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Source: *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 12, Fasc. 3, (Jul., 1962), pp. 241-259

Published by: BRILL

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1516653>

Accessed: 18/06/2008 14:37

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A FRESH INTERPRETATION OF ZECHARIAH IX–XI ¹⁾

BY

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The well-established critical view that Zech. ix-xiv is quite separate in date and content from Zech. i-viii ²⁾ has not yet led to a satisfactory interpretation of the later chapters. The use of *מִשָּׂא דְּבַר־יְהוָה* to introduce Zech. ix-xi and xii-xiv and Malachi has suggested that anonymous complexes have been collected in three parts, by the editor of the Book of the Twelve Prophets, and added to the last of the named prophecies. But whether a single prophet is responsible for cc. ix-xi, or whether it is itself a collection of two or more varied prophecies is not agreed. The main impediment in the way of establishing its date and meaning is the obscurity of the historical references. On the whole, the tendency since STADE's articles of 1881-2 ³⁾ is to regard the section as late. The background of ix 1-18 is often taken to be the conquest of Syria by Alexander the Great. The shepherds of ch. xi are commonly understood to reflect Ptolemaic rule of the early third century. *יָן* in ix 13, it is alleged, must mean Greece. The common factor is the Greek period. Those features which led earlier scholars to give a pre-exilic date, in certain cases pre-721, in others pre-586, are then explained as archaisms.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a fresh interpretation of Zech. ix-xi. It will be argued that the most probable date is the first half of the fifth century and that none of the crucial passages demands a later date. A new historical reconstruction is required, and the detection of an autobiographical framework to cc. ix-xi will make it possible to discern the activity of a prophet living in or near Damascus, taking active pastoral responsibility for the Israelites of the northern dispersion in this region, and passionately devoted to the reunion of the people of God.

¹⁾ A paper read at the meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study in Dublin, 19 July 1961.

²⁾ A distinction made as early as 1653 by Joseph MEDE.

³⁾ "Deuterozacharja. Eine kritische Studie", *ZAW* 1 (1881) pp. 1-96. 2 (1882) pp. 151-172, 275-309.

The immediate problem of the literary character of these chapters is posed by the presence within them of apparently pre-exilic and post-exilic elements. EISSFELDT¹), among others, has drawn forceful attention to this. But he has failed to suspect that the passages most convincingly interpreted of the Greek period may wear a different appearance when their true character is understood. It has been observed that the prophet (whom we call Second Zechariah) uses older oracles especially from Amos and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It has been assumed that the passages, as they now stand, are the result of a late eschatological redaction. The implication is that the historical allusions must be clearly found in the contemporary situation of the redactor. But may it not be that the prophet is wont to quote or use older prophetic passages, as also to use poetic or prophetic conventions, because he sees their relevance to his own day? Then he will not be adapting earlier oracles to the precise historical situation of his day. He will merely be recognising that his situation is generally envisaged in earlier prophecy. The historical allusions may well then be in part striking enough to suggest the connexion, but in part imprecise. For the older passage will always retain its own character. If this is true, the modern commentator may fall into the danger of seeking historical allusions which are not there!

This may now be illustrated.

ix 1-8

This passage contains a prophetic judgment against (as nearly all interpreters think) the cities of Syria, and certainly against Phoenicia and Philistia. It ends with a promise that the purified remnant of the Philistines will be incorporated in the holy people, who will be henceforth divinely protected. The passage is usually referred either to the period of the early Ptolemies or to that of Alexander the Great. The assumption is that a hostile campaign must be identified in the period after the exile when the conditions described in the passage were fulfilled. In 333 BC Alexander the Great won the battle of Issus, and as a consequence Palestine fell into his hands. The description

¹) *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (1934), pp. 485-493. S. R. DRIVER, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, 9th ed., (1913) pp. 346-350) clearly analysed this feature, but thought that the most characteristic parts of the prophecy pointed to a date not earlier than 333 B.C. The pre-exilic sections he called "in part a re-affirmation, in a form adapted to the circumstances of the time, of older promises". (p. 349).

of Tyre in vv. 3, 4, suggests that it had not been previously destroyed, or at any rate that it was standing intact. Alexander took it in 332 BC. Thus the passage is often pinpointed to the period between the battle of Issus and the capture of Tyre, and attributed to one who recognised in Alexander the divinely chosen agent for the deliverance of the Hebrew people.

But this is not a necessary correspondence. All that is required is a time in the post-exilic period when Tyre was prosperous. She had been besieged, according to Josephus¹⁾ in 585-573, and this is supported by the Babylonian documents. Ezekiel xxvi-xxix may be interpreted to show that Tyre was, in fact, taken²⁾. The view of Sidney SMITH³⁾ is that, according to Ezek. xxix 18-19, Nebuchadrezzar and his troops entered Tyre in 571 only to find that there were no treasures to take. Both the men and the wealth had disappeared. Exactly what happened we do not know. But Tyre recovered. Eckhard UNGER⁴⁾ showed that Nebuchadrezzar installed a provincial administration. A list of officials includes the kings of Tyre, Gaza, Sidon, Arvad and Ashdod⁵⁾. It is therefore probable that within a hundred years Tyre found no difficulty in resuming her old, proud, commercial predominance. It made good sense to the Jews of the fifth century, when a prophet in their midst, who was well acquainted with the oracles of Amos and Ezekiel, re-affirmed the older predictions of Tyre's destruction.

v. 1 provides an essential clue to the situation of the prophet. This verse is usually thought to require radical emendation. And if it is necessary to include Damascus among the cities that are to be destroyed, then the MT is very difficult. Both the RSV and the Jerusalem Bible impose upon the unprotected reader a conjectural emendation that goes back to KLOSTERMANN⁶⁾.

