

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 22, Chapter 11

To repeat the mantra that I've spoken since the introduction to the Book of Zechariah, this is perhaps the most challenging book in the Bible to properly interpret, and, yet, one of the most important from which to glean knowledge. Chapter 11 might be the prince of all the difficult Zechariah chapters (as a whole) to deal with.

To aid us in dissecting it, I'll begin by saying that we can divide the chapter into 3 fairly obvious sections. The first section is verses 1 – 3, which amounts to a threat of judgment given in a Hebrew poetic format. Verses 4 -14 present us with the second section, which speaks about, and gives us a description of, the good shepherd. Finally, section 3, is verses 15 – 17 and it provides us with a brief illustration of the bad or false shepherd.

This chapter was written a considerable length of time after the completion of Zerubbabel's Temple. So, Yehud was operating under a stable government, and the Temple and Priesthood were operating. The information is not about Israel's past or present from where Zechariah stood in history, but rather it is about the future and it might be depicting the most dark time (or times) of Israel's long history. However, there is much debate over when this awful destruction that is pictured, occurred or will occur. That is, as we look back in history from the vantage point of the year 2025, is there a particular devastating event that is being spoken about, or is it yet to come? I'll not get into all the possibilities that various scholars suggest might be the one because, frankly, it is just too vague to speak with certainty. In fact, if one wants to take this passage as more of a general prediction of Jerusalem's future (as some Bible scholars suggest), then there really isn't one particular event to look to at, past or future, at all.

Perhaps if one were to take a vote of all the various views, the winner with the most votes would probably be the event of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and it would be characterized as a divine punishment upon the Jews in response to Israel rejecting her Messiah. I want to pause just a moment to address that issue of Israel rejecting their Messiah, and what it

means. This common accusation of the Jews rejecting Yeshua (that is really a lynchpin of Christian doctrine) needs to be examined more carefully. After all, the New Testament tells us that many thousands of Jews accepted Him. So, what is the numerical criteria that must be met to count Israel as having rejected Christ if several thousands aren't enough to consider it as acceptance? Does it have to be a simple majority (50.1% of Jews)? Does it matter which Jews accept or deny? That is, is it only about the ones in Jerusalem? Or, perhaps, only the Jews living in the Holy Land? Or does it have to include the 95% of all Jews living in the Diaspora most of whom hadn't even heard of Yeshua? Bumper sticker slogans and slanders like "the Jews rejected Christ" aren't meant to represent truth. They are meant to elicit emotional responses and bigoted viewpoints.

My position is that this rejection must be based upon a national corporate level. That is, the disposition of the Jewish leadership towards Yeshua must be the standard to determine national acceptance or rejection, and this since it is the leadership who are representatives of the nation and the people as an identifiable entity. In the Middle East, it was always the beliefs of the head of the family who determined the faith of the family... because everyone in the family simply, by ancient custom, followed what he decided. I think this blends well with what we will read in chapter 11 in which God ultimately blames bad or false shepherds... leaders... for Israel's false beliefs and for the people being way off track in their religion. And, when we look to the present, the past, and the future, the judgments spoken about are on two levels: the national level, and on the individual level. When a nation is judged, or an entire people group is judged, that nation or people group is harmed economically, physically, militarily, and usually includes a loss of independence. When an individual person is judged, it is usually more speaking about an eternal future although it certainly can involve personal catastrophes as curses or punishments that are isolated to that person or his immediate family.

Thus, I think that when we hear the damning words that the Jews rejected Jesus, we need to think not in terms of the number of common individuals who did or did not accept Yeshua as Messiah, but rather of the Jewish civil and religious leadership. Again; we know from the New Testament that on an individual level, thousands and thousands of Jews DID accept Yeshua as

Messiah in the Holy Land alone. And once the Disciples, and later the Apostles like Paul, took this message out to the Diaspora, many more Jews also accepted Him. But, what of Jewish leadership in the Diaspora? For the most part, history says no. Just as it still is to this day.

