

The Figure of David and His Importance in Ezekiel 34–37

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1. Introduction

The book of Ezekiel addresses repeatedly, in the context of pronouncements of judgment, the failure of the kings who originate from the house of David.¹ One need only think of Ezek 12.8–16 and 17.11–19, the dirge in chap. 19, or the enigmatic saying in 21.30–32. At the same time, the Book of Ezekiel is aware of a new hope for salvation linked to the Davidic dynasty. Take, for example, 17.22–24 as well as chaps 34 and 37.

The peculiarity of the proclamation of salvation in Ezek 34.23–24 and 37.24–25 is that David is explicitly mentioned, whereas other prophetic texts speak of the Davidic line pictorially: employing terms like חֹטֶר (cf. Isa 11.1a), נֹצֵר (Isa 11.1b) and צִמְחָה (Jer 23.5; Zech 3.8; 6.12). Outside the Book of Ezekiel, David is mentioned by name as a future salvation figure only in two places: Hos 3.5 and Jer 30.9.

How precisely is the figure of David now to be understood within Ezek 34 and 37? What role and what values are assigned to him?

2. The Figure of David in Ezekiel 34.23–24

The given verses are a part of the Shepherd-Chapter Ezek 34.1–31, the historical development of which cannot be traced here. In the final form of the text there is a certain tension between a theocentric view of the coming salvation (vv. 11–16) and a messianic-oriented conception (vv. 23–24). Although it is accepted that there has been some editorial work in the text, the chapter is altogether well thought out and designed in a flowing manner: after the opening in v. 1 there is a double movement along the path of “scolding” (vv. 2–6 and 17–19), through “threat” (vv. 7–10 and 20–22), culminating in “salvation” (vv. 11–16, 23–24 and 25–30).

¹ I thank my colleague Dr. (habil.) Ignatius M. C. OBINWA for translation and review of this paper.

Opening	1	
Scolding	2–6 [7–8] ²	17–19
Threat	[7–8] 9–10	20–22
Salvation	11–15 [16]	23–24 + 25–30
Conclusion	31	

Verse 23 has no clear text signal for a new beginning, but introduces a new topic: David as the future shepherd of God's people. Due to these unclear findings, some exegetes add vv. 23–24 to the preceding context (e.g. Walther Zimmerli, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Moshe Greenberg), while others do so to the following context (Walther Eichrodt, Daniel I. Block). Verse 24 marks a final break with the verbal word of God formula **אני יהוה דברתי**.³ It can be taken that verses 23–24 belong to the preceding context. This creates in vv. 17–24, as in vv. 1–15, a sequence of “scolding – judgement – salvation.”

2.1 The Text of Ezekiel 34.23–24

²³ I shall set over them one shepherd , who will feed them, my servant David . He is the one who will feed them, and He is the one who will become their shepherd .	והקמתי עליהם רעה אחד ורעה אתהן את עבדי דוד הוא ירעה אתם והוא יהיה להן לרעה:
²⁴ And I myself, Yhwh , will become their God, while my servant David will be prince in their midst . I, Yhwh, have spoken.	²⁴ ואני יהוה אהיה להם לאלהים ועבדי דוד נשיא בתוכם אני יהוה דברתי:

2.2 The Narrative Context of Ezekiel 34.17–24

Verses 23–24 continue the text-section vv. 17–22, which is structured by the triple use of the verb **שפט**:

- a) in v. 17 in the participial phrase: **לשה לאילים ולעתודים** (“Behold, I shall be judging between sheep and sheep, the rams and he-goats”).

² Verses 7–8 serve double-duty, as part of the scold and the threat.

³ The description of **שלום** in vv. 25–30 leaves off the theme of shepherd and paints the pictures of a messianic time in paradisiacal form. However, the LXX differs from the MT in that it sees the covenant of peace offered by Yhwh as made not “with them” (להם), but rather with David (τῷ Δαυιδ). The LXX thereby continues Davidic-messianic perspective. But that would form another theme altogether. Verse 31 closes the chapter and clearly brings the theme of shepherd back: The two expressions **צאן** and **אדם** are combined in an unusual manner. They occur again in Ezek 36.37–38 and help to structure the context of Ezek 34–37. For details on this see Johan LUST, “Edom – Adam in Ezekiel, in the MT and LXX,” in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint: Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. Peter W. FLINT, Emanuel TOV, and James C. VANDERKAM (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 387–401.

