



ZECHARIAH, Being the People of God

Rejection of the Messiah

Lesson 11 Zechariah 11:1-17

As we begin this chapter, we should keep in mind that chapters 9, 10, and 11 form a single unit. The chapter divisions and verse notations were added by translators and are not part of the original Hebrew text. There is debate about where these first three verses are properly part of the sub-unit of thought in chapter 10, or form the introduction to the remaining verses in chapter 11. My view is that the latter position is the appropriate one, and the chapter division here is proper. Either view does not alter the overall meaning of the three-chapter unit.

To put this chapter in context, we should recall that in chapter 9, Zechariah prophesied about a future ruler (from his standpoint), Alexander the Great, who would conquer most of the then-known world, except for Judah. God would supernaturally protect Judah. Beginning in chapter 9, verse 9, a different ruler is introduced, namely Messiah Jesus. Messiah will not be like Alexander or any other earthly kings, and He will have a worldwide dominion. Whereas chapter 9, verse 9, speaks of Jesus' first coming, verses 10 through 17 look to His second coming. Chapter 10 provides additional information about conditions during His kingdom, especially blessing and security. In chapter 11, Israel's future response to Messiah is presented, namely to reject him and value him at 30 pieces of silver, a slave's price (see Exodus 21:32). Israel will reject the good shepherd and be relegated to a hireling.

11:1 "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. **2** Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. **3** *There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.*"

These introductory verses explain the judgment that will result from Israel's characteristic rejection of Jesus as Messiah, which rejection is explicit in verses 10 through 14. The historical fulfillment will be in the first century when the Romans overthrow the growing Jewish rebellion, culminating in the sacking of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The rebellion was not limited to Israel, and the Romans brought judgment against its neighbors as well. In verse 1, Lebanon is told it might as well open its doors to the invaders because the destruction is certain. Zechariah writes that they will burn Lebanon's cedars. Lebanon was known for its cedars, and in fact supplied the wood for the Solomonic Temple. The identification between Lebanon and its cedars is so strong that the destruction of the cedars is symbolic of the overthrow of the nation. In a very literal sense, the invading army would render the land a wasteland. And since the mighty cedars will fall, the more modest fir trees should wail as their destruction is also certain. This emphasizes the totality of the coming destruction. Zechariah states that "*the mighty are spoiled*," which is a reference to the overthrow of Lebanon's soldiers and rulers. The trees of Bashan, an area northeast of the Sea of Galilee, will also fall as the old ("*vintage*") forests are destroyed. In a literal sense, the shepherds will howl in agony as their herds are stolen. Again, the literal event speaks more broadly of the destruction, and here it points to the fact that those in authority will lose their positions. The young lions and the "*pride of Jordan*" are both references to lions and are poetically word paired with shepherds and, therefore, probably is representative of princes and kings that will be defeated. (see, e.g., Jeremiah 50:44, Ezekiel 19:1-9).

11:4 “Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; 5 Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.”

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows: vv. 4-6 introduce the good shepherd, vv. 7-14 show the characteristic rejection of the good shepherd and the breaking of his two symbolic staffs, and vv. 15-17 address a new, worthless shepherd sent to the people. These verses begin to explain the reason for the destruction in the first three verses. The “*flock of the slaughter*” refers to Judah, a flock that is not being fed, but slaughtered by those that should be its shepherds. The reference to “*they that sell them*” and “*possessors*” is a reference to foreigners who rule over Israel, sell the people as chattel, and slay them. These wicked people would offer praise to God for making them rich through the trade in Jewish slaves, and feel no guilt in their actions (“*hold themselves not guilty*”). Moreover, Israel’s own shepherds have no compassion for the people. To set up a divine object lesson for how Messiah will be received by the people at this future time, God commands Zechariah to offer his service in feeding the sheep of Israel. There is considerable debate about whether Zechariah literally offered his services to the people or only did so in some symbolic fashion. God often had prophets play out a divine object lesson before the people (see 1 Samuel 15:27-28; Isaiah 20:2; Jeremiah 27:2-12; Ezekiel 12:1-16, 37:15-23; Hosea 1:2-3). In either event, the message conveyed is the same. Zechariah’s offer to feed the sheep foreshadows Jesus’ presentation of himself as the good shepherd. Zechariah will face rejection (the literal reality of this rejection may be further confirmed by Jesus’ statement that Zechariah was eventually martyred, Matthew 23:35), just as Jesus will. We might ask why Zechariah would face rejection. Probably, a significant amount of time has passed since the eight night visions of Zechariah that helped encourage a revival and the building of the Temple. It would appear that the people are returning to their old ways by the time Zechariah is commanded by God to play out the role of the good shepherd.

11:6 “For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver *them*.”

