

The Rejection of the True Shepherd

Scripture: Zechariah 11:1-14

Code: 2167

We've been studying the book of Zechariah and we come now to the eleventh chapter. And I've entitled this "The Rejection of the Good Shepherd...The Rejection of the Good Shepherd." It's a very sad chapter. It's a very grieving chapter. It's a very ugly chapter in many ways. And it...in comparison to chapters 9 and 10...stands out in a rather stark contrast.

The chapter pictures the Lord Jesus as a shepherd. And that's not a concept unfamiliar to us because the Old Testament talks about God as a shepherd. Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my shepherd." The prophet Isaiah said that He gathers the little lambs and He gently leads those that are with young, pictures God as a shepherd. In John chapter 10 of the New Testament, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd cares for his sheep." And so the concept of God as a shepherd, of the Lord Jesus Christ as a shepherd is not anything really new. But in most cases in the Old Testament, you find that in the presentation of God as shepherd, or even in the New Testament where Christ is presented as shepherd, the chapter is lovely. There's beauty to it. It's gracious. It's endearing. But when you come to the eleventh chapter of Zechariah and you read here Zechariah's presentation of the shepherd, it is anything but beautiful, it is anything but lovely, it is anything but winsome, it is very ugly, it is very sinful, and that is apparent from the very first verse on to the end of the chapter.

Now remember that the book of Zechariah was written with the intention of comforting the people of God. They had come back from the Babylonian captivity which had lasted 70 years. Their city was in ruins. Their nation was in almost non-existence. Their hearts were broken and grieved over the destruction of such a beautiful place and such a significant place. And they came back to all this rubble and they were unable for many years to do anything about it, to rebuild it, to restore it. And so it was a time of great discouragement. And Zechariah received from the Holy Spirit this wonderful prophecy to encourage the people, to comfort the people. And the message of the prophecy is twofold. Number one, God is going to enable you to rebuild your city. And number two, He's going to enable you some day to have a kingdom beyond what you've ever dreamed. And so part of the book deals with the historic rebuilding of the city and part of it deals with the future great kingdom that God is going to bring. We have seen as we've studied this book the tremendous plan of God for the redemption of the nation Israel, for the fact that in the future God is going to establish them in the land. God is going to redeem them in the land. God is going to gather them back and God is going to give them the Kingdom that they were promised.

This is a promise of God. Now we Christians believe this, most of us. We believe that the Bible says God has a plan for Israel. Have you ever wondered what Israel believes about that? Have you ever wondered what a current modern twentieth century orthodox Jew believes? Is he premillennial or amillennial? Does he believe there's no kingdom for Israel? Or does he believe there is one?

Well, let me give you a little idea of what a current contemporary Jew believes. This is a letter that was in the Jerusalem Post written by Rabbi Maer(?) Kahonni(?), apparently an orthodox rabbi. And this was in the Jerusalem Post which is a Jerusalem newspaper. And it was written...here's the title, "To a Bible-believing Christian President, Jimmy Carter, from a Bible-believing Jew: Will you sell...this is the headline...Will you see America for 30 barrels of oil?" It is not Israel that needs America but American survival depends on Israel.

Now let me preface before I read you some points out of it that this man is not a Christian. He is an orthodox Jew. He calls himself a Bible-believing Jew because he believes the Old Testament. This is what he says and I can't read the whole thing or I wouldn't be able to preach my sermon, cause it's long. But basically what he says is this: the whole point of the Abrahamic covenant is wrapped up as far as other nations are concerned with this promise, "I will bless them that bless thee and him that curseth thee shall I curse," Genesis 12:3. So the rabbi says that from Abraham on, God said that whatever nation blesses Israel will be blessed and whatever nation curses Israel will be cursed. So he takes the literal view of the Abrahamic covenant.

He says this, "The final redemption and their kingdom of heaven with the era of eternal peace are inexorably tied to the Jewish people. The Jews are the key to history. The final redemption is irrevocable, tied to the return of the Jewish people to its land, the ingathering of the exiles, the resurrection of the Jewish state and the sanctification of the Jewish people through their return to God. These are the states that must proceed the establishment of the Kingdom of God and there is not a true Christian believer in the Bible that can deny that." Isn't that interesting? He is a literalist. He says everything promised to Israel is going to come to pass.

And then he goes on to prove it by quoting piles of Old Testament Scripture. And he says, "And the Gentiles, what about them? There will be those who understand the decree of God and who remember the eternal promise of heaven," and he quotes again, "Blessed are those that bless you and cursed be those that curse you." He says, "Blessed and fortunate will be those that understand and leap to aid the redemption of the Jewish people, to hurry the final redemption of mankind and how cursed and destroyed will be those individuals and nations who do not understand, who defy the divine decree, who refuse to stand totally at the side of the Jewish people, who attempt to thwart the return of the Jewish nation to its land and to diminish the sovereignty and territory of the land of Israel as the exclusive holy land of the chosen people."