- b) in v. 20 in the transition to the judgment pronouncement, in a prominent speech of God: *הנני-אני ושפטתי בין-שה בריה ובין שה רזה* ("Behold, I am here, I shall judge between fat sheep and the lean sheep").
- c) and in the final v. 22: *ושפטתי בין שה לשה* ("I shall judge between sheep and sheep").

Gerhard Liedke has made it clear in a study of the Old Testament legal pronouncements that the divine *שפט*-action in our context serves the purpose of re-establishing the violated order.⁴ This can be accomplished by achieving an internal balance, according to Liedke, but in extreme cases it can lead to a separation judgement or a divorce oracle, as Ezek 20.32–39 describes it. In the present text, separation judgement is not expressly mentioned. The decisive factor is the juridical quality of the expression.

The enforcement of divine justice is continued in v. 22–24a in the saving action of Yhwh, expressed with *ישע* (*Hiphil*) + *ל* in the phrase *ולא-תהיינה לצאני* ("And I shall save my flock, so that it will no longer be prey"). Even the divine *ישע*-action expressed with *ישע* (*Hiphil*) + *ל* refers to the juridical sphere, as is evident from the Book of Deuteronomy and from the Psalms. Deuteronomy 22.27 presents the case of the rape of a girl: "He has met her in the open field, the betrothed girl may have cried for help, but there was no helper for her (*ואין מושיע*)" (לה). Among the curses / threats in the case of one breaking the covenant, Deut 28.31 states *inter alia*: "Your ass shall be snatched from you, and shall not be restored; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and there shall be no helper for you" (*צאנך נתנות לאיביך ואין לך מושיע*). Psalm 72.4 speaks of the establishment of justice by the coming Messiah and combines *ישע* (*Hiphil*) + *ל* with *שפט*: "He will defend the oppressed among the people (*ישפט עניי-עם*). He will bring help to the children of the poor (*יושיע לבני אביון*); he will crush the oppressor" (*וידכא עושק*).

The verses immediately preceding vv. 23–24 qualify the action of Yhwh using *שפט* [3×] and *ישע* (*Hiphil*), such that by this action, the distorted order will be restored. This is due to the decisive intervention of Yhwh, which is further unfolded in vv. 23–24.

⁴ Gerhard LIECKE, *Gestalt und Bezeichnung alttestamentlicher Rechtssätze. Eine formgeschichtlich-terminologische Studie*, WMANT 39 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971), 65: "Zwei Menschen oder zwei Gruppen ..., deren Verhältnis zueinander nicht in Ordnung ist, sollen durch das *שפט* eines dritten ... wieder in Ordnung zueinander kommen. Das geschieht, indem der dritte die Ursache des Streites durch sein *שפט* beseitigt." Based on this statement, Frank-Lothar HOSSFELD speaks of a restoration of the disturbed order: "Wiederherstellung der gestörten Ordnung" (*Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie des Ezechielbuches*, FB 20 [Würzburg: Echter, 1977], 266).

2.3 Verses 23–24 as a Continuation of Verses 17–22

The divine action restoring order (and expressed in legal terminology) is continued in vv. 23–24. These verses give coherence to both textual sections.⁵ This is exemplified in two statements: (1) the appointment of the shepherd and (2) the covenant formula.

2.3.1 On the Appointment of the Shepherd (והקמתי עליהם רעה אחד). The verb קום (*Hiphil*) with Yhwh as the subject often refers to a new establishment of divine salvation, especially in the priestly tradition, as, for example, in the establishment of a covenant (Gen 9.9–11, 17.7–8, Exod 6.4–7; Ezek 16.60, 62). If a person to whom a task is assigned is the object of קום (*Hiphil*), then this is usually a legal process. The sovereign act of establishment of an office emphasizes the authority of Yhwh. It is he who assigns somebody a specific task or establishes him or her for a service. At the same time, the importance of the person put into the service comes into focus, since he has now a special relationship with Yhwh.

To be mentioned in this context are the vocation of prophets (e.g., Deut 18.15, 18; Jer 29.15; Amos 2.11), the appointment of judges (Judg 2.16, 18), of delivers (Judg 3.9, 16), of priests (1 Sam 2.35), and of kings (1 Kgs 14.14; Jer 30.9), as well as the appointment of shepherds (Jer 23.4, 5; Ezek 34.23, Zech 11.16).

