

Title: **A TIME FOR HOWLING**
Text: Zechariah 11:1-17
Subject: *Divine Judgment*
Date: Sunday Morning — July 1, 2007
Reading: *Zechariah 11:1-17*
Tape # Zechariah #59

Introduction:

Zechariah 11 sets before us a time for howling, not howling by God's elect, but howling by false shepherds who are wolves in sheep's clothing, and howling by those who follow them. The key to understanding this chapter is in verses 12 and 13, where the prophet of God speaks of the thirty pieces of silver for which our blessed Savior was betrayed by Judas (Matthew 26:15; 27:3, 9). Since the Holy Spirit has told us plainly that verses 12 and 13 refer to our Lord Jesus Christ, we will not err in applying the entire prophecy to him.

As always, this chapter can only be understood in the context in which it is found. In chapters 9 and 10, the Lord God tells us about the coming of Christ to redeem and save his people by the sacrifice of himself at Calvary and by the irresistible grace and effectual call of his Spirit. Like chapters 9 and 10, Zechariah 11 refers to the whole gospel age and the gathering of God's elect unto himself by omnipotent mercy and grace.

Obviously, the prophecy speaks of our Savior's first advent and refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation under the judgment of God because of they despised his Son. But it is a great mistake to limit this, or any other prophecy of its kind to the nation of Israel. To do so is to rob ourselves. The message of these seventeen verses is just as applicable to us as our Savior's words to Nicodemus in John 3.

JUDGMENT AT GOD'S HOUSE

This chapter begins by describing the judgment God brings upon his own house (vv. 1-2).

(Zechariah 11:1-2) "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. (2) Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down."

A TIME FOR HOWLING

The devouring fire came upon the temple, which was made of the cedars of Lebanon, and upon Jerusalem, when the Lord God destroyed the temple and the city in 70 AD. God brought judgment upon his own house because of the wickedness with which it had corrupted itself. The house of prayer had become a den of thieves. And the thieves were the men who were supposed to be protecting and caring for the house: the scribes, and Pharisees and Herodians, the false, hireling shepherds of Israel!

But we must not imagine that there is no application for us today. In this day the house of God, the professed church of Christ, is just as corrupt as the temple during the days of our Lord's earthly ministry. As always, our Savior's fan is in his hand, and he thoroughly purges his floor, separating the wheat from the chaff. This is what Peter describes in 1 Peter 4:17.

(1 Peter 4:17) "For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God?"

The Gospel of Christ is a two-edged sword. It cuts both ways, saving some and slaying others. To chosen, redeemed sinners, called by the grace of God, it brings life and salvation. To the unbelieving and the reprobate, it brings condemnation and death. Those gates which are shut against the gospel of Christ are opened to destruction!

Illustration: "Why did the Lord send them?"

Robert Hawker wrote, "The heart is to be opened by grace, or broken by judgment. A *spirit of judgment*, and a *spirit of burning*, are the great means the Lord makes use of, to melt the hard heart of sinners, and to consume the lusts and affections."

HOWLING SHEPHERDS

Beginning in verse 3, the prophet describes the coming of Christ as a thing that causes false shepherds to howl. That was certainly the case during our Lord's earthly ministry. How the scribes and Pharisees, those self-serving promoters of law-work religion, began to howl, when they realized that once sinners met the Savior they forsook them!

A TIME FOR HOWLING

(Zechariah 11:3) “*There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.*”

When Christ comes to chosen sinners in the saving operations of his grace, he robs false prophets of their glory. Once a sinner has been given the light of grace, once the Branch of the Lord appears “*beautiful and glorious*” in his eyes, he escapes the prison of darkness (Isaiah 4:2-5) and sees the religion that held him in darkness and bondage for what it is.

(Isaiah 4:2-5) “In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel. (3) And it shall come to pass, *that he that is* left in Zion, and *he that* remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, *even* every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: (4) When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. (5) And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory *shall be* a defence.”

Then, the proud ambitions of self-serving false shepherds are destroyed, and they roar like young lions against Christ, his gospel, and his servants. Indeed, in the next verse, God’s elect, against whom Satan’s offspring (False prophets are the offspring of that roaring lion, the devil.), are called...

THE FLOCK OF SLAUGHTER

Read verse 4 with me. These appear to be the words of our Lord Jesus Christ himself, our Good and Great Shepherd. He says...

(Zechariah 11:4) “Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter.”

Though false shepherds, false prophets, self-serving, covetous preachers care nothing for the souls of men, Christ Jesus is the Shepherd who

A TIME FOR HOWLING

constantly serves his sheep. Let us never forget our Shepherd and his care for us (Ezekiel 34:10-31).

(Ezekiel 34:10-16) “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I *am* against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. (11) For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, *even* I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. (12) As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are* scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. (13) And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. (14) I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and *in* a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. (15) I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. (16) I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up *that which was* broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.”

(Ezekiel 34:22-26) “Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. (23) And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. (24) And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken *it*. (25) And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. (26) And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.”

