

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

Lesson 25, Chapter 11 Conclusion

As we progress through Zechariah chapter 11, we paused last week as we were looking at verse 12. Much symbolic action has been taking place... spiced up with a number of metaphors, and not an insignificant amount of irony has also been involved in the telling. One of the more critical actions taking place occurred just before verse 12, at verse 10, when we read of Zechariah being told to break in half one of his staffs he was carrying: the one called No'am. We don't have to wonder what the broken staff indicated; the next few words of verse 10 said it indicates God breaking the covenant He had with Israel. It is at this point that Christianity is near unanimous in saying that this is when God abolished the Torah and the Law of Moses. But as we discussed, that is not at all what "breaking a covenant" means. Rather, to break a covenant means to invoke the consequences, usually called curses as it pertains to the Covenant of Moses, for the violations that have occurred. The point being that in no way was the Covenant of Moses now dead and gone. But, Israel would suffer the costs of breaking the terms of the covenant to which they had agreed.

To continue with that critical line of thinking... a line of thinking that flies in the face of the most basic foundational doctrines of the Church... the Old Covenant with its Law Code has not been destroyed and abrogated by God, and then replaced with something new. Rather the intent of the Prophet Jeremiah's announcement of a new covenant was, as Eric Meyers well put it: **"The new covenant will be the same as the old but will be constructed in such a way that the people will no longer be able to violate its terms. It will be written on the hearts of the people, so they will automatically obey its stipulations"**.

One of the issues we constantly face especially in studying the final 5 chapters of Zechariah is that it speaks of both Zechariah's present and Zechariah's future that extends all the way through the End Times, and he will at times speak of both in a single statement. That is, the prophecy at times points to both occurrences of fulfillment and not just to one or the other. It can get confusing because the rule of thumb for most Bible commentators is that they

will pick one or the other fulfillment to say that this is what it is about. It's either about Zechariah and his era, or its about Yeshua as Messiah in the End Times. Not so.

So, let's pick up now at verse 12 and continue to parse its words and meaning. Turn your Bibles to Zechariah chapter 11.

READ ZECHARIAH CHAPTER 11:12 – end

The first words of verse 12 are: "If it seems good to you". We run across this phrase at times in the Old Testament and it is essentially an expression that means how a person evaluates a certain situation or request or circumstance. Perhaps some news has been given and so the idea is ask how, subjectively, the person views it. Behind it is that the person asking the question is actually seeking approval. What approval, then, is the Prophet seeking, here? That's not entirely clear, but it must have been to Zechariah. It seems to me that he is asking this of the merchants of the flock; those bad or false shepherds that are leading the flock. The Prophet's action was that he has just broken his staff to symbolize breaking the covenant. Thus, what is the shepherds' reaction to this piece of symbolic information?

Certainly, they should not be happy about it because it signified that God has declared that the terms of the covenant have been broken, and implicitly that means He is going to activate the consequences that the covenant calls out for the violations of the party that committed them. Ironically, it seems that the bad shepherds' do admit that Zechariah's message *is* indeed coming from God, and that it *is* authentic. Although, what we see almost seems like they say, "yes, it is God's message to us. But we don't necessarily agree that it means consequences will now begin or that it necessarily applies to us."

But more, because these shepherds are used to paying the guild prophets for the words they want to hear, then they certainly expect to pay Zechariah, too. The bottom line in: yes, we confirm it, but we don't necessarily intend to respond. So, Zechariah asks to be paid, and the shepherds are not reluctant or surprised to do so. The response of the shepherds as to how much they will give to him will be an indicator of just how much or little they value what the

Prophet has presented to them. Their decision was to pay him 30 shekels of silver.

While any Hebrew listener or reader of Zechariah would have understood the significance of the amount, we modern people do not. 30 pieces of silver is the standard price that was paid to a slave owner should someone kill or maim his slave. Thus, it was the price of purchasing a new slave. In our situation, it is an insult. 30 shekels is saying that God's message and messenger to them has no more worth than the value of a slave. It might be that this is so offensive, that it would have been better had they simply refused to pay him at all. It is interesting that it is also what the Prophet Hosea paid for the adulterous woman, Gomer, who God told him to have as his wife.

