

YAHWEH SHEPHERD-KING AND THE RESTORATION OF JUSTICE:
METAPHORS OF SHEPHERDING AND THE CONSTELLATION OF KINGSHIP

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Introduction

Yahweh as shepherd-king is a central metaphor in Ezekiel 34, but little work has been done in developing a linguistic and literary analysis of the interweaving of metaphors surrounding Yahweh as shepherd-king in this passage and the implications of this interweaving for our understanding of the purpose of this passage and its relationship to the rest of the biblical corpus. As one examines the metaphor of “Shepherd” within the OT, one can trace a common theme which weaves shepherd with kingship and uses the metaphor of shepherd as king with metaphors of human kingship and divine kingship. At times these metaphors interact with elements of the divine warrior motif.¹ This theme asserts Yahweh’s role as shepherd king in light of the failing human shepherds. In many cases, this theme merges pastoral metaphors with military metaphors or with covenantal metaphors of repentance, judgement, and justice. These metaphors demonstrate the tension between human shepherd figures and the Divine shepherd Yahweh. In Ezekiel 34, these metaphors focus on the right judgement of Yahweh, the liberation of the people, and the re-establishment of Yahweh’s position as shepherd king and his restoration of his kingdom through a Davidic figure. This paper will trace the repeated interweaving of these metaphors in Ezekiel 34 by first introducing past scholarship, then setting out a literary-linguistic approach to metaphor, and finally applying this metaphor analysis to examine the nature of these metaphors and their distinctive purpose within the discourse of Ezekiel 34.

¹ While this paper only deals with Ezekiel 34 and the focus will not primarily be on divine warrior imagery, I would maintain that this interweaving of divine warrior imagery and shepherd imagery is also present in other passages in the OT including Jeremiah and Zechariah. Some scholars have examined the role of shepherds in these books including Kuyvenhoven in Jeremiah and Boda in Zechariah. See Kuyvenhoven, “Jeremiah 23:1-8: Shepherds in Diachronic Perspective” and Boda, “Reading Between the lines: Zechariah 11.4-16 in Its Literary Contexts.” More work could be done to shed further light on these uses of the metaphor particularly in light of recent metaphorical study.

Past Scholarship

Our discussion of past scholarship will encompass two main fields: the study of metaphor in the OT generally and the study of the shepherd metaphor in Ezekiel 34 specifically. First, metaphor is a common area of study in the OT. There have been several studies which have focussed on the metaphor of Yahweh as king and others on Yahweh as shepherd.² The strength of these studies has been an awareness of the need of more overarching analysis of metaphor within the OT, yet a weakness has often been the lack of interaction with the broad range of metaphor study. Only recently has the study of biblical metaphor in general incorporated modern metaphor theories developed in literary, philosophical, and linguistic fields. One such study is the work of D. H. Aaron who points to the importance of ambiguity in the function of metaphor, particularly within biblical metaphor.³ In the study of metaphor in Ezekiel, S. Tamar Kamionkowski has utilized modern metaphor theory to analyze Ez 16 and 23 and their presentation of gender.⁴ While Aaron and Kamionkowski represent a helpful move toward the integration of metaphor theories into biblical interpretation, there is much work to be done applying such theories more

² For example, Brettler provides a helpful study on the Israelite metaphor of “God is King” in Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding An Israelite Metaphor.*; Joyce focuses primarily on the description(s) of king and messiah in Ezekiel in Joyce, “King and Messiah in Ezekiel.”; Gan explores the metaphor of shepherd in the Hebrew Bible countering the typical assumptions of pastoral theology in their interpretation of this metaphor. See Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading*. In his two-part series, Thomas Golding also provides an examination of shepherding imagery in the Bible. Golding incorporates ancient documents from the ANE with a careful study of elements surrounding shepherding and sheep. See Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 1.”Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 2.”

³ Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities : Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*. Among others working on the use of modern metaphor theory in interpreting the Bible, other scholars include Hyukki Kim, “Daughter Zion: A Metaphor of Israel’s Ego”; Feyaerts, *The Bible Through Metaphor and translation: A Cognitive Semantic Perspective Religions and Discourse.*; Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium.* and other various works of van Hecke (see footnote 5).

⁴ Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel*.

broadly. As yet, no such study has been done on the shepherd-king metaphor in Ezekiel 34.⁵ This paper intends to provide such a study.

Instead of modern metaphor theory analysis, scholars have approached Ezekiel 34 in a variety of other ways.⁶ Some scholars have pointed to the socio-economic elements within the text, seeking this as the key for interpretation.⁷ While socio-economic elements no doubt play an essential role in the understanding of metaphor, one must also place careful boundaries on what one reads into a metaphor from these elements. This will be discussed in greater detail in the “Context of Culture” section below.

⁵ Though some work has been done around this area using cognitive metaphor theory, but not specifically in Ez 34 and not using my specific interdisciplinary approach. For example, Van Hecke who uses cognitive linguistic analysis to examine the metaphor of “the Lord is my shepherd” in Gen 48:15 (see Hecke, “Shepherds and linguists: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to the Metaphor “God Is Shepherd” in Gen 48,15 and Context.”); van Hecke has also provided cognitive analysis on the lexical structure of the Hebrew root r’h (רָחַם) and a discussion of the pastoral metaphor in light of the HB and ANE contexts. See Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium*. Hecke, “To Shepherd, Have Dealings and desire: On the Lexical Structure of the Hebrew Root R'h .”; and Hecke, “Pastoral Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.”. These two final works were not able to play a role this paper because the books were inaccessible at the time of writing. In the future, more integration with these articles could further support the argument presented in this work.

⁶ Articles on Ezekiel 34 include Adams, “Ezekiel 34:11-19.” Brownlee, “Ezekiel's Poetic Indictment of the Shepherds.” Batto, “The Covenant of Peace : A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif.” Gosse, “La Nouvelle Alliance Et Les Promesses D'avenir Se Râ©Fâ©Rant Â David Dans Les Livres De Jã©Rã©Mie, Ezã©Chiel Et Isaie.” Wiles, “Shepherds, Flock, and the Shepherd Text : Ezekiel 34:11-24.”

⁷ Mein is one such scholar and his work includes a helpful survey of other scholars who have included such elements in their work. See Mein, “Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34.”

Some Christian scholars have read Ezekiel 34 through the lens of John 10, finding the “good” shepherd in Ezekiel 34, though such a reading may be problematic.⁸ Others have sought to place Yahweh as shepherd-king in parallel to Sumerian titles of shepherd-king.⁹ As can be the case with those using a *Religionsgeschichte* approach, often scholars mistakenly argue that a parallel in another religious system provides the key to interpreting the passage. Yet a more careful metaphorical theory appreciates that seeing a parallel is not the same as *interpreting* this parallel. This problem is present in the work of Beth Tanner as she discusses the metaphor of Yahweh as King. Tanner asks the question whether Shepherd is “a title or a metaphor” for Yahweh, arguing that Shepherd is a title.¹⁰ Tanner seems to think that this distinction is important, but is it necessary to say that describing Yahweh as shepherd is only a title or only a metaphor as though titles could not also be metaphors? A more nuanced approach, with an awareness of the ubiquity of metaphor in all forms of speech including titles, suggests that while

⁸ Blenkinsopp and Cody are among those who add the concept of “good” to the shepherd in Ezekiel 34, though as Deeley points out, no such usage is present in Ezekiel 34 itself. See Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*. Cody, *Ezekiel, with An Excursus on Old Testament Priesthood*. Zimmerli points to the “nobility and dignity of the shepherd” which “reside in the fact that the shepherd works wholeheartedly for his sheep...John 10:11 expresses it: the Good Shepherd lays down his life of his sheep”. See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 214.