To fully understand Ezek 34.23 f, we must note that even though the newly introduced figure of רעה lends a distinctly different accent to the explicitly theocentric message of vv. 11–16, there is no contradiction.⁶ Firstly, the juridical nature of the language continues. Secondly, Yhwh's sovereignty is not reduced. On the contrary, it is strengthened: he himself is the one who appoints the coming shepherd on his own authority. Finally, the evidences from Jer 30.9 and Hos 3.5 also show that the coexistence of Yhwh and the shepherd appointed by him is not unknown, although both texts are talking about a king, not a shepherd.

ועבדו את יהוה אלהיהם ואת דוד מלכם אשר אקים להם:

But they shall serve Yhwh, their God, and David, their king, whom I will raise up for them. (Jer 30.9)

אחר ישובו בני ישראל ובקשו את־יהוה אלהיהם ואת דוד מלכם
ופחדו אל־יהוה ואל־טובו באחרית הימים:

⁵ HOSSFELD has correctly noted “[dass] die juristische Terminologie durchgehend den Text prägt. Darüber hinaus existiert zwischen den Themen von VV. 17–22 und VV. 23 f keine Kluft, sondern sie fließen ineinander über; die gemeinsame Basis bildet die Ankündigung Jahwes, die gestörte Ordnung wieder herzustellen” (*Untersuchungen*, 273).

⁶ Cf. the views of Hans Ferdinand FUHS, *Ezechiel II 25–48*, Die Neue Echter Bibel, Altes Testament 22 (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1988), 194, and Karl-Friedrich POHLMANN, *Der Prophet Hesekiel / Ezechiel. Kapitel 20–48, mit einem Beitrag von Thilo Alexander Rudnig*, ATD 22/2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 467.

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek Yhwh their God, and David their king; and they shall come to Yhwh trembling, and to his goodness in the final days. (Hos 3.5)

2.3.2 On the Covenant Formula. The covenant formula is also legal in connotation. It falls into the context of a covenant event and was probably part of a public rite. The covenant formula thus evokes a public process producing appropriate legal effects.⁷

It is found in v. 23–24, though in a modified form. It is clearly visible in v. 24aα: וְהָיָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהָם לְאֱלֹהִים. In this context, it is striking that the prefixed stressed personal pronoun has received more weight through the Tetragrammaton that stands in apposition. From the sentence construction, v. 23bβ may likely belong to the covenant formula. The modified covenant formula would then read as follows:

וְהָיָה יְהוָה לְהָם לְאֱלֹהִים
וְהָיָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהָם לְאֱלֹהִים

So, both Yhwh and the shepherd have their own particular relationship to the people. The “servant David” will become their shepherd while Yhwh presents himself as God to them.

In his study of the covenant event in Deut 26.17–19, Lohfink has drawn attention to the relationship between covenant rite and covenant formula.⁸ He argues that the investiture of a Davidic king provides the starting point for the relationship between covenant rite and covenant formula. In fact, he is able to cite several biblical references that suggest a combination of covenant formula and the new king. To this end, Lohfink mentions 2 Sam 7.24 (regulating the Davidic succession) and 1 Sam 12.22 (the transition of the reign of Samuel to Saul).

Lohfink also points to three prophetic future promises, in which the coming mediator is directly connected with the covenant formula: Jer 30.22; Ezek 34.24; and Ezek 37.23, 27. On these texts (Jer 30.21 f; Ezek 34.23 f and Ezek 37.23, 27), N. Lohfink says:

Finally, we have three prophetic future promises, in which the motif of the new prince, the new king, the new David is connected directly with the ‘covenant formula’... It can-

⁷ Besides Ezek 34.24, the covenant formula occurs again in 34.30, though in a variant form. It thereby forms a framework around the section 34.23–30, which has the “covenant of peace” as its central theme.

⁸ Dtn 26.17–19: “You have declared this day concerning the LORD that he is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his ordinances, and will obey his voice; ⁽¹⁸⁾ and the LORD has declared this day concerning you that you are a people for his own possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, ⁽¹⁹⁾ that he will set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he has spoken” (RSV).

not be ruled out that this motif-connection is new and that the three texts are related. But it is equally possible that perhaps in the future announcement here, the old context of the past shows up again, namely: When a new king comes, the relationship between God and the people is also made new.⁹

2.4 On the Structure of vv. 23–24

The structure of the two verses is relatively complex, a fact which can perhaps be explained by the genesis of the text. Perhaps also the relationships between the individual statements are deliberately kept open. Based on the use of the root רעה, Schwagmeier has proposed the following concentric structure for v. 23:¹⁰

v. 23a₁: והקמתי עליהם רעה אחד

v. 23a₂: ורעה אתהן

v. 23a₃: את עבדי דויד

v. 23b_a: הוא ירעה אתם

v. 23b₃: והוא יהיה להן לרעה

The participles רעה and לרעה form the external frame, just as the verbal uses of the same root in its *weqatal* ורעה and *yiqtol* ירעה forms provide the internal one. Located in the centre of the statement is v. 23a₃: את עבדי דויד. Syntactically, this object-phrase is appositional to רעה אחד, but it is detached by the appearance of the verbal clause ורעה אתהן. Alternatively, את עבדי דויד can be explained as the object of והקמתי עליהם. Then the object is delayed, separated from its verb, to serve a heightening function, which is confirmed by the concretizing expression את עבדי דויד.