CJB Hosea 3:1-2 *Yehoveh said to me, "Go once more, and show love to [this] wife [of yours] who has been loved by her boyfriend, to this adulteress- just as Yehoveh loves the people of Isra'el, even though they turn to other gods and love the raisin cakes [offered to them]." ² So I bought her back for myself with fifteen pieces of silver and eight bushels of barley.*

The value of 8 bushels of barley was imagined as 15 shekels of silver here, thus the barley plus the silver totaled 30. Not very much. Thus, biblically the amount of 30 pieces of silver or 30 silver shekels, is an expression used commonly to mean something of low value. It actually has an extended meaning of contempt. Therefore, when we look at the incident recorded in the Gospel accounts of Judas's betrayal of Yeshua, we read:

CJB Matthew 26:14-16 *¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve, the one called Y'hudah from K'riot, went to the head cohanim ¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me if I turn Yeshua over to you?" They counted out thirty silver coins and gave them to Y'hudah. ¹⁶ From then on he looked for a good opportunity to betray him.*

Judas took a relatively small amount of money from the head priest to turn Yeshua in. At the same time, we learn that the head priest didn't place much

value in what Judas claimed he could do. So, after Judas has done the dirty deed, we read:

CJB Matthew 27:1-5 *Early in the morning, all the head cohanim and elders met to plan how to bring about Yeshua's death. ² Then they put him in chains, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor. ³ When Y'hudah, who had betrayed him, saw that Yeshua had been condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the head cohanim and elders, ⁴ saying, "I sinned in betraying an innocent man to death." "What is that to us?" they answered. "That's your problem." ⁵ Hurling the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, he left; then he went off and hanged himself.*

For a relative pittance, Judas had turned against His Master, Yeshua. Then he felt guilty and the Priests wouldn't even take the money back (you can rest assured that had it been a significant sum, Judas would have kept it). On the other hand, the second fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy is the incident with Judah being a traitor to Messiah... a matter future to Zechariah. Might there be a 3rd fulfillment coming in the End Times? Possibly.

Verse 13 continues with this matter of the 30 pieces of silver.

CJB Zechariah 11:13 *¹³ Concerning that "princely sum" at which they valued me, Yehoveh said, "Throw it into the treasury!" So, I took the thirty silver [shekels] and threw them into the treasury in the house of Yehoveh.*

The use of the phrase "princely sum" is meant sarcastically. And notice that the one whom Yehoveh said this paltry amount represented as His value to the shepherds, was Himself! The ingratitude is staggering, and of course the insult will soon be repaid. So, since the shepherds were probably Temple representatives in this scenario (that is, the corrupt Hebrew religious leadership), then Yehoveh says to throw the 30 pieces into the Temple treasury... that is, give it back as being worthless.

Where our verse says "throw it into the treasury", in fact that is not the literal translation. Rather it literally says "throw it to the potter". It is quite likely that the potter was the name of some official inside the Temple Treasury, and the use of the term had become a derogatory one, in the same way that merchant had become a derogatory term in every day speaking among the Hebrews. Thus, it cannot be a coincidence that, as regards Judas, we read:

CJB Matthew 27:5-7 ***⁵ Hurling the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, he left; then he went off and hanged himself. ⁶ The head cohanim took the silver coins and said, "It is prohibited to put this into the Temple treasury, because it is blood money." ⁷ So they decided to use it to buy the potter's field as a cemetery for foreigners.***

So, here we see the term "potter's field", which no doubt was a burial yard where non-Israelites or non-citizens or poor people, indigents, were buried. It was (logically) financed by the Temple. So, it seems more and more that "potter" was the title of a person who doled out finances in the Temple Treasury, thus reconciling what we read in Zechariah 11:13 with the Judas incident in Matthew 27. Zechariah did as he was told and threw the 30 silver shekels into the Temple Treasury.