"President Carter and Christian America, the Jewish people and the state of Israel are God's chosen. They can never be destroyed. It is not they who need you, but you whose very survival depends on doing the will of God by standing totally at Israel's side and helping to fulfill biblical prophecy of total return and defeat of the enemies of God and His people. Every effort to force Jews to give up any part of the holy land that is completely theirs by divine grant is an effort to undo the will of heaven. The cry 'Not one inch of Jewish retreat' is not a military or political one, it is a religious decree." He says, "I grieve for an America that may defy the Lord and attempt to impose a settlement to throttle Israel. Such a settlement will never be and the Jews will survive it. May God grant you, Mr. President and Christian America, the wisdom to understand before it's too late for you." Then he signs his name.

Now I don't agree with the fact that he is using this for political leverage. And I don't believe in the fact that our foreign policy is necessarily to be totally dictated by a commitment to the fact that at all costs we have to aid Israel no matter what they do. But what is interesting to me is that here is a Jew in the twentieth century who is totally committed to a literal understanding of the Old Testament, who is saying, "I believe in the redemption of Israel, I believe in the return of Israel, I believe in the regathering of Israel and I believe that ultimately this is going to end up in the kingdom of God on earth." Now that is no different than what Zechariah has been proclaiming in the chapters we've studied. That's exactly what the Old Testament teaches. What amazes me is that there are many people who are within the framework of Christianity who want to deny the literal character of that. And even unbelieving Jews, that is unbelieving in the sense of New Testament truth, are committed to the Old Testament understanding.

And so, what Zechariah said centuries ago is still being echoed as the hope of the hearts of Jews today who are literalists in interpreting the Old Testament. To show you how literal some of them are, the other day they stoned a lady in Jerusalem. Did you read about that? She walked into the orthodox sector in an improper dress and they stoned her to death. That's literalism, that's taking the Old Testament letter to the very inth degree. So there are some Jewish people who still are committed to a literal interpretation of not only a Mosaic law, Deuteronomic law, but of prophecy.

Now with that introduction, let's go back to the eleventh chapter. God has promised Israel a kingdom. God has promised Israel salvation. God has promised them a marvelous return, regathering and restoration in the land. But suddenly in chapter 11, the prophet of hope turns into a prophet of doom. And he turns from the glories of Messiah at His Second Coming and the glories of Messiah at His Kingdom and he turns to a national apostasy and a national rejection of Messiah that occurred at His first coming.

Now we know at the Second Coming is going to be redemption. At the Second Coming there's going to be restoration. At the Second Coming there's going to be a Kingdom. But at the first coming there

was a terrible apostasy. There was a terrible rejection. And this chapter goes not so much to the Second Coming of Christ as to the first coming. And it predicts the rejection of the shepherd. The second point in the outline is the main point of the chapter, the rejection of the true shepherd. And this is a very, very severe, a very profound, a very straightforward, a very judicial kind of chapter. There's really no bright light in it. It's judgment.

In fact, this may help you to see it in perspective, chapter 11 tells us...watch this...chapter 11 tells us why the promises of chapters 9 and 10 never came to pass when Jesus came the first time. Chapter 11 tells us why the promises of 9 and 10 never came to pass when Jesus came the first time because chapter 11 tells us that when He came the first time, they rejected Him. And so that accounts for the postponing of the promises of 9 and 10.

Now I want us to look at this in the format of shepherds. You'll notice that all three of the points on the outline deal with shepherds. First there is the ravage of the wailing shepherds. Second, there is the rejection of the true shepherd. And thirdly, there is the reception of the false shepherd. So the chapter follows the motif of shepherds.

Let's look, first of all, at the ravage or the ruin of the wailing shepherds, verses 1 to 3. This incidentally is the most poetic section in the whole book. In Hebrew it's totally poetic. Let me read you the three verses. "Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Wail, fir tree, for the cedar is fallen because the glorious trees are spoiled. Wail, O ye oaks of Bashan for the forest of the vintage is come down. There is a voice of the wailing of the shepherds for their glory is spoiled, a voice of the roaring of young lions for the pride of the Jordan is spoiled."