This delay is more prominent in the Masoretic text through the *zaqef qaton* in אתהן, and through the *atnach* in the name דויד. Since the accusative particle את can also exercise an underlining, emphasising function, the statement of v. 23a₃ is highlighted further still.¹¹

⁹ Norbert LOHFINK, "Dtn 26,17–19 und die 'Bundesformel,'" in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur I*, Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 8 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990), 211–261 (260): "Schließlich haben wir drei prophetische Zukunftsverheißungen, in denen sich das Motiv des neuen Fürsten, neuen Königs, neuen Davids unmittelbar mit der ‚Bundesformel‘ verbindet ... Es ist nicht ausschließbar, dass diese Motivverbindung neu ist und dass die drei Stellen zusammenhängen. Aber es ist ebenso gut möglich, dass hier in der Zukunftsansage vielleicht der alte Zusammenhang der Vergangenheit wieder aufscheint: wenn ein neuer König kommt, wird auch das Gott-Volk-Verhältnis neu."

¹⁰ Peter SCHWAGMEIER, "Untersuchungen zu Textgeschichte und Entstehung des Ezechielbuches in masoretischer und griechischer Überlieferung" (Dr.Theol. diss., Universität Zürich, 2004), 302.

¹¹ On this possibility, see grammars such as Rudolf MEYER, *Hebräische Grammatik 3: Satzlehre*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1972), § 90,2 f (It says "that a subject can be highlighted through the particle את, -את, which was not originally joined to a specific part of a sentence, but merely serves an emphatic purpose"); Wilhelm GESENIUS and Emil KAUTZSCH, *Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräische Grammatik völlig umgearbeitet von E. Kautzsch*, 28th ed. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1985), § 117i; and Paul JOÜON and Takamitsu MURAOKA, *A Grammar of*

The multi-highlighted object עבדי דויד serves as the main point of the first unit of the statement, and at the same time serves as the logical subject of the two following sentences. These particularly highlight, through the emphatic prefixed personal pronoun, the role of עבד דויד: “He it is who shall feed them;” “He is the one who is to shepherd them.”

The sentence structure of v. 23b β corresponds to the that in v. 24a α , thus the covenant formula:

v. 23b β : והוא־יהיה להן לרעה
v. 24a α : ואני יהוה אהיה להם לאלהים

In this way, the two verses are not only formally intertwined, but also from the actual content, David is involved as a shepherd of the flock in the covenant relationship. In addition, different roles are highlighted by the opposition of the personal pronouns והוא and ואני: the role of the shepherd and the role of Yhwh. The Tetragrammaton, inserted in apposition to the personal pronoun ואני, modifies the covenant formula and underscores the diversity of the subjects and their functions, as well as clearly distinguishing the two from one another.

The second occurrence of “my servant David” in v. 24b β strikes again in the centre of the concentric statement of the preceding verse, thereby qualifying David again in his relation to God (עבדי) and in his relation to the flock: נשיא בתוכם. This message-strengthening formula indicates a slight break and ends the section.

2.5 Key Messages of the Figure of David in Ezekiel 34.23–24

2.5.1 Renewal and Stabilization of Order. Linking up with vv. 17–22, which focus on Yhwh’s acts of justice for the community, vv. 23–24 go further with the aspect of renewal and stabilization of order through the designation of a shepherd. The shepherd is to be appointed by Yhwh himself, as expressed by קום (*Hiphil*). As mentioned above, it will be a legally binding process that, first and foremost, makes the sovereignty of Yhwh visible. In this, there is no contradiction to the theocentric statement of vv. 11–16, although significantly divergent accents might be an indication of work by a complementary hand. That power will be delegated to the shepherd appointed by Yhwh is brought out clearly by the prepositional phrase והקמתי עליהם רעה אחד.