One might say that scholars like Mary Katherine Deeley attempt to read in the opposite direction. For Deeley this means approaching the use in John 10 by first evaluating the original use in Ezekiel 34 rather than the other way around. Deeley provides a critique of those who read John 10 back into their interpretation of Ez 34. See Deeley, “Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical texts. Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical Texts,” 255 fnt.8. In a similar vein, Manning's work includes a significant section of the use of Ezekiel 34 in John 10 as part of his overall argument of John's use of Ezekiel more generally and Kostenberger uses Ezekiel 34 as foundational to John 10 as well. See Manning, *Echoes of a prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in Literature of the Second Temple Period*. and Kostenberger, “Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor.” John Paul Heil argues that Ezekiel 34's shepherd and sheep metaphor provides the foundation for the “narrative strategy” of Matthew's gospel. See Heil, “Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew.” Baxter also sees Ezekiel 34 as foundational to Matthew, but specifically to Jesus' healing ministry in Matthew. See Baxter, “Healing and the “Son of David”: Matthew's Warrant.”

⁹ Though most scholars acknowledge this connection to the titles in Sumerian writings, they usually point to the works of Hallo and Seux who examine the royal Sumerian titles. Brettler has noted the importance of “shepherd” as one of the Israelite metaphors for God as king. See Hallo, *Early Mesopotamian Royal titles: A Philologic and Historical Analysis*, 141, 147-49. Seux, *Epithetes Royales Akkadiennes Et Sumeriennes*, 244-50. Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding An Israelite Metaphor*, 36.

¹⁰ See Tanner, “King Yahweh As the Good shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23 King Yahweh As the Good shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23,” 270.

describing Yahweh as a shepherd has precedent for overlapping with the title of king (Tanner's argument), yet both giving Yahweh the titles "king" and "shepherd" are metaphorical descriptions.¹¹

Metaphorical analysis has been so scarce that some scholars like Vawter and Hoppe have even gone as far as to describe the metaphor of shepherd as discontinuous in Ezekiel 34 by not including the sheep metaphor within the larger shepherd metaphor.¹² This paper will suggest a more nuanced view of the metaphor of shepherd king in Ezekiel by using an interdisciplinary metaphor theory described below.

Metaphor Theory

This paper will analyse the metaphors associated with shepherd in Ezekiel 34 using a linguistic/literary metaphor theory. This theory suggests that our understanding of biblical metaphor can be enhanced by combining elements of theories of metaphorical analysis in cognitive and systemic functional linguistics as well as literary analysis.¹³ Based originally on the interaction theory of Max Black,¹⁴ this metaphor theory incorporates the Conceptual Theory

¹¹ Tanner's work focuses primarily on Psalm 23, but her discussion of the metaphor of Yahweh as Shepherd-King is nonetheless applicable to our discussion especially as she analyzes Psalm 23 based on Ezekiel 34.

¹² In their commentary *A New Heart*, after affirming literary unity, Vawter and Hoppe suggest that Ezekiel 34 should be understood as an oracle "that condemns Judah's 'shepherds' (i.e., its political rulers) and then promises that in the future God will act as Judah's ruler and dispense with human kings who have prove not just ineffective but perverse (vv. 1-16)." They see this oracle as attached to three other units (vv. 17-22) which "abandons the shepherd metaphor and speaks of judgment that is coming to the flock itself"; (vv. 23-24) which "presents David as the shepherd of God's flock"; (vv. 25-31) which "abandons the figure of sheep and shepherd (except for v. 31) and speaks of an idyllic future for Israel." Vawter and Hoppe, *A New heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, 154.

There are serious problems with separating the shepherd metaphor from the sheep metaphor as Vawter and Hoppe have done. First, Vawter and Hoppe have utterly side-stepped their entire goal of literary unity and instead emphasized the disunity of the passage. Second, by not seeing the shepherd-sheep metaphor as a metaphorical complex, Vawter and Hoppe are forced to argue that the shepherd metaphor is "abandoned" in vv. 17-22 and 25-31. A more helpful understanding of the metaphorical complex of shepherd-sheep allows for a more unified approach to the shepherd metaphor as a whole.

¹³ This section represents a summary of my more detailed presentation of this metaphor theory and also represents a similar summary to my prior work for this course in my paper, "From Heavenly to Dust-Strewn Throne: Metaphor, Ambiguity, and the Royal Throne in Psalm 89". The purpose of repeating elements of this summary is to point to how this method is used with Ezekiel 34 in light of the various steps of the method. A full presentation of my interdisciplinary model of metaphor can be found in my work, "Metaphor Theory and the 'I AM' Passages in the Gospel of John".

¹⁴ Black, "More on Metaphor." Black, *Models and metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*.

of Metaphor of Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner and its use of metaphorical mapping¹⁵ with the systemic functional linguistics of M.A.K. Halliday among others in establishing context, co-text, register, prominence, markedness, and cohesion.¹⁶ It also addresses literary questions to the metaphor as it functions within its literary context. We now proceed with a step-by-step description of the application of this model.

The first step in this model is identifying the contextual factors which influence the social setting to this text. First, we will identify broadly the context of culture for Ezekiel, providing a brief assessment of the “extra-linguistic factors”¹⁷ of the cultural setting and features of the genre of prophetic literature.¹⁸ Second, we will identify the context of situation for Ezekiel 34, describing the immediate historical context and literary context for these passages.

The second step in this model is identifying the co-textual factors of the metaphorical expression within our passage. This will involve identifying metaphors at their lowest levels of discourse and then building up the rank scale. Each metaphor will be described in terms of target and source and their lexicogrammatical form will be identified. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus primarily on the description of Yahweh as shepherd-king in comparison to the

¹⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live by*.

Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*.

Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*.

¹⁶ This paper primarily follows the theories of Halliday in establishing context of situation and context of culture (see Halliday, *Language As Social semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.) as well as following Hasan and Halliday in their model for understanding cohesion. See Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*.

¹⁷ The context of culture “includes such extra-linguistic factors as setting, behavioural environment, language itself, including the category of genre, and extra-situational factors, often referred to as frames or scenarios.” (Porter, “Dialect and Register,” 198. In this discussion of “extra-situational factors,” Porter cites Duranti and Goodwin, *Rethinking Context: Language As An Interactive Phenomenon*.) The influence of the context of culture on a metaphor explains, for example, why certain types of metaphors work within one culture and not within another and why within one culture a metaphor may have certain constraints, not present in another cultural context. This statement is in response to Dr. Mark Boda’s intriguing question of why certain elements of the source is included in metaphor and other elements are out of bounds. Boda provided this helpful insight when I presented my paper on metaphor theory in its preliminary form to the Theological Research Seminar at McMaster Divinity College on October 28, 2008.

¹⁸ See Butler “Systemic Models: Unity, Diversity, and Change”, *Word* 40:1-35: 1989:(13-19) for the discussion of genre and extra-linguistic factors.

description of the human shepherd-kings. This study will look closely at the frequent use of the verb **רָעָה** in its various forms throughout the passage and the metaphors surrounding its use.