(Ezekiel 34:28) “And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen,

A TIME FOR HOWLING

neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make *them* afraid.”

(Ezekiel 34:30) “Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God *am* with them, and *that* they, *even* the house of Israel, *are* my people, saith the Lord GOD.”

- The Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep.
- He seeks his sheep and finds them.
- He calls his sheep by name, leads them out, and gives them eternal life.
- He feeds his sheep, protects them, and brings them safely into his heavenly fold.
- Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ delivers his sheep from those false prophets who oppress them with freewill/works religion, the oppressing religion of law and bondage (v. 5-6).

(Zechariah 11:5-6) “Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed *be* the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not. (6) For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour’s hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver *them*.”

Look at the language our Lord Jesus uses to describe the scribes and Pharisees of his day and their successors (religious work-mongers) in every age.

- They slay the souls of men with poisonous doctrine, teaching them by the commandments of men to seek righteousness by their own works, flaying them like slaughtered sheep (Micah 3:3).

(Micah 3:3) “Who also eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them; and they break their bones, and chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron.”

- They feed themselves, and not the flock, as “*lords over God’s heritage*” (Ezekiel 34:2; 1 Peter 5:3).

A TIME FOR HOWLING

(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?”

- Yet, they “*hold themselves not guilty!*”
- They sell them, making merchandise of men’s souls. That is to say, they readily compromise the truth of God for the sake of personal gain. — It matters not to them that immortal souls are destroyed by their doctrine! — They care only for the filthy lucre they can get by making merchandise of men’s souls!
- Though they enrich themselves by robbing widows’ houses, they say, “*Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich.*” — “My success speaks for itself. Who can deny that God’s blessing is upon me?”
- They are heartless, self-righteous, self-serving religionists. Though they talk of love by the pounds, there is not an ounce of pity in them. — “*Their shepherds pity them not!*”

Illustration: Bill Parker

(Matthew 23:15-16) “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (16) Woe unto you, *ye* blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!”

(Matthew 23:23) “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

From such shepherds Christ delivers his sheep by the gospel (Isaiah 66:5).

A TIME FOR HOWLING

(Isaiah 66:5) “Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.”

CHRIST’S PROMISE

Now, read the sweet promise our Lord Jesus Christ, the Shepherd of our souls makes to his elect (vv. 7-9).

(Zechariah 11:7-9) “And I will feed the flock of slaughter, *even* you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock. (8) Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. (9) Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.”

Shepherds commonly carry one staff. It is called a shepherd’s staff, a shepherd’s rod, or a shepherd’s crook. Our Lord Jesus Christ has two. — “*Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me*” (Psalm 23:4). Here, our Savior calls his two staves “*Beauty*” and “*Bands*,” or “*Beauty*” and “*Binders*.” Though he does not tell us precisely what these two staves are, it is obvious to me, both by their names and their use, what they are.

- **The first staff, “Beauty,” is the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ.** The Gospel is and must be beautiful to a soul truly convinced of sin and conscious that he has no righteousness in himself, because it proclaims mercy and grace, pardon and peace, redemption and righteousness by the blood of Christ (Isaiah 52:7).

(Isaiah 52:7) “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”

- The second staff, “*Bands*,” represents the ordinances of the gospel. — The word “*Bands*” means “*Binders*.” The ordinances of the

A TIME FOR HOWLING

gospel by which the Lord Jesus feeds his sheep are the things that bind his sheep together. — Public Worship — Gospel Preaching — Baptism — Church Membership — The Lord's Supper.

The three shepherds he promises to cut off are the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Herodians of every age.

- **Scribes** are religious scholars, learned in the letter of the law, but utterly ignorant of spiritual things.
- **Pharisees** are religious separatists, self-righteous legalists, people who cherish outward forms of religion, ceremonies and creeds, but know nothing of mercy, love, grace, and tenderness. — The Pharisee prides himself upon the rectitude of his own heart, and ventures his everlasting welfare upon the merit of his good works before God (Luke 18:9-14).
- **Herodians**, like those Jews who took Herod's name, pretend to be the true seed of Israel. They are party men, denominational defenders, who love and cherish the status quo. — That means they are always opposed to Christ and his gospel.
- John Gill suggests that, instead of Herodians, the third group of shepherds our Lord promises to destroy are those called in ancient times, "**Essenes**." The word "Essenes" refers to those who vainly imagine that they can appease and satisfy God's law, justice and righteousness by depriving themselves of pleasure.

JUDGMENT AND MERCY

In verses 10-14 our Lord Jesus, speaking by his prophet Zechariah, declares that he has, by his accomplishments as our Savior, acted in judgment upon those who despise him and in mercy toward his chosen.

(Zechariah 11:10) "And I took my staff, *even* Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people."

When our Savior declares that he has cut asunder his gospel, the staff Beauty, that he might break the covenant he had made with all the people (that is all the people of Israel), he is telling us that **he has forever taken from Israel the light of the gospel, giving it to the Gentiles**, that he might save his sheep scattered among the nations (Romans 11:25-26).