2.5.2 One Shepherd. Ezekiel promises רעה אחד, one shepherd. In this, he differs from Jer 23.4, where several shepherds are mentioned. LXX speaks of “another shepherd”; it has read אחד “one” as אחר “another”: ἕτερον. Probably this reading is original. It presents the many shepherds who have failed (vv. 1–10), against

the ἄτερον, the qualitative “another.”¹² The MT reading, רעה אחר, is probably influenced by Ezek 37.15–28, where אחר is one of the defining keywords. With the use of the keyword אחר the two passages from Ezekiel (34 and 37) are even more related.

2.5.3 David. The identification of the shepherd can be considered the main point of the phrase in v. 23: “my servant David” (את עבדי דויד). This precise naming is grounded in the prophetic tradition of Israel, which on several occasions presents the descendant of David in connection with the salvific future of Israel. Jeremiah 23.5 talks of a “righteous branch” (צמח צדיק), Amos 9.11 speaks of סכת the fallen tent of David that is to be raised up again (הקים), Isa 9.5 f talks of the child “on the throne of David” (על-כסא דוד). Isa 11.1 mentions חטר מגזע ישי (“the sapling from the stump of Jesse”). The only two places outside the Book of Ezekiel where David is expressly mentioned are Hos 3.5 and Jer 30.9:

אחר ישבו בני ישראל ובקשו את־יהוה אלהיהם ואת דוד מלכם
ופחדו אל־יהוה ואל־טובו באחרית הימים:

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek Yhwh their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to Yhwh and to his goodness in the latter days (Hos 3.5)

ועבדו את יהוה אלהיהם ואת דוד מלכם אשר אקים להם:

But they shall serve Yhwh their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them (Jer 30.9)

It is not a revival of the historical David that is described but a figure of the quality of David from the house of David, who will be a constitutive embodiment of the coming salvation.

2.5.4 My Servant. David is twice described as עבדי (“my servant”) in Ezek 34.23–24. In it, his unmistakable relationship with God is expressed: his subordination under Yhwh as אדון (“Lord”) and at the same time, his honourable position before him. The subordination under Yhwh is surely formulated with regard to the failure of the bad shepherds (vv. 1–10). At the same time the title עבד יהוה is to be understood as an honorary title. It is in the same sense that Daniel Block says:

Moreover, in the Old Testament עבד יהוה ... also functioned as an honorific title for those who stood in an official relationship to God, often with the implication of a special election to a task. ... David’s own standing is expressed most clearly by Yahweh himself, who identifies him as ‘David my servant, whom I have chosen’ (1 Kgs 11:34).¹³

¹² It is also possible that אחר “another” refers to the shepherd Yhwh (vv. 11–16). Yhwh would then make use of another shepherd beside his office as the shepherd. Moshe GREENBERG, *Ezekiel 21–37*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2005), 407, entertains such a thought.

¹³ Daniel I. BLOCK, “Bringing Back David: Ezekiel’s Messianic Hope,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. SATTERTHWAITHE, Richard S. HESS, and Gordon J. WENHAM (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 167–188, esp. 175.

2.5.5 *Prince*. Finally, David is described in v. 24aβ as נשיא בתוכם (“prince in their midst”). While Hos 3.5 and Jer 30.9 employ the title מלך for the upcoming David, Ezekiel uses the archaic name נשיא (“prince”). This expression shows the relativized position of the “prince.” At the same time, his integration within the people of Yhwh is underlined by the preposition בתוך, so that the prince is seen as *primus inter pares*.¹⁴

2.6 *Intermediate Results: Characteristics of the Coming David in 34.23–24*

2.6.1 עבדי דוד (“my servant David”) is, according to Ezek 34, a constitutive embodiment of the coming salvation. The juridical connotation of the formulation emphasizes the constitutive character of this figure. But at the same time, the announced David is not a saviour. Yhwh alone causes and brings the coming salvation. However, part of this divine saving action is the appointment of the shepherd David, who plays the role of the servant of Yhwh.

