

The “Little Ones” of verse 7 (Zechariah 13)

Adam Clarke:

And I will turn mine hand upon the little ones - I will take care of the little flock, and preserve them from Jewish malice and Gentile persecution. And so this little flock was most wondrously preserved, and has been increasing from year to year from that time to the present day.

But wait! What about the “little ones” against whom God turns His hand? Is God really destroying the poor? The children? The weak? Here we have another error of the (Talmudic scholars, known as the) Masoretes who have disturbed the text and attributed great crime to God.

The verb *tsā`ar* means “to be small” or “to be insignificant.” The root is shared among many Semitic languages such as the Arabic word *tsaghura* and the Akkadian *tseheru*.

The Hebrew verb clearly appears in Job 14:21 and Jer. 30:19 meaning “one who is brought low” or “one who is insignificant.” That the word appears as a Poel participle in Zech. 13:7 is disputed among biblical scholars. The word is commonly translated there as “little ones”; however, Loewenstamm, based on a linguistic relation with the Ugaritic root *tsgr* (“shepherd”), has proposed that this word could be another word for “shepherd,” which appears twice in the verse already (HED # 7749).¹

881, 7749.151
אֶת־הַרְעָה
'et-hārō'eh
do, art, v, Qal, act, ptc, ms
the shepherd

6142, 7096.152
עַל־הַצְּעָרִים
'al-haṣṣō'ārîm
prep, art, v, Qal, act, ptc, mp
against the small ones

The point is, this is God saying that He will bring judgment on the

¹ Thoralf Gilbrant, [“צַעַר”](#) in *The Old Testament Hebrew-English Dictionary*, The Complete Biblical Library (WORDsearch, 1998).

wicked shepherds, which links this fulfillment with the events of Zechariah 11, just as we would naturally understand it to do.

Thankfully, the more ancient Greek translation of the text has preserved the correct rendering:

Zechariah 13:7 (NETS (Primary Texts))

⁷ “Awake, O sword, against my shepherds and against his fellow citizen,” says the Lord Almighty. Smite the shepherds, and remove the sheep, and I will bring my hand **against the shepherds**.

Orthodox Study Bible:

“and I shall bring My hand against the shepherds.”

Peshitta (ancient Syrian translation),

“I will turn my hand against the great ones.”

The point is that the Masoretic text that is the basis for all modern Bibles is unreliable as compared with versions more ancient than itself. This is not difficult to do, as the Masoretic text was not finished in its editing process until AD 1100! Over a fifteen-hundred years AFTER Zechariah was written and over two-thousand years after many other books in the Old Testament. God is here promising that those wicked who had misled and misused the people they were meant to shepherd would be judged for their wickedness.

Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? Indeed, He shall—and He did.