CJB Zechariah 11:14 ***Then I snapped in two my other staff Hovalim [bound together], in order to break up the brotherhood between Y'hudah and Isra'el.***

Now the Prophet does another symbolic act by severing or snapping in two his second staff. This staff represents the kinship and brotherhood ties between Judah and Israel (same as saying Judah and Ephraim)... meaning the unity of Israel was fractured. There is little other way to look at this but as something that was well into the past of Zechariah. So, the best way then to look at the symbolic action of cutting the 2 staffs in half is this: they represent the 2 history making acts of God upon His people that created the ongoing national crisis of dispersal of the tribes. That was the breaking of the covenant and then the ripping apart of united Israel into 2 separate kingdoms. It was the broken faith between God and all Israel, and the broken faith between the tribes of Judah and the tribes of Ephraim. Truly a catastrophe.

This passage in Zechariah is essentially looking back in time... it is a brief and symbolic retrospective... about what happened in the past to Israel, and why God responded as He did. This is followed with the assurance that God will reverse it in the future. This is the core of what the Book of Zechariah is about. It grieves me that so many Believers have been given incorrect information over the centuries, and never more than in our day, about what God's stance is on Israel, because Israel is the Bible's central theme around which all else is built. While some Christian Churches have come around and now accept the biblical truth that Israel is still firmly in God's plans, the majority continue to insist on teaching their own manmade doctrines that 1) God is permanently done with Israel, 2) that the covenant God made with Israel is abolished or revoked, and 3) that we are to view God's revulsion with Israel as an eternal divorce from His covenant people. Yet, as we study Zechariah, that is **not** what the Prophet tells us.

Rather, as we put the pieces together from what we have gleaned thus far in this book, it is this: 1) God did indeed pull back from Israel even sending them into exile as a curse for the breaking of certain terms of the Mosaic Covenant... but He says that it will only be temporary. 2) The Covenant of Moses was not abolished; it is alive and well. Yeshua Himself told us so in the clearest, strongest terms in Matthew chapter 5. 3) Breaking a covenant doesn't mean terminating it; it means violating one or more of its terms, thereby activating the penalties that were built into it should it be broken. And 4), God did not divorce Israel. They have remained His people all along. He did not take another and new bride called The Church, diverting to them all that He, at one time, had promised to Israel. What we have seen in nearly every chapter of Zechariah is that one day in the future... a future usually labeled as Judgment Day, or the Day of the Lord, or as we hear more often The End Times, the situation would be remedied and reversed... Israel would be healed and restored, and He would do it Himself.

The reality is that God established His covenants (plural) with Israel on a forever basis, never to be revoked.

CJB Genesis 17:7 *"I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.*

CJB 1 Chronicles 16:15-17 *¹⁵ Remember his covenant forever, the word he commanded to a thousand generations, ¹⁶ the covenant he made with Avraham; the oath he swore to Yitz'chak ¹⁷ and established as a law for Ya'akov, for Isra'el as an everlasting covenant:*

CJB Hebrews 13:20 *The God of shalom brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Yeshua, by the blood of an eternal covenant.*

These 3 passages speak of 3 different covenants: First, the Abrahamic, second the Mosaic, and third the New Covenant. Every one of them is called forever, or perpetual, or eternal, or to a 1000 generations (which is but a Hebrew idiom meaning forever".

Think about this: if God can make a covenant with His people, and us tells us that it is forever or perpetual, and then later say "I changed my mind, I have revoked it", then the New Covenant, which we all stand upon for forgiveness of sins and eternal life is not built upon a Rock but rather upon quicksand. What prohibits God from doing the same thing again and saying about the New Covenant: "I changed my mind; I have revoked it"?