2.6.2 Syntactically, the statement in v. 24aβ (ועבדי דוד נשיא בתוכם) is formulated as a nominal sentence, so it is temporally neutral. The immediately preceding covenant formula in v. 24aα (ואני יהוה אלהיה להם לאלהים) is indicating the reference to time. Once Yhwh in his authority (note the emphatic אני יהוה) is God for Israel (אלהים להם לאלהים), only then (and dependent on it), will David also realize his being “prince” in the midst of the people. Schwagmeier has rightly emphasized: “with that is the rule of David also on the formulation level concomitant with Yhwh’s rule.”¹⁵

2.6.3 The replacement of the usual formulation נשיא להם (“prince for them;” 37.25) with the unusual preposition נשיא בתוכם (“prince among them”) underlines the involvement of Prince David in the relational space of the people. At the same time, this formulation evokes further texts in the Book of Ezekiel and in the Priestly literature in which the statement “I want to dwell among them / my sanctuary will dwell among them” is connected with the covenant formula (e. g., Ezek 37.23–24, 25–27). This would mean that the mediator figure David belongs to God’s people in a salvific future, whose centre is the presence of God. His role “in your midst” is thus transparent to Yhwh and also to the people. The centre of the salvific future certainly remains the presence of God among his people, as the second relevant passage on our subject (Ezek 37) shows.

¹⁴ The absence of the preposition עליהם can be explained as follows: מלך is constructed with על, while on the other hand נשיא is in construct state or with ל. More striking is the use of the preposition בתוכם.

¹⁵ SCHWAGMEIER, *Untersuchungen*, 302: “damit wird die David-Herrschaft auch auf der Formulierungsebene zum Begleitumstand der JHWH-Herrschaft.”

3. The Figure of David according to Ezekiel 37.24–25

3.1 Structure and Context of the Statements about David

The salvation oracle in Ezek 37.15–28 opens with the prophetic word formula in v. 15 and ends with an extended recognition formula in v. 28: “Then the nations will know that I am Yhwh who sanctifies Israel when my sanctuary is in their midst (בהיות מקדשי בתוכם) forever (לעולם).”

The pericope consists of two sections, a symbolic action (vv. 15–19) and its explanation (vv. 20–28). The latter is itself subdivided into two sections, vv. 20–24a and vv. 24b–28, which are characterized by the use of the covenant formula (v. 23, 27) and by the key terms אחד (“one”) and עולם (“forever”). The two statements about David belong to the two parts of the explanation. They are therefore to be understood by the sign of “unity” (אחד, v. 24a) and permanent validity “forever” (עולם, v. 25b).

3.2 David and the Unity of God’s People

3.2.1. *The Context of vv. 20–23, 24a.* The opening of v. 20 refers back to the preceding sign act. Verse 21 formulates the saving action of Yhwh to the people with the three terms לקח + מן, “take out”; קבץ (Piel), “gather”; and בוא (Hiphil) + אל, “bring to.” The same sequence of verbs already appeared in Ezek 36.24 and, similarly, in Ezek 34.13 where the triad is slightly modified and the first expression לקח + מן (“take out”) is replaced by יצא (Hiphil): והוצאתים מן־העמים. This variable triad serves the purpose of characterizing the future saving action of God as a new Exodus. With the new Exodus, Yhwh as king and shepherd works out firstly an ethnic and territorial renewal.

Verse 22 announces a political overhaul and redesign with the keyword אחד, which has the unity of all God’s people under one leadership as the goal. This unity is the work of Yhwh: ועשיתי אחם לגוי אחד (“I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel”). The people so united would need a guide: ומלך אחד יהיה לכלם למלך. The action of this one king is geared towards the unity of God’s people. Not the monarchy as such, but the unity of the people of God is at the centre. David is not the point here. He is introduced from v. 24. No act of installation is mentioned (unlike in Ezek 34.23). So one may question whether it is not originally the kingdom of Yhwh that is in view in v. 22. By uniting the people, he proves to be the sole king and the focal point of the unity. Joyce interprets the text in this way:

The primary concern here seems to be the renewed unity of the people ... rather than the renewal of monarchy as an end in itself. Moreover, it is at least possible (as we shall see later) that v. 22 refers to God as the one king ruling over the reunited nation rather than to any human king.¹⁶

¹⁶ Paul M. JOYCE, “King and Messiah in Ezekiel,” in *King and Messiah in Israel and the An-*

The aim of this divine action – the unification of the nation under one leader – is to strengthen national unity and to permanently exclude a continuing internal political and ethnic schism.

Verse 23 furthers the theme of unity and presents its spiritual dimension: the inner healing of God's people. The liberation from idolatry and the ability to reject it are part of the spiritual renewal, as is the forgiveness of sin. All this is part of a future salvific era. It comes out in the expression *והושעתי אתם* ("I will save them") as a divine rescue action (cf. Ezek 34.22) and as a process of cleansing *וטהרתי אותם* ("and I will cleanse them").

The announcement of the future unity and the renewal of God's people have their first climax and destination point in the covenant formula of v. 23b: *והיו לי ויהיו לאלהים*.¹⁷ The transformation of Yhwh's people is sealed by a new affiliation of Israel to its God and by a new way of God's presence in the covenant.

