idiom for one’s own people as in the plural use in the phrases “gathered to one’s people” (Gen 25:17; 29:22; 35:29) and “cut off from one’s people” (Gen 17:14; Exod 30:33) (“The Two Shepherds,” 683; *Zechariah 9–14*, 85), and Wolters’s solution that the final *mem* is enclitic (*Zechariah*, 377–78). A corollary dispensational interpretation argues that the broken covenant is the Mosaic covenant with Israel, nullified in favor of the New Covenant (Richard L. Mayhue, “Why Futuristic Premillennialism?” in *Christ’s Prophetic Plans: A Future Premillennial Primer*, ed. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue [Chicago: Moody, 2012], 73). The meaning of the nomenclature “covenant with all peoples” in Zech 11 renders it unlikely that the covenant spoken of is precisely the Mosaic covenant.

Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it,' declares the LORD" (Ezek 37:12–14).

These realities are rooted in the unilateral and irrevocable nature of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 22:15–18).⁹⁶ That Zechariah intends by one phrase to set aside pervasive OT language of covenant perpetuity is doubtful, especially given Zechariah's extensive literary and theological dependence on the canonical prophets who preceded him (cf. also Jer 33:17–18; 50:4–7; Dan 12:1–3).

Second, this understanding would contradict clear statements from the Pentateuch and historical narratives, using identical language, to underscore that YHWH would not break his covenant with Israel. The term פָּרַר carries the connotations of "break," "violate," "make ineffectual," or "nullify,"⁹⁷ and occurs in the same verse with בְּרִית twenty-three times in the OT, the majority with reference to the fact that YHWH will uphold the covenant in spite of Israel's continued flouting of her covenant obligations and responsibilities.⁹⁸ Lev 26:44 envisions a time when Israel is in exile due to the nation's sin. Even in this bleak situation, YHWH affirms that "I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking [Hiphil infinitive, פָּרַר] my covenant [בְּרִיתִי] with them. I am the LORD their God." Likewise in Judg 2:1 the Angel of YHWH affirms the promise not to violate the covenant with Israel: "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land I swore to give to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break [Hiphil yiqtol, פָּרַר] my covenant [בְּרִיתִי] with you.'" The language of covenant violation outside Zech 11:10 applies in every instance to human failure to uphold covenant duties or conversely to divine commitment to sustain his covenant obligations. The occasion of this language in Zechariah is unique, therefore, and should not be interpreted too readily as signifying God's intention to nullify the covenant with Israel.

Third, the view understands the plural form עַמִּים ("peoples") in a way that is both unusual and contradictory to the context of Zechariah. The term עַם occurs nine times in Zechariah, mostly in the latter

⁹⁶On the nature of the Abrahamic covenant as non-nullifiable, see Keith H. Essex, "Abrahamic Covenant," *Master's Seminary Journal* 10 (Fall 1999): 209–212.

⁹⁷BDB, 830; *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "פָּרַר," by Tyler F. Williams, 3:692.

⁹⁸Gen 17:14; Lev 26:15, 44; Deut 31:16, 20; Judg 2:1; 1 Kgs 15:19; 2 Chron 16:13; Isa 24:5; 33:8; Jer 11:10; 14:21; 31:32; 33:20–21; Ezek 16:59; 17:15–16, 18–19; 44:7; Zech 11:10. See also David A. Dean, "Covenant, Conditionality, and Consequence: New Terminology and a Case Study in the Abrahamic Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57 (2014): 281–308. Dean classifies these texts into eight categories of usage, of which more than one-third pertain to Israel's violation of her covenant obligations or regulations (ibid., 291–92n36).

chapters, and always with reference to foreign nations (Zech 8:20, 22; 10:9; 11:10; 12:2, 3, 4, 6; 14:12). In Zech 8:20, 22 “peoples” is parallel to “the inhabitants of many cities” who come to Jerusalem to seek YHWH. This latter group is distinguished clearly from the Jewish people in 8:23 as “the men from all the tongues of the nations.” In 10:9 “the peoples” represent the nations among whom Israel is scattered in exile. In 12:2–6 “the peoples” comprise the foreign nations who besiege Jerusalem, a group whom YHWH strikes in 14:12 as they attack Israel. These contextual clues almost certainly point to “the covenant with the peoples” in 11:10 as a treaty or covenant with foreign nations rather than with ethnic Israel. Beyond this, the presence of foreign nations may be hinted at already in the context with the surrender of every citizen into the hand of “his king” (given the postexilic context likely a foreign monarch) (v. 6) and to the threat of outside hostility that will be given license to decimate the sheep (v. 9).⁹⁹