These false doctrines fostered by the new gentile faith created in 4th century, a faith called Christianity, are based upon the big lie that God has cancelled all the covenants prior to the New Covenant...the same ones He pronounced as forever. This is what is used by the Church to confer upon itself the status of replacement Israel or the new Israel. By adopting this hideous tradition, the Church is able to call on Jeremiah chapter 31 to say that the new covenant that is all about the restoration of Israel is actually for gentile Christians. And yet, when we read that passage it says:

CJB Jeremiah 31:30 *"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah.*

The result of twisting and turning God's Word is that God's chosen is now defined as the gentile Church. Jews are the ones left behind and discarded. Gentile Believers aren't grafted into Israel as Paul says, rather Jewish Believers have to abandon their Israelite heritage and be grafted into the Church (says most denominations). All has been turned upside down. The problem with this wrong doctrine that emerges, comes from the very thing Israel was being punished for: idolatry. We have to be oh so diligent to read God's Word and take it for what it says, and then live it out and turn a deaf ear the false shepherds who make new doctrines to advance their own agendas.

God uses the metaphor of false shepherds to speak of bad religious leadership that teaches falsely and so, leads falsely. And He uses the metaphor of sheep to speak of followers...these are God worshippers, not pagans... who love God, or at least the God they've been taught that exists... naively listening to the false shepherds and so, the sheep happily march off to the slaughter, thinking all the time they are being taken to greener pastures.

Zechariah and the other Prophets are graciously given to us in the Bible so that we have a wealth of truth available to us... the good and the bad of it. The stuff we want to hear, and the stuff we'd rather not. But, when we realize that the truth the Prophets tell perhaps doesn't match with what that man in the pulpit says, or what some Bible teacher says, what is one to do? You see, that's the decision that each and every one of us is tasked with, by God, to make. Israel was long-ago faced with it... so it's not a new conundrum... and they chose unwisely. The truth was known to them, because the Prophets told them. The cost for Israel's refusal to hear and act was unexpected and horrendous, even though it should not have been. Let us determine to trust God and His Word, then acknowledge it as truth, and then take appropriate action even if it puts us in a tough spot. This, to me, is the underlying message of Zechariah (and really, in all the Prophets).

Verse 15 continues with:

CJB Zechariah 11:15 *Yehoveh said to me, "This time, take the equipment of a worthless shepherd.*

Every time a verse begins with "Yehoveh said to me", it is a marker that God is sending a new prophetic oracle, or at least more details, to the Prophet. And, each new oracle (here in Zechariah) brings with it a new symbolic action that the Prophet is to act out. What does God tell Zechariah to do, here? The CJB translation obscures it a little bit. Better would be "take unto you the instruments (or perhaps the implements) of a bad shepherd". Or even more clear to us, "the gear or wardrobe of a foolish shepherd".

The Hebrew word being translated into equipment or implements or gear is *keli*. It is used here and in other places in the Bible to indicate the special garb and accessories... tools of the Prophetic trade, so to speak... that Prophets used to wear to identify themselves. Shepherds, too, had their own garb, with the shepherd's crook as the standard tool of their trade. But now, worthless shepherds who are unconcerned with the flocks they are to lead, are in charge and they have given to themselves the privilege of using this garb to validate themselves as true Prophets and good shepherds, when in truth they are NOT God appointed nor are they good shepherds. They are phonies. We get a vivid picture of God mocking these false prophets and bad shepherds, and it fits well with God earlier telling His Prophet to now ask for, or accept, payment for his service.

Verse 15 then is followed by the statement of verse 16:

CJB Zechariah 11:16 *For I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who won't bother about the ones who have been destroyed, won't seek out the young, won't heal the broken and won't feed those standing still; on the contrary, he will eat the meat of the fat ones and break their hoofs in pieces.*

God says that as a result of what He has explained up to now, He is going to raise up a shepherd with all the negative aspects of his leadership as a foolish

or false shepherd. This shepherd will reflect all the bad things of past false shepherds and will also involve the agitation that exists between good shepherds and bad ones, and between guild prophets and true Prophets.