3.2.2 Verse 24a: David and the Unity of God's People. Verse 24a goes beyond the covenant formula formally. Therefore, v. 24a is often assigned to the following section. On the other hand, this half verse illustrates and substantiates the content of the covenant formula. Verse 24a presents Yhwh's servant David as the *one* shepherd and so connects the covenant formula explicitly with the issue of unity that characterises the whole section, vv. 20–24a. At the same time, David as God's servant receives his special service function for the unity among God's people: *ועבדי דוד מלך עליהם ורועה אחד יהיה לכלם*.

As mentioned in 34.24, it is to be asked if the nominal phrase in 37.24aa is not to be taken as a circumstantial clause, which joins up with the preceding covenant formula and formulates a concomitant of the covenant reality. The reasoning could be paraphrased as follows: "You shall be my people, and I: I will be to them the Godhead – while my servant David will be king over them; he being *one shepherd for them all*."

The profile of David is first of all determined again by his relationship with God. As *עבדי* ("my servant") he is especially related to God within the covenant

cient Near East. Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar, ed. John DAY, JSOTSupp 270 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 323–337 (328). Cf. also Anja KLEIN, *Schriftauslegung im Ezechielbuch. Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Ez 34–39*, BZAW 391 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 361 relating to Ezek 37.20–23*: "Unter dieser Voraussetzung legt es sich nahe, in dem einzigen König, der nach 37,20–23* die Einheit des Volkes garantieren soll, eine Referenz auf den Hirten Jhwh in 34,11–15* zu sehen."

¹⁷ It is striking that, unlike in Ezek 34.24a, the Tetragrammaton is not added as apposition for the strengthening of the divine "I". However through the personal pronoun in the second part of the covenant formula the "I" of Yhwh is emphasized: "They will be my people, and I, myself, I shall be their God."

event. As מלך עליהם he has a political leadership function for the people.¹⁸ The final formulation לכולם יהיה אחד ורועה אחד emphasizes the unity of God's people in two ways: through the "one shepherd" (ורועה אחד) and by referring to the people of God "in its entirety" (לכולם). The history of the once-separated kingdoms comes to its end and will be replaced by the future unity of the people of God.

3.2.3 David as a Lasting Gift from God: v. 25b. The section vv. 24b–28 is characterized by keyword עולם and shows a three-part structure:¹⁹ (1) the renewed people of God (vv. 24b–25); (2) covenant of peace and presence of God (vv. 26–27); and (3) God's testimony of renewed Israel (v. 28). David is mentioned only in the first part, vv. 24b–25. He forms an integral component of the renewed people of God.

The section begins in v. 24b with a reference to Israel's new obedience, which will wipe the past failed history (cf. Ezek 20). This new obedience is a constitutive part of the coming salvation, for it shows the effectiveness of antecedent divine saving action for his people: ובמשפטי ילכו וחקתי ישמרו ועשו אותם.

Verse 25 combines this new obedience with a new occupancy of the land. That life according to the Torah and life in the land objectively belong together was already underlined by the flashback history, Ezek 20. If the land transfer in v. 25a with לעבדי ליעקב ("to my servant, to Jacob") is connected, this may be due to the fact that Jacob is considered as a representative of the exiles,²⁰ who identify themselves with him, while the inhabitants of the land relate to Abraham accordingly (cf. Ezek 33.24). Since Jacob also stands for the Israel living in the Diaspora (cf.

¹⁸ Referring back to v. 22 the question comes up again whether the reference to David was not only subsequently added from v. 24a to v. 22 and so comes secondarily in place of the divine king. See once again JOYCE, *King and Messiah in Ezekiel*, 335: "I have noted that renewed Davidic rule is explicitly promised in vv. 24–25. However, it is conceivable that in the earlier reference in this passage rule by God as king is intended. The verse in question is v. 22: 'I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be king over them all' (such an interpretation is perhaps the more possible in the light of the words of the following verse, 23, 'Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God'). If the divine king is intended here at v. 22, this passage would in this respect resemble the 'two-decker' pattern of chap. 34, presenting divine and human royal figures in parallel, with of course the human figure subordinate to the divine, like a viceroy. However, on balance, the natural reading of 37.22 is probably as a reference to a human king."