Unfortunately, the conclusion that עַמִּים entails foreign peoples fails to clear up all the difficulties. The OT speaks nowhere explicitly of a covenant made between YHWH and the nations; the background of the phrase, therefore, is unclear. Several interpreters have linked the concept to the Noahic covenant and to YHWH’s promise never again to destroy the earth or its inhabitants.¹⁰⁰ Petersen understands the rupture of this covenant as signifying “the revision, if not termination, of the divine promise regarding protection of humanity from destruction.”¹⁰¹ Elsewhere Chisholm has linked the genre of oracles against the nations similarly to the obligations of the Noahic covenant and has classified these oracles as indictments against nations that commit acts of wanton violence against the helpless who are made in the image of God.¹⁰² Such acts, according to Chisholm, entail a violation of the prescriptions given to mankind generally in Gen 9:1–6 to preserve the sanctity of human life and the mandate for human flourishing; attacks against divine-image bearers are thus attacks against God himself. Here, then, the annulment of the covenant would entail the divine decision no longer to restrain the nations in their violence toward one another, thus presumably leaving Israel vulnerable to their attacks. Although this thesis is attractive, it holds a few difficulties. First, the Noahic covenant conveys general obligations to which all nations are accountable for their relations toward one another; Israel is not specifically in view in these stipulations. It is not clear, therefore, that the nullification of this covenant would bring about a particular threat to Israel in the way that seems to be the case here. Second, the context of

⁹⁹Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization,” 747.

¹⁰⁰Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 95; Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 198.

¹⁰¹Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14 and Malachi*, 95.

¹⁰²Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 75–76.

Genesis 9 designates the Noahic covenant as an “everlasting covenant” (בְּרִית עוֹלָם) (v. 16; cf. Isa 24:5), guaranteed by the bow in the clouds (v. 13), that the waters will never again flood the earth to destroy all flesh (v. 15). That YHWH intends to convey through Zechariah the nullification of an eternal covenant appears highly improbable. Third, given the literary ties between Zechariah 11 and Ezekiel, an allusion to the Noahic covenant seems less likely. Ezekiel incorporates material from the covenant blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 to underscore Israel’s restive relationship to the nations in exile as a contrast to YHWH’s promised blessings of future security and prosperity.¹⁰³ A similar conceptual backdrop concerning the latent hostility between Israel and the nations as developed in the law codes of the Torah appears to be the focus of Zechariah 11.

On the strength of the aforementioned intertexts between Ezekiel and Zechariah, Hanson and others have proposed that the covenant in view is the covenant of peace foretold in Ezek 34:25 and 37:26.¹⁰⁴ There Israel is promised an era of unparalleled safety and flourishing within the land: “I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of savage beasts so that they may live in the wilderness and sleep in the forests in safety” (Ezek 34:25). Ezek 37:26 clarifies that the covenant will be perpetual and will involve God’s presence among them: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever.” The covenant here broken would thus entail a reversal of God’s promise to bring universal and lasting peace to Israel.¹⁰⁵ Although this view aligns more closely with the background of Ezekiel, there are also difficulties with the proposal. The covenant of peace foretold in Ezekiel pertains to an eschatological period when God installs a new David as prince over his people and unleashes an era of unparalleled peace and prosperity (Ezek 34:23–29; 37:24–28). The fulfillment of this prophecy remained future from the standpoint of Ezekiel and had not yet been realized in Zechariah’s day. The nullification of the covenant in Zechariah 11 could not pertain, then, to a covenant that had not yet been enacted. Moreover, as with the Noahic covenant, YHWH attests that this covenant of peace

¹⁰³Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 276; Lawrence Boadt, “The Function of Salvation Oracles in Ezekiel 33 to 37,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 12 (1990): 9.

¹⁰⁴Hanson, *Dawn of the Apocalyptic*, 344–45; Mason, “The Use of Earlier Biblical Material,” 152; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1984), 270–71; Stuhlmüller, *Rebuilding with Hope*, 138–39.

¹⁰⁵Compton links these Ezekiel texts to the new covenant (R. Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 8 [2003]: 20–23). If granted, this connection abates the likelihood that the nullified covenant of Zech 11:10 is to be equated with Ezekiel’s covenant of peace, as the latter is irrevocable (*ibid.*, 13, 21).

will be permanent, so it is unlikely that the prophetic sign-acts signal an abrogation of this covenant.