I want to add a descriptive word to the other adjectives that have been used to describe this kind of bad shepherd: illegitimate. They may have papers that say they are a prophet. They might have their graduation certificate from a prophet seminary. Some may even agree that they are prophets; but God does not recognize them as such, because He knows who He has called to be His Prophet and who He hasn't.

Let me take a shot here at something that so bothered me, that I have never forgotten it. More than 30 years ago I was sitting in a Church service, when for some unknown reason the Pastor felt it necessary to pause his sermon, and to tell everyone that they needed to hear him because he had been ordained by God. I waited anxiously for a lightning bolt to come through the roof and burn that man to a cinder. Any pastor or Bible teacher or modern-day person professing to be personally anointed by God to validate his authority, and that tells you that, is anything but that. This is precisely what is being talked about here in this section of Zechariah 11. God is virtually saying that the era of true Prophets being sent by, and personally anointed by, God is coming to a close (with Malachi probably being the final one). And, the only prophets that will exist from that time forward will certainly not be the ones specifically sent by God... like Zechariah... through which the Lord brings new oracles. Rather they will either be phonies who are self-deceived, or there will be a new definition of the term "prophet" this is coming (and in fact the New Testament provides that new definition as essentially being a person who professes or teaches God's written word... things that have already been given as opposed to new revelations).

By no means am I suggesting that all pastors feel as this one did; I suspect he represents a minority. But, that so rattled me that I soon left that particular Church. Folks, the spirit of the false shepherd is alive and well today, just as is the spirit of the Anti-Christ (and it may be they are one in the same) among some of the leaders in nearly every religious institution, so we must be on guard and have our ears open at all times. How can we identify them? By

seeing if what they are saying matches with the Bible. That puts the onus on us to know the Bible and to check the Bible to be sure we're not putting ourselves under a false shepherd.

It is interesting that most Bible scholars rush into a historical search for who this particular false shepherd is that God says He is going to raise up. Most Jewish Bible scholars point to Herod the Great. Some of them say it was Ptolemy IV from the early 3rd century B.C. I don't think this prophecy is about a singular or specific person, but rather a category of people that will come and go over the centuries.

What comes next in this verse is a listing of several characteristics, all negative, of this worthless shepherd. We have to be just a little careful in not getting into too much detail or nuance about these because essentially this amounts to a kind of Hebrew poetry that is used to list them. There is a rhythm and beat when spoken in Hebrew that is present, that no doubt makes it more memorable. It is important to note that the verbs used are all in the imperfect tense. This means that this is an ongoing action... it is happening now and in the future.

Before we look closely at the several characteristics of the bad or false shepherd, let's look to Ezekiel who gives us a similar list, but of positive characteristics of the good shepherd; it is quite the contrast.

CJB Ezekiel 34:12-16 ***¹² Just as a shepherd looks after his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark. ¹³ I will bring them back from those peoples, gather them from those countries and return them to their own land. Then I will let them feed on the mountains of Isra'el, by the streams and in all the livable places of the land. ¹⁴ I will have them feed in good pastures; their grazing ground will be on the high mountains of Isra'el. They will rest in good grazing grounds and feed in rich pastures on Isra'el's mountains. ¹⁵ Yes, I will pasture my sheep; and I will let them rest" says Yehoveh ELOHIM. ¹⁶ "I will seek the lost, bring back the outcasts, bandage the broken, and strengthen***

the sick. But the fat and the strong I will destroy- I will feed them with judgment."

Now compare this Zechariah 11:16.

CJB Zechariah 11:16 For I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who won't bother about the ones who have been destroyed, won't seek out the young, won't heal the broken and won't feed those standing still; on the contrary, he will eat the meat of the fat ones and break their hoofs in pieces.

What a contrast. The first negative characteristic is that this bad shepherd won't attempt to go to the sheep that are on the road to destruction. I want first to correct a grammar problem with the CJB interpretation. These are sheep that have not already been destroyed, but rather those who are to be destroyed. Why would anyone be bad for not going to dead sheep? Rather, this is about going to those sheep who are unaware of their dire predicament and in danger of destruction, because they have been falsely taught and led. A good shepherd would at least attempt to help them by telling them the truth, and trying to lead them to safety. The bad shepherd has no interest in them; he'll just leave them to their fate.

