

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH
Lesson 24, Chapter 11 Continued 2

We're still in Zechariah chapter 11, and concluded our last lesson at verse 8. The material is so dense in information, and yet can be so puzzling in its meaning, that it is always best that we take brief moment to review and summarize. It is not possible to overstate how important this material is for Believers to know as it was intended for us to know, because this *is* our present and near future that is being depicted. I hope you can hear that and let it impact you.

Recall that Zechariah chapters 9-14 are now regularly called Second Zechariah because it is so different in structure and character than the first 8 chapters. Whether these last chapters were written by someone (or more than one person) other than the writer (Zechariah) who created those first 8 chapters, we can't know for sure. I lean towards thinking that Zechariah wrote it all, but that indeed over the centuries there has been some re-wording. There has, without doubt, been some scribal errors introduced because that is simply inherent in the hand copying of the text every time another copy is wanted. And, as we today have Bibles from many different ancient cultures (some Bible versions that only the most educated theologians are even aware exist) that have some differences between them, we know that there were Bible editors who translated the Hebrew into their local language from their own cultural worldviews. Zechariah is probably the champion of being the most variously translated of all Bible books because of its challenging nature. But also, I think, because institutional Christianity simply doesn't like what it says as it flies in the face of much long-cherished doctrine especially about the End Times.

What makes it the most challenging is that it speaks so much about the future and the End Times; and yet it also mixes in what was already history to Zechariah and his contemporaries. Some of the verses even deal with Zechariah's present. Then there is the issue of Hebrew poetry interspersed with prose, and the use of metaphor as symbolism that is the necessary literary tool for speaking about events in an unknowable future.

What we have learned so far from Zechariah chapter 11 is that the time these passages are mostly speaking about (the future from Zechariah's day, up to and including the End Times), is pretty gloomy. Not all is despair, however, as it also speaks of the wonder of the return of Ephraim (the 10 Lost Tribes) from their many centuries-long exile throughout the Asian continent, and back to the Promised Land. There they will rejoin their brethren from the House of Judah (today we call them Jews), but only after Israel is re-established as a Jewish state (which, obviously, happened already in 1948). Even more, we're told that Jewish Israel will have a strong and formidable military that will play a significant role in facilitating the return of the Lost Tribes. And, if the present has taught us anything (from the perspective of early 2025), it is that Israel has a military that is much more capable and powerful than the world had previously understood.

One of the most impactful things we learn from chapter 11 almost seems too fanciful to be taken seriously... and yet, we better believe it and do so soberly. It is that the numbers of people of the 10 Lost Tribes who are returning will be so mammoth that Israel has too little land mass to hold them all. So, they will be annexing all or parts of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan to handle the overflowing new population.

Using the standard Hebrew sheep/shepherd metaphor, chapter 11 deals with the problem of bad leaders within the Jewish community (characterized as false shepherds). And, while the people (the sheep) cannot escape guilt for their unfaithfulness and for their wrong behavior and beliefs, the shepherds are held as the most responsible. What is made doubly clear is that these false shepherds are not foreigners... they are not outsiders to Israel. Rather, these are Israel's own internal leaders... their leading men... both civic and religious... that are, and have been, leading Israel astray even though they claim to be God's representatives or at least doing what they think is Godly.

We also saw how the core message of this prophecy of Zechariah is reflected, even amplified, in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. So, I made the point that while we can all wait with joyous expectation of the return of Messiah, we must realize that events that mark the arrival of the End Times and the soon coming of Messiah will be awful, and even the first stage of Yeshua's return

will be deadly and destructive like never before in the history of the world. Since the Millennial Kingdom will be established on the Earth as it will be at the end of the Armageddon wars, then we must also accept that living conditions won't be easy for several years. The Earth will be deeply scarred, pretty much everywhere. There will be much for the survivors to overcome, and we get no hint that some supernatural intervention by God will immediately or miraculously restore all the damage.

As we were coming to the end of our previous lesson at verse 8, we learned that Yeshua as the returned Messiah (in being a kind of Prophet) will Himself deal with all the bad leadership of Israel by getting rid of them in record time... in no more than 1 month, and probably in only a matter of days. And, I also suspect that because Israel is representative of all God worshippers (the Church even considering itself as the New Israel), then this action of Messiah will extend into the faith world of gentiles, and therefore include the shepherds... the leadership... of what we call Christianity.

Let's re-read chapter 11 starting at verse 8.

