



## Zechariah - Chapter Eleven

- II [Zechariah 9:1-14:21 - The Return of the King \(continues\)](#)
- II.a [Zechariah 9:1-11:17 - The First Oracle: Leaders and their People \(continues/concludes\)](#)
- II.a.ii [Zechariah 10:1-11:3 - Restoration of Judah and Israel \(continues/concludes\)](#)

### Summary of Chapter Eleven

Zechariah's focus turns from the flock back to the shepherds. The fable of vv.1-3 conveys impending destruction, but of what or whom? Interpreters differ on this question and on several details in the rest of this difficult section. The regions described may be the primary referent, just as Egypt and Assyria were in the preceding verses, in which case the metaphors anticipate the destruction following the fall of the shepherds of Judah.

From a plurality of shepherds, attention turns in vv.4-17 to a single shepherd who, once appointed, acts briefly on behalf of the flock before abandoning them. He is equipped with two staves, one symbolising an international covenant and the other a national covenant between Judah and Israel, both broken in succession. Verses 15-17 see the reappointment of a foolish shepherd, whose carelessness results in the devastation of the flock and who thus stands condemned.

The allusive and symbolic language poses problems for interpretation. Were the actions assigned to the shepherd carried out as sign-acts, or are the instructions more parable-like, themselves communicating the divine message? Who is the single shepherd who receives these instructions: simply Zechariah, or is a different figure envisaged in vv.15-16? Is it possible, or desirable, to identify the three destroyed shepherds of v.8? While one coherent line of interpretation is followed, such questions occasion caution at the level of

detail. They also have the effect of promoting the fundamental truths enshrined in the text: that the fate of the community for good or ill lies in God's sovereign hands; that God reveals his will to his people; and that God's agents remain responsible for their own actions in response to the divine word.

### II.a.ii.3 Zechariah 11:1-3 - Judgement on Judah's Shepherds

The glory of Israel's shepherds, the subjects of the Lord's judgement in 10:3, will be brought low. They are pictured in three horticultural images as:

- Massive cedar trees, for which Lebanon was famous (v.1).
- The mighty oaks of Bashan (v.2), a fertile region in the Transjordan.
- The lush thicket of the Jordan (v.3). As glorious and prosperous as these trees are, they could be devoured by fire, or felled and brought low, or made worthless by the presence of a fierce lion.

So too, Israel's shepherds will lose their glory when the Lord acts to deliver his people.

- <sup>1</sup> Open your doors, O Lebanon,  
so that fire may devour your cedars!
- <sup>2</sup> Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,  
for the glorious trees are ruined!  
Wail, oaks of Bashan,  
for the thick forest has been felled!
- <sup>3</sup> Listen, the wail of the shepherds,  
for their glory is despoiled!  
Listen, the roar of the lions,  
for the thickets of the Jordan are destroyed!

### Zechariah 11:1-3

Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! This describes the coming of destructive armies of judgement from the north, through Lebanon. The doors of Lebanon are the mountain passes between Lebanon and Israel. These verses might have described the Babylonian invasion if they had been written earlier; but that was past history by Zechariah's time. There is nothing in the history of the people that a comprehensive destruction of the land can refer to prior to the terrible destruction ordered by Vespasian and his successor Titus during the Roman campaign against Judæa.

Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen. The cedar trees illustrate Lebanon's strength and once they fall the lesser forests of cypress and oak will also be destroyed, so they also wail. Lebanon and the surrounding lands were sacked by Alexander the Great but Jerusalem remained intact: <<**He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall**>> (Isaiah 10:34), and: <<**On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a blazing pot on a pile of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they shall devour to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while Jerusalem shall again be inhabited in its place, in Jerusalem**>> (Zechariah 12:6).

The wail of the shepherds; the roar of the lions. In addition to the trees, the shepherds and lions also mourn because of judgement on the land that is coming because Israel has rejected the Good Shepherd: <<**Like a lion coming up from the thickets of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly chase them away from her; and I will appoint over her whomsoever I choose. For who is like me? Who can summon me? Who is the shepherd who can stand before me?**>> (Jeremiah 50:44).