¹⁹ See Daniel I. BLOCK, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 415–422; Franz SEDLMEIER, "Ich schliesse für sie einen Bund des Friedens' (Ez 34,25; 37,26). Visionen des Heils im Ezechielbuch," in *Inquire pacem. Beiträge zu einer Theologie des Friedens: Festschrift für Bischof Viktor Josef Dammertz OSB, zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz SEDLMEIER and Thomas HAUSMANNINGER (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2004), 42–71 (62–67); Franz SEDLMEIER, *Das Buch Ezechiel. Kapitel 25–48*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar 21/2 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2013), 231–236.

²⁰ The expression "to my servant, Jacob" refers to Ezek 28.25 f. The description of Jacob as "my servant" is used in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 44.1, 2, 8; 45.4; 48.20); in Jeremiah (Jer 30.10; 46.27,28). It highlights the protective action that exists between Yhwh and his servant. At the same time, Jacob represents the collective Israel (cf. Isa 43.10), such that the expression of God's faithfulness and his protection of his people comes out clearly.

Isa 43.10), the promise of the land that is linked with Jacob and his descendants for three generations is to be understood in its permanent validity.

In this context of consistently valid promises of salvation (cf. the keyword עֶלְוִים is “my servant David” mentioned again in v. 25bβ: וְיָדוּד עַבְדִּי נָשִׂיא לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם (LXX: καὶ Δαυὶδ ὁ δοῦλός μου ἄρχων αὐτῶν ἔσται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). This statement probably looks back to such texts as 2 Sam 7.5, 8 where Yhwh calls David “my servant” twice. Even David describes himself in the prayer ten times as “your servant.” Moreover the term עֶלְוִים occurs eight times in 2 Sam 7.²¹

In contrast to v. 24a the role of David is not described with the title “king”, but with נָשִׂיא (“prince”). In addition to his subordination to Yahweh as the true king of Israel, his connection with the people is expressed again. Presumably this title, which occurs as a standard statement especially in Ezek 40–48, signals a critical distance from the behaviour of the real kings of Israel. Also, this messianic ruler figure coming from the house of David is assured of permanent existence: נָשִׂיא לָהֶם לְעוֹלָם.

The following two sections on “Yhwh’s abiding presence” (vv. 26–27) and “Israel’s witness to God” (v. 28) say nothing more of David. This silence about David confirms once more that he is not the main character. The main character is Yhwh. And yet, David *is* a part of the renewed Israel, which has found its full form.

4. Conclusions and Summary

As part of the symbolic action of the two rods Ezek 37.24–25 announces “one shepherd,” “my [Yhwh’s] servant David,” who – as king and as the “one” shepherd – is the guarantee of the future unity of the people of God. The combination of the terms “king,” “one shepherd,” “my servant David,” and “prince” makes it clear that this “messianic” figure is, on the one hand, an expression of the unity of God’s people and, on the other hand, remains clearly related and subordinate to Yhwh. The announced king is given a service function in regard to Yhwh’s plans of salvation, which are aimed at the unity of the people of God.

Ezekiel 34.23–24 probably has in view not only Jer 23.5–6, but also Ezek 37.24–25 and 34.11–16 as background texts. With their being taken over and being integrated into the covenant formula, the statements of Ezek 37.24–25 are further made relative: “He [David] becomes for them a prince, and I myself, Yhwh, will be for them Godhead, while my servant David is prince among them” (v. 24a). David is therefore totally involved in the covenant action between Yhwh and his people.

²¹ For the everlasting nature of the covenant made with David, see 1 Chr 28.4, 7, 8, 9 and Ps 89.4–5, 29–38.

The mentioned relativizing of David gives, at the same time, a certain profile to the figure of David:

- a) David is not the first prince “over them” or “for them,” but “prince among them.”
- b) The royal title from Ezekiel 37 is not used in 34.23–24, but only the appellation נָשִׂיא, a title from ancient times, which emphasizes the subordinate position in relation to Yhwh.
- c) The phrase “my servant” is certainly a term of respect, but also it makes explicit his employment relationship to Yhwh and his attachment to him.
- d) The exclusive use of the title רֹעֶה “shepherd” rather than a royal title in Ezek 34.23–24 prevents a one-sided political misunderstanding of the future ruler.

Finally, all statements and titles in Ezek 34.23–24 and in Ezek 37.24–25 testify that the future descendant of David, whom Ezekiel and his disciples or some later editors expect, is entirely related to Yhwh. Not he, but Yhwh himself will bring forth the salutary future. The “messianic” figure introduced here is also entirely involved in the people, as the special design of the covenant formula shows. It belongs to the renewed people of God in its full form. The promised David is thus characterized by two relationships: towards Yhwh and towards the people of Yhwh.

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