RE-READ ZECHARIAH 11:8 – 17

When thinking about who these shepherds of Israel are, we must think beyond their political leadership. Israel's government today is, as are virtually all non-Muslim national governments, secular by design, with religion being partitioned off and relegated to Churches, Synagogues, and various Temples and Shrines for those that are not Judeo-Christian. Thus, we have to understand that these shepherds we are reading about are primarily, and nearly exclusively, the religious leaders.

We have a bit of a puzzle starting with verses 8 and 9, as to figuring out who is speaking these words. Is it Zechariah's own speech (and referring to himself), or is it still God speaking and Zechariah merely recording it? Some modern scholars think it is Zechariah's own words and it is referring to himself, but nearly unanimously those scholars writing prior to modern times held the belief that it was still Yehoveh speaking. Why the discrepancy? The more modern scholars say it is because of the particulars of the Hebrew grammar

and syntax. And yet, when just reading it, we see no obvious or logical shift from God to Zechariah as the speaker. The continual use of "I" and "my" certainly seems to continue to point towards Yehoveh as speaker. Here's the thing: as is the biblical principle proved true through recorded history that prophetic fulfillments happen more than once, then we must be reading a prophecy about 2 or more fulfillments that have been amalgamated into a single statement that covers them all. That, by the way, is common in prophetic utterances of all the Prophets. That is, the precise person or event being spoken about is only relevant to the precise fulfillment event that happens. And the next time it happens, another and different person and event is involved. In other words, it may well be that it *does* apply to Zechariah personally as the first fulfillment. Zechariah *does* become impatient with those he is trying to shepherd and the leaders of the Jews become weary of him (again, something pretty common for biblical prophets). And, eventually Zechariah refuses to feed the flock anymore (to go to them to take them God's oracles) because he becomes so disgusted with the deaf ears. But, this also applies later to another "prophet" of a later fulfillment who finds himself in the same position, but in a different era and circumstance because as the centuries go by, the world becomes a different place. Ultimately, this will apply to Yeshua at both His first advent and His upcoming return. Remember that Yeshua biblically qualifies as a Prophet of God, just as Moses said He would.

What is especially interesting about verse 9 is that it explains that whomever it is that is in the role of the shepherd (a prophet in some era or another) has determined that he will NOT shepherd Israel. Why? Because "they detested me", according to the final words of verse 8. The good shepherd, provided by God, won't shepherd God's flock because they don't want him to shepherd them. They don't want to hear God's true oracle to them. They hate Him and prefer the shepherds they have, who (from God's perspective) are bad shepherds. This tells us that these bad shepherds while spiritually harming the flock by teaching false doctrine, don't as a rule do intentionally malicious things to them. Quite the opposite; they please the flock. The flock is satisfied with them. Unfortunately, the corruption of the deceived leaders bleeds so deeply into the flock that the flock becomes corrupted, but none of them realizing it, and so they refuse any correction. And, no matter how hard the

good shepherd tries to reach them, they wind up hating him. So, he loses patience and says enough! I will no longer shepherd them. This that I have just explained is not allegory or opinion... it is what verse 9 is explaining so we'd all be wise to pay attention.

Next 3 consecutive clauses describe the fate of the deceived flock (and this is Israel but in later times will extend into including the Constantinian Church), whom the good shepherd refuses to lead. The first is, **whoever is to die shall die**. Literally this says, "whoever is dying will die". Meaning, the dying is already in progress, but no rescue attempt will be made for them. This is not a peaceful death of old age; this is a most dramatic way of speaking about total annihilation of both the physical and the spirit. Next, **whoever is to be destroyed shall be destroyed**. This is a pretty broad statement that means a person is brought to ruin, and again, the good shepherd will not intervene to deliver that person. It could be physical ruin or being forcibly removed from wherever it is they normally belong. Then finally, **whoever is left shall devour**. The bottom line is that people of faith are destroying themselves or others are doing it to them, and they are doing nothing to prevent it and are not open to changing their ways. The final result is that: **all the rest can devour each other**. Likely this has a double meaning. I cannot buy that this is speaking about actual cannibalism as some commentators think. Rather this is the equivalent of an idiom in common use today, when we speak of a person or a group "who eats their own young". It means to betray someone or even to attack someone in your group for your own gain. The flock of Israel (and by extrapolation the Church) will turn on one another. However, this also no doubt is figurative and expands to mean spiritual betrayal as well. The flock's own internal corrupt nature explodes into action, refuses to hear the truth, and makes themselves even more corrupt and deceived, and therefore all the more ripe to experience God's wrath.