As a punishment for its rejection of Messiah, God would allow Israel to be defeated by its neighbors and foreign kings. These other nations will “*smite the land*,” and God will not deliver Israel from this judgment. Again, the fulfillment of this prophecy comes with the Roman quashing of the Jewish rebellion in 70 A.D. Although most Jewish people do not make the connection, their defeat by the Romans and the scattering that remains in place to this day of the people from the land came as a result of their rejection of Jesus Christ.

QUESTION

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1. What does verse 6 teach about God’s response to a nation that characteristically rejects Him?
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11:7 “And I will feed the flock of slaughter, *even you*, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.”

When Messiah comes, He will feed “the flock of the slaughter,” indeed He will especially focus on the faithful (“*O poor of the flock*,” as in poor in spirit or humble). Zechariah comments on his role in delivering this prophecy. To understand his statement, we must be reminded that shepherds traditionally carried two staffs, one for walking support and one for fighting off predators. One staff is called Favor (or “*Beauty*”) and one called Union (or “*Bands*”). The staff called Favor or Beauty signified God’s grace toward His people, and the staff called Union or Bands symbolized the union of the two nations (Israel and Judah). We are to understand that Zechariah is carrying these staffs in the role of a shepherd and is feeding the flock, which is likely a reference to teaching and prophesying.

11:8 “Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul lothed them, and their soul also abhorred me.”

The identification of the three shepherds has been debated for centuries. Rather than understanding these to be specific people, the better view is probably that they are three classes of shepherds (prophets, priests, kings) that Messiah will bring judgment upon when He comes because they rejected him. This would be fulfilled in the first century when the Jewish leadership is destroyed by Rome. That final destruction would befall them quickly (“*cut off in one month*”).

11:9 “Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.”

Because of Messiah’s rejection by the nation, He will not shepherd them. He will not feed the flock, nor deliver them from the Romans and the consequences of the coming destruction. The last phrase seems to indicate that famine will follow the destruction, and with the famine, cannibalism. The Jewish historian Josephus made a record of this event in connection with the Roman siege (see *War*, VI, 193-213):

Now of those perished by famine in the city, the number was prodigious, and the miseries they underwent were unspeakable; for if so much as the shadow of any kind of food did anywhere appear, a war was commenced presently; and the dearest friends fell a fighting one with another about it, snatching from each other the most miserable supports of life. Nor would men believe that those who were dying had no food; but the robbers would search them when they were expiring, lest any one should have concealed food in their bosoms, and counterfeited dying: nay, these robbers gaped for want, and ran about stumbling and staggering along like mad dogs, and reeling against the doors of the houses like drunken men; they would also, in the great distress they were in, rush into the very same houses two or three times in one and the same day. Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes; and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed: the very wisps of old hay became food to some; and some gathered up fibers, and sold a very small weight of them for four Attic [drachmae]. But why do I describe the shameless impudence that the famine brought on men in their eating inanimate things, while I am going to relate a matter of fact, the like to which no history relates, either among the Greeks or Barbarians! It is horrible to speak of it, and incredible when heard. I had indeed willingly omitted this calamity of ours, that I might not seem to deliver what is so portentous to posterity, but that I have innumerable witnesses to it in my own age; and, besides, my country would have had little reason to thank me for suppressing the miseries that she underwent at this time.

There was a certain woman that dwelt beyond Jordan, her name was Mary; her father was Eleazar, of the village Bethzub, which signifies the House of Hyssop. She was eminent for her family and her wealth, and had fled away to Jerusalem with the rest of the multitude, and was with them besieged therein at this time. The other effects of this woman had been already seized upon; such I mean as she had brought with her out of Perea, and removed to the city. What she had treasured up besides, as also what food she had contrived to save, had been also carried off by the rapacious guards, who came every day running into her house for that purpose. This put the poor woman into a very great passion, and by the frequent reproaches and imprecations she cast at these rapacious villains, she had provoked them to anger against her; but none of them, either out of the indignation she had raised against herself, or out of the commiseration of her case, would take away her life; and if she found any food, she perceived her labors were for others, and not for herself; and it was now become impossible for her anyway to

find anymore food, while the famine pierced through her very bowels and marrow, when also her passion was fired to a degree beyond the famine itself; nor did she consult with anything but with her passion and the necessity she was in. She then attempted a most unnatural thing; and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, "O, thou miserable infant! For whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this famine, and this sedition? As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves! This famine also will destroy us, even before that slavery comes upon us:—yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both the other. Come on; be thou my food, and be thou a fury to these seditious varlets and a byword to the world, which is all that is now wanting to complete the calamities of us Jews." As soon as she had said this she slew her son; and then roasted him, and ate the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her, that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied, that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them; and withal uncovered what was left of her son. Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight; when she said to them, "This is mine own son; and what hath been done was mine own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not you pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother; but if you be so scrupulous and do abominate this my sacrifice, as I have eaten the one half, let the rest be reserved for me also." After which, those men went out trembling, being never so much affrighted at anything as they were at this, and with some difficulty they left the rest of that meat to the mother. Upon which the whole city was full of this horrid action immediately; and while every body laid his miserable case before their own eyes, they trembled, as if this unheard-of action had been by themselves. So those that were thus distressed by the famine were very desirous to die; and those already dead were esteemed happy, because they had not lived long enough either to hear or to see such miseries.