Not only is this important to consider as we ponder how to judge Jews regarding their acceptance or rejection of Messiah Yeshua, but how God looks upon all nations. The Bible is clear: it is the mindset and aims of the leadership that determines national judgment.

Open your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 11.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 11 all

The mood of this chapter is dark and foreboding. This is quite the contrast to chapters 9 and 10 where hope abounds. Theologians and Bible scholars lament that these verses bring up some seriously prickly theological matters, making the material not only controversial but also frustrating. Front and center are whom, exactly, the good shepherds and the bad shepherds are meant to symbolize, and by what standard is their classification as good or bad based. As I read over various theological viewpoints, it becomes clear that the most of the disagreements and upsets come as a result of the theologian or religious leader having a predetermined set of doctrines, and a very focused denominational lens, through which they arrive at the meaning. And then finding that the material seems to go against it, when taken at face value.

That is, the words of the Scriptures are made to try to fit what they already believe, rather than letting the words inform about what they say and intend. Or those words must fit within a set of doctrinal patterns or the plain meaning is rejected as not possible, thus resulting in an inability to discern what those words say and mean. This, of course, causes consternation and frustration that is brought on by a closed mind. The Church's solution was the creation of what is called Systematic Theology.

In order to get to the intended meaning of chapter 11, we have to link some of its passages and the objects of the stated actions or references with certain

other statements made in earlier chapters of Zechariah. The first most important link, then, is simply to agree that there are connections. The opposite view is that the opening words of chapter 11 are the presentation a new prophecy that is apart from what was written in the earlier chapters. The correct view, however, is that this is simply additional information given about previously revealed prophecies in Zechariah. Therefore, this 3-verse opening section of chapter 11 that talks about Lebanon, Bashan, and Jordan refers back, and connects to, Chapter 10 where Lebanon and Gilead are mentioned (Bashan and Jordan are located in the area known as biblical Gilead). The connection is that the devouring fire of forests, and howling and laying waste of regions are undeniable descriptions of what is going to happen in Lebanon, Bashan (modern Syria), and Jordan (modern Jordan that is also known biblically as Gilead).

Why are these places being laid low? Because in chapter 10 we're told there will be an absolute flood of the returning 10 Lost Tribes' exiles to their homeland (when it begins in earnest), and there won't be enough room for them as the size of Israel (the size it is today) is too small to hold them all. So, Israel will need to stretch its boundaries into Lebanon and Gilead (Syria and Jordan). Let me say this another way: just as the destruction of Egypt and the taking of the Land of Canaan from its current residents were part and partial of the Israelite's redemption from slavery and acquiring a land God told Abraham He would give to him, so is environmental destruction part and partial of the redemption of the 10 Lost Tribes from their exile so that sufficient space can be made for them to inhabit. The purpose, then, of fire devouring the famed Cedars of Lebanon is to provide more space for housing and villages... forests are turned into living space.

Verse 1 says "Open your gates"; some translations say "Open your doors". Either is fine. In the Bible, gates and doors are typically depicted as closed in their normal state in order to guard against entry by intruders. It takes some kind of willful action to "open them". Gates and doors speak of a demarcation of boundary space. That is, the walls of an ancient city created definite and protected boundaries for its citizens to reside in, in order to keep out the outsiders who might want in. Gates and doors in the walls of that city, then, are how you pass through the boundary perimeter to get in or get out. The

Prophet tells the nation of Lebanon to open its gates... its boundary space... to permit Israelites to enter. For Lebanon, this is a terrible loss... a most negative thing from their standpoint. Thus, the cypress trees of verse 2 are to figuratively howl and wail to lament what has happened. The cypresses are symbolic of the leaders and people of Lebanon; that is, they are depicted as metaphorical cypress trees, which have much in common with the cedars being burned down since both are trees of the forest.