#### II.a.iii Zechariah 11:4-17 - Two Kinds of Shepherds

The shepherd rescues his flock but is then rejected. Zechariah himself acts out the role of a shepherd whom the sheep come to detest, and who then leaves the flock to a worthless shepherd.

<sup>4</sup> Thus said the Lord my God: Be a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. <sup>5</sup> Those who buy them kill them and go unpunished; and those who sell them say, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich'; and their own shepherds have no pity on them. <sup>6</sup> For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the earth, says the Lord. I will cause them, every one, to fall each into the hand of a neighbour, and each into the hand of the king; and they shall devastate the earth, and I will deliver no one from their hand.

#### Zechariah 11:4-6

These verses record a prophetic sign-act that Zechariah was instructed to perform. He was to become the shepherd to a flock symbolically described as doomed to slaughter, for neither their owners nor their shepherds cared about them as anything other than a means of acquiring wealth: <<**Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them – to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep**>>

(Ezekiel 34:2-3). This represented the Lord's attitude toward his people in the past, abandoning them without pity to suffer abuse from their Persian overlords, their king, and their fellow citizens, i.e. their neighbour.

<sup>7</sup> So, on behalf of the sheep dealers, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staffs; one I named Favour, the other I named Unity, and I tended the sheep.

### Zechariah 11:7

The reason for the Lord's lack of compassion becomes clear as the sign-act unfolds. Zechariah tended his flock with the two staffs, Favour and Unity or Union, symbolising his positive intentions for them.

<sup>8</sup> In one month I disposed of the three shepherds, for I had become impatient with them, and they also detested me.

### Zechariah 11:8

In a very short period, just one month, Zechariah removed three other shepherds and became the shepherd to this flock, symbolising a complete purging of the defective leadership. Yet instead of developing a positive relationship between himself and his flock, he became impatient with them and they detested him. Interpreters have suggested many specific identifications of these three shepherds, but there is no consensus, and they probably represent either leaders well known to readers at that time, or else leaders in general whom God has rejected.

The best explanation is probably the oldest, which sees the three shepherds not as three individuals but as three classes of individuals, namely: the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel. The offices of prophet, priest, and king were taken away from Israel after the Roman conquest of Judæa and have never been restored because they are now fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup> So I said, 'I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another!'

### Zechariah 11:9

I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. In bringing judgement by letting the dying die, God merely withdraws his hand of protection: <<***He shall come and ravage the land of Egypt, giving those who are destined for pestilence, to pestilence, and those who are destined for captivity, to captivity, and those who are destined for the sword, to the sword***>> (Jeremiah 43:11). At one time God had a covenant with all the peoples, preventing them from attacking his people Israel. When God decides to break the covenant, his

people will be attacked. Zechariah resigned from his position, leaving the flock to devour itself: <<*They gorged on the right, but still were hungry, and they devoured on the left, but were not satisfied; they devoured the flesh of their own kindred*>> (Isaiah 9:20).

The idea of the flock devouring itself can be seen as symbolic for the lack of unity within the community of Judah although cannibalism literally occurred during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.

<sup>10</sup> I took my staff Favour and broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. <sup>11</sup> So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep dealers, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord.

### Zechariah 11:10-11

Zechariah broke his staff Favour, thus breaking his covenant with the nations around Israel, leaving the flock exposed to their predation: <<*You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust*>> (Psalm 89:39). This was despite earlier appeals for God not to do so: <<*Do not spurn us, for your name's sake; do not dishonour your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us*>> (Jeremiah 14:21).

The sheep dealers, knew that it was the word of the Lord. There could be no mistake among those who had not led the people as they should, and indeed among the flock itself, that God had spoken this against them.

<sup>12</sup> I then said to them, 'If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.' So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it into the treasury' – this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of the Lord.

### Zechariah 11:12-13

Zechariah received as his pitifully inadequate wages thirty shekels of silver, the price of a slave, which he rejected, throwing it into the treasury. Verse 13 in the NRSVA is slightly different to many other translations, such as the NIV: <<*And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter" – the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord*>>. This potter worked at the house of the Lord, suggesting the Lord's rejection of the temple activities as well.