A more fruitful avenue for exploring the significance of this phrase lies, then, in its specific joining of covenant terminology with the term “peoples.” The phrase בְּרִיתִי (“my covenant”) and the plural form עַמִּים (“peoples”) collocate together in only three texts in the OT: Gen 17:14; Exod 19:5; and Zech 11:10. Gen 17:14 pertains to the rite of circumcision as the mechanism of covenant obedience: the uncircumcised Israelite has “broken my covenant” (אֶת-בְּרִיתִי הֵפַר) and is thus to be cut off from his “peoples” (suffix + עַמִּים + מִן). This covenant is not enacted between YHWH and foreign nations—this is the idiomatic usage of peoples, as discussed earlier, to signify one’s own nation—and thus this text does not speak to the situation in Zechariah.

The only other text, then, combining “my covenant” with “peoples” occurs in Exod 19:5–6. There YHWH promises Israel an exalted position as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if she complies with her covenant responsibilities: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (ESV). The implications of this covenant include a series of special privileges for Israel vis-à-vis the other nations: a protected status (“my treasured possession”), a royal-priestly mediatorial role (“a kingdom of priests”), and a distinctive character reflecting YHWH’s own nature (“a holy nation”). These unique privileges suggest an obverse: the foreign nations are withheld from either destroying or assimilating Israel due to her special mediatorial role in the world as a conduit of blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3; cf. the removal of the hedge in Isa 5:5; Ps 80:12).¹⁰⁶ The amplification of this special status in the millennial era, signified by absolute peace with the human and animal realms (Hos 2:18), may hint at a similar, although incomplete, earlier protection as Israel fulfilled her covenant duties.¹⁰⁷ The rare incidence of this terminology in the OT, together with the key place of Exod 19:5–6 in the formation of OT theology,¹⁰⁸ suggests a possible intertext. Given the Messianic interpretation of the shepherd sign-acts for which we have argued, this text foreshadows a later prophecy of Jesus Christ. As the disciples extol the beauty of the temple, Jesus foretells its imminent demise: “As for what

¹⁰⁶Thomas McComiskey refers to this as the “universal strictures that God places upon the nations” (“Zechariah,” in vol. 3 of *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 1197).

¹⁰⁷See Feinberg, *God Remembers*, 208.

¹⁰⁸See Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 166, 255; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 96–99; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 22–24.

you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down” (Luke 21:6). Earlier in the Gospel the vision of this imminent destruction had prompted Jesus to weep over the city:

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation’ (Luke 19:41–44 [ESV]).

Later in the context of Luke 21 Jesus prophesies similarly that “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). The “times of the Gentiles” generally denotes the period in which Israel remains under foreign domination from the Babylonian captivity until the climax of the foreign menace in the Great Tribulation.¹⁰⁹ Correlating these texts, Jesus speaks of a coming intensification of the times of the Gentiles in which Rome would be an instrument of God’s judgment in punishing the nation for her failure to acknowledge her Messiah (Luke 20:13–18), to recognize the time of her visitation and kingdom offer (Luke 19:44), and to yield allegiance to Messiah as king instead of putting him to death (Luke 9:22; 18:31–33; 19:47; 20:14–19; 22:1–2).¹¹⁰ In all these acts the leaders of the nation, especially the priests, scribes, and elders, were not merely participants but instigators (Luke 6:7; 9:22; 11:53–54; 19:47; 23:10). Zechariah 11:10, then, foretells these future events. As a result of the nation’s rejection of her Messiah, instigated by her apostate leaders, God would temporarily remove Israel’s preferred status as a kingdom of priests and holy nation, along with the special protection and privileges she was afforded, by invoking the pledged covenant curses (Lev 26:13–39; Deut 28:15–45). In consequence, YHWH would allow foreign powers to harshly dominate and decimate Israel, culminating in the reign of the abusive shepherd/anti-Messiah (11:15–17), until she turns back climactically during the Great Tribulation to surrender to her rightful Messiah (Zech 12:10–14). The rupture of the covenant of brotherhood (v. 14) similarly would signal the dissolution of cohesion among ethnic Jews that followed their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. This divisiveness came to heated fruition during Rome’s destruction of the land and Jerusalem in the Jewish wars of the first century.¹¹¹ Thus,

¹⁰⁹J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things To Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1958), 314–18; *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, s.v. “Tribulation, Old Testament References,” by J. Randall Price, 412–15.

¹¹⁰Robert H. Stein, “Jesus, the Destruction of Jerusalem, and the Coming of the Son of Man in Luke 21:5–38,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 16 (Fall 2012): 23.