In verse 2, the wailing of the cypresses over their dismay of the fallen cedars of Lebanon, extends now to Bashan in Gilead because their oak forests are also cut down, and for the same reason: to make more room for the enormous number of returning exiles of the 10 Lost Tribes. Let me be clear: while this is using trees as metaphors and figuratively, the event it symbolizes is quite real, and it will happen. Let me take this one more step. Understanding that the trees are symbolic, then it is important that we recognize that the majestic Cedars of Lebanon represent the supreme, the most elite, of all trees. And since these trees represent the people of nations, then we understand that it means they must be associated to political entities...nations or kingdoms. What is being prophetically symbolized, then, is nothing less than a complete change of world order. The mighty nations fall, and the oppressed nation (Israel) rises.

Because this prophecy is speaking of something in the future to Zechariah... and since this has not yet happened, then it means it is still future to us... and it means the current world order (what it is today and whatever it will be at that time) that will necessarily be gentile oriented; but, it will suddenly and improbably be reversed. The old political systems and alliances and power bases of the world will now be ruled from Jerusalem. And, the God of Jerusalem (Yehoveh), will be the God of the world and not just Israel.

That's a lot to take in, I know, so I want to briefly summarize it. The bottom line to it all is, in the End Times the bitterly oppressed Israel will, through acts of God and the greatest war the world has ever experienced, defeat the mightiest nations of the world and their bad shepherds. This brings a reversal of fortunes. The heretofore gentile world essentially becomes a universal Israelite kingdom, with Israel's king reigning over the world from Jerusalem.

That king is the Messiah... Yeshua. Prior to His return and taking His throne in Jerusalem, Israel will be so overrun with returning Israelite exiles, the number of which is beyond anyone's wildest imaginings, that Israel will have to make more room for them by capturing Lebanon, Syria and Jordan... or at least goodly parts of them. Yes, deforestation will happen, literally, for reasons it has always occurred: to make room for the growing of field crops and for living space. But, the trees themselves also are symbolic of nations and leaders and their citizenry. All that in only the first 2 verses!

Verse 3 speaks of the howling of shepherds. Why are shepherds so full of grief? Because their glory is laid waste. All throughout the Bible, the sheep/shepherd metaphor is used for people and their leaders. It is no different here. So, these shepherds are national leaders including probably religious leaders, all of whom are lamenting with great intensity their loss of personal glory... and their glory was their elite status and high authority over the people... now ripped away from them by Israel and Yehoveh.

How are we to feel about what Zechariah is telling us? I have said countless times that the hardest thing for Believers to do, is to unlearn incorrect teaching and doctrines that have become embedded in our minds and flowed even into our instincts. After years of false belief and practice, we cannot learn and practice truth until we unlearn what is not true. I have had conversations with hundreds of faithful followers of Christ who have left the Constantinian Church to learn of God and His commands by means of the Hebrew Roots approach to understanding God's Word, and living by it. Most speak of how difficult it has been to stop seeing God's Word through the distorted lens of doctrinal Christianity, and to cease their minds from instinctively substituting plain words of the Bible with Church doctrines taught to them since they first trusted Jesus for salvation.

The image of God, and of Christ, that Christianity has taught is love and only love. Peace and unity. Tolerance and inclusion. Yet, when we read the Bible, we find a God and His Messiah as warriors who fight, and create massive bloodshed, and they are anything but even handed... they take sides. God divides, elects, and separates on behalf of protecting and elevating His people. The evil and the rebellious are eventually wiped out through war; a war that is

triggered by God's wrath and command. And, no, this isn't just about the God of the Old Testament. In Zechariah we are reading NOT about wars and mass death taking place in the Bible era, but rather at the End of Days. God and His Messiah will be the ones to cause the wars and bloodshed and to prosecute them. Why? Because for fallen humans, whose hearts are sick and wicked always, there is no other way to cleanse the earth from evil than to terminate the people because it is only the people who harbor the evil. This was first demonstrated by the Great Flood that killed all but 8 human beings who God had declared as righteous in His sight.