'The word of the LORD is *against* the land of Hadrak, and will rest upon Damascus.

For to the LORD belong *the cities of Aram*'. (reading עָרֵי אֲרָם)

It is necessary to start afresh, laying aside the hypothesis of a Greek

¹⁾ *Ant.* X.11.1; *Contra Ap.* I. 21.

²⁾ G. FOHRER, *Ezekiel*, *HAT* (1955).

³⁾ "The Ship Tyre", *PEQ* (1953), pp. 97-110.

⁴⁾ *ZAW* (NF) III (1926), pp. 314-317.

⁵⁾ E. UNGER, *Babylon, die heilige Stadt* (1931), pp. 282-294; J. B. PRITCHARD, *ANET*, pp. 307-8.

⁶⁾ *Theol. Litt. Zeit.* 1879, p. 566.

background, and Alexander's campaign against the whole region. It is then possible to translate the Hebrew literally.

דְּבַר־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ חֲדָרָךְ וּדְמֹשֶׁק מְנַחְתּוֹ means exactly what it says: "The word of the LORD in the land of Hadrak, and Damascus its resting-place". There are no verbs. This is not a prediction but a statement. We are not to assume that the word of Yahweh is beginning his *destructive* work. The prophet declares simply that the word of Yahweh has been spoken and heard in the land of Hadrak ¹⁾, and Damascus is the place where it settles. מְנַחְתּוֹ bears no suggestion of hostility ²⁾.

In Isa. xi 10 Zion is the glorious restingplace of Yahweh Himself, to whom the nations will come (וְהָיְתָה מְנַחְתּוֹ כְּבוֹד). So here Damascus is the scene of His communication to the prophet. And as in Isa. ix 7 and Amos vii 16 the word of God 'drops', so here it 'settles'. אֵין לַיהוָה עֵין אָדָם וְכָל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל can then mean, again literally: 'for towards Yahweh are the eyes of men and all the tribes of Israel'. The 'tribes of Israel' are particularly the descendants of the Israelites of the northern dispersion, and the prophet is one of them, living in or near Damascus. Both the people generally and the Israelites of this region look to the prophet as to one through whom Yahweh has chosen to speak.

וְגַם־חַמַּת תְּגַבֵּל־בָּהּ 'And Hamath borders thereby'. This, together with the quotation from Amos that follows in vv. 4ff., provides the pointer we need to the prophet's mode of thinking. The book of Amos contains the prophecy ³⁾, 'Therefore will I cause you to go

¹⁾ *Hadrak*, identified by SCHRADER with Ḥattarik(k)ā several times mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions. See M. DELCOR, "Les Allusions à Alexandre Le Grand dans Zech. ix 1-8", *VT* I (1951), pp. 110-1. It occurs nowhere else in O.T. DUSSAUD thought it north of Damascus, *Topographie de la Syrie* p. 236; ABEL, between Damascus and Arpad (*Géographie de la Palestine* II). There is no direct evidence of the continuing use of this name in post-exilic times apart from the witness of Rabbi Jose: "I am at Damascus and I call heaven and earth to witness that there is a place called Hadrak near to Damascus". It would be characteristic of Second Zechariah to refer to this locality by its ancient name.

²⁾ In all the instances of the word מְנַחְתּוֹ there is no hint of hostility; emphatically the reverse. It is used to describe the *presence* of Yahweh in temple or tabernacle; (cf. Isa. xi 10, lxvi 1, Ps. cxxxii 14, 1 Chron. xxviii 2) and also to describe the settlement of Israel in the promised land (cf. Deut. xii 9, 1 Kings viii 56, Isa. xxxii 18, Ps. xcvi 11).

³⁾ The grounds for regarding this part of Amos as interpolated after the capture of Calneh (738 BC), Hamath (720) and Gath (711), a gloss of the period after Isa. x 9, are not convincing. (See SELLIN, *Das Zwölf-prophetenbuch* I, KAT,

into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD' (v. 27). This is followed in vi 2 by: 'Pass ye to Calneh and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Or is their border greater than your border?' (אִם-רַב גְּבוּלָם מִגְּבֻלְכֶם).

It is unnecessary to know or discuss the precise meaning of the passage in Amos. What seems clear is that the Amos passage suggests to Second-Zechariah the mention of Hamath¹), and that Second Zechariah (in exile beyond Damascus) regards *himself* as one who represents in his own place and situation the fulfilment of prophecy.