¹¹¹Josephus describes the national fragmentation during the Roman siege of

although the covenant is not enacted specifically with the nations in Exodus 19, their presence as witnesses and beneficiaries of the covenant may be implied from the context. YHWH will grant the nations greater (although not exhaustive) license to ravage Israel as a result of her rejection of the Messiah.

The Wisdom Context of the Shepherd Portrayals

The terminology used to depict the contrasting shepherds in Zechariah 11 suggests a wisdom backdrop, a connection developed only marginally in previous studies.¹¹² The prophet names his first staff “Delight” (v. 7), from the Hebrew term נָעַם, meaning “kindness,” “beauty,” “favor,” or “congeniality,”¹¹³ and deriving ultimately from the related cognate verb נָעַם, “to be lovely/delightful,” “to be pleasant/agreeable,” “to be friendly with.”¹¹⁴ The terms נָעַם and נָעַם occur sixteen times in the OT with the highest concentration in Proverbs.¹¹⁵ Although a few scholars have tied the lexical field of נָעַם to the concept of sanctuary, given its usage in Ps 27:4 (“the beauty of the LORD”),¹¹⁶ the wisdom context is predominant. In the occurrences in Proverbs, the noun and verb forms are parallel to מֶתֶק (“to be sweet”) (Prov 9:17; 16:24), בְּרִכַּת-טוֹב (“the blessing of goodness”) (Prov 24:25), and שָׁלוֹם (“peace”) (Prov 3:17). More abstractly, the verb נָעַם likewise parallels the verbal phrase בּוֹא + לֵב (“to enter into the heart”) (Prov 2:10), visualizing the welcome reception of wisdom. The noun form also appears in the phrase אִמְרֵי-נָעַם (“gracious words”) contrasted with מַחְשְׁבוֹת רָע (“the thoughts of the wicked”), which are an abomination to YHWH (Prov 15:26). Outside Proverbs, the term also occurs in Psalm 90 (“May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us” [v. 17]), often categorized as a wisdom psalm.¹¹⁷ The lexical field of נָעַם in these contexts highlights one of the benefits of wisdom as imparting that which is

Jerusalem: “The city being now on all sides beset by these battling conspirators and their rabble, between them the people, like some huge carcass, was torn to pieces. Old men and women in their helplessness prayed for the coming of the Romans and eagerly looked for the external war to liberate them from their internal miseries” (Josephus, *J. W.*, 5.5).

¹¹²See Bautch, “Zechariah 11,” 260; Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah*, 124.

¹¹³HALOT, 706; DCH, 5:706.

¹¹⁴HALOT, 705; DCH, 5:705; NIDOTTE, s.v. “נָעַם,” by Samuel Meier, 3:121–23.

¹¹⁵Prov 2:10; 3:17; 9:17; 15:26; 16:24; 24:25.

¹¹⁶Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization,” 738.

¹¹⁷Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, trans. John H. Marks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 210–222; Allan Harman, *Psalms*, Mentor Commentary (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 1998), 308.

pleasant, lovely, and agreeable. The value of wisdom lies, moreover, in the communication of goodness and peace to the wisdom recipient who appropriates the insights offered (cf. Prov 1:23, 33). This terminology as used with the first shepherd points to his wise character. He names the staff, a gesture of authority and of character-designation, from the conceptual world of wisdom, suggesting that he is able to confer the positive benefits of wisdom in his shepherd ministration.

This aspect comes into sharper focus in contrast with the second shepherd. YHWH designates the latter as the “foolish shepherd” (אֱוִילִי־רֹעֶה) (v. 15), marking his character as distinct from the first shepherd. The term אֱוִילִי occurs nineteen times in Proverbs to denote the generic fool as opposite the prudent or upright man.¹¹⁸ The fool is corrupt morally and religiously, more so than the inexperienced simpleton (פְּתִי) who is merely naïve. The fool is characterized by his arrogance (12:15; 14:13; 29:9), obstinacy (1:7; 15:5; 16:22; 27:22), aggression (12:16; 20:3), boastfulness (10:8, 10, 14; 27:3), and disregard for sacred things (1:7; 14:9). The fear of YHWH, the fundamental principle of Proverbs and linked there to knowing God (9:10), is a disposition the fool spurns (1:7). The prophet Jeremiah similarly equates the ignorance or deficit of the true knowledge of God to folly: “My people are fools (אֱוִילִי); they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding” (Jer 4:22). Correlating this wisdom terminology, the second shepherd displays folly in that he is ethically and religiously corrupt and exhibits no personal knowledge of the true God.