A TIME FOR HOWLING

(Romans 11:25-26) “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. (26) And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:”

And **he has, by his death upon the cursed tree, broken and forever abolished the legal, Mosaic covenant, by completely fulfilling it** (Romans 10:4).

(Romans 10:4) “For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

(Zechariah 11:11) “And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it *was* the word of the LORD.”

Then, in verses 12 and 13, our great Savior describes his betrayal for thirty pieces of silver. As I stated at the beginning of my message, this has specific reference to our Lord’s betrayal by Judas Iscariot.

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

But there are three things in these two verses that demand our attention.

1. **The act of betrayal is here said to be the act of many people, not of one man.** — “*They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.*” I take that to mean this. — All who refuse to trust the Lord Jesus Christ do so because they count him a worthless thing. Thirty pieces of silver, under the law, was nothing but the price of a worthless salve Exodus 21:32).

(Exodus 21:32) “If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant;

A TIME FOR HOWLING

he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.”

2. **The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and Lord, the Ruler and Master of all, became Jehovah’s manservant, and was gored to death by the ox of God’s holy law, that he might redeem us from our sins.**
3. **And this was all done by his own sovereign will and decree, as Jehovah’s Servant.** — “*I said to them, Give me my price.*” — “*The LORD said to me, Cast it to the potter.*” — “*I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.*”

Then, after the Jews took God’s Son and killed him, he miserably destroyed those wicked men (v. 14; Matthew 21:38-41; 22:7).

(Zechariah 11:14) “Then I cut asunder mine other staff, *even* Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.”

(Matthew 22:7) “But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

When our Lord Jesus sent the Roman armies into Jerusalem in 70 AD, he utterly destroyed that city and nation, forever taking from them his Bands, the ordinances of divine worship that had held them together throughout their history, forever breaking the brotherhood of Abraham’s physical seed. So thorough and complete was the destruction of the Jewish brotherhood that to this day there is not a Jew in the world who knows from which tribe in Israel (if any) he came.

“The Gospel and Gospel ordinances being removed from the Jews, there was no more work of conversion among them; their church state came to nothing...And so it is when God takes away his Word and ordinances from a people. They are unchurched and their brotherhood is broken, those being the bands which keep them together; and therefore, when loosed, their unity and society cease.”
(John Gill)

A TIME FOR HOWLING

FOOLISH SHEPHERDS DAMNED

In the last verses of this chapter, all false prophets are portrayed as a foolish shepherd.

(Zechariah 11:15-17) “And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. (16) For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, *which* shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. (17) Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword *shall be* upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.”

I will have to come back to this, but I want you to see three things in these verses.

1. **The foolish shepherd, every foolish shepherd, every hireling prophet, is raised up, controlled, and used by God** as an instrument of judgment against those who will not receive the love of the truth. — “*For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land.*”
2. **The instruments of a foolish shepherd are always the same.**
 - They will not visit (pastor, oversee, care for, feed, and help) those who need them, those who are cut off, who have gone astray.
 - They will not seek the Lord’s sheep, the tender, needy souls, the weak sheep who must be carried in the shepherd’s arms.
 - They will not heal those who are broken, the contrite spirit, whose bones are broken by a deep sense of sin.
 - They will not feed those who hunger, because they are so feeble that they cannot move, who stand still and have no ability to care for themselves.
 - They eat the fat of the flesh. — They take riches to themselves, spoiling the rich by their craftiness.
 - Rather than caring for the sheep and helping them, self-serving preachers, those fools who dare to fleece the sheep, “tear their claws in pieces.” — That is to say, they try to take away what strength the sheep have, constantly tormenting them, trying to take away the

A TIME FOR HOWLING

grace, faith, hope, and love with which they would worship and serve their God (Exodus 10:26).

- The foolish shepherds are all “*idol*” shepherds (v. 17). They are “idle;” and they are idolaters. The only god they worship is their own belly! — “*They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:18).
- When they have thoroughly fleeced the flock, they leave it (v. 17). Fleece and forsake is their policy and their practice. Once they have gotten everything they can from a congregation, they get a sudden call from the Lord to move on to another place, where they are “needed.” — Strangely, the other place is always bigger and richer, and more promising!

3. To such self-serving deceivers the Lord God promises utter destruction (v. 17; Micah 3:5-7).

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

(Micah 3:5-7) “Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. (6) Therefore night *shall be* unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. (7) Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for *there is* no answer of God.”

May God ever deliver his church from such men, for Christ’s sake. Precious Savior, in mercy, send pastors, faithful pastors, to your people, pastors after your own heart, who shall feed them with knowledge and understanding. Make me such a pastor!

I cannot send you home until I have given you one word of earnest exhortation. Is the Lamb of God counted by men of no value? Do they weigh for him nothing but the value of a common slave? Is he valued by

A TIME FOR HOWLING

this world at a mere thirty pieces of silver? Let him be to our souls the one “*pearl of great price.*” All the riches of the earth cannot be compared to him, the Lord of life and glory! May God enable us by his grace to sell all we have and buy Christ, “*without money and without price!*”

Amen.