That the prophet looks at previous prophecy in this way is confirmed by the vv. that follow. Tyre is singled out in v. 4 as the special object of divine judgment, because Tyre was the dominant and proudly unsubdued power. It may well be that Amos' prediction that the LORD would send fire on the wall of Tyre, determines the language of Second Zechariah. And, of course, Ezekiel also predicted the destruction of Tyre by fire. But it is vv. 5 and 6 which are conclusive. These verses have a verbal, though free, correspondence with Amos' prediction of war (i 6-8) against Gaza and the Philistine cities which is inescapable.

Zech. ix 5-6

וְאָבַד מִלֵּךְ מְעֵזָה וְאַשְׁקֹלֹן לֹא תִשָּׁב:
וְיָשָׁב מִמְזֹר בְּאַשְׁדּוֹד וְהִכְרַתִּי גְאוֹן פְּלִשְׁתִּים:

Amos i 8

וְהִכְרַתִּי יוֹשֵׁב מְאַשְׁדּוֹד וְתוֹמֵךְ שִׁבְט
מְאַשְׁקֹלֹן
וְאָבַדוּ שְׂאֵרֵית פְּלִשְׁתִּים

On Gaza see Amos i 6.

This creative rendering of an earlier oracle, using many of the same words and conceptions, but in a slightly different order (NB the similar generalizing conclusion against the Philistines) may be said to be characteristic of Second Zechariah²). It is not too much to say that the prophet is reaffirming (in relation to the conditions and situation of his day) the prophecy of Amos. He stands a personal witness to the fulfilment of Amos' prophecy, in so far as he is himself an exile beyond Damascus. But as he looks around at the Phoenician and Philistine cities, he reaffirms Amos' prediction of judgment on

(1929), pp. 240, 242.) In any case it was firmly part of the collected oracles of Amos by the time Second Zechariah became acquainted with them.

¹) Hamath suggested the ideal northern limit of the Holy Land.

²) See STADE, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-52.

them. It is the oracle of Amos which prompts this passage, not the approach of Alexander the Great. This means that the language of ix 1-8 is not an exact description of the contemporary situation, but it is sufficiently suggestive to point to it. Certainly Tyre was prosperous, the Philistine cities dependent on her, and Gaza still had a king. There is nothing here to require explanation in terms of the activity of Alexander the Great.

It is tempting to suppose that the וְהִנֵּיתִי at the beginning of v. 8 resumes the autobiographical framework which has been noted in v. 1. The translation might be

“I will make my camp ¹⁾ in or at my own house ²⁾, away from the army ³⁾; free from passing hither and thither, and no oppressor shall again overrun them”. (וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר עֲלֵיהֶם עוֹד נִישׁ)

On the basis of this translation, it would be possible to sketch more detail of the prophet's situation. In a time of disturbance, he has himself served in the army. But he sees the time of peace coming when swords shall be turned into ploughshares. He will exchange the army camp for his own house; constant marching for settled life, danger for security.

It is however an objection to this translation that it removes the antecedent of עֲלֵיהֶם. The natural antecedent is בְּיָמֵי understood as the Lord's people or the holy land (cf. Hos. viii 1, ix 15, Jer. xii 7ff, Ps. cxiv 1), and Yahweh is probably the speaker as in vv. 6, 7.

Then will I encamp at or around my house as a guard,
so that none shall march to and fro,
No oppressor shall again overrun them.

This picture of peace is, as will be shown, consistently maintained throughout these chapters.

¹⁾ The *double entendre* implied in this translation of וְהִנֵּיתִי is similar to that in נוֹגֵשׁ (x 4), and is not unnatural in this prophet.

²⁾ The לְ בְיָמֵי is odd, but might be prompted by the unusual play on words. בְּ would be too precise.

³⁾ מְצַבָּה צְבָה for צְבָה מְצַבָּה (LXX, Syr.) were right, or the often proposed מְצַבָּה, it would be difficult to explain why the Massoretes rejected an obvious reading in favour of the apparently difficult vocalization מְצַבָּה

But it in no way follows that Yahweh is speaking in the final sentence:

כִּי עֲתָה רָאִיתִי בְּעֵינַי:

This is a statement of inspiration (cf. Job xlii 5 but especially 1 Kings xxii 17). This is what the prophet anticipates in prophetic vision. In this way he eagerly recognises in his own situation the fulfilment or the beginning of the fulfilment of past prophecy. It is the starting-point for his own prophetic message.

ix 11-17

Here the prophet speaks of the return of the Israelites of the dispersion to Zion. He pictures reunited Judah and Ephraim like a weapon in Yahweh's hand. Then, according to the usual interpretation, Yahweh promises to use this weapon especially against Greece. Peace and prosperity will follow.

As for thee also, because of the blood of my covenant with thee,
I will set your captives free from the waterless pit.

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope,
today I declare that I will restore to thee double.

For I have bent Judah my bow:

I have made Ephraim its arrow. (vv. 11-13).