Let's put this head-spinning couple of verses into real terms that should this happen today is what it would mean. The religious shepherds of Israel have been for 2000 years, and remain, the Rabbis. They are the ones the Jewish people look to for wisdom, truth, law and guidance. But, these same Rabbis are preventing their flock... or at least discouraging them... from accepting Yeshua as their Messiah. Much manmade Rabbinical tradition and Jewish Law

has also replaced the truth and the commands of God's Word, and as a result, much of what they believe and do is, from a divine standpoint, corrupt. Yet, might this also expand into *all* who claim to worship the God of Israel, Jew or gentile? Yes, it does. So much of what is prophesied about Israel in later times directly does. Since this is the case then I'm speaking of the Church as we know it... the one I label the Constantinian Church. The Pastors, and Bishops, and Priests, and Seminary Professors, and Bible Teachers and whomever else shepherds the Church but who teaches and leads using their various manmade doctrines and traditions that in many cases defy the Word of God. These same shepherds tell their congregations that they have no obligations or duties before God, nor do they have to obey any biblical command or rule, and in fact to attempt to obey God's written commands is tantamount to rejecting Christ. These are also among the false shepherds that are spoken of in Zechariah. At the same time, by definition the Church flock has been deceived by their leaders and thus is believing wrongly. In fact, in some passages and chapters to come in Zechariah, we're going to see the most amazing role reversal concerning prophets. That this reversal takes place at all is baffling if not upsetting, but then we realize that it is actually addressing this issue of false teachers and the religious institutions they govern.

Verse 10 is where the speaker switches from being God to Zechariah, and for a while, Zechariah is speaking of himself. Zechariah takes his 2 staffs and snaps one of them into two. The staff that is physically broken into 2 is called **No'am**, which means something like delight or pleasant. The next statement is constantly misconstrued: it says, "... in order to break my covenant..." Now, to the Christian world this says that Zechariah's symbolic action indicates that God has abolished the covenant (and the covenant always means the Covenant of Moses). As Eric Meyers explains: "Yet because Delight (**No'am**) represents the covenant, severing it makes it ineffectual, just as cutting the **Asherim** or other idols removes their efficacy". To repeat: to break the covenant does NOT mean to abolish it; it means to make certain terms of it ineffectual.

When a covenant agreement is broken, the covenant is **not** terminated. Rather, it invokes certain prescribed penalties as punishment. I want you to stop and think for a second: if the Covenant of Moses with its 10

Commandments followed by about 600 more laws was abolished and terminated, then how could anyone ever be accused of sinning? To sin *means* to break the rules that God set down. But, if the rules no longer exist, there is nothing to break. If God had never given Adam and Eve the rule that they were not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, then when they did eat from it they committed no offense. Sin can only happen when there are rules to break.

If Yeshua abolished all the rules 2000 years ago, and replace them with only the command to "love", then since that time it has been impossible to sin. And if it's been impossible to sin, what use is there for a Savior to save us from what can't be done...to sin? Can you see how irrational the Church doctrine is that Christ abolished the Law? Then, there is this:

CJB Matthew 5:17-19 ***¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened. ¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

How much more plainly and forcibly can it be said? But, the false shepherds that have steered the Church since early in the 4th century A.D. have deceived the flock and it has led to corruption of the faith that Yeshua taught and the loss of moral guidance. And, whomever is a leader of a flock that might be hearing this, just remember that you are going to be held accountable to God for what you are doing to that flock by feeding them wrongly. Stop it now, immerse yourself in God's Word, learn the truth and teach it even if it means recanting what you have told them before.

Because of the enormous ramifications of what "breaking the covenant" means, I want to speak to that for a few minutes because this is what either validates or it makes the Constantinian Christian doctrine about abolishing the Law untrue.

The entire notion of a new covenant is found in Jeremiah 31. Let's look at it.