How much it bothers me for especially the Evangelical Western Church to raise their hands to Heaven and shout for the Lord to return to set up His glorious kingdom with smiles, laughter, shouting and great joy as the mood! But, oh... what happens to achieve this Heaven on earth is too terrible for our minds to grasp. If this were to happen today... right now... nearly all of us would lose family members we love to violence and destruction... from children to the elderly... the innocent and the guilty alike. Our nation will likely be decimated by war, as will most of the rest of the world. There will be great deprivations. Look what happened during the Covid epidemic to our supply chains for the things all of us need daily to function. That was nothing compared to what is going to occur. In fact, the bulk of us probably won't survive it if we're alive when it happens.

This is not Tom Bradford's vision of the future. This is what is prophesied. But the deluded Church tends to push this harsh reality to background if not denying it altogether by saying not to worry because no Believer will have to face it (yet another false doctrine). Do you want to know what our mood as Believers probably ought to be? Bittersweet. And bittersweet is exactly what is being portrayed by the Prophet Zechariah. The events leading up to Christ's return, and the first days or weeks when He returns, are going to be more bitter than mankind has ever experienced. The smiles, laughter and joy (the sweetness) only come at the finale, when the wars have ended, and the wicked are gone, and the dead are buried, and the nations are subdued, and our planet is a wreck...but Yeshua now sits on His throne in Jerusalem as the victor to mark the beginning of new and wonderful age of peace and God-with-Us.

Verse 3 continues with another aspect of the judgment that is the theme of the 1st section of chapter 11. It involves the metaphorical shepherds... the leadership. The wailing and howling of the shepherds are *because* of what happens in verses 1 and 2. It is their reaction to Israel expanding into Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan and settling the returnees of the 10 Lost Tribes there. Therefore, these must be the shepherds... the national and religious leaders... of these nations. When this verse moves to speak of the roaring of the young lions, it is meaning that the lions who inhabited these forested areas and the thick underbrush along the Jordan River (here called the splendor of Jordan) are lamenting the loss of their natural ecological territory. Human development throughout history of course pushes out wild animals that lived there. This is no different. So, we have the leaders, the people, and now even the Alpha predators being pushed aside, and there is nothing they can do about it except to watch, wail, and roar.

Verse 4 in nearly every English Bible says this (or something similar) ... I'll use the KJV as the example:

KJV Zechariah 11:4 *Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter;*

What this says in Hebrew is: ***Thus says Yehoveh my elohim***. Neither the words lord nor God are actually found here. We've touched on this matter before, but because this can be so difficult to understand, this phrase provides yet another good example of tradition trumping biblical reality. First, God's formal name is used... not the generic "lord". Second, we find the word ***elohim***, which I have demonstrated in a number of lessons is better translated as "divine (or heavenly) being". There is but one Hebrew word for God and that is ***Yah***. ***Elohim*** means something a little different and it is lazy to just drop "God" in there. As with a few other words, ***elohim*** is a characteristic of God, or perhaps better, the name of one of God's several roles. The word also doubles as the name of the category of heavenly beings that are the administrators of Heaven who form God's Divine Council.

Speaking of God as **elohim** is a way of speaking of Him in the role of the Chief administrator of both Heaven and Earth. That is, God declares His will to the Divine Council, and they are tasked with carrying it out, usually by delegating it to the appropriate spiritual creatures of other and lower categories that inhabit Heaven. But, this same God views humans as His earthly **elohim** who are in charge of all the other lower categories of earthly creatures... animals. Thus, in Heaven, the only being that is above the **elohim** is God. And on earth, the only being that is above humans is God.

Notice in this verse 4, how God (in the role as the Chief Administrator) is delegating the task of feeding the flock of the slaughter. What, exactly, does this mean? I think the RSV does a good job of dynamically translating this verse that adds a word that is not there, but it certainly helps to extract the sense of it.