Second Isaiah had described the exiles in Babylon as prisoners called to come out of the dungeon (xlii 6-7, cf. xlix 9). This prophet applies the same imagery to the Israelites of the dispersion. Reunited, Judah and Ephraim will make a powerful weapon in Yahweh's hand; a bow and arrow; or, if you like, "as the sword of a mighty man" (v. 13) cf. Isaiah xlix 2 where the image of a weapon in no sense implies military action, and is, in fact, employed to describe the Servant of the Lord. Then follows the crucial sentence:

וְעוֹרְרֵתִי בְּיָדָהּ צִיּוֹן עַל-בְּנֵיהָ יוֹן

It is everywhere assumed that because reunited Judah-Ephraim is likened to a weapon, therefore the image must be of a hostile attack against Javan. Javan is then contrasted with its use in Ezek. xxvii 13 where it does not indicate a hostile nation, but simply 'traders'. Here, in contrast, it is said, the Greeks are quite clearly named as the *enemies* of the Sons of Zion. But what is there against the opposite view? May it not be that this prophet is making a biblical allusion in the way that is highly characteristic of his style?

Suppose יָוָן is the figure of Gen. x 4, father of Elishah and Tarshish, Kittim and Dodanim, of whom it is said: "Of these were the isles (coastlands) of the nations divided in their lands". Then יָוָן is a characteristic, poetic and archaic way of describing the distant nations, the coastlands (cf. Isa. xli 1 etc., cf. Isa. lxvi 19) ¹.

In rhetoric of this kind Jawan is appropriately set over against Zion, as a symbol of the nations. The picture is similar to that of Isa. xlix 22 where Yahweh calls to the nations

"and they shall bring thy sons in their bosom,
and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders".

(cf. Isa. lx 4, 9)

Jawan is not the enemy but the means of restoring the lost sons of Zion.

I will rouse up thy sons, O Zion,
Upon (עַל) thy sons, O Jawan.

Is not this precisely the role of the nations in Isa. II & III? And this will be found to be entirely consistent with the picture that follows.

This is plausible. The difficulty lies in עַל וְעוֹרֵרְתִי. This so commonly means to brandish a weapon *against* (cf. 2 Sam. xxiii 18, 1 Chr. xi 11, 20, Isa. x 26, Zech. xiii 7), that it is difficult to imagine anyone reading the sentence otherwise, in a context where Judah-Ephraim is presented as a weapon in Yahweh's hand. On the other hand, the phrase עַל-בְּנֵיךָ יָוָן overloads the line and is metrically superfluous. Moreover it is a typical identifying gloss of a kind frequently found in the prophetic literature. We may assume that Second Zechariah developed his military *metaphor* without any intention of implying a military *role*. He concludes the line:

I will make thee *like* a warrior's sword.

¹ J. KLAUSNER, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, (1956), holds that the Greeks could have been known to the prophets of Judah as inhabitants of the Ionian islands as early as the time of Darius (p. 199). However that may be, the Ionians had built up their commercial activity to a climax between 800 and 600 BC. The Persians seem to have favoured the Phoenicians, and in the fifth century the Ionians freed themselves from Persian control. It has to be admitted that the Ionians of this century do not readily suggest themselves as symbols of world power. The choice for the meaning of יָוָן is between the later Greek power and the archaistic use of the word. This would be strictly parallel to Second Zechariah's use of the terms Egypt and Assyria (Zech. x 10). See also W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1946), p. 259.

But the glossator's touch changed the metaphor into a literal prophecy of warfare against the Grecian power of a later century.

v. 14 is of course not the language of warfare but of theophany.

Then the Lord will appear unto them
and his arrow go forth like lightning;
the Lord God will sound the trumpet ¹⁾,
and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south.

(cf. Ps. xviii 15, lxxvii 18, Deut. xxxiii 2, Hab. iii 3, 11. Ju. v 4) The passage ends in v. 16 with an idyllic picture of the gathered and united people of the dispersion, like a flock, and like precious stones 'sparkling' over the land.

At first sight v. 15 seems to destroy the consistency of this picture, and to suggest precisely the military image which we have been at pains to expel. The RSV has

and they shall devour and tread down their slingers
and they shall drink their blood like wine
and be full like a bowl,
drenched like the corners of the altar.

Either the expression of unparalleled ferocity or textual corruption (or both) is the verdict of most commentators. It is neither. As in Isa. xlix 10 the released prisoners will "not hunger nor thirst", so here they shall eat and drink. First the eating is qualified by a parenthetic clause:

'They shall eat and trample on sling-stones'.

That is, the stones will stay where they belong and not be collected together to be used as missiles. This is of course archaistic. These were the weapons of David against the Philistines, not the modern, devilish, destructive weapons of the fifth century B.C.! But the prophet had pondered deeply on the life of David, as may be seen especially in ix 9-10. The archaism is characteristic. He means that people will eat in peace. Then the drinking is also qualified by a parenthetic clause:

¹⁾ Though the trumpet or horn (shôphâr) was in early Israel the means of summoning men to war (Ju. iii 27, vi 34 etc.), its use in the post-exilic period was (a) to call Israel to worship, and (b) to announce the imminent presence of God. Mention of the trumpet suggested at this time not war, but the *gathering* of all Israel and theophany—precisely the point of this passage. See Joel ii 1, 15 and notes ad loc. in Douglas R. JONES, *III Isaiah and Joel*, Torch Commentary (1962); cf. Exod. xix. 16.