CJB Jeremiah 31:30-36 ³⁰ *"Here, the days are coming," says Yehoveh "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'udah. ³¹ It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says Yehoveh. ³² "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says Yehoveh: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³³ No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know Yehoveh'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more." ³⁴ This is what Yehoveh says, who gives the sun as light for the day, who ordained the laws for the moon and stars to provide light for the night, who stirs up the sea until its waves roar- Yehoveh-Tzva'ot is his name: ³⁵ "If these laws leave my presence," says Yehoveh "then the offspring of Isra'el will stop being a nation in my presence forever." ³⁶ This is what Yehoveh says: "If the sky above can be measured and the foundations of the earth be fathomed, then I will reject all the offspring of Isra'el for all that they have done," says Yehoveh.*

I read this full excerpt from Jeremiah because, otherwise, what has been taught about it goes unchallenged. We all, in our times, have learned the hard way that photos can be cropped, videos edited, quotes only partially given, in order to present something as evidence for a certain viewpoint, when in fact if the entire photo is shown, or the video is unedited, or the entire quote is presented, it proves the exact opposite. This is exactly what the Church has done to Jeremiah 31 as regards the matter of a new covenant.

First and most glaringly, verse 30 says that this covenant will be made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Not with gentiles. Not with something called The Church. Only with Judah and Israel.

Second, the issue is not the abrogation of the covenant, but rather the violation of it. Two entirely different things. Just as it is today regarding civil laws, there is the matter of voiding that law and taking it off the books, then there is the different matter of violating a law and facing the repercussions.

Third, the foundational point in Jeremiah 31 is that the covenant that was long ago presented on a mountaintop, written on stone tablets and then more of it on sheepskins, will now be directly placed, by God, into a person's heart (which, in that era meant "mind").

Fourth, the result of this is as it says verse 32: "I will put my Torah within them". Or in other English translations, "I will put My law within them". Note that the original Hebrew word used here is NOT law, it is precisely the word "Torah" as we have known it since the Book of Exodus.

Fifth, the word **chadash** is what is usually translated as "new" (new covenant). The issue is this: it means new in the sense of something fresh or renewed. That is, if you were to go and buy a used car, you might say to someone "come and see my new car". You don't mean that the car is brand new and unused, you just mean that it is new to you. The Bible records a few instances in which the Covenant of Moses was **chadash**... renewed... such as soon after Israel crossed the Jordan River into Canaan. It was a re-validation or re-dedication of the Torah... and not a dedication of something that had never before existed.

Sixth, God goes on to explain that His laws, even going back to before there were humans (when He established the moon and the stars), will never end unless the sky becomes measurable, and so until it does, neither will He reject Israel permanently. So, the foundational doctrine of the Constantinian Church that God rejected Israel forever and gave this promised covenant of Jeremiah to the gentile Constantinian Church defies what we just read on every level. What Jeremiah tells us is that what changed with the covenant was merely the medium. God's laws didn't change, it's only that they went from external to internal. Or as Meyers so well puts it:

This is essentially what Yeshua told everyone in His Sermon on the Mount. And, He also made it clear that He is the means by which that renewed Torah can be placed internally into our hearts. Yet, is that what the institutional Church teaches? No. They disregard the Scripture and teach their flocks the opposite, even misquoting and editing Jeremiah 31 to make it seem otherwise. This is the very definition of the actions of a bad shepherd according to Zechariah.

One final thing and we'll move on. A good shepherd does not mean a perfect shepherd. The only perfect shepherd is Yeshua. All the rest of us now and in the past are subject to error. So, if your shepherd makes an unintended error occasionally it merely means he's human, and not a bad shepherd. But, when presented with evidence of his error and he insists on still preaching what he now knows is wrong...? That's different.

Verse 11 says:

CJB Zechariah 11:11 ¹¹ *On that day when it was broken, the most miserable of the sheep who paid attention to me knew that this was indeed a message from Yehoveh.*

When the covenant was broken, the penalties took effect. And perhaps one of the most major and pertinent effects of the break was that God withdrew His protection over His people and His nation. God had imposed upon the gentile nations of the Earth a warning not to harm His people or to destroy them; this was part of the Mosaic Covenant. Thus, when Israel broke the covenant through their unfaithfulness to it, God's restraining hand was lifted and Israel was delivered up to the nations.

Although we more typically find that phrase of "on that day" used to speak of Judgment Day, or the Day of the Lord that occurs in the End Times, here it might not mean that. It might just mean the unspecified time when the people broke the covenant with God. Or, equally as possible, it means both. That is, in its first fulfillment it meant the day the Lord first declared a broken covenant. But, in a later time, it will happen again. It is simply not clear.