Moving from word group to clause, in the third step we will identify where on the spectrum of markedness,¹⁹ conventionality, frequency, and congruence the metaphors in our passage sit.²⁰ Having established the degree of markedness, the fourth step of this model is to look closely at the role of the metaphor in the cohesion of the discourse. We will determine whether the shepherd metaphor functions on its own or is connected to larger elements of cohesion such as clausal chains, semantic domains, etc. and note in what ways these cohesive ties link metaphor to the rest of the text.²¹ This discussion of cohesion and markedness will then help us interpret the role of metaphor in creating prominence within Ezekiel 34.

¹⁹ Battistella describes a series of criteria for diagnosing markedness. The first is “semantic indeterminateness of the unmarked term.” Second is the that “the unmarked category frequently serves as the prototype, or best example of an opposition.” Third, unmarkedness is “the greater freedom of distribution or use”. “The fourth criterion is “syncretization: the unmarked sometimes shows a larger number of subcategorical distinctions.” The fifth criterion is “formal simplicity.” Battistella, *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language*, 66. For further discussion on markedness, see Battistella, *The Logic of Markedness.*; Andrews, *Markedness theory: The Union of Asymmetry and Semiosis in Language*.

Andrews and Tobin, *Toward a Calculus of meaning: Studies in Markedness, Distinctive Features and Deixis*. Tomić, *Markedness in Synchrony and Diachrony.*; Eckman, Moravcsik and Wirth, *Markedness*.

²⁰ I suggest these issues are interrelated as demonstrated in my four metaphorical spectrums. Goatly provides five metaphorical clines that resemble some of the elements of the three metaphorical spectrums I describe here. My spectrum of unmarked to marked spectrum resembles Goatly’s marking to no marking cline, and my congruent to incongruent spectrum is similar to the approximate similarity to distant similarity and the non-contradictory to contradictoriness clines. I have eliminated the cline of explicitness as it is difficult to determine the level of explicitness in ancient texts *a priori* and thus is not helpful for the first level of interpretation. See Goatly, *The Language of Metaphors*, 252-253. I have also added the notion of a spectrum of frequency which I believe influences the conventionality of metaphor substantially as well as its markedness.

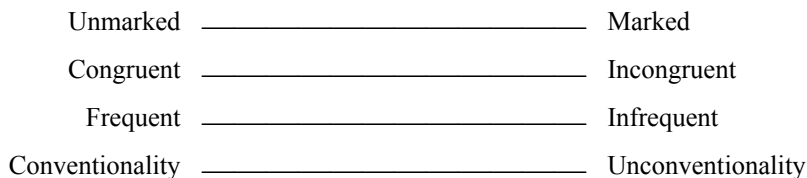


Figure 1. Four metaphorical spectrums

²¹ This paper follows Hasan and Halliday in their model for understanding cohesion. See Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*.

As a fifth step, this prominence in discourse will then be connected to the metaphorical coherence of Lakoff and Johnson's model by analysing the various types of metaphors used for a single concept and their interrelationship. This will involve the study of metaphorical entailment and the highlight and hiddenness of certain aspects of the metaphorical components and metaphorical blends to identify the new factors that arise from the interaction of source and target. This element will be particularly important for our analysis of the interweaving of the various metaphors surrounding kingship in our passage.

Once the prominence of metaphor and the context of the metaphor in the discourses are established, we will look at how this context, the metaphorical coherence, cohesion, and prominence within the discourse provide clues to the meaning of the metaphor itself by applying literary analysis. What complexities are added to both target and source due to larger context? What are the goals of the speaker? How might different hearers/readers understand the metaphor based on these larger contextual clues? Narrative critical analysis and its relation to metaphorical interpretation here becomes essential to the literary element of metaphorical interpretation. Other aspects of literary theory will no doubt play a contributing role including rhetorical strategies, poetics, and the relationship between ideology, culture, and metaphor—an issue present in linguistics and philosophical accounts as well as literary ones. An exploration of these ideas may in turn lead to a deepening of theological understanding of the use of metaphor in our passage.

The Context of Ezekiel 34

Context of Culture

As stated above, our analysis will begin by first identifying the extra-linguistic factors of culture that create the context for these passages. In the case of Ezekiel 34, the broader cultural

element of animal husbandry and the genre of Ezekiel 34 as a prophetic oracle are important factors in the context of culture.

Animal Husbandry and Ezekiel 34

One important element in establishing the context of culture in Ezekiel 34 is an awareness of the practices of animal husbandry in the ancient Near East and its effect on shepherd-king metaphor. On the one hand, scholars like Andrew Mein have looked to animal husbandry as the source for the description of Yahweh as shepherd in Ezekiel 34. Mein's article is helpful for establishing the probable "real life" elements of animal husbandry in the world of the ancient Near East and makes a good point when he states: "Therefore, taking seriously the recognition that the shepherds are hirelings changes our understanding of the metaphor slightly but significantly, since their care for the flock is not for its own sake but for the sake of its owner YHWH."²² Mein provides helpful insight into the owner/hireling relationship between the owner of sheep and his shepherds and the use of the language of "wool", "milk"²³, slaughter, and the issue of the scattering of the sheep.²⁴ The weakness of Mein's approach is his lack of understanding in the complexity of metaphor.²⁵ Mein cites Brettler's work on metaphor and adapts an element of Black's theories through this means,²⁶ but Mein does not use Black himself

²² Mein, "Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34," 502.

²³ This involves interpreting כֶּחָלָב in v. 3 as חֵלֶב "milk or cheese" rather than שֶׁחָלָב "fat". TNIV and NIV translate this word as "curds"; in a similar vein The Message, CEV, and NLT translate the word "milk"; NCV translates this word "milk curds". Many other translations (including NET, KJV, ASV, NASB, ESV, RSV, NRSV) translate this word as "fat".

²⁴ Mein, "Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34," 495-499.

²⁵ Thus I do not agree with his argument in the full. For example, why is it necessary to argue that for Yahweh to be concerned with his name and for him to assert his divine power is to necessarily mean that he does not also have a concern for his flock? It is more likely that both ideas are present here: Yahweh's desire to be rightly represented by his leaders and Yahweh's desire for his flock to be rightly treated for their continuing health and well-being.

²⁶ Mein uses the work of Marc Brettler. See Brettler, "The Metaphorical Mapping of God in the Hebrew Bible," in Bisschops and Francis, *Metaphor, Canon and Community: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Approaches Religions and Discourse*, 219-32.

as his source. This causes Mein to miss an important aspect of Black's approach. Black correctly acknowledges that metaphor includes elements of both the target and the source, but he also correctly acknowledges that it hides elements of both target and source.²⁷ In other words, one cannot assume that because shepherd is used as a metaphor for God that *all* the aspects of a shepherd would be understood as applicable to God. Though Mein acknowledges that "not all of the [common-place associations] are in play in any one example of the metaphor,"²⁸ Mein appears to apply all of the common-place associations to Ezekiel 34, causing Mein to see Yahweh's purpose as self-motivated rather than motivated by a care for his sheep. But this conclusion is by no means the only possible way of understanding Yahweh's motivation based on a metaphor theory following Black.