The bad shepherd will not seek out the immature who are in need of good shepherding, or they may well become lost. The Hebrew word is ***na'ar*** that indeed means "youth", but it is also sometimes used to indicate those who wander around. So, it is considered an inherent attribute of youth that they are rather aimless and unsettled, making them vulnerable to the false teachings of bad shepherds.

The false shepherd will not heal the broken. The term broken means just what it sounds like. It is both those who are physically infirm, and those who are psychologically or emotionally infirm. These are hurting people that desperately need a touch of compassion, wisdom, and healing. Because these people are of no value to the bad shepherd, he certainly won't go looking for them.

This despicable shepherd won't feed the hungry... the physically or spiritually hungry. Although the words "won't feed those standing still" are awkward, this *is* the meaning. This shepherd lives among the elite in society, and has no interest in the poor or the needy in spirit.

And finally, the bad shepherd preys upon the fatted sheep of the flock... the ones that can be of help and value to him... and leave nothing for the rest of the flock. He has no time or interest in all things that the good shepherd of Ezekiel puts first in his life and ministry.

When it speaks of breaking their hooves in pieces, it means that the bad shepherd so thoroughly consumes every bit of the wealthy and fatted sheep, that there are not even table scraps left for the neediest of the needy. The bottom line is that this characteristic speaks of unfettered greed and selfishness.

Folks...honestly... if you can't look around you and see in government circles, in society in general, and in our religious institutions some people who are like this description of the worthless shepherd... the illegitimate shepherd... then you have been paying no attention at all to what is going on all around you. I know that the Church tells people we are wrong to judge others. But Christ says the opposite. We indeed ARE to judge, based upon the fruit these leaders produce. It is either bad fruit or good fruit, and depending on the quality of that fruit, it reveals who that person actually is. Yeshua also gives us descriptions of what good fruit and bad fruit look like so we can learn the standard by which we are to judge. And, then of course, use that same standard to look in the mirror and judge ourselves BEFORE we get into the task of judging others. If we are prohibited from judging, or have no standard to judge, how can we be held responsible to God for making bad choices of friends or leaders since we have no way to tell the difference?

To judge does not mean to condemn. And to condemn does not mean to notice or point out wrong doing. Condemn means to sentence someone to death. So, while we are to judge a person, only God will determine whether to condemn them or not. So, be more suspect of leaders who tell you NOT to judge, because they are saying to not take notice of what they do.

The final verse of chapter 11 says this:

CJB Zechariah 11:17 ***"Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons the sheep! May a sword strike his arm and his right eye. May his arm be completely withered and his right eye totally blinded."***

Make no mistake: God is cursing this bad shepherd... all bad shepherds. Woe (**hoy** in Hebrew) means that judgment is falling upon this person or people or place. The worthless shepherd is essentially a parallel expression of the one who "abandons the sheep". Thinking back to Ezekiel 34 about the good shepherd, the bad shepherd has no interest in leading; only in benefiting from his position. To God, this is abandonment. The entire purpose of a shepherd is to lead and protect those who he has charge over, and especially over the most vulnerable and suggestable. Guild prophets are worthless shepherds because for them, being a prophet is but a money-earning occupation with a status and lifestyle they like.

These last 2 verses are very much eschatologically oriented; that is, they point towards the End Times. That the idea of a sword wounding this bad shepherd's arm and right eye definitely speaks of a violent act of physical harm. The use of arm and right eye is meant to symbolize the parts of the body, as well as the mental ability, that allows him to carry out his terrible plans and deeds. This is Yehoveh intervening in order to make this bad shepherd no longer powerful or effective through his use of false prophecy, false teaching, and false leadership.

The dark tone of this entire chapter gets some relief in that God will eventually rescue the people from this bad shepherd. We'll stop here and open up chapter 12 next time.