Now all those three verses are judgmental. Now watch and I'll show you what they mean. It is obvious here that you see three different sections of land; verse 1, Lebanon...verse 2, Bashan...verse 3, Jordan. If you know anything about the basic geography of Israel, you know that starts in the north and descends to the south. And here is judgment sweeping. Fire, verse 1, devouring beginning in Lebanon and burning up the cedars. Sweeping down to Bashan and consuming the oaks. Coming all the way down to Jordan and destroying the pride of Jordan, the place where the lions dwelt which was all of the foliage around the Jordan valley. And so there is a judgment that sweeps from the north down to the south. And the Holy Spirit here with poetic imagery and dramatic movement arranges the words with an almost rhetorical power to describe the ruin and the ravages of the whole land of Israel.

There's coming a storm of judgment, God said, and that storm is going to sweep from the north to the south. And the trees are sort of personalized here and made to be sort of the recipients of the judgment. But this is really only a metaphor. This is really only a picture. This is really only a figure in that sense. The trees stand for the sections of land. Lebanon was known for its cedars. Do you remember the wood that was used to build Solomon's temple were the cedars from Lebanon?

Lebanon was known for the mighty cedar trees, massive beautiful trees. And some of the mountains of Lebanon rise high, way high and they're just covered with trees. These mighty trees fell.

And then there was the area of Bashan. Now Lebanon was the north border of the land of Israel, on the Syrian Palestinian border...at the north is Lebanon. And coming down south a little bit and going east a little bit to the east of Jordan was the area of Bashan. The area of Bashan was an area populated by oak trees. And then descending further down into the lower part of the land you come to the Jordan valley which runs all the way to the Dead Sea. And the Jordan Valley, along the Jordan River on both sides was dense foliage. At one time we understand that there was almost a jungle there of foliage. And all of this is going to be consumed in this tremendous judgment that hits the land.

Now I really believe that the judgment that God is speaking about here is an actual devastation. It's not a literal fire that burns trees, but it is an actual devastation. It's not just a spiritual judgment, but it is a real judgment where real people die real death, where the land of Israel is really judged. In fact, in verse 1 Lebanon is told to open its doors. There's no sense in fighting it. You might as well just throw open the doors and let it happen. And once you see Lebanon go, verse 2, you oaks of Bashan, you might as well wail. The fir tree might as well wail. Why? Cause if the mighty cedar goes, the fir tree isn't going to be able to stand. In other words, when the high and the mighty are fallen, every lesser tree is going to be unable to escape. From the high and the mighty all the way down the line. And some people have likened these trees to the leadership of Israel and said that this is a spiritual judgment on the hierarchy of Israel all the way from the high and the mighty, the priests and so forth, and the elders and the scribes and the rules down all the way to the common men. Maybe there is that implication also. But in this judgment, when the fall...when the mighty fall, everything goes as well. And when you see the forest of the vintage come down, in other words, that's referring to Lebanon, when you see the finest forest, the glorious trees, the splendid trees, when they go...actually the Hebrew says "the inaccessible or impenetrable forest," that's literally what it means when it says the forest of vintage. The impenetrable Lebanon, the mighty Lebanon falls, when the best goes, everything else better wail cause it's going to go too. And so the fir trees wail and the mighty oaks wail and there's a wailing all the way down in Jordan.

Notice this, verse 3, there is the voice of the roaring of the lions for the pride of the Jordan is spoiled. This is interesting. After the captivity of the northern kingdom, wild beasts began to multiply around the Jordan. You can check out 2 Kings 17:25, Jeremiah 49:19 and Jeremiah 50:44. And in those passages, 2 Kings 17, Jeremiah 49 and chapter 50 there, is the indication that wild beasts proliferated the Jordan area for many centuries. It became literally a place where lions dwelt in the thick foliage. And so verse 3 is saying the lions will roar when they see the devastation that comes. And there was devastation. And the "young lions" is an interesting term. It refers to lions that have been weaned and they're young and they have great appetites and they're very fierce. And these fierce lions are going to roar at the destruction that occurs.

Now this is poetic imagery. The point here is not the trees get burned up and lions lose their homes. The point is that they are made to be like wailing elements, as figures of the wailing that's going to occur in the land when it's devastated. The idea of destruction is here, people, because three times in these three verses the verb in Hebrew for "destroy" is used...the verb for destroy, three times. So the thought of destruction and permanent devastating kind of destruction is going to occur.

Now notice the response to this. The one human response you find is in verse 3. "There is a voice of the wailing of the shepherds for their glory is spoiled." Here are the shepherds. Are these just literal shepherds? Well, possibly. And they're crying and howling like an animal, the Hebrew word, literally howling like a coyote, or like a lone wolf, screeching and wailing because all of their pastures have been devastated, because all of the grass that they needed has been burned up and destroyed and the hills are denuded. And again, some say it may be a reference to those who are the shepherds of Israel, the leaders. And it may be. But the sum of it all, the trees and the grass and the animals and the leadership, it all falls into the same wail as God's great judgment comes.