Van Hette provides a helpful correction to this analysis of the metaphor of Yahweh as shepherd. As Van Hecke explains,

"a conceptual metaphor may now be defined as the interaction between two conceptual domains, an interaction in which one conceptual domain is restructured on the basis of what we know about another conceptual domain. In our metaphor, 'the Lord is my shepherd' the domain of RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND MEN structured on the basis of the domain of PASTORALISM".

Van Hecke explores this metaphor by applying it specifically to Genesis 48:15. One helpful insight of Van Hecke is his discussion of the generic level of the domain of PASTORALISM compared to the generic structure of the domain of RELATIONS BETWEEN GOD AND MEN. He states,

we will for example import the generic relation AGENT TAKES CARE OF PATIENT into the metaphor, but not generic relation AGENT HAS RIGHT TO KILL PATIENT, that corresponds to our more specific knowledge about

²⁷ See Black, "More on Metaphor." Black, *Models and metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*.

²⁸ Mein, "Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34," 496.

pastoralism that shepherds usually kill off the young male animals that are not needed for the procreation of the flock. This reason is that the first generic relation does not violate the generic structure of what we think to know about God, whereas the second does.²⁹

In other words, Van Hecke is pointing out that establishing the socio-economic parameters of the source domain of shepherding (as Mein does in his work) does not guarantee a one-to-one relationship with the target domain of Yahweh. Mein includes *all* the generic relations of AGENT to PATIENT and creates a situation where Yahweh relates to his people *exactly* as a shepherd/owner would relate to his sheep, but this exact equivalency never exists in any metaphor. Thus while elements of the context of the culture are essential to establishing the metaphorical context of Ezekiel 34. Our analysis must consider what is included and what is not included in our metaphor from this larger context.

The Prophetic Metaphorical Oracle in Ezekiel 34

An important extra-linguistic factor of the culture of context for Ezekiel 34 is the genre of this passage as within prophetic literature broadly and specifically as a metaphorical oracle. Broadly speaking, one of the characteristics of the genre of prophetic literature are its themes. First, in prophetic literature, the prophet acts as God's representative and thus may call to task other representatives including political figures such as kings.³⁰ In the case of Ezekiel this includes oracles against foreign nations including Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, as well as

²⁹ Hecke, "Shepherds and linguists: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to the Metaphor "God Is Shepherd" in Gen 48,15 and Context," 482.

³⁰ Petersen, *The Prophetic literature: An Introduction*, 3. Miller provides an insightful analysis of the importance of the prophetic role in relation to kingship: "The kingship of Yahweh seems at times to have served both to undergird the existing sociopolitical structure and to challenge its manifestations...the functionality of the divine rule could be destabilizing and critical. This is found particularly in the figure of the prophet as the agent of the divine rule who had responsibility for designating the one chosen by Yahweh as ruler as well as pronouncing 'judgement on the king, the forfeit of kingship for bread of law or covenant, as well as the death of the king for like reasons.' In like manner, the national shrine was not only guaranteed by also threatened by Yahweh's rule, as demonstrated by the oracles of Amos in the North and those of Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in the South. Furthermore, the rule of Yahweh on Zion and through Yahweh's anointed became one of the primary carriers in Israel's religion of a vision of social and political harmony, peace, and justice." See Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 11.

longer oracles against Tyre (ch. 26-28) and Egypt (ch. 29-32). Many have noted after the fall of Jerusalem in Ch. 33 the shift from these oracles of judgement to a tone of hope in Ezekiel, particularly in Ez. 34. Yet, one must not miss that Ezekiel 34 also represents an indictment against the shepherd-kings ruling over Israel. Thus, while hope is present, Ezekiel remains the prophetic voice against those who choose to turn away from Yahweh.

The category of “metaphorical oracle” in Ezekiel is explored at length by Karin Schöpflin.³¹ Schöpflin argues that the dominant elements in metaphorical oracles in Ezekiel 14-33 are the “fire and heat representing divine anger and judgement” in Ez 14, 21:2-4, 22:17-22, and 24:3b-14, and the metaphor “of the spouse unfaithful to her husband as a retrospective of Jerusalem’s sinning”. Schöpflin argues that the metaphor of the shepherd and his flock in Ezekiel 34 stands in stark contrast to these oracles which announce disaster and instead offers hope for restoration; she asserts that the composition of these metaphorical oracles are deliberate and almost systematic.³² Thus, both the broader structural factors of Ezekiel 34 and its specific form as a metaphorical oracle point to a shift in its message from the previous judgment in Ezekiel 1-33.

Context of Situation

This assessment of Ezekiel 34 as prophetic metaphorical oracle coheres well with the factors influencing the context of situation for Ezekiel 34. The specific historical setting and the specific literary setting of Ezekiel 34 play important roles in the interpretation of the metaphors within the passage by providing a contextual frame for interpretation.

³¹ Schöpflin, “The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles Within the Book of Ezekiel.”

³² Schöpflin, “The Composition of Metaphorical Oracles Within the Book of Ezekiel,” 101, 113.

Specific Historical Setting

Argument surrounding the unity and dating of Ezekiel have developed in three different waves across modern scholarship moving from unity to disunity to unity again.³³ Most recently, scholars like Moshe Greenberg and S. Tamar Kamionkowski, who follows Greenberg, have focused on the literary unity of the text. This paper follows Kamionkowski in her assertion that “the prophet Ezekiel or a similar person represented by the character Ezekiel lived and prophesied during the first part of the Babylonian Exile. Thus the writings offer us a first-hand account of the tragedies and chaos of the late sixth century BCE” and that the majority of the passages “are attributable to Ezekiel and that the book has internal coherence and logic.”³⁴

Thus to set this passage historically, we first acknowledge the place of Ezekiel the prophet generally. Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah who was exiled to Babylon in the first deportation in 598 B.C.. “He prophesied words of judgement to his fellow exiles, and then after the final fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., began to prophecy hope for the future. Ezekiel therefore nicely fulfills the mandate to “comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable”³⁵. Ezekiel 34 follows immediately after the description of the fall of Jerusalem in Ch. 33:21.³⁶ Thus Ezekiel 34 marks an important shift of historical context within the book of Ezekiel itself and in the lives of the people of Israel. Some have argued that Ez 34 also is key to the rise of apocalyptic literature.³⁷ It is important for us to read the promise of Yahweh’s reestablishment of

³³ This is of course a broad generalization. For a more detailed survey of these trends in Ezekiel dating and unity, see Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel*, 10.

³⁴ Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel*, 10, 14.

³⁵ Holladay, *Long Ago God spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*, 193.

³⁶ Ez 33:21 “In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, ‘The city has fallen!’”

³⁷ Holladay, *Long Ago God spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*, 193.

his role as shepherd and his promise of a Davidic prince-shepherd figure in light of this specific historical setting and its implications.³⁸

Specific Literary Setting

The literary setting of Ezekiel 34 is equally important to our interpretation of the metaphor of shepherd king. First, one must address the question of literary dependence in relation to Psalm 23 and Jeremiah 23. It is the consensus of many scholars that Ezekiel's metaphor of the shepherd builds on a similar metaphor in Jeremiah 23;³⁹ less clear, however, is the relationship between Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34.⁴⁰ It is perhaps equally helpful to note the common usage of shepherd as leaders in ancient Near Eastern literature and in other parts of the biblical canon.⁴¹

The immediate literary context of Ezekiel 34 is in continuity with the response in Ezekiel 33 to the destruction of Jerusalem. As Seitz notes, "The Book of Ezekiel is remarkably well-organized according to a system of dates, correlated with the exile of Jehoiachin."⁴² Besides the structure of dating, the text is also divided by a relatively consistent structure of phrases, "then the Word of the Lord came to me"⁴³ indicating the beginning of an oracle and "declares the

³⁸ Christopher Seitz provides an interesting discussion on the use of "prince" instead of "king" in Ezekiel in light of the exilic perspective and the relationship between Ezekiel and Jeremiah. See Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, 121-63.