^{RSV} **Zechariah 11:4** *Thus said the LORD my God: "**Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.***

What we learn is that this is an instruction to the Prophet Zechariah to be the shepherd (the leader) of the flock doomed to slaughter. The sheep/shepherd metaphor was pretty standard throughout the ancient Middle Eastern culture; but, the role of a Prophet as a shepherd is unique to the Hebrews and the Hebrew Bible. Moses, of course, was the epitome of a shepherd. So was King David, and to others of Israel's kings. But, citing Zechariah as a shepherd is something new. Why the change? While I can't say it with certainty, I think the evidence is that it was due to when Judah returned from exile, there was wholesale change in their prior historical leadership structure. Once Persia lorded over the land of Judah, even changing its name to Yehud, Jewish leadership still played a role, but the definitions and purposes of each office was modified. For instance, the High Priest passed through his former boundaries of dealing only with the spiritual/religious affairs, and was additionally assigned the duty of judging civil matters (something that used to be the king's purview). A Jewish leader was to rule over Yehud... now a foreign province... but he was not to be a king. He was a governor... a civil servant working for Persia...who had less authority than a king and even less authority than the High Priest on some matters. God didn't try to change this nor did He

rail against it. Rather, He began to change some roles to comply with this reality because historically this was going to go on for a very long time... and clearly it was His will that it be this way.

Even when Judah returned from exile, they brought with them a new and secondary religious establishment that in time would be called the Synagogue. It was separate from the Temple and Priesthood, and had no connection to the Temple or Priesthood, but neither did it try to take over the standard ritual functions. God did not condemn it or imply that now that Judah was back from Babylon, that this secondary system that was formed out of necessity for the exiles was no longer needed. And here we find, for the first time, that a Prophet is addressed as a shepherd over the Jews. So, the traditional role of Prophet as being mainly a messenger from God that speaks truth to power, is now expanded into a leadership role. None of these changes violates the Torah or any God principle. But it does represent significant change in leadership structure.

The startling phrase “flock of the slaughter” (with the reference being to the metaphorical sheep), is speaking of Israel. By no means is this prophesying or ordering the destruction of all Israel. Some of the flock will survive (we like to say a remnant will survive). In fact (to get pretty technical) the Hebrew word **haragah** that is usually translated as slaughter has a somewhat wide range of meaning and application, including meaning “ruined”. However, when it comes to the standard slaughter of sheep or other domesticated animals, the word **haragah** is not used. So, perhaps the sense of this verse is less about people being killed en masse and more about people being badly affected (ruined or devastated) by the bad shepherds. I can’t say with certainty which is the better choice, so we’ll just leave it for the moment as one of the many conundrums we encounter when dealing the Book of Zechariah. Either way, it is a very negative outcome.

In the end, God is telling Zechariah to “feed the flock”. This means that he is to give Israel (for now that is Judah) divine truth and moral direction. It has nothing to do with bread and meat. And, this is because over the centuries, the shepherds of Israel have failed and have turned to giving the people

traditions and doctrines (some of it of pagan origin) instead of divine truth. Essentially, this is a call for the Prophet to attempt reform.

OK. With this understanding, let's pause and visit a most famous discussion between Yeshua and His disciples, because now we have the context for understanding it as He intended it, but considering the flow of the discussion I truly doubt that His disciples fully understood.