Next we encounter another problematic phrase, "The most miserable (or afflicted) of the sheep..." We find the same thing back in verse 7, so I won't go over it again. But, the Greek Old Testament says here, "the merchants of the flock" referring to the wicked buyers and sellers, who in turn represent the bad shepherds. "Merchant" is a nasty epithet that speaks of an unfair and dishonest person. So, this verse perhaps ought to read: "On that day when it was broken, the merchants of the flock who paid attention to me..." So, this could be referring to the sheep, or it could be referring to the shepherds, and I lean towards thinking it's the shepherds, but that is my best guess and not something that I'm certain about.

It is so very interesting that whether it was the sheep or the shepherds, those that heard Zechariah knew that his words to them were genuinely from Yehoveh. Essentially the Prophet is saying that somehow those who heard his oracle from God knew it was valid and true. It indeed was God's will they were hearing. Further, because of what they had always known, when a Prophet spoke God's oracle, that was the moment the claims and promises of the oracle were set into motion and however near or far into the future they were meant to happen, there was nothing that could stop it.

I cannot tell you the large number of Believers who have said to me that once they began studying the Bible with us... and setting aside human doctrines and traditions and just allowing the Word to speak for itself... they instinctively knew it was the truth. How? I cannot tell you. It was something inside of them (I'd like to think it was the Holy Spirit), that made their hearts leap at the power of truth. I know it was that way with me and I immediately knew I could never go back to believing what I used to believe... because it wasn't the truth. What I now believe has true power. What I used to believe did not and does not because I could rather easily give it up. The difference? God's will and Word versus men's will and doctrines.

Verse 12 is rather curious:

CJB Zechariah 11:12 I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; if not, don't." So, they weighed out my wages, thirty silver [shekels, that is, twelve ounces].

The way this verse starts is why I lean towards thinking the middle part of the previous verse ought to be translated "the merchants of the flock" instead of "the afflicted". Since merchants, and buy and selling all work together to denote a financial transaction, so does the notion of being paid a wage. But, there's more... there's a deep irony here. Prophets for hire existed. In fact, there were Prophet schools and academies in existence. These were not people God called to be prophets, rather they were people who desired to be prophets probably because of the attraction to that status. Being a prophet in that era was a usual practice within pagan religions. In 1Samuel 10 we read of a Hebrew prophet guild and no doubt the graduates expected to be paid. But, we have no such phenomenon with true Prophets that God called. If there was any money involved, it came from an occupation the Prophet had before God called them to be a Prophet... or perhaps being a Prophet was only for a short time and he continued to work in his normal profession the rest of the time. This is an important nuance to understand, especially for what we're going to read in some coming chapters of Zechariah.

So, the question is why would Zechariah seek a wage from the very people that have been designated as the money-grubbing bad shepherds? It begins by understanding that the true biblical prophets did not desire to be Prophets, and certainly not to earn a living from it. I'm reminded of a comment about the Prophet Amos.

CJB Amos 7:12-14 ***¹² Amatzyah also said to 'Amos, "Go away, seer! Go back to the land of Y'hudah! Earn your living there; and prophesy there; ¹³ but don't prophesy any more at Beit-El; for this is the king's sanctuary, a royal temple." ¹⁴ 'Amos gave this answer to Amatzyah: "I am not trained as a prophet, and I'm not one of the guild prophets- I own sheep and grow figs.***

So, there were guild prophets and then there were Prophets of God. Apparently there were a goodly number of guild prophets, but precious few Prophets of God, because He raised them up as He needed a Prophet to deliver a divine oracle. Part of what we are reading here is a surfacing of the tension that existed between the guild prophets and a true Prophet like Zechariah.

Guild prophets of course told their patrons what they wanted to hear (who is going to pay for bad news?). True Prophets rarely brought anything but criticism and warning and a demand for correction. So, how are we to understand a true Prophet asking for a wage? When we back away and examine this from a larger perspective, we need to be reminded that Zechariah has adopted a copious use of irony to make his points. What could be a greater irony to the people of Zechariah's era than for a true Prophet asking to be paid? All along the people of Judah feel they have been living an irony. Their own God has turned to their enemies to punish them, His own people. He has even replaced Israel's government by putting the Jews under the control of a gentile government. This isn't supposed to happen. Yet, it's not the first time God has asked a true Prophet to do something bizarrely wrong or impure. He asked Hosea to go and marry a known prostitute and then have children with her, for instance.

I think we are getting the first piece of the picture, but we have to get through the next couple of verses before it starts to become more clear. Before that, note the amount of the wages paid to Zechariah: 30 pieces of silver. Sound familiar? Good! Then you'll remember it for next time as we'll stop here and finish up chapter 11 in our next lesson.