The putative wisdom background suggests itself likewise in the chapter’s pervasive economic terminology, often associated with the social context of biblical wisdom.¹¹⁹ Foster has observed this striking feature, arguing that the prevalent commercial vocabulary may hold the interpretive key to the passage.¹²⁰ The passage thus mentions “buyers” (קְנִיֵּהוּ), “sellers” (מְכַרְיָהוּ), “I am rich” (וְאֵנִי עָשִׁיר) (v. 5), “my wages” (שְׂכָרִי), “they paid/weighed” (וַיִּשְׁקָלוּ), “thirty pieces of silver” (שְׁלֹשִׁים כֶּסֶף) (v. 12), and “the magnificent sum” (אֶדְרֵי הֵיקָר) (v. 13). Part of the developing tensions among the rival shepherds turns on the economic advantages at stake in the oversight of the flock. Within the retributive

¹¹⁸Prov 1:7; 7:22 [disputed]; 10:8, 10, 14, 21; 11:29; 12:15, 16; 14:3, 9; 15:5; 16:22; 17:28; 20:3; 24:7; 27:3, 22; 29:9. See *TDOT*, s.v. “אֱוִילִי,” by H. Cazelles, 1:137.

¹¹⁹J. David Pleins, “Poverty in the Social World of the Wise,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12 (February 1987): 61–78; Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 260–64; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradiction in Proverbs,” *Hebrew Studies* 33 (1992): 25–36; R. N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 99 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1990); Scott C. Jones, “The Values and Limits of Qohelet’s Sub-Celestial Economy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 21–33.

¹²⁰Foster, “Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization,” 744.

pattern of biblical wisdom, especially Proverbs, the fear of YHWH, along with its concomitant righteous conduct, produces wealth and blessing (Prov 3:1–10; 22:4), while diligence staves off poverty (Prov 10:4; 12:24; 13:4). Here, however, the apostate shepherds and their allies vie by other means, mainly their business acumen and underhanded dealings, to benefit economically from the flock. The loss of this wealth and privilege prompts their wailing (Zech 11:3) and their virulent animosity toward the good shepherd (11:8). A key aspect of their rejection of the good shepherd appears motivated, then, by economic factors (v. 5).¹²¹ The cumulation of these factors suggests that a wisdom milieu lies behind Zechariah 11 and that the two shepherds contrast a supremely wise and a supremely foolish leader.

THE CURSE UPON THE WICKED SHEPHERD (11:17)

Woe to the illusory shepherd
who abandons the flock!
May the sword smite his arm and his right eye!
May his arm wither completely away,
and his right eye go completely blind!

We turn finally to the character and identity of the wicked shepherd, culminating with the corollary divine curse. Although Baldwin asserts that Zechariah does not intend his readers to identify the figure of the shepherd,¹²² few have been dissuaded from an attempt. Boda links the shepherd figure to contemporaries of the prophet, either Zerubbabel or Elnathan, the son-in-law of Zerubbabel.¹²³ This option appears unlikely, however, given the Messianic implications and the eschatological orientation for which we have argued. Moreover, it is difficult to conceive that Zerubbabel would be characterized here as a foolish and worthless shepherd, in the light of the favorable terms by which he is characterized elsewhere (Hag 2:23). Leupold and Merrill link this final shepherd to all the Jewish leaders from Zechariah's day onward, although Merrill proposes a final culmination "at last in that epitome of godless despotism, the individual identified in the NT as the Antichrist."¹²⁴ It seems unlikely, however, that all apostate Jewish

¹²¹Compare the similar motive driving the Sanhedrin's hostility to Jesus Christ in John's Gospel: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48 [ESV]).

¹²²Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 186.

¹²³Boda, *Zechariah*, 678; cf. also Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road*, 201. Peterson also connects this shepherd to the contemporary ruler, although in his case to the Persian king (*Behold Your King*, 193).

¹²⁴H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Zechariah* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 219; Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 303. Cf. also Chary, *Aggée-Zacharie, Malachi*, 193; James M. Boice, *The Minor Prophets: An Expositional Commentary*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 2:204.

leaders would be represented by the singular figure of the wicked shepherd. Feinberg contends, by contrast, that the entire church age occurs between vv. 14 and 15, leading him to identify the Antichrist as not merely the ultimate but the sole referent for this prophecy.¹²⁵ Baron concurs that insofar as the two shepherds represent the highest degree of their respective ministrations, the foolish shepherd represents the Antichrist who exhibits supreme folly by “arrogating to himself divinity and claiming divine honours.”¹²⁶ With this potential link, we will examine more carefully the character of the Antichrist and his identity as a Jewish political mercenary.

