

THE PROPHECY OF THE SHEPHERDS ZECHARIAH 11:1-17

Introduction

In this chapter, we see that Israel's Messiah and everything that is connected with Him leading up to His rejection and the corresponding judgment upon Israel that followed, is described here with amazing clarity!

We see that God used Zechariah here in this 6th century before Christ to describe the situation and background as they were at the time of the Messiah's first coming. Understand that the things that Zechariah shows us belongs to one of the darkest of time periods in Israel's history.

It describes Israel rejection of the Messiah's and its results. That which Zechariah prophesies in this chapter has been precisely fulfilled according to the Word of God.

Notice the prophecy related to the Destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Vs 1-3)

The doors of Lebanon opened for the approaching Roman armies who attacked Israel and occupied her from the north.

The Romans left destruction and misery behind them as they made their way through Lebanon. Later on, Jerusalem would also fall, and not one stone of the Temple would remain upon the other.

The words, "*There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled,*" point to the 70 A.D. destruction of the Temple.

For the leaders in Israel, the only thing that remained was howling and lamenting. The wording of verses 1-3 point to the entire Jewish land and its inhabitants being given over to judgment.

Why were they given over to such destruction? The answer was proclaimed almost 600 years before Christ through Zechariah.

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I. THE CRITICISM OF ISRAEL'S BAD SHEPHERDS. (Vs 4-6)

Israel's leaders led the people astray. They didn't behave like shepherds, but like sheep dealers who were only concerned with making a profit. They had no mercy on the flock and impoverished it.

They slaughtered the flocks without having to account for their actions. They did what they wanted with the people, and placed an unbearable burden upon them. They were shepherds without mercy who sought their own glory and wanted to be seen by the people.

The "*flock of Israel*" meant no more to them than sheep for the slaughter. Instead of opening up heaven to them, they closed it. They were blind leaders of the blind.

We need to read the words of judgment Jesus used in **Matthew 23** to know just how the leaders really were.

But even Jeremiah saw this and described it in **Jeremiah 50:6-7**.

Jeremiah 23:1—"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD."

Ezekiel 34:2—"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

When the Lord came to this earth the first time, **it was these bad shepherds who instigated His crucifixion**—The high priest, the elders (Pharisees and Sadducees), and the scribes!

John 19:15—"But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar".

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Look again at what the Lord said to them in **Zechariah 11:6**.

They rejected the King of Israel and turned to the Roman emperor, who eventually sent his troops in 70 A.D. to devastate the land and people in a brutal war.

Israel's shepherds — the high priests, elders and scribes — were the ones who led the people to this catastrophe like lambs to the slaughter!

THE CRITICISM OF ISRAEL'S BAD SHEPHERDS...

II. THE COMING OF ISRAEL'S GOOD SHEPHERD. (Vs 7-13)

A. The Grace Of God Appeared!

In verse 4 the LORD said "*Feed the flock of the slaughter*"

Now look at verse 7 again.

The words "*Beauty*" literally means "*graciousness*" and "*Bands*" literally means "*union*."

God sent His Son into this situation. In John 10, Jesus referred to Himself as the "*Good Shepherd*."

Messiah came to feed the flock tended by the bad shepherds. Messiah came to draw them to Himself, to unite the divided nation under His rule and to save them.

Messiah came in complete graciousness; that is, He came in love and mercy. God's saving grace appeared.

Messiah came to bind up the wounded:

Luke 4:18-19—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he bath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he bath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord".

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B. The Rejected Shepherd Now Rejects! (Vs 8-9)
The **high priests, elders and scribes** were **Israel's three shepherds** who rejected the Messiah.

Matthew 26:57—“And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.”

The expression, "*...and their soul also abhorred me,*" expresses a strong dislike to the point of vomiting.

The Gospels explain how the Lord rejected the elders and then only spoke in parables. Later, in 70 A.D., they perished. Since then, the Jews have had no priestly shepherds.

The Temple, the ephod (part of the priest's garments) and the sacrifices were taken from them.

Hosea 3:4-5—“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: 5 Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and his goodness in the latter days.”

But the people also perished with the shepherds. They lost their pasture, the land of Israel. The 70 A.D. siege was so terrible that even cannibalism took place among the people.

The staff called "*Beauty*" or "*Graciousness*" is now broken: **(Vs 10-11)**

With these words, the Lord proclaimed Israel's impending judgment and revealed the possibility of Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans. The staff of graciousness was already broken before the crucifixion of Christ.

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He turned away from them before this, and only spoke to them in parables and threatened them with judgment!
(If you compare Matthew chapters 12, 13 with 23:37-39)

Jesus already knew that the leaders of Israel had rejected Him. The staff of graciousness was also broken in **verse 10**, that is, before the description of betrayal for thirty pieces of silver in **verses 12-13**. The Gospels confirm this.

After Christ's betrayal and crucifixion, the staff called "*Bands*" or "*Union*" was also broken, which in Zechariah is destroyed in **verse 14** (after the betrayal described in verses 12-13).

