

Bad Shepherds

Zechariah 11

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Zechariah 11:1-3 – Desolation of Israel

Open your doors, O Lebanon,

That fire may devour your cedars.

² *Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,*

Because the mighty trees are ruined.

Wail, O oaks of Bashan,

For the thick forest has come down.

³ *There is the sound of wailing shepherds!*

For their glory is in ruins.

There is the sound of roaring lions!

For the pride of the Jordan is in ruins.

From where will Israel's future judgment come?

Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars: This describes the coming of destructive armies of judgment from the north, through Lebanon. The doors of Lebanon are the mountain passes between Lebanon and Israel.

When will this judgment happen?

This prophecy was fulfilled in the Roman campaign against Judea.

- These verses might have described the Babylonian invasion if they had been written earlier; but that was past history by Zechariah's time.
- There is nothing in the history of the people that a comprehensive destruction of the land can refer to prior to the terrible destruction ordered by Vespasian and his successor Titus.

Is there any significance to the cedar, cypress and oak trees that are fallen here?

The cedar trees illustrate Lebanon's strength and once they fall the lesser forests of cypress and oak will also be destroyed, so they also wail.

Who are the wailing shepherds and lions?

The leadership of Israel mourn because of judgment on the land that is coming because Israel has rejected the Good Shepherd... Jesus when He comes.

Parallel passage, Jeremiah 25:34-38 – *Wail, shepherds, and cry! Roll about in the ashes, You leaders of the flock! For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions are*

fulfilled; You shall fall like a precious vessel. ³⁵ *And the shepherds will have no way to flee,*
Nor the leaders of the flock to escape. ³⁶ *A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and a wailing of the leaders to the flock will be heard. For the Lord has plundered their pasture,* ³⁷ *And the peaceful dwellings are cut down because of the fierce anger of the Lord.* ³⁸ *He has left His lair like the lion; for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the Oppressor, and because of His fierce anger.*

- This clarifies that the lions are the oppressive agents God raised up to discipline Israel.

What is the significance of the pride of the Jordan being in ruins?

God pronounces judgment on the pride of Israel, and they had pride in the river Jordan and in their thick forest as well.

What is the problem the Lord has with pride?

There is a difference between the kind of pride that God hates (Proverbs 8:13) and the kind of pride we can feel about a job well done (Galatians 6:4) or the kind of pride we express over the accomplishment of loved ones (2 Corinthians 7:4).

- The kind of pride that stems from self-righteousness or conceit is sin, however, and God hates it because it is a hindrance to seeking Him.
- Psalm 10:4 explains that the proud are so consumed with themselves that their thoughts are far from God: *"In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God."*
- The proud are so blinded by their pride that they think they have no need of God.

What are the consequences of pride?

Proverbs 16:18-19 – *pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.*

Satan was cast out of heaven because of pride (Isaiah 14:12-15). For those who rise up in defiance against God, there is nothing ahead but disaster (Isaiah 14:22).

How does pride keep people from accepting God's provision for salvation?

Admitting sin and acknowledging that in our own strength we can do nothing to inherit eternal life is a stumbling block for prideful people.

- Pride is giving ourselves the credit for something that God has accomplished.
- Pride is taking the glory that belongs to God alone and keeping it for ourselves.
- Pride is essentially self-worship.

Zechariah 11:4-14 – Prophecy of the Shepherds

⁴ Thus says the Lord my God, "Feed the flock for slaughter, ⁵ whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt; those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich'; and their shepherds do not pity them. ⁶ For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land," says the Lord. "But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of his king. They shall attack the land, and I will not deliver them from their hand."

⁷ So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock. ⁸ I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. ⁹ Then I said, "I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other's flesh." ¹⁰ And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹ So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. ¹² Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

¹³ And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter. ¹⁴ Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

What did God tell Zechariah to do?

He told Him to act out a prophecy of judgment. So, he fed a literal flock of sheep that represents the people of God. As the shepherd Zechariah represents the LORD who has appointed this flock for a season of judgment.

What is the significance of the two staffs of Zechariah?

Zechariah's two staffs were named "Beauty" (grace or favor) and "Bonds" (unity). The staff was a common tool for a shepherd (Psalm 23:4); one was used for running off wild beasts and the other for rescuing sheep in trouble.

v5 – Why was the flock of sheep doomed?

Their leaders (shepherds) were effectively selling their people (sheep) to foreign oppressors.

v6 – To whom is God giving the people over?

To their neighbors and the king of their neighbors. This is what God did in raising up Babylon and it is what He said He would do if Israel became unfaithful...

Deuteronomy 28:49-50 – *The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.*

v8 – What is with the three shepherds who were dismissed in one month?

We know that Zechariah is acting prophetically, but it is hard to identify these three shepherds whom Zechariah hated, and they hated him.

- The best explanation is probably the oldest, which sees the three shepherds not as three individuals but as three classes of leaders, namely: the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel.
- The offices of prophet, priest, and king were taken away from Israel after the Roman conquest of Judea and have never been restored - because they are now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

It is also possible that this mutual animosity between the leaders of Israel and God refers to those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah...

Luke 9:22 – *The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.*

v9 – How did God execute judgment on Israel?

I will not feed you. Let what is dying die: God merely withdraws His hand of protection. At one time God had a covenant with all the peoples, preventing them from attacking His people, Israel. When God decides to break the covenant, His people will be attacked.

Did Israel resort to cannibalism?

Let those who are left eat each other's flesh: This really happened during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. according to Josephus.

v10 – Why did Zechariah cut the staff Beauty in two?