³⁹ Scholars that maintain some level of dependence include Mein, "Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34," 499.; Block, *Ezekiel*, 275-77; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 709.; contra Brownlee, "Ezekiel's Poetic Indictment of the Shepherds."

⁴⁰ This issue is related to the dating of Psalm 23. Some scholars attempt to avoid the issue by merely addressing parallels in metaphor. For example, Tanner does not deal with the dating of Psalm 23 directly, but appears to believe that Psalm 23 depends on Ezekiel and Jeremiah and not vice versa (though her discussion of parallels between texts is quite murky). See Tanner, "King Yahweh As the Good shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23 King Yahweh As the Good shepherd: Taking Another Look at the Image of God in Psalm 23."

⁴¹ Both Golding and Gan have recently provided such studies. See Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 1." Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 2." Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading*.

⁴² Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, 121. Seitz provides a helpful list of the main works on the chronology of Ezekiel in footnote 42.

⁴³ וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

Sovereign Lord”⁴⁴ indicating the end of an oracle.⁴⁵ Although Ez 34:1 begins an oracle, it is also part of the larger structure connected to Ez 33, beginning at the date of the fall of Jerusalem. This is indicated by the lack of closing formula in Ez 33 and by several elements of linguistic continuity that will be examined below.

There appears to be a significant parallel between the language of Ezek 33:27 and Ezekiel 34:8. The Lord promises that those who refuse to turn and repent (33:10-11) will be “devoured by wild animals” as surely as the Lord lives, and they will be destroyed by the sword (33:27). This language is then used to describe what the shepherds have allowed to happen to the sheep. They have become food for wild animals and the plunder of war (Ezekiel 34:8).

Ezekiel 33:27 further depends on its language of life and death from the preceding verses 11-16.⁴⁶ In Ch. 33, the phrase “as surely as I live” (אֲנִי־חַיִּים) is used twice with LORD GOD (אֲנִי־יְהוָה). In v. 11, Yahweh asks the people to repent, and, in v. 27, Yahweh promises what will occur if they do not repent. This same phrase “as surely as I live” also appears in 34:8 (again with LORD GOD) which suggests that now we see the results of what has happened because they did not repent, but this is also apparently because of the bad actions of the shepherds (i.e., the lack of shepherding). This makes one wonder what the role of obedience to Yahweh of the shepherds is here. It appears that the shepherds are required not only be directly obedient in their own actions, but also encourage the people to also be obedient to Yahweh. Charting the

⁴⁴ אֲנִי־יְהוָה : פַּ. Often found with either a ד or a פ.

⁴⁵ Block describes v. 1 as a “word-event formula” and describes vv. 30-31 as a “modified version of the recognition formula”. Block also notes the complexity of the content and “formal rhetorical signals”. See Block, *Ezekiel*, 273.

⁴⁶ Deeley notes that Yahweh’s judgement against the flock “echoes one of the themes of 33:10-19, that each person is answerable for his or her actions.” Deeley, “Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical texts. Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical Texts,” 255.

relationship between Ez 33 and 34 in this way questions a simple assertion that Ez 34 has moved purely to a vision of hope for the future. Instead, this paper suggests that Ezekiel 34 is neither a picture purely of hope or of judgment,⁴⁷ nor is it purely a picture of Yahweh's selflessness and care as a shepherd or a picture of Yahweh as merely a distant sheep-owner upset about the economic predicament his hireling shepherds have created. Instead, Ezekiel 34 provides a more complex picture of the character and actions of Yahweh in relationship to his people in light of the exile through the use of metaphor. We will trace the depiction of this complex metaphor as we analyze the co-text of Ezekiel 34.

Co-Text of Ezekiel 34

Having established the contextual factors which influence Ezekiel 34 including both extra-situational and extra-linguistic factors, we now turn to the linguistic factors by studying the co-textual elements of Ezekiel 34. This begins with an identification of the main elements of the metaphor throughout the discourse, defining the range of the metaphor and its outer lying companion metaphors.

Identifying the Metaphorical Range

To discuss the range of the metaphor "Yahweh is shepherd-king" in Ezekiel 34, one must first identify the two metaphors present in this metaphor. First, in one sense "Yahweh is king"

⁴⁷ This position is *contra* Vawter and Hoppe who argue that Ezekiel 34:1-16 "What started out as an oracle of judgement ends as an oracle of salvation that speaks directly about Judah's future. That prophet no longer refers to Judah's past and the judgement that it generated. The prophet deals with Judah's future and the salvation that the exiles will experience" Vawter and Hoppe, *A New heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, 155.

and “Yahweh is shepherd” function as their own metaphors throughout the Old Testament.⁴⁸ Second, one cannot assume that once we identify the implications of “Yahweh is king” and “Yahweh is shepherd” that we have fully explicated the entire metaphor particularly as “shepherd is king”. Van Hecke provides insight into the help that Conceptual Blending gives in his discussion of “God as shepherd” in Hosea.⁴⁹ Van Hecke correctly points out that the strength of a Conceptual Blending approach is its awareness that when two elements in a metaphor are combined they create a new complex. Further Conceptual Blending leaves room for the interfacing of multiple metaphors. In the case of Ezekiel 34, several metaphors are part of a larger metaphorical complex whose development will be traced throughout the passage.

1. Judging the Shepherds and the Reassertion of Yahweh’s Position as Shepherd (v. 1-16):⁵⁰

As the chapter opens, Yahweh tells Ezekiel to speak to the “shepherds of Israel” concerning the treatment of “the sheep”. Verses 1-3 provide a detailed indictment against these “shepherds”, describing their treatment of the “sheep”. Verses 4-5 shift the focus to the resultant “scattering of the sheep,” because they have no “shepherd”. In the verses that follow, the case against the shepherds is described in greater detail focusing on the selfish nature of the shepherds (vv. 6-9). Thus it is important to note that the reader’s initial introduction to the metaphors of

⁴⁸ As noted above, work has been done on the “Yahweh is king” metaphor by Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding An Israelite Metaphor*. and a good deal of work has been done on the metaphor of shepherd, see Gan, *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading*. Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 1.”Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible. Part 2.”Hecke, “Shepherds and linguists: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to the Metaphor "God Is Shepherd" in Gen 48,15 and Context.”Hecke, “To Shepherd, Have Dealings and desire: On the Lexical Structure of the Hebrew Root R'h .”Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium*.Hecke, “Pastoral Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.”

⁴⁹ Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium*.

⁵⁰ Some have seen these verses as the primary oracle with three attachments, though there is no ending formula at this point. See Vawter and Hoppe, *A New heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, 154. I make a division here for narrative reasons. Whereas v. 1-16 speaks directly to the shepherds and speaks of the sheep in the 3rd person, v. 17 marks a shift to the flock as the recipients of the message of future judgement.