QUESTION

2. When God allows a nation to fend for itself (physically and spiritually), what happens?
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11:10 "And I took my staff, *even Beauty*, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. **11** And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it *was* the word of the LORD."

Zechariah continues the divine object lesson before the people. Presumably, this occurs in a public place, and because he is known as a prophet, people will observe his action and spread the word. Zechariah takes the staff named Beauty, representative of God's goodness and grace toward His people, and breaks it. This symbolizes the fact that God's covenant of protection and blessing of the people is ended. Some would argue that this speaks of the termination of the Mosaic Covenant at the cross (see Colossians 2:14), but in context, more likely it just indicates God lifting the hedge of protection He placed around the nation. When the destruction comes, the "*poor of the flock*" (i.e., the poor of spirit or faithful) will recognize the fulfillment of Scripture ("*knew it was the word of the LORD*").

11:12 "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give *me* my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver. **13** And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty *pieces* of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD."

Zechariah, playing the role of the good shepherd, asks the people to give him his severance pay since he has, in essence, been fired. Basically, he says that if they think he is entitled to something, they

should give it to him, but if not, they can “*forbear*” or give him nothing. In response, the people determine that his worth is 30 pieces of silver (a slave’s value under the law, Exodus 21:32) and they give it to him. In response to this, God tells Zechariah to cast the money to the potter, and then sarcastically God says, “*A goodly price that I was prised at of them.*” Zechariah obeyed God and cast the 30 pieces of silver to the potter at the Temple. This potter probably produced the vessels needed for the Temple operations. Of course, the meaning of this prophecy really does not become clear until, in the New Testament, Jesus is betrayed for 30 pieces of silver and the traitor Judas Iscariot returns the money to the Jewish leaders, who in turn purchase a potter’s field for burying foreigners since they did not want blood money in the Temple treasury. (Matthew 27:3-10).

As a side note, when Matthew says this prophecy was fulfilled, he ascribed it not to Zechariah but Jeremiah. Some have seen this as a contradiction or error in the text and numerous explanations have arisen to explain it. One is that Matthew was drawing from both Jeremiah (especially chapter 19) and Zechariah, and so he named the more prominent prophet. Another explanation that is also satisfactory is that in Jewish tradition, the prophet writings were organized with Jeremiah coming first, and thus Matthew can be seen as quoting the passage from the roll of the prophets, which is cited by its first book, Jeremiah.

QUESTIONS

3. How accurate is God’s prophecy about Messiah? How do we test whether prophecy is from God?
 4. List some other prophecies about Messiah’s life and consider the probability that any man would fulfill all of the prophecies perfectly. Why does the Bible have so much prophecy about Jesus?
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11:14 “Then I cut asunder mine other staff, *even Bands*, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.”

Zechariah continues the role play and breaks the second staff. Since this staff represented unity of the two nations (Judah and Israel), the breaking of the staff indicates disunity or strife between them, which Zechariah explicitly states, “*That I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*” This internal strife characterized the two nations in Jesus’ day. There was political strife as different groups vied for power (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Herodians), as well as the antagonism of Judah toward Samaria.

11:15 “And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. **16** For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, *which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.*”

At this point, Zechariah is told by God to play a second role, that of a foolish (or wicked) shepherd (“*take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd*”). God will raise of a shepherd in “*the land*” (namely, Israel). A good shepherd searches out the lost sheep, but the wicked shepherd that God will raise up will not do so (“*shall not visit those that be cut off*”). He will not take care of the young sheep that need more attention, nor will he mend the wounded sheep, nor even feed the sheep that are before him. Instead, he will devour them completely, even removing their hooves to get every last morsel. The picture of the wicked shepherd is a future leader that God will raise up that will not care for the people and will persecute and kill them. It is not clear that Zechariah’s prophecy has one specific ruler in mind, but it does seem that many bad shepherds fit the bill, and they all portend a future ruler often referred to as Anti-Christ.

11:17 “Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword *shall be* upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.”

Although God will raise up the wicked shepherd, God will also bring judgment on him (“*woe to the idol shepherd*”). The sword shall be upon him. The image is that of a shepherd wounded so that he is unable to shepherd. This shepherd has his arm injured so that he cannot defend with a staff, and then his eye is injured so that he cannot see. God will render him unable to defend himself, then (by implication) slay him. The destruction of Anti-Christ is addressed in other places in Scripture (see Daniel 7:8-11, 26; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:19-21, 20:10).

QUESTION

5. Why does God raise up the wicked shepherd?