This represented the end of God's favorable care of Israel.

Did God break His covenant with Israel?

This is not referring to the Abrahamic covenant which was unconditional. This has to be referring to the Mosaic Covenant which was conditional... God was turning Israel over to divine discipline.

v11 – Who was it that knew Zechariah was speaking truth from God?

The poor of the flock ... knew that it was the word of the LORD: These are the faithful remnant who know that even the hard words are from God.

v12 – Why did Zechariah ask to be paid?

Give me my wages: Zechariah is "play-acting" this prophecy, employing himself as a shepherd over a flock. Now he asks his employer for his wages, and they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

Why was the 30 pieces of silver call a princely sum?

Zechariah speaks sarcastically here. Thirty pieces of silver was not an insignificant amount, but it was the price of a slave...

Exodus 21:32 – *If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.*

It was the lowest they could pay, and it said to Zechariah "we think of you as a slave."

v12-13 – How was this a messianic passage?

This speaks prophetically of Jesus, who was contemptuously betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15 and 27:3) - the price of a slave.

Threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter:

Curiously, Zechariah says that the thirty pieces of silver were thrown into the house of the LORD but that they were also given to the potter. This is an exact fulfillment of what Judas did with his thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 27:3-10).

What was the significance of the potter's field?

The money to betray Jesus - His purchase price - went to buy a potter's field (Matthew 27:7). A potter's field was a piece of useless land where he threw his broken, damaged, and rejected pots. Jesus really did purchase the potter's field - the place where broken, rejected, and useless people like us are scattered.

Is there an inconsistency in Scripture here?

Matthew 27:9-10 – *Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me.*

This is a problem because clearly Zechariah records the passage mentioned in Matthew 27:9-10. There are generally three solutions offered for this problem:

- Some think it is an error but an early copyist made a mistake. Perhaps Matthew wrote Zechariah, but an early copyist put Jeremiah instead
- Some think that Jeremiah spoke this prophecy and Zechariah recorded it. This may be the word spoken by Jeremiah, but recorded by Zechariah
- Some think that Matthew refers to scroll of Jeremiah which was the first book in the scroll of all the prophets including the book of Zechariah

v14 – Why did Zechariah cut in two the other staff called Union?

Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel: After the exchange of the thirty pieces of silver the staff of Bonds (unity) is broken. This was fulfilled when Israel was scattered by the Romans after their rejection of their Shepherd Jesus.

Zechariah 11:15-17 – The Worthless Shepherd

¹⁵ *And the Lord said to me, "Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶ For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.*

¹⁷ *"Woe to the worthless shepherd, Who leaves the flock! A sword shall be against his arm And against his right eye; His arm shall completely wither, And his right eye shall be totally blinded."*

Why did God tell Zechariah to take up implements of a foolish shepherd?

Now Zechariah play-acts as a foolish shepherd who does not care for the sheep the way that a shepherd should.

What may we distinguish between godly and foolish shepherds?

- The foolish shepherd will not care for those who are cut off but a wise and godly shepherd will seek the lost
- The foolish shepherd will not seek the young but a wise and godly shepherd knows that the young need to come to the LORD as much as older people
- The foolish shepherd will not heal those that are broken but a wise and godly shepherd looks for broken hearts and lives and mends them with God's love and word

- The foolish shepherd will not feed those that still stand but a wise and godly shepherd will faithfully feed the sheep
- The foolish shepherd will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces but a wise and godly shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11)

How is it God will raise up this future foolish shepherd in the land?

This foolish shepherd is allowed and appointed by God as judgment because His people forsook the true shepherd. This was fulfilled in Israel's rejection of Jesus. They rejected the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18) but would receive another shepherd...

John 5:43 – I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.

Who is this worthless shepherd that Israel would receive?

This is referring to the Antichrist who presents himself as Israel's savior by championing 7-year a peace covenant... this is the official beginning of the 7-year tribulation...

Daniel 9:27 – Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.

Why does God say, “woe to the worthless shepherd”?

Though God appointed the foolish shepherd in light of Israel's rejection of the Good Shepherd, it does not mean that God approves of the foolish shepherd. God will judge that worthless shepherd who injured His flock.

What will become of this worthless shepherd?

God will destroy him...

A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye; his arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded

This is symbolism where the eye represents his intelligence and arm represents his power. While the Antichrist uses his satanic power and intelligence to rise to power over the world, his wounded intelligence and power is an act of grace on God's part to protect those who would enter the Millennial Kingdom. God will so afflict the Antichrist before he meets his end...

Revelation 19:20 – Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

It is likely this wounding of the Antichrist has a dual fulfillment... figuratively and quite literally based on:

Revelation 13:3 – I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.

Some say the Antichrist will suffer a fatal wound but at least appears to come back to life which is Satan's mimicking the resurrection of Christ. If this is the case, the wounding described in Zechariah would be literal.

Is the weakening of the Antichrist a pattern we see in the ungodly?

Yes, God afflicts the reasoning power of the ungodly as part of turning the over to themselves...

Romans 1:21-22 – because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools

It is amazing how the policies of the ungodly always fail, making worse the situation they are trying to improve or bringing about the very problem they are trying to avoid.

What principles do we see from our discussion today that we should apply in the here and now?

- Pride is destructive, the Christian should nip this in the bud whenever it crops up.
- There are consequences for rejecting God's provision for salvation.
- There are no contradictions in Scripture, only gaps in our own understanding.
- The Antichrist is coming and we can already see the spirit of Antichrist among godless worthless shepherds.
- The policies of the godless will always fail, Christians should do what we can to support godly leadership.