The Character of the Antichrist in Scripture

The foolish and wicked character of this shepherd aligns well with other titles for the Antichrist in Scripture, including the oppressor (Isa 51:13), the little horn (Dan 7:8; 8:9), the coming prince (Dan 9:26), the willful king (Dan 11:36), and the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3, 8). Lorein defines the Antichrist as “a man who will appear at the end of time, wholly filled with Satan. He will be an arch-deceiver, as a tyrant (unjust, murderous) and as a false god (turning himself and others away from all existing religion).”¹²⁷ Elsewhere in Scripture the Antichrist is characterized as uniquely gifted (Dan 7:8, 24; Rev 13:3), intelligent (Dan 7:8, 20; 8:23), notorious (Rev 13:3–4), ruthless (Dan 7:21; 8:24), eloquent (Dan 7:20; Rev 13:3, 5), charismatic (Dan 7:20), shrewd politically and militarily (Dan 7:8, 20, 24; Dan 11:38; Rev 13:4, 7), and highly arrogant and narcissistic (Dan 8:25; 11:36–37; 2 Thess 2:3–4, 8).¹²⁸

Several interpreters have argued that the Antichrist is a Gentile, owing to his possible ethnic ties to the people who destroy the second temple (Dan 9:26) and to his emergence from the midst of the ten horns (Dan 7:8) and from the sea (Rev 13:1), the latter often a symbol for the nations (Rev 17:15).¹²⁹ The cumulative evidence, however,

¹²⁵Feinberg, “Exegetical Studies,” 69. Cf. also Unger, *Zechariah*, 202. G. W. Lorein contends that “the Messianic interpretation of vv. 4–14 lends itself to but does not prove conclusively the presence of an antichrist theme” in Zech 11 (*The Antichrist Theme in the Intertestamental Period*, Journal for the Society of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 44 [London: T & T Clark, 2003], 40).

¹²⁶Baron, *Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 417.

¹²⁷Lorein, *The Antichrist Theme*, 29.

¹²⁸Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 3:370–72; Mark A. Hassler, “The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 27 (Spring 2016): 41–42.

¹²⁹Pentecost, *Things To Come*, 332–34; Gary Gromacki, “The Times of the Gentiles,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21 (Spring 2017): 30; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 306; George M. Heaton, “An Interpretation of Daniel 11:36–45,” *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (Fall 1983): 211; John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971),

favors a Jewish origin, with the portrait emerging from Zechariah 11 lending further credibility to this interpretation.¹³⁰ This follows from several factors. First, the epithet “he will not give heed to the God of his fathers” (וְעַל-אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו לֹא יִבְיֶן) (Dan 11:37) is likely a reference to his repudiation of YHWH, the covenant God of the patriarchs.¹³¹ Several interpreters deny this connection insofar as the plural form אֱלֹהִים may suggest a plurality of false gods rather than the true God (cf. NIV: “he will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors”) and in that the divine name YHWH is not explicitly mentioned in this context.¹³² The usage of this phrase elsewhere in the OT, however, is decisive in favor of an Israelite connotation in which the future Antichrist rejects YHWH, the God of his fathers. The phrase אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו occurs sixty times in the OT and refers always to the true God, YHWH.¹³³ Several noteworthy conclusions emerge from the correlation of these texts.

(1) “God of the fathers” is a preferred designation for YHWH in the postexilic period. Twenty-eight occurrences appear in Chronicles, where the phrase always designates the true God. (2) In most occurrences in Chronicles the phrase highlights the faithfulness/unfaithfulness of the Davidic king in relation to YHWH, the God of his fathers.¹³⁴ This connection suggests that the phrase may have particular import with respect to the national leader’s royal/political allegiance to YHWH. (3) In the Pentateuch the phrase ties particularly

273; Walter K. Price, *The Coming Antichrist* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 133–34.

¹³⁰The view that the Antichrist is of Jewish ethnicity originates in the early church in the work of Irenaeus (120–202) and his successor, Hippolytus, who authored the first treatise on the theme, entitled “On the Antichrist” (see Kevin L. Hughes, *Constructing Antichrist: Paul, Biblical Commentary, and the Development of the Doctrine in the Middle Ages* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005]; Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000], 58–63). Hippolytus argues that the Antichrist emerges from the tribe of Dan on the basis of several factors, including that tribe’s sordid character in Gen 49:16–17, the reference to Dan in the context of destructive warfare in the land in Jer 8:16, and the absence of the tribe in the list of regenerated tribes in Rev 7:5–8 (Hippolytus, “On Antichrist,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. [1886; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004], 5:246–47).