“shepherd as king” and “the people of Israel as sheep” is in the context of bad shepherds mistreating the sheep. In this way, the passage introduces us initially to a “human king as shepherd” metaphor before vv. 11-12 shifts to Yahweh taking the title of “shepherd” for himself. Verse 10 marks an important bridge as it describes the removal of the entrusting of the sheep to the shepherds and the subsequent transfer to Yahweh. As the power passes back into Yahweh’s hand directly, he also is conferred with the same metaphorical title as the bad rulers: Yahweh becomes shepherd in their stead. In metaphorical terms then, we have multiple metaphors within the same metaphorical range: the human kings of Israel as shepherds, the people of Israel as sheep, and Yahweh as shepherd king. All of these metaphors fall into the basic shepherd-sheep metaphorical structure, but one should not miss the difference between Yahweh as shepherd king versus the human kings as shepherds. Yahweh’s kingship is a metaphor in itself which functions alongside his metaphorical role as shepherd.

Verses 11-16 moves away from the indictment of the shepherds to a profession by Yahweh of his actions towards his “sheep”. Verse 12 provides the first direct simile between Yahweh and a shepherd. Yahweh describes his actions towards “his sheep” (צֹאֲנָיו) as “like the care of a shepherd” (כְּבִקְרֵת רֹעֶה). It is helpful to compare the actions of the shepherds in vv. 2-4 to the actions of Yahweh in vv. 11-16. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the misdeeds of the

Figure 2. Chiastic structure of the actions of the bad shepherds and Yahweh's actions

	<i>Actions of the Shepherds</i>		<i>Actions of Yahweh</i>
v. 2-3	you did not shepherd the sheep (i.e. they cared for themselves instead of the sheep and did not shepherd justly)	v. 12	rescue them from all the scattered places
v. 4a	you did not strength the weak or bind the injured	v. 13	bring them out of the nations into their own land
v. 4b	you did not bring back the strays or search for the lost	v. 14a	pasture them in mountain heights of Israel, in ravines,
v. 4c	You have ruled them harshly and brutally	v. 14b	feed them in rich pasture
v. 5	They were scattered because there was no shepherd and became foot for all the wild animals	v. 15	shepherd/tend to them, make them lie down
v. 6a	My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill.	v. 16a	search for the lost and bring back the strays.
v.6b	They were scattered over the whole earth	v. 16b	bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, destroy the sleek and strong
v. 6c	and no one searched for them or looked for them	v. 16c	shepherd the flock with justice.

shepherds are the inversion of the righteous deeds of Yahweh. The writer of Ezekiel has demonstrated this inversion by creating a chiasm between vv. 2-6 and vv. 12-16. This chiasm surrounds vv. 7-11, the section in which Yahweh re-exerts his role as shepherd, announcing judgment against the shepherds. The actions within this chiasm provide a series of metaphorical

descriptions demonstrating further continuity and discontinuity between the target domain “king”/ “Yahweh” and the source domain “shepherd”.⁵¹

2. Judgement of the Sheep (vv. 17-22)

Verse 17 marks a narrative shift which focuses on Yahweh as shepherd speaking directly to his sheep and judging them. Whereas vv. 1-16 speaks directly to the shepherds and speaks of the sheep in the 3rd person, vv. 17-21 speaks to the sheep in the 2nd person frequently. In vv. 1-16, the actions of the bad shepherds and Yahweh as shepherd help characterize the range of the “king as shepherd” metaphor, in vv. 17-22, the actions of the sheep provide further insight into the “people as sheep” metaphor that exists alongside the “king as shepherd” metaphor. These sheep include those who are faithful to Yahweh and those who are not. This unfaithfulness is depicted through the metaphorical “trampling” and “muddying with feet” of the pasture and water (v.18-19), and the “shoving with flanks and shoulders” and “goring with horns” of the weaker “sheep” among them (v. 21). In fact, it is not only the unreliable and cruel shepherds that have caused the sheep to be scattered, but v. 21 informs the reader that the sheep themselves have contributed to their own scattering and that this is the reason that Yahweh is judging the people. It appears that as Ezekiel 33:20 states, these fat sheep, like the shepherds fat on slaughtered sheep, will be judged according to their ways.⁵² Verses 20 and 22 provide a linguistic frame for the metaphorical description of the actions of the sheep by the repeated language of “I will judge between sheep and sheep”.⁵³ Thus while Ezekiel 34 promises hope for the faithful

⁵¹ Van Hecke provides a helpful discussion of the continuity and discontinuity of the shepherd metaphor to Yahweh. See Hecke, “Pastoral Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.” Hecke, “Shepherds and linguists: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to the Metaphor "God Is Shepherd" in Gen 48,15 and Context.”

⁵² Deeley, “Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical texts. Ezekiel's Shepherd and John's Jesus : A Case Study in the Appropriation of Biblical Texts,” 255.

⁵³ Verse 22 (וְשִׁפְטֵתִי בֵּין שֹׂהַ לְשֹׂהַ :) appears to be a summary of the more detailed phrase in v. 20

(אֲנִי וְשִׁפְטֵתִי בֵּין-שֹׂהַ בְּרִיָּהּ וּבֵין שֹׂהַ רְזוּהַ :)

sheep, the message of judgement remains part of the picture for the unfaithful and unjust among both sheep and shepherds and the exile is seen as the fault of both sheep and shepherds as well.⁵⁴

3. One Shepherd David the Prince (vv. 23-24)

Within the metaphorical range of shepherd we have already identified the negative depiction of human kings as shepherds and the positive depiction of Yahweh as shepherd king, to these vv. 23-24 adds the metaphor of a positive human king who will be the “one shepherd” over the people, namely David, the servant. On the one hand, this reference to Davidic kingship has caused some scholars to point to the eschatological or messianic implications of Ez 34 as a whole.⁵⁵ On the other hand, some scholars point to the impact of the Deuteronomic History on Ezekiel 34.⁵⁶ Along these lines, Paul House argues that metaphor of “a Davidic ruler as shepherd” (present in Jeremiah 23:1-8 and Ezek 34) demonstrates the view that these books (as well as Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve) “all look to the Davidic dynasty for an ideal king to solve the nation’s sin problem.”⁵⁷ The Davidic king functions as the human representative for Yahweh. This may explain the importance of the word “one” in describing David as shepherd

⁵⁴ As Paul House notes in reference to Ezekiel, “for renewal and perfect peace to emerge, however, the wicked must be removed from the earth, which entails the judgment for all who reject God’s word.” See House, *Old Testament Theology / Paul R. House*, 400. On a form critical level many scholars have argued that vv. 2-10 represent an independent woe oracle while the following section (vv. 11-22) point to Yahweh’s “salvific activity with his flock”. Finally vv. 23-31, Block suggests, “the focus shifts to positively reconstructing the shalom that Yahweh has intended from the beginning.” See Block, *Ezekiel*, 274.

⁵⁵ For example, Holladay argues that Ezekiel 34 marks the rise in the apocalyptic. See Holladay, *Long Ago God spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*, 193. Block speaks of the eschatological hope of Ezekiel as “beyond a new exodus and a renewal of Yahweh’s covenant with his people; it incorporates all the other promises on which the Israelites had based their security...” this includes “Yahweh’s covenant with David”. Block, *Ezekiel*, 416. As noted above many scholars read elements of the Messianic Good Shepherd of John 10 into Ez 34, whether such reading is warranted.