CJB John 21:14-17 ***¹⁴ This was now the third time Yeshua had appeared to the talmidim after being raised from the dead. ¹⁵ After breakfast, Yeshua said to Shim'on Kefa, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me more than these?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I'm your friend." He said to him, "Shepherd my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Shim'on Bar-Yochanan, are you my friend?" Shim'on was hurt that he questioned him a third time: "Are you my friend?" So he replied, "Lord, you know everything! You know I'm your friend!" Yeshua said to him, "Feed my sheep!***

I have already mentioned on a couple of occasions that the Old Testament passages most quoted by Christ are from the Book of Zechariah. Without doubt, it was the section of Zechariah that we are now studying that He had in mind. The question is: can you, now, see it? We are Yeshua's shepherds and it is our job to restore divine truth and moral direction to the people of Israel and by association, to those gentiles who have joined themselves to Israel through trust in the works of our Savior, Yeshua. The disciples were going to have to contend against the Synagogue religious leadership... the Synagogue... who taught traditions and doctrines over actual Scriptural commands. That is what Zechariah was tasked with. It is what the 12 disciples were tasked with. And it is what you and I, as part of the modern-day Hebrew Roots movement, are tasked with. It is a great and weighty responsibility and it will be mightily opposed.

Verse 5 continues with the problem of good versus bad shepherds.

CJB Zechariah 11:5 *Their buyers kill them and go unpunished; while those who sell them say, 'Barukh ADONAI! Now I'm rich!' Even their own shepherds show them no pity.*

"Their buyers" or "those who buy them" immediately presents us with a problem of identity. Who are these buyers? That is, who exactly is buying or selling God's flock, Israel? So, when we connect this to the previous verse, to me it lends more weight to translating part of verse 4 as "the flock that is ruined" rather than "the flock that is slaughtered". That is, it seems to me that what we're seeing is that some of the flock (Israel) *will* be killed, and some will be treated in other negative ways (bought and sold).

When I weigh the evidence, I think "those who buy them" are NOT foreign enemies, but rather Israel's bad shepherds... their bad leaders... civil and religious...who lead the people wrongly to their great demise. I don't think this points to some particular and unique historical event, but rather this is general and applies throughout Israel's history from Zechariah's era onward. This is not to say there wasn't poor leadership in the past; it's just that the past is not the subject or timeframe of Zechariah's prophecy.

Although the CJB says buyers will "kill" them, in fact it is again the Hebrew word **haragah** that was earlier translated as "slaughter". Again, a good alternative for "slaughter" is "ruin" or even "devastate". And I lean towards the latter. We get a picture of Israel's leaders using their positions of power for their own benefit, which in turn has bad outcomes for the common people.

The next words of the verse are rather fascinating, and can be taken quite literally. These bad leaders who enrich themselves are not held accountable. In fact, their society might not even think they ought to be taken to task for their bad leadership. While we probably ought to understand this as the misguided people not exposing their leaders' misdeeds, one has to ask how misguided people even know how to recognize a misdeed and what to do about it if they did?

It seems like every month at most, one of the leaders of a Western Democratic nation is found to have been very corrupt. Often, simply quitting

their position is enough to avoid any kind of legal punishment. But, by what standard are they labeled as corrupt? It varies from nation to nation, and even from era to era within the same nation. They have no objective standard. And, between nations, whatever standard they are upholding and judging by, it is not the same as any other nation.

This is what happens when manmade traditions and doctrines overrule national constitutions. Or when manmade traditions and doctrines overrule God's sovereign Word. Regardless of how the world judges one another, how does God judge us? What standard does He use to define good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral, ethical and not ethical? Bad shepherds use whatever standard benefits them. Good shepherds use God's defined and recorded standards. Where do we find those? The Law of Moses.

As worshippers of the God of Israel, and the redeemed of Yeshua, how do you think we are going to be judged? By what standard? To be quite frank, and no doubt knowing it will offend, Christianity says the only standard is "love". And, however that is to be worked out in our actions is uniquely individualized by God's Holy Spirit that dwells in us. In other words, there is no objective standard of our behavior by which we will be judged, or with which we can judge others. However we define love is good enough and it can be different from person to person. This is a prime example of the leading of bad shepherds, that creates ruin for the sheep, but in the doing no one seems to notice... except for God. Why don't the sheep notice? Because they don't know any better.

We'll stop here for today and continue in verse 5 next time.