¹³¹On the literary structure of Daniel 11 and the key factors demonstrating that the Antichrist is in view from v. 36 onwards, see Andrew E. Steinmann, “Is the Antichrist in Daniel 11?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (April 2005): 195–209.

¹³²Walvoord, *Daniel*, 273; Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 306; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 332.

¹³³Gen 31:5; 31:29, 42; 31:53; 32:10; 43:23; 46:1, 3; 50:17; Exod 3:6, 13, 15, 16; 4:5; 15:2; 18:4; Deut 1:11, 21; 4:1; 6:3; 12:1; 26:7; 27:3; 29:24; Josh 18:3; Judg 2:12; 2 Kgs 21:22; 1 Chron 5:25; 12:18; 28:9; 2 Chron 7:22; 11:16; 13:12, 18; 14:3; 15:12; 17:4; 19:4; 20:6; 21:10; 24:18; 24:24; 28:6, 9, 25; 29:5; 30:7, 19, 22; 33:12; 34:32, 33; 36:15; Ezra 7:27; 8:28; 10:11; Dan 11:37.

¹³⁴1 Chron 28:9; 29:20; 2 Chron 7:22; 14:3; 15:12; 17:4; 19:4; 20:6; 21:10; 24:18; 28:25; 29:5; 30:7, 22; 33:12; 34:32–33.

to the covenant (cf. the usage in Exodus and Deuteronomy) and thus to the inviolable relationship between YHWH and the nation of Israel. (4) In nearly two-thirds of the occurrences (38 out of 60) the phrase is preceded by the name YHWH, fortifying a conceptual link between “God of the fathers” and YHWH as entailing formulaic language or a stock expression in which the former stands for the latter.¹³⁵

Second, the Antichrist will not receive a proper burial due to the destruction of “your land” and “your people” (Isa 14:20). These designations suggest his intrinsic connection to the land of Israel and to the Jewish people in that the destruction in view in Isaiah 14 pertains to these entities. Third, the Antichrist is characterized as “the prince who is to come” (Dan 9:26) who will make a covenant with the Jewish people for one week (8:11–13; 9:27). In the midst of the week he suspends the offerings and proclaims himself to be god (Dan 11:36). It is unlikely that the Jewish people would accept a non-Jew as the Messiah and eschatological temple-builder, heightening the probability that the Antichrist is Jewish. Jesus may offer an oblique reference to this Jewish provenance when he affirms that although the nation of Israel had rejected him as Messiah, “if another (ἄλλος) comes in his own name, you will receive him” (John 5:43 [ESV]), although this text is not decisive.¹³⁶

¹³⁵Walvoord’s argument to the contrary that if YHWH were intended in Dan 11:37 the phrase would read “the Jehovah of his fathers” is a non-sequitur (*Daniel*, 273). Beyond its inelegance (i.e., YHWH is a personal name, not a title), his suggested phrase occurs nowhere in the OT. Likewise, Wood’s argument that the switch from plural to singular signals a polytheistic nuance in this phrase is not persuasive (*Daniel*, 306). Rather, Daniel utilizes a stock phrase, as argued above, and switches to the singular here to emphasize that the willful king will pay heed to no god save himself.

¹³⁶At times the semantic distinction between ἄλλος and ἕτερος is overplayed by those who argue that Jesus is affirming that the Jewish people would receive another Messiah of the same kind (i.e., Jewish) rather than another of a different kind (i.e., non-Jewish) (A. W. Pink, *The Antichrist* [1923; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988], 41). The terms were virtually synonymous in Hellenistic Greek (Robert W. Funk, *A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar of Hellenistic Greek*, 3rd ed. [Salem, OR: Westar Institute, 2013], 432–35). A few other arguments offered for the Jewish provenance of the Antichrist are also non-persuasive. First, Ezek 21:24–27 [MT 21:29–33] is interpreted as designating the Antichrist the “profane and wicked prince of Israel” (v. 25 [MT v. 30]) who is to be destroyed in final judgment. The context defines the day of his demise as “in the time of the iniquity of the end” (רַצְוֹן עֵץ הַיָּדָא (v. 25 [30]), possibly alluding to the eschatological Great Tribulation (Pink, *The Antichrist*, 41). The king referenced here, however, is likely Zedekiah and thus it is not clear that the Antichrist is in view (Charles Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 122). Second, the reference to “the death of the uncircumcised” for the prince of Tyre in Ezek 28:10 is interpreted as suggesting that the Antichrist will be put to death in a manner that contravenes the fact that he is Jewish (and is therefore circumcised) (Pink, *The Antichrist*, 41). The referent here, however, is likely the literal king of Tyre. According to Herodotus, the Phoenicians practiced circumcision, so the death depicted is idiomatic for a shameful death (Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 159–60).