And they shall drink, they shall be
boisterous as though filled with wine

(וְשָׂתוּ הֵמוּ כְּמוֹ-יַיִן)

And they shall be full like bowls i.e. as though
drinking in bowls-ful
and (drenched) like the corners of the altar.

(וּמְלֵאוּ כַּמְזֻרְקֵי כַּזְוִיּוֹת מִזֵּבֶחַ:)

The flowing sacrificial blood of the altar was a metaphor of the plenty that God would give. It is easy to see how literal minds interpreted this of Israel's bloody triumph over her enemies, once the thought of military conflict had been inserted by the misinterpretation of an earlier verse. From some Greek VSS down to the RSV it has been assumed that the prophet envisages the triumphant Jews drinking the blood of their enemies. This is a striking example of the way in which a hidden assumption will determine erroneous exegesis for more than a thousand years. In Zech. ix 11-17 a consistent exegesis was then made impossible. We may now see that the picture is entirely one of peace both consistent in itself, and stylistically and thematically consonant with the rest of the prophet's work. We can understand why the return of Ephraim here and in ch. x plays so great a part in the thought of a prophet who belonged to this Ephraim himself and lived in or near Damascus. We can understand also why the prophet (or was it a scribe) uttered a sigh of wonder as he contemplated the marvel of the vision

מֵה-טִיבוֹ וּמֵה-יָפִיּוֹ

How fair, how lovely is this prospect!

xi 4-17

The remaining passage, alleged to indicate a Greek background to these oracles, is xi 4-17. This is the famous passage about the shepherd who looked after the flock doomed to be slaughtered, who expelled (or destroyed) three shepherds in one month, took the two staffs Grace and Union, broke the staff Grace when the flock became hostile, was paid 30 shekels of silver and cast it into the treasury, then broke the staff Union, and finally enacted the part of a foolish shepherd who would destroy the flock. Here it is not too much to say that the history of exegesis presents a chaotic picture. As many as forty different conjectures have been offered for the identity of the three wicked shepherds, on the assumption that the

passage is an allegory ¹). Not surprisingly some scholars have declared that there is no obvious historical allusion. If a precise historical allusion is to be sought, there is now a fair consensus of opinion that the Ptolemaic period provides the most plausible correspondence. But interpreters are quick to admit that no solutions are without difficulties, and their hesitations betray an unmistakable lack of confidence.

It is commonly assumed that the three shepherds stand for kings or rulers of the people, either Jewish or heathen.

In xi 1-3 the shepherds who wail because their glory is despoiled are plainly heathen kings. But this passage is linked closely with the end of ch. x, where the prophet envisages the return of the dispersed northerners to the land of Gilead and Lebanon. Before they come, a place must be prepared for them. Hence Lebanon must be subject to judgment. The prophet characteristically uses a passage from Jer. xxv 34-38 and builds on it, quoting loosely, but giving it a precise reference to Lebanon and adding imagery to suggest the Day of the Lord.

It is not therefore necessary to suppose that the mention of shepherds in xi 4-17 must in any way be determined by their meaning in xi 1-3 or x. In fact it may appear that the structure of ix-xi is achieved simply by the placing of autobiographical sections at the beginning and the end, with the oracles collected in the middle. Structurally it bears comparison with Isa. vi-viii. xi 4-17 may be allowed to speak for itself, and indeed may have more in common with ix 1-8 than with xi 1-3. Nor must Jer. xxiii 1-4 and Ezek. xxxiv where the shepherd imagery is used of Israel's unworthy kings, be regarded as determinative. It is already clear that this prophet owes much to earlier prophecy. But he is creative, not imitative. Nor may xiii 7-9 be directly associated with this passage, let alone moved to a direct connexion with it, since xiii 7-9 belongs inextricably and demonstrably to its context ²).

¹) "The prophecy is the most enigmatic in the Old Testament. It is obviously an allegory". S. R. DRIVER, *Minor Prophets II*, Century Bible (1906), p. 253. Thirty proposed identifications have been listed by Josef KREMER, *Die Hirtenallegorie im Buche Zacharias*, 1930.

²) Nearly all modern critics, since EWALD, assume that xiii 7-9 is misplaced and ought in some way to be restored to its proper relationship to ch. xi. It is in fact linked to xiii 1-6 in the following way. What God in His law (Deut. xiii) requires of His people in their inflexible severity towards false prophets (overriding claims of kith and affection), this He Himself will practise in His relationship to His own shepherd. One might say that in xiii 7-9, as compared with xiii 1-6, the Lord God practises His own precept! See notes ad loc. in Douglas R. Jones, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, Torch Commentary (1962).