This speaks prophetically of Jesus, who was contemptuously betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15 and 27:3), the price of a slave. Matthew also

wrote: <<Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me’>> (Matthew 27:9-10). This is a problem because clearly Zechariah records the passage mentioned in Matthew 27:9-10. Commentators generally offer three solutions for this problem:

- Some think it is an error but not by Matthew, i.e. an early copyist made a mistake. Perhaps Matthew wrote Zechariah, but an early copyist wrote Jeremiah instead.
- Some think that Jeremiah spoke this prophecy and Zechariah recorded it. This may be the word spoken by Jeremiah, but recorded by Zechariah.
- Some think that Matthew refers to the scroll of Jeremiah, which included the Book of Zechariah.

However, the most likely solution is that Matthew drew on a combination of words from Jeremiah 19:1-13 and Zechariah 11:11-13; Matthew then attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah as the more prominent prophet. In the same way, Mark combines quotations from Isaiah and Malachi but cites only Isaiah as the more prominent prophet: <<As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’>> (Mark 1:2), which is taken from Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

<sup>14</sup> Then I broke my second staff Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel.

#### Zechariah 11:14

At this point, Zechariah broke the second staff Unity, destroying the unity between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

<sup>15</sup> Then the Lord said to me: Take once more the implements of a worthless shepherd. <sup>16</sup> For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing, or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.

#### Zechariah 11:15-16

Take once more the implements of a worthless shepherd. Now Zechariah plays as a worthless shepherd who does not care for the sheep the way that a shepherd should:

- The worthless shepherd will not care for those who are cut off but a wise and godly shepherd will seek the lost: <<**He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”**>> (Matthew 15:24).
- The worthless shepherd will not seek the young but a wise and godly shepherd knows that the young need to come to the Lord as much as older people do: <<**When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”**>> (Mark 10:14).
- The worthless shepherd will not heal those that are broken but a wise and godly shepherd looks for broken hearts and lives and mends them with God’s love and word.
- The worthless shepherd will not feed those that still stand but a wise and godly shepherd will faithfully feed the sheep: <<**The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep”**>> (John 21:17).
- The worthless shepherd will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces but a wise and godly shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

For I am now raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for the perishing. This worthless shepherd is allowed and appointed by God as judgement because his people forsook the true shepherd. This was fulfilled in Israel’s rejection of Jesus. They rejected the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18) but received another shepherd: <<**I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him**>> (John 5:43). The worthless shepherd embraced by Israel was partially fulfilled in their choice of a thief and murder: <<**Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, ‘Which of the two do you want me to release for you?’ And they said, ‘Barabbas.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ All of them said, ‘Let him be crucified!’**>> (Matthew 27:20-22), but will be ultimately fulfilled in their embrace of the Antichrist and their covenant with him: <<**He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator**>> (Daniel 9:27).

<sup>17</sup> Oh, my worthless shepherd,  
 who deserts the flock!  
 May the sword strike his arm

and his right eye!  
Let his arm be completely withered,  
his right eye utterly blinded!

### Zechariah 11:17

Zechariah then left the flock to the mercies of a worthless shepherd who would not care for the flock but would exploit it for his own benefit. This sign-act reverses the pictures of Ezekiel Chapters 34 and 37, in which the Lord promised to be Israel's shepherd, judging their present bad shepherds and providing a good shepherd, a new David, to reunite his people. Instead, because of their failure to respond to the shepherd he provided, the Lord declares that they will be given over to false shepherds, returning to the situation that led up to the exile.

The NT sees in the rejection of the shepherd by the flock and the pitifully inadequate wages a connection to the rejection and betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 27:3-10 and John 10:25-27). Yet the handing over of the Lord's people to a worthless shepherd cannot be the end of the story. The Lord will ultimately act to bring judgement on the worthless shepherd, striking his right eye and his arm, parts of the body essential to carrying out warfare and exerting control over the flock. Revelation 13:3 and 13:12-14 reveal that the Antichrist will suffer a severe wound yet survive. This confirms that the worthless shepherd is ultimately fulfilled in the Antichrist.