Approximately 37 years following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the ultimate fulfilling of this broken union in Israel was consummated and the land was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

Verse 10 mentions that the covenant with the nations was declared invalid: "...that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people."

The nations were limited as to what they could do by what God permitted. Jesus Himself predicted the lifting of the limits and Israel's demise:
Matthew 23:38—"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"

Luke 21:20—"... when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh"

Verse 11 shows us that Israel came to realize that these words of judgment applied to them.

Look at **Matthew 21:33-45**.

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C. The Official Rejection Of The Messiah! (Vs 12-13)
Judas' betrayal of the Lord was foretold with these words. The high priests wanted Jesus out of their way at all costs! Their opportunity came by means of Judas' betrayal. They paid him thirty pieces of silver. The fulfillment of this prophecy is described in *Matthew 26:14-15: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."*

Remember, Zechariah had already proclaimed this six centuries before Christ was even born. That is a long time before it was actually fulfilled.

The background of the thirty pieces of silver is significant. This amount of money was also designated as the amount paid for a slave who was killed by an ox in *Exodus 21:32: "If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver"*.

The hatred and mockery the high priests had for Jesus is revealed here. They hated Him so much that they paid for Him the sum of a killed slave! Jesus was worth nothing to them!
Isaiah 53:3—"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

But Jesus is Jehovah God from eternity ("*I Am That I Am.*") He revealed Himself to His people as Jehovah, but He was of no more value to them than a dead slave.

And what was the LORD's assessment of this? Look at **vs 13** again.

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According to Jewish tradition, a potter was one of the least esteemed workmen during Zechariah's time. If that is the case, this detail, along with the fact that the money was thrown to the potter, makes it even clearer just how despised Jesus was.

The money was not to be thrown just anywhere, however, but "...to the potter in the house of the Lord." It would be revealed that Israel had rejected her Messiah in the most holy place.

Centuries later, this was fulfilled in **Matthew 27:3-7**. The phrase there, "...to bury strangers in," is really a wonderful fact concealed in the Old Testament.

The death of Christ became the salvation of the stranger, that is, the Gentiles, through the rejection on the part of the Jews. They now received the right to take part in Christ's death and resurrection.

D. **The Second Staff Also Broke After Christ's Crucifixion. (Vs 14)**

We've already seen that prior to Judas' betrayal of Christ, the staff of "Graciousness" had been broken. This pointed to the time when Jesus was among His people and proclaimed judgment to them.

The staff of "Union" was broken after Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. Soon after Jesus' ascension, the union between the Jews in the land started to fall apart. Diversion and betrayal took place. Jesus had prophesied of this beforehand.

Mark 13:12—"Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death"

Matthew 24:10—"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another"

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This came to pass in 70 A.D. The Romans attacked Jerusalem, destroyed everything, and the Jews were dispersed all over the world. The union which had previously held everything together was now gone.

III. **THE COMING OF THE FOOLISH SHEPHERD. (Vs 15-17)**

Just as Jesus' endtime discourse on the Mount of Olives contains a double meaning (the first fulfillment in 70 A.D. and the main fulfillment in the coming Great Tribulation), so too does Zechariah 11 link the events at the time of Christ on earth to the endtimes.

Israel's situation at Christ's First coming included the rejection of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the razing of the land by the Romans. In verse 15, Zechariah jumps to the endtimes.

A. **We See The Foolish Shepherd's Proclamation.**

It appears that the LORD had Zechariah had to play the part of a foolish shepherd: *Vs 15 "And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd."*

This foolish shepherd personifies the false Messiah, the Antichrist, the man of sin and the son of perdition! (The one Paul tells us about in 2 Thessalonians 2).

This foolish shepherd doesn't come to feed Israel, but he comes to rob her. Jesus spoke of him in *John 10:10-11: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."*

But because the Jews rejected the Good Shepherd so the foolish shepherd would now come in His place.

The Lord also foretold this:

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John 5:43—"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive"

B. The Foolish Shepherd's Appearance. (Vs 16)

Like Jesus, the Antichrist will appear *"in the land"* — Israel.

It is striking that the evil shepherd does the exact opposite of that which the Lord did as the Good Shepherd.

We've already mentioned where Jesus said in *Luke 4:18-19*—*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord"*

In contrast to this, it says of the foolish shepherd in **vs 16**:
"... 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."

Daniel 9:27—"And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

2 Thessalonians 2:4—"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

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C. The Foolish Shepherd's End. (Vs 17)

According to Jewish tradition, the arm is a sign of power and the right eye a sign of intelligence.

We know from the book of Daniel that the Antichrist will appear on the scene with the utmost devilish intelligence and power.

A prophetic example of this is found in ***Daniel 8: 23-25***.

At that time, this referred to Antiochus Epiphanes, but it also applies to the Antichrist of the endtimes.

At the end of days, the Lord will return and make an end of the Antichrist. He will consume him with the spirit of His mouth and destroy him with the brightness of His coming! (*2 Thessalonians 2:8*)

Then the Lord Himself will return for Israel as the Good Shepherd: Isaiah describes this in *Isaiah 40:10-11*—*"Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."*