We may therefore be allowed to test the hypothesis that it is the prophet who speaks in v. 4 of himself ¹⁾. 'Thus said the LORD my God, Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter'. The 'my' is to be given its full weight. It shows that we are returning to the autobiographical framework of cc. ix-xi (i.e. ix 1, 8, xi 4, 7, 8, 13, 15). In what sense can the *prophet* be said to have been a shepherd? It is certainly not necessary to assume political let alone royal functions. According to ix 1-8 he was living in or near Damascus. Politically he was subject to the Persian governor, (if the question of date may be for a moment begged). But is it possible that he was given a *pastoral* responsibility for the Israelites of this region? Is 'the covenant which I made with all the peoples' (v. 10) the official arrangement made with the rulers, by which he entered on this responsibility? (even if this is regarded as a particular example of a more comprehensive covenant which Yahweh would make with all nations for the return of His people. cf. Isa. xlii 6, xlix 8). There is nothing impossible in this situation, for the story of Ezra shows how far the Persian government would go in encouraging the religious life of a subject people.

The 'flock of slaughter' creates the picture of a flock of sheep being reared for the market, destined for the shambles (cf. Jer. xii 3). It is not necessary to see in this a hint of imminent national extinction, as though a foreign power is about to destroy the Jewish nation. The prophet means that the Israelite people of this region are not being cared for as though meant to live, as though valuable for their own sake. They are the victims of those who use them for their own gain.

Their possessors (קִנְיֵיהֶן) are those who buy them and sell them. The image is pursued. Anyone who buys sheep can kill them for meat if he wants, and no blame can be levelled at him. Or he can sell them and congratulate himself on his profit. Even so the northern Jews are no more than sheep in the hands of their overlords who exercise absolute rights over them. 'Their *own* shepherds have no pity on them', i.e. they have leaders of their own, but they have abandoned true pastoral care. But the Lord will deal with the proud sheep-owners. When the prophet adds the Lord's verdict: 'I will cause men to fall each into the hand of his shepherd, and each into

¹⁾ This is different from the view that the prophet was *impersonating* the shepherds of Israel's history.

the hand of his king', he means that judgment will be ironic. Those who are treating the men of Israel as sheep for the shambles, will find themselves as the powerless possessions of their own shepherds.

The prophet says in v. 7 'So I became the shepherd of the flock'. The prophet obeyed Yahweh's command, and entered upon his pastoral task. Here a widely adopted emendation of the MT לִין־הַצֹּאן to make לְכֹנְעֵי־הַצֹּאן (following the LXX) fits perfectly the above interpretation. The non-Jews of this region were branded by the Jews as 'Canaanites, and of course there was word-play. They are 'traders' bent on gain. The phrase must qualify not 'doomed to be slain' but 'I fed'. The sheep were not slain for the 'Canaanites'. Rather, 'I fed the flock... for the Canaanites of the flock'. This means that the prophet took up his pastoral responsibility in some degree of answerability to the overlords, even (it will appear) paid by them.

The main episodes of the prophet's period of office (however long it was) were marked by four prophetic signs. First he took two staves to indicate the fundamental purpose and aspiration of his pastoral ministry. 'And I took two staves: one I named Grace, the other I named Union'. The root נָעַם is often used of physical beauty and in Ct. vii 7 is parallel to יָפָה which is used in Zech. ix 17. The staff in this way sums up, in symbolic fashion, the vision of the returned and reunited people like precious stones 'sparkling over the land' for, he had said, "they are the flock of his people". (ix 16). 'Oh! the beauty of it'. As for 'union', the prophet has demonstrated in the oracles collected in ix 9-x 12 that the unity of Judah and the dispersed northerners is his ruling theme. This will be vividly illustrated below in a moment. Thus by means of the two staves, the prophet declares the true aim and end of his office, that the people may be the beautiful flock of Yahweh, and that they may be one.

If this is so, then the three shepherds, whom he cut off in one month, must have been shepherds in the same sense that the prophet was a shepherd. We are led to suppose that there was some organisation of the dispersed Israelites in this region, and that some who had been entrusted with pastoral responsibility over the Israelites did not share the prophet's ideals or plans. In some way he succeeded in expelling them from their office. There were no doubt Jews then, as in Hellenistic times, who were prepared to compromise the integrity of their faith for the sake of personal advantage and gain.

But it appears that the expelled leaders retained the sympathy of the people. The prophet lost patience with them, and the people in turn 'loathed him'. The strong expression **נִפְשָׁם בְּהִלָּה בִּי** suggests a bitter struggle. The prophet's vision was not shared. He therefore decided to give up office and to abandon the task. This however was no merely human calculation or act of despair born of failure. It was God's will to abandon the flock to its fate. "What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed", he said. Those for the shambles will die; those separated will not be reunited, and the internecine strife that accompanies all godlessness will ensue (v. 9). The proof that it was God's will was the second prophetic sign viz. the breaking of the two staffs. A second word of God annulled the first. "So", he said, "the traders of the flock that watched me, knew that it was the word of the LORD".