⁵⁶ Ackroyd, for example, points to the obvious influence of the D material, but also suggests that Ezekiel moves beyond “the tendency [in D] to moral exhortation”. See Ackroyd, *Exile and restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.*, 109.

⁵⁷ House, *Old Testament Theology / Paul R. House*, 242.

and the use of “prince” (נְשִׂיָּא) instead of king for David.⁵⁸ House further asserts that “Ezekiel 34:20-24 places the Davidic heir squarely in the center of a coming spiritual renewal of the people of God.”⁵⁹ This Davidic heir is described clearly in the metaphor of shepherd. In fact, v. 23 is replete with the language of shepherd.⁶⁰ One may see v. 24 as the restatement of the figurative statement in v. 23.

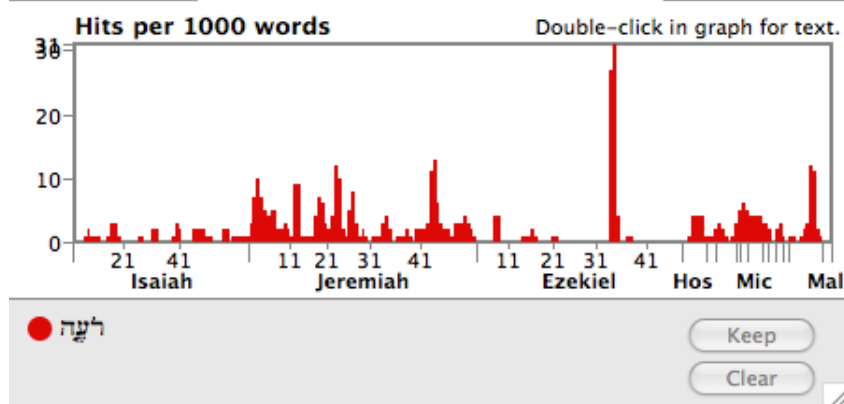
4. The Covenant of Peace and the Hope of Restoration (vv. 25-31)

Though some have deemed the final passage an abandonment of the shepherd and sheep motif,⁶¹ these verses contain more than simply the reference to the sheep metaphor in v. 31. Moreover, upon close inspection, one can find several resonances of the sheep-shepherd metaphor still ruminating. One example is to repeated descriptions of the riding of wild beasts from the land (v. 25, 28). While fear of wild animal attack was no doubt a real threat during this time, this language also picks up the language in v. 5 and v. 8 of the sheep who are food for the wild animals. In a similar vein, the language of “plunder” in v. 28 recalls v. 8. In both cases, it

⁵⁸ As BDB explains, the term (נְשִׂיָּא) may be used generally for a human ruler over against God, but in Ezekiel this term is repeatedly used in various contexts: of Zedekiah, the chief men of Judah, the future Davidic king, and the foreign princes. Seitz provides a helpful explanation of Ezekiel’s use of this term. See Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah*, 121-63.

⁵⁹ House, *Old Testament Theology* / Paul R. House, 400.

⁶⁰ The spike in Ezekiel represents a noticeable increase over other prophetic literature and v. 23 represents a tall



spike within Ezekiel itself.

⁶¹ Vawter and Hoppe, *A New heart: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, 154.

appears that what has been used metaphorically previously in the passage is now being used in a non-figurative way, but no doubt the resonance between the two usages was intended, particularly in light of v. 31.

Markedness

In setting up the range of metaphor, we have already identified many of the key literary and linguistic elements joining the metaphors in the passage, based on this analysis we will look more closely at their level of markedness. The metaphor of positive shepherd figures is more rare in the OT. Within the ANE this is a common metaphor for kingship, but within the OT frequently this is negative kingship (bad shepherds), thus one might say that overall the frequency of the metaphor of king as shepherd and even Yahweh as shepherd is closer to the frequent side of the scale, but the positive attribution of the shepherd both creates greater incongruity and greater markedness because of its unconventionality. Van Hecke's work moves in this direction describing the metaphor of Yahweh as shepherd as contributing to an "anti-metaphor." Van Hecke states that ancient authors at times "questioned and rejected the validity of the metaphor if their historical or socio-political context urged them to do so."⁶² By adjusting the assumptions inherent in the "God as shepherd-king" metaphor, the use of the metaphor can become marked because it allows "Yahweh as shepherd" to correct "human leaders as shepherds".⁶³

Cohesion

Thus the metaphor of Yahweh as shepherd-king includes elements of the metaphor "human kings as shepherds" and leaves other elements out. This interweaving of the human and divine aspects of the "shepherd as king" metaphor is joined together in Ezekiel 34 through the

⁶² Hecke, "Pastoral Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible and in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," 209.

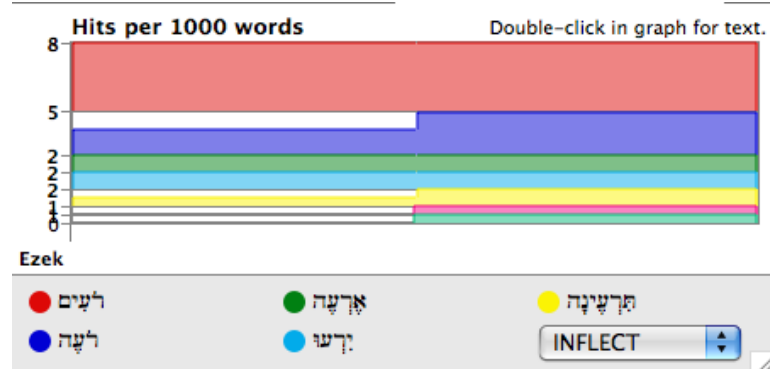
⁶³ Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding An Israelite Metaphor*, 37.

careful use of cohesive elements. In this section, we will highlight some of these key cohesive elements as they relate to the metaphor in Ez 34. First, a common means of cohesion is the frequent repetition of words within similar semantic domains.⁶⁴ Some refer to this as “imagery” or “theme”, but whatever term is used, the concept remains the same. In Ez 34, repetition of the root רָעָה in various grammatical forms dominates the discourse.⁶⁵ Alongside this word are other words within the same pastoral domain. These include: sheep, pasture, goat, lamb, and grazing. Further as noted above the actions of the shepherds of tending the sheep through caring for their injuries, seeking the lost sheep, feeding the sheep, etc., while not in the same semantic domain, still pertain to pastoral actions in “real life”.

In addition to the use of overlapping semantic domains, the author of Ezekiel uses connectives to create cohesion between the various sections of the passage and thus between elements of the metaphors themselves. Block comments on the rhetorical complexity of this

⁶⁴ Cohesion follows logically from an understanding of the linearization of the text, that is, the choice of the author to place one word before another in a particular order. Halliday provides four ways in which cohesion is created in English: reference, ellipsis and substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Porter argues that within Greek four similar factors contribute to the cohesion of a text. These factors are person reference, verbal aspect, connectives, information structure. Semantic domain may be related to information structure. See Westfall, *A Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews: The Relationship Between Form and Meaning*, 29.; Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 287-313.; Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*. Very little work has been done on determining answers to the same questions in poetry and prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible.