The Identity of the Foolish, Illusory Shepherd as Jewish Antichrist

Zechariah's portrait of the false shepherd comports well with these other depictions of the Antichrist and adds greater nuance in several ways.¹³⁷ First, Zechariah emphasizes the Antichrist's Jewish origin. The wicked shepherd will be appointed "in the land" (בְּאֶרֶץ) and will abandon "the flock" (עֶזְרֵי הַצֹּאן), correlating with the emphasis on the land and people in Isa 14:20. When used metaphorically the term "flock" (צֹאן) refers almost exclusively in the OT to the people of Israel, particularly in the Psalms and prophets (Ps 78:52–53; 95:6–7; 100:3; Isa 63:11; Jer 13:18–20; 31:10; Ezek 34:2; Mic 2:12; Zech 9:16).¹³⁸ The shepherd's desertion of the flock may hint at an intrinsic obligation toward the Jewish people due perhaps to ethnic ties.

Second, Zechariah focuses on his military prowess, with YHWH invoking a woe oracle and curse upon his arm and right eye.¹³⁹ These curses amount to a destruction of both body parts, which are necessary components for effective combat. Soldiers depend on physical strength, clear visibility, and depth perception to wield the sword and shield. This curse is intended almost certainly to cripple him militarily, as elsewhere one's right eye (1 Sam 11:2) and arm (Ps 44:3; 89:13; 98:1; Isa 62:8) appear in contexts of warfare. Jeroboam's withered hand and denunciation by the nameless prophet in 1 Kgs 13:1–4 may foreshadow this curse as an act of judgment against an apostate leader ridded of power.

Third, Zechariah highlights his lack of knowledge of the true God by labeling him "foolish," a term that in biblical wisdom designates one who is morally and religiously corrupt, without knowledge of God. This spiritual nescience constitutes a type of folly amounting to "deliberate ignorance of the divine commandments"¹⁴⁰ as noted in our earlier discussion of the wisdom context of the shepherd portrayals.

Fourth, Zechariah accentuates his ruthless leadership style, as he pays no attention to the slaughtered, scattered, and injured sheep. The evil character of the shepherd is depicted by his neglect of four basic activities that constitute good shepherding: tending (פָּקֵד), seeking (בִּקֵּשׁ), healing (רָפָא), and providing sustenance (כֹּלֵל) to the flock (v. 16; cf. Ezek 34:2–4). He debilitates the healthy sheep by consuming them to enrich himself and to satiate his own ravenous appetites. Given these

¹³⁷Lorein, *The Antichrist Theme*, 38.

¹³⁸NIDOTTE, s.v. "צֹאן," by Victor P. Hamilton, 729–31.

¹³⁹The eye here is likely not a symbol for intelligence (*contra* Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 329) but by synecdoche with his arm suggestive of military and perhaps political prowess (Boda, *Zechariah*, 680; Foster, "Shepherds, Sticks, and Social Destabilization," 739).

¹⁴⁰Caquot, "Brèves remarques," 47 (author's translation).

features, Zechariah rounds out our understanding of the person and character of the Antichrist as an abusive shepherd originating from the Jewish people.

CONCLUSION

In this essay we have proposed that Zechariah 11 holds a key function in the literary structure of Zechariah 9–14. It serves there as the pivot of a literary chiasm emphasizing YHWH's wrath toward apostate leaders who reject his agent, the rightful shepherd, as well as his judgment of the nation through the tyrannical accession of the wicked shepherd. In tandem with this proposal we have argued for a Messianic reading of the shepherd sign-acts as portraying the future Messiah and pseudo-Messiah, the eschatological Antichrist, who is a shrewd, ruthless, and corrupt Jewish political and military leader. Zechariah 11 thus provides the center movement in the drama of the Messianic program and destiny of the nation Israel. In spite of Israel's infidelity and rejection of her Messiah, however, YHWH will prove faithful to his promises by granting eschatological salvation and glory to the nation (Zech 12:7). This divine redemption will evoke reverent joy: "The Ephraimites will become like warriors, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in the LORD" (Zech 10:7). Christians will share in this fulsome joy, as the apostle Paul emphasizes, when all Israel is saved (Rom 11:12, 15, 26).