It now appears that the prophet was not only in some sense answerable to the authorities, but also paid by them. He had taken the initiative by breaking the staffs and ending his contract with the authorities. It was within their rights, we may suppose, to withhold payment. "If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them". In fact they paid him thirty pieces of silver, according to Exod. xxi 32 the price of an injured slave. Because this paying off was a sign of the annulled covenant the money could not be put to ordinary use. The LORD instructed him to cast it to the **יוֹצֵר** in the house of the LORD. This expression is of course a well known obscurity. But if we could follow the suggestion of the Peshitta, supported by a long line of commentators from NOWACK to the RSV, then we may assume the money was placed in the treasury¹). It would be entirely in harmony with the whole theme of cc. ix-xi if the prophet of Damascus nevertheless spoke in the name of Him whose word came from Jerusalem²), and deliberately made a journey to the temple to place the wages there. The placing of the money in the temple treasury was thus the third prophetic sign designed to show that the prophet was doing Yahweh's work, and therefore the payment must go to Him; designed also to show that Zion was the centre of Yahweh's one flock. The opposition may well have resisted this conviction, and so anticipated the antipathy of those who later precipitated the Samaritan Schism.

¹) M. DELCOR, "Deux Passages difficiles: Zach. xii 11 et xi 13", (*VT III*, 1953, pp. 67ff.) is ingenious, but unconvincing.

²) Cf. Amos i 2.

The fourth prophetic sign was to take instruments or implements of a foolish shepherd. Perhaps these were incomplete or inadequate in some way to the tasks of a shepherd. We do not know. Perhaps the absence of the staff of beauty and the staff of union was underlined. The meaning is clear enough. The vacuum created by the resignation of the true shepherd will be filled by a false shepherd who

does not care for the separated
or seek the wandering
or heal the maimed
or nourish the sound

but will live off the sheep. The chapter ends with a terrible curse on the worthless shepherd, characteristically employing the form of Jeremiah's oracle in 1 35-38. Though the prophet failed in his practical objective, there were apparently those who recognised the truth he uttered and incorporated his work in a small collection of anonymous prophecies—Zech. ix-xi, xii-xiv and Mal.

Once again, in xi 4-17, there is no need to interpret this passage of Ptolemaic or Seleucid times. And the fact that Zech. xii-xiv¹⁾ and Mal. contain nothing which demands a date after Ezra and Neh., and moreover that Mal. fits the situation in which Nehemiah worked 'as snugly as a bone fits its socket' (J. M. P. SMITH), confirms the natural assumption of this paper that Second Zechariah lived in the first half of the fifth century, between the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of Nehemiah²⁾.

¹⁾ It is a striking fact that the main grounds for dating Zech. ix-xiv in the Greek period are in fact relevant only to Zech. ix-xi. There are no independent signs of this late date in cc. xii-xiv. It is often assumed that these chapters must be later because of their apocalyptic character, or because they are dependent on Joel or because they imply a post-Ezra situation. This sort of reasoning will not bear inspection. Who can say that this sort of apocalyptic must be after Ezra? Dependence on Joel is far from evident. Variant traditions of the same theme can easily belong to the same period. And, of course, our knowledge of the customs and religious and political life of Judah in this period is not extensive enough to permit us to decide what could or could not be before Ezra. It is probable that ch. xiv is independent of cc. xii-xiii since the two traditions of the last battle outside Jerusalem do not entirely harmonize. But once cc. ix-xi and Malachi are understood to belong to the fifth century, no reasons exist for supposing that cc. xii-xiv are much later, since all belong to the same collection. I hope to return to this question.

²⁾ This date is strongly defended by Joseph KLAUSNER, *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, p. 200. But he thinks that cc. ix-xiv were composed by Zechariah himself *in his old age*. The thesis of this paper, if it is correct, makes this view highly improbable, if not impossible.

It remains to illustrate by one striking example in ix 9, 10 what I have called the prophet's ruling theme. This passage also exemplifies the use of older scriptural parallels and images, which I have found characteristic of Second-Zechariah. It was the observation of this feature which led to the thesis of this paper.

Lo your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on an ass,
on a colt the foal of an ass.
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem.

This follows the discomfiture of the nations in ix 2-7, as in the pre-exilic Jerusalem cultus the humiliation of Israel's enemies was followed by the joyful recognition of Yahweh's epiphany and probably of his viceroy the king in Zion. There is no need to deny cultic influence, and it is at least possible that the passage itself has a cultic history.

But there may well be another and a stronger influence at any rate for Second Zechariah. Is not this prophet, who was so alert to discern the patterns of history in prophecy, who has already shown at least one hint of preoccupation with the story of David's kingdom, is he not here allowing God's dealings with David to teach God's plan for His people? Is he not reflecting that even David's kingdom was divided after Absalom's successful effort to separate the people from their rightful allegiance, but then reunited? Is he not implying that the enemies of unity are usurpers? At a time when there was no king and no recognisable northern kingdom, this prophecy of unity and peace under one Davidic king, is not a practical political programme but a vision born of faith and meditation upon the permanent meaning of 2 Sam. xv-xix. Let us see how, in the light of the story of David and Absalom, every difficult word becomes intelligible.