⁶⁵ The chart below shows the various lexical forms used in Ezekiel 34 and their frequency.



linguistic patterning.⁶⁶ One example of these connectives is the use of לְכִי־נָ in v. 7, 9, 20. In v. 7, לְכִי־נָ provides a conjunctive “therefore” connecting v. 7 to the preceding section (vv. 1-6); in a similar fashion לְכִי־נָ joins v. 9 to v. 7-8 and via the connection with v. 7 to vv. 1-6 as well. In v. 20, לְכִי־נָ also connects this passage to v. 17-19. In each case these uses of לְכִי־נָ are directed at the shepherds (as in vv. 7 and 9) or the sheep (v. 20). Thus the metaphor acts as part of the cohesive movement with these connectives.

Another element of cohesion is the inversion of word order. This can also contribute to the markedness of a particular section. Ezekiel 34 provides several examples of direct object fronting. Direct object fronting occurs when a direct object (in this case with its direct object marker) is placed at the front of a sentence. This occurs frequently in poetry and occasionally in prophetic literature, but no doubt there is a purpose to such inversion of the normal Hebrew word order.⁶⁷ In Ezekiel 34, direct object fronting occurs in v. 3, 4, and 16. In verses 3-4, the use of direct object fronting foregrounds the victim of the cruel shepherds’ actions, connecting the direct objects to the reference to “the flock” at the end of v. 2. As discussed above, v. 16 is an essential part of the chiasmic structure of Ezekiel 34’s human to divine shepherd inversion. Verse 16 maintains the direct object fronting of its inverted parallel v. 4. This may be to make the parallels between v. 4 and v. 16 more clearly connected and may also serve to join v. 16 to the “my sheep” of v. 15. Again, this element of direct object fronting is directly connected to the cohesion not only of the passage, but the metaphor as well.

⁶⁶ See Block, *Ezekiel*, 273.

⁶⁷ This would be an interesting place for expanded study in terms of the importance of word order for prominence and cohesion in Biblical Hebrew poetry and prophetic literature.

Finally the use of personal pronouns is an element of both cohesion and prominence. In Hebrew because the use of the personal pronoun is often unnecessary, use of the personal pronoun can often be marked, may serve toward providing cohesion, and may make certain elements of the text more prominent than others.⁶⁸ One such outstanding feature of this text is the frequent use of **אני**.⁶⁹ Though scholars like Mein argue that the frequent and obvious use of this pronoun implies a “theocentricity” (describing the 1st person pronouns as “the relentless sequence...which dominates 34:11-15),⁷⁰ it is perhaps more consistent to see this constant use of “I myself” as an emphatic rhetoric device: the unreliable and wicked shepherds have hurt the flock of Yahweh, now He himself has to step in and make things right. Such an emphasis is present in the overall tone of the passage and is consistent with the removal the shepherds and the replacement with Yahweh himself and the Davidic figure as his human representative. Again, this element of prominence and cohesion is intimately linked with the metaphor itself.

This analysis of cohesion (and prominence) points to the centrality and prominence of the shepherd metaphor in this passage. The shepherd-sheep metaphor is essential to the cohesive principles of the discourse, provides important rhetorical and literary connections throughout the text, and allows the text to highlight particular elements through repetition and overlapping semantic domains.

Metaphorical Coherence

The goal of metaphorical coherence analysis is to analyze what each metaphor highlights and hides by the relationship between target and source and the relationship between the other

⁶⁸ The same is true in Greek discourse. See Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*.

⁶⁹ While it might be possible to argue for the occasional use of the term as a feature of late Hebrew, that is, of course, assuming that one believes that Ezekiel is an example of late Hebrew, it appears unlikely due to the frequency of use within Ez 34.

⁷⁰ Mein, “Profitable and Unprofitable shepherds: Economic and Theological Perspectives on Ezekiel 34,” 501.

interacting metaphors within the larger complex. In our establishment of the range of metaphor, we have already discussed many of the interactions between negative visions of human shepherds, Yahweh as shepherd-king, and “David” as the human shepherd representing Yahweh. Amidst the many implications of these interactions, we have already noted that the usual expectation for shepherds does not cohere to the OT usage of the metaphor and that in some way the OT subverts the usual use of this metaphor, creating an “anti-metaphor”. In our passage, “Yahweh as shepherd” and “Yahweh as king” overlap in varying degrees to allow for “Yahweh as judge” to emerge as an additional metaphor. As we will discuss below, this metaphor proves important to the overall message of Ezekiel 34.

Though time and space limit a full discussion of the companion metaphors to the kingship/shepherding metaphors we have already discussed at some length, two important metaphors should be noted in brief. Overlapping with the metaphor of Yahweh as shepherd-king is the metaphorical language of Yahweh as judge. As Brettler demonstrates in his work on the metaphor of God as King, one of the royal appellations associated with Yahweh as king is Yahweh as judge.⁷¹ While one may reasonably argue that the action of judging may fall within the attributes of either king or shepherd (if one is judging sheep), yet the language of justice and judgement that frequents Ezekiel 34 may suggest that Yahweh as judge provides an additional metaphor. A form of the root **שָׁפַט** is used 4 times between vv. 16-22. This quality of “Yahweh as judge” is particularly important in light of his promises for the future and his authority as king. In this way, we become aware that Yahweh as shepherd must differ from the human shepherd,

⁷¹ Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding An Israelite Metaphor*, 44-45.

because he becomes the judge of the human shepherds. Yahweh as a shepherd judges his sheep and as a king judges his kingly representatives to be a failure and provides a new choice.

A second and equally important metaphor comes in the final section of Ezekiel 34: vv. 25-31. In these passages, though perhaps behind the scenes, Yahweh's role as Creator takes centre stage and thus resonance with the Divine Warrior tradition may have some overlap with this passage. More investigation in this area could prove important, particularly in light of the Divine Warrior imagery in passages that share metaphorical imagery with Ezekiel 34.

Literary and Theological Implications

The shepherd-sheep metaphor of Ezekiel 34 has become not only a prevalent theme in the biblical canon and within pastoral theology, but as Tanner points out the concept of God as shepherd, through its association with Jesus, has become “a religious icon.”⁷² In terms of the implications of this analysis, several points can be made. First, scholars who attempt to remove the metaphor “Yahweh as shepherd” tend to miss the larger literary picture created from the complexity of the interweaving of the metaphors of negative human shepherds, Yahweh as shepherd, David as shepherd, and the people of Israel as sheep. Each of these metaphors has significance for the others and this paper has only stepped into the edge of the very deep waters of this complex metaphorical world. To use a simile in an attempt to describe metaphor, metaphors are like stars that exist in constellations. One needs not only to map the star, but to see its interrelationship with its fellow stars in order to gain a sense of direction.

Second, the danger of oversimplifying metaphor is akin to the oversimplification of Ezekiel's message. While one might find it easier to think of Ezekiel's message as various forms

⁷² Tanner notes that her internet search on www.google.com provided over 2,500 images. My own search on Google provided 3,480,000 images, (though one must reduce this number because some were of the movie, “The Good Shepherd” from 2006 since Tanner's publication).

of woe and hope strung together, to understand the purpose of Ezekiel 34 and its voice to the people in the exile it is perhaps more helpful to read the passage as a literary whole. Consistent with the message of Ezekiel 1-33, Ezekiel 34 makes its reader aware of the consequences of the misuse and abuse of others: judgement. But this judgement, this act of shepherding, is one of justice and this promise of justice rings in the safety and security depicted in the last section of Ezekiel 34 with the covenant of peace that Yahweh, our shepherd, provides.

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