Now, we meet then the wailing shepherds. And they wail because they've been ravaged. The question is, to what destruction does this refer? At what point in Israel's history did this happen? And I'm going to give you what I believe to be the soundest and the best interpretation. And incidentally, it's the oldest one, it's the old one that the old rabbis believed and it's still currently held by many scholars, and I'm convinced it's true, that what this is referring to is the destruction of Israel and Jerusalem that occurred in 70 A.D. You remember that after Jesus was crucified around 30 or so A.D., forty some years later, nearly forty years later, there was the great devastation, the Roman army came in and destroyed Jerusalem. And I mean, when they destroyed Jerusalem, they didn't just destroy Jerusalem, they destroyed Jerusalem good, one million, one hundred thousand Jews died...one million, one hundred thousand. They threw a hundred thousand bodies over the wall, just for the sport of it.

And years following that, Hadrian marched through the area north toward Galilee and destroyed 985 towns. Literally devastating the state of Israel, scattering them all over the world. And only in your life time have they come back, since 1918 and following. And I believe that what he sees here is this unbelievable devastation that occurred in 70 A.D. And the reason I believe that is because of what immediately follows which is given as the reason for the judgment. And the reason for the judgment is the rejection of the shepherd. And that just fits history beautifully because when they rejected Jesus Christ, it wasn't 40 years later until their whole nation went out of existence...as a nation, although the Jewish people have been preserved as individual people.

And so, we find--first of all--the general warning of the ravage of the wailing shepherds. And then the reason for this ravage comes in the second point, the rejection of the true shepherd. Let's look at verse 4. And all the way through verse 14, he discusses the rejection of the true shepherd. We can't

really reproduce today, I don't think, vividly enough in our minds unless somebody could make a movie about this and maybe that wouldn't even do it, we can't really understand the ravaging that occurred in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the years following. I mean, when the Roman army came down, they literally destroyed an entire civilization of people except for the remnant that managed to escape and be preserved by God to be regathered today...utter devastation. As we shall see in a moment, and as we mentioned earlier in the book, during the siege of the city of Jerusalem, the Jewish people even began to eat their own children because of the starvation. Incredible destruction occurred. This is the devastation that happened. And this devastation, beloved, was God's act of judgment on the rejection of the true shepherd. The shepherds were ravaged and they wailed, but they wailed as wailing shepherds because they had rejected the true shepherd.

Now I want to give you some information you have to have to understand this prophecy. I've studied a lot of chapters in the Bible. I don't think I ever studied one that's more difficult than this one. This is a very difficult chapter. I say that basically so that you'll understand that if you don't quite get every little thought here, I'm not sure anybody gets every little thought here. Very difficult...because the style is often poetic. And trying to reproduce everything that was in the mind of the prophet is difficult. But I want you to see the flow of it because the overall flow and purpose of the chapter is very clear in spite of some of the little nuances in the Hebrew that are very difficult and I don't want to get bogged down in all of those. You know, I just know a little Hebrew, and he runs a delicatessen. So, I don't want to get involved in all of that.

But anyway, there is an important key, there is an important key to the chapter, and you've got to get this. There are many styles of prophetic utterance in the Old Testament. I remember having a course in Old Testament prophecy and my professor was Dr. Fineberg and he really knew this. And he opened up to me an understanding of so many kinds of prophetic method that I never understood. And one of them that he talked about that was interesting, I thought, was the fact that the prophets often made a prophecy by acting out a symbolic act. In other words, rather than just verbalizing something, they literally acted out something. For example, well Isaiah 8 might be a fitting example. Don't turn to it, I'll just read a verse or two real quick. Isaiah 8, "Moreover the Lord said to me, Take a great scroll and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took to me faithful witnesses to record," etc., etc., etc.

In other words, the Lord said I want you to do a demonstration, Isaiah. Get a big scroll and write some stuff on it. Well that was a demonstration. That was doing something very visible as a symbol of a certain prophecy.

Over in Ezekiel 4, I'm thinking of another one. God said to Ezekiel, "Take a tile or a piece of clay...like you'd tile a roof with...and lay it before you and paint on it the city of Jerusalem. And lay siege against it and build a fort against it and cast a mound against it." Now can you see this? The very dignified prophet Ezekiel is building himself a little fort, see. He's got his little clay and he's

drawing Jerusalem. And the people are all saying, "Poor Ezekiel's...you know...slipped one of those wheels that he was talking about in chapter 1 and something's definitely gone wrong with Ezekiel."