It is the daughter of Zion who is bidden to rejoice.

Behold thy (fem. sing.) king cometh to thee.

Jerusalem's king is imagined returning to Zion the centre of the kingdom of God. That he is described as נִשָּׁע 'saved', shows that it is the Davidic king, and not Yahweh Himself. He is also צִדִּיק

i.e. he is the right or legitimate king ¹). Both expressions are exactly suited to describe David as he returned to Jerusalem after Absalom's revolt. He had been saved from the ruthless ambition of Absalom. He was the 'rightful' 'legitimate' king against the usurper who had both detached the loyalty of many of his people and seized Jerusalem.

Behold thy king cometh to thee; the rightful king
saved from his enemies.

We can hear the acclamation and imagine the scene. Once again this does not exclude the continued cultic history of this cry, as each Davidic king was ritually saved from his enemies ²).

Now the David who went to meet the Philistine with a staff and a bag of sling-stones is pictured as 'lowly, and riding upon an ass'. David had gone up by the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, his head covered and barefoot. His exile was accompanied by every circumstance of ignominy and humiliation. Shimei cursed him and threw stones (2 Sam. xvi). We may give the full and natural sense to עָנִי. He was 'oppressed', 'afflicted'. And if he was riding upon an ass, that no doubt contrasts the peace-loving David with those who, like Absalom, use horses and chariots, the instruments of war and the symbols of conquest by arms ³). But we cannot forget that Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth had provided David with a 'couple of asses' 'for the king's household to ride on' (2 Sam. xvi 1, 2) and it was no doubt on one of these that David made his triumphal entry.

It had been part of the hybris and ambition of Absalom that he had 'prepared him a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him' (2 Sam. xv 1). This sort of military display was unprecedented in Israel. It was a symbol of reliance upon both the instruments of war and human scheming. Hence the prophet adds

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem.

The mention of Ephraim answers to the disturbance of the hardily-

¹) This does not exclude the meaning 'righteous' in the sense born by the word צַדִּיקָה in the Jerusalem cultus. See A. R. JOHNSON, "The Rôle of the King in the Jerusalem Cultus", in *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke (1935), pp. 104, 5.

²) J. MORGENSTERN thinks that "David's formal going forth from Jerusalem. . . . was plainly a regular ritual act celebrated at the very commencement of the Matzot Festival". "The Suffering Servant—A New Solution"—III, *V.T. XI* (1961) p. 417

³) Cf. the warning in 2 Sam. viii 11.

won unity of north and south, which David had achieved¹⁾. The mention of Jerusalem points to the initial success of Absalom's revolt, when he had displaced his father and paraded his strength in the capital. The mention of both suggests a united kingdom. If such is the conceptual background of this passage, it is possible to understand the strong conviction, even passion, which enabled the prophet to hold on to an ideal when there was no practical possibility of implementing it, when indeed he failed in the limited objective he set himself. He did not look for the repetition of the past nor for the literal fulfilment of earlier prophecies. He discerned the principles of the divine action underlying the sacred history, and witnessed by the prophets. Clearly he had meditated upon its meaning profoundly. The rest of ch. ix and ch. x is a collection of more detailed oracles on the restoration of Judah and Ephraim to be the one beautiful flock of Yahweh.

Thus the various parts of Zech. ix-xi fall into place, to reveal a meaningful harmony. Though the occasional detail of this thesis may be open to criticism, it is a serious question whether any other interpretation in the long perplexing history of exegesis has been able to make sense of every part of the complex. As one piece after another drops into place, the whole seems to find convincing confirmation. We are then provided with the material for a fascinating historical reconstruction. These chapters may be taken to provide evidence of prophetic activity and pastoral oversight, exercised in or near Damascus, among Israelites of the northern dispersion of the fifth century. The prophet looked forward to peace as the prelude to the restoration of the united people of God. This for him meant above all the return of the tribes of the dispersion (ix 11-17) and the unity of Judah and Ephraim. His ultimate hope was the restoration of the one Davidic king (ix 9). Ch. x shows that the unity of north and south as the one true Israel was his ruling passion. He acknowledged a certain primacy to Judah (x 4) and the centrality of Zion, but the salvation of Ephraim must follow hard on that of Judah. The limits of the Holy Land would have to be extended to Gilead and Lebanon to include the 'one flock of God's people' beautiful as precious stones glistening over the land. This was the prophet's vision. But he also descended into the arena of public life for active intervention, and, with these ideals

¹⁾ Historians assume that the centre of Absalom's revolt was in the south. But there may have been special reasons why he raised his standard at Hebron. It is probable that the greater part of his support came from the north.

in mind to guide him, accepted the pastoral oversight of the Israelites of the region. This was apparently an official appointment with government backing and even a salary. Unhappily there were those who found the *status quo* much to their advantage and had lost all desire to be visibly and organically the one people of God. They succeeded in frustrating the prophet's practical aim and he abandoned his office. Nevertheless the careful preservation of his oracles witnesses to a deeper conviction not only on the part of the prophet himself but among some whom he influenced that though the people is grass, the word of our God will stand for ever.