And wasn't it Jeremiah who was laying on one side and then later on he turned and laid on the other side? And he was acting a symbolic act before the people.

Now that seems to be what is going on in this chapter. God is speaking to Zechariah asking Zechariah to be an actor, to play a part, to put on a symbolic act, to enter on a stage. He says, "Now Zech, I want you to be a shepherd." He said, "I want you to play the part of a shepherd, okay?" And then He goes on to tell him step by step what to do. Now everything that Zechariah acts out is a picture of Jesus Christ. Now I hope you understand that approach to prophecy. He symbolically carries out certain actions that speak of the rejection of Jesus Christ. And they are very, very, very vivid things that he does.

Let's look at them, beginning at verse 4. "Thus saith the Lord my God, Feed the flock of the slaughter." Now first Zechariah is to feed the flock of the slaughter. Now the word here "to feed" is the word "tend" in the Hebrew. It means to care for, to feed, to lead, to nurse. It's used in Psalm 23 to speak of the ministry of a shepherd. He says, "Now the first thing I want you to do in your role as a shepherd is act out a feeding. Feed the flock." And that would mean, of course, to teach them. I want you to be like the...like the true shepherd, like the spiritual shepherd and you feed the flock the Word of God.

Now notice what he calls the flock..."the flock of the slaughter." That's not the most endearing term. That doesn't sound a lot like Psalm 23, does it? If we were to put it in modern English, we would say: Feed the flock intended for butchering...because that's exactly what it means. Feed the flock intended for butchering. The flock is the covenant nation, but the covenant nation has been unfaithful. The covenant nation has turned their back on the shepherd and he says you feed the flock intended for butchering.

Now that's a strange statement and I mean it. I read that over lots of times before I understood what he was saying. He's saying, "Look, Israel has rejected the shepherd...and we'll see that as we go through the chapter, I'm assuming that at this point...Israel's rejected the shepherd, they are then therefore designated as the flock for butchering. But I'm going to give them...I'm going to give them a chance. I'm going to feed them, I'm going to try to feed them and see if they'll eat."

That's essentially what I believe he's saying. So the Lord here is sort of played by Zechariah in this little play. And Zechariah is to go to this flock that is already God knows, it's already in the plan, God has known it, they're a flock for butchering, there's going to be a horrible devastation, there's going to be a horrible judgment, but before the judgment comes, God says I want to try to feed them one more time.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

And that's essentially what Jesus did, didn't He? Seventy years before the great butchering of Israel, God came and tried to feed the flock. Would they be fed? For the most part, they would not be fed. And so they were a flock for slaughter.

Now verse 5, follow me, "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."

Now 5 and 6 is a little parenthesis. This really gets tough, so hang in there now. You're going to learn the deep truths tonight. What are these possessors? Now watch. The possessors who slay them are the foreigners, the foreign oppressors, the nations. And though it is true that God's sovereignly handed Israel over to the nations for judgment, it is still true that the nations are responsible for their cruelty, that's clear in the Scripture in many places. God may have designed Israel for judgment, but that doesn't mean when the nations superseded reasonable judgment and acted cruelly that they are without guilt.

In fact, in Jeremiah 50 verse 17, it says, "Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven them away. First the king of Assyria devoured him and last this Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones. Therefore says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I'll punish the king of Babylon and his land as I have punished the king of Assyria." In other words, God had ordained the king of Assyria and the king of Babylon to judge Israel, but that made them no less guilty for the sins of cruelty that they perpetrated. Now that's something you just have to leave with God.

So, he says, "Look, they're going to be slaughtered and I want to feed them once more before the slaughter comes. And it's going to come from the nations that are going to slay them. And these nations are going to hold themselves not guilty. There going to sense no guilt at all. They'll just slay them and they won't feel a thing." And in fact that's exactly the way the Assyrians and the Babylonians felt centuries before 70 A.D. when they slaughtered Israel. They didn't feel anything. In fact, in the same chapter, Jeremiah 50, he says, "All that found them have devoured them and their adversaries say, We offend not because they sinned against the Lord." They deserve it, they're a sinful people so we just went in and whacked them, see.

Isn't it amazing that the nations could take just enough Bible to justify what they want to do? Somewhere along the line, the Romans must have determined that what they were doing was a wonderful act of judgment. And they go further even, it says, "They say, Blessed be the Lord for I am rich." In other words, they made money on the spoils of the people they've slaughtered. And they

actually say bless the Lord, mockingly.

So, first of all, the slaughter is going to come, verse 5 says, at the hands of Gentile nations. Now in 70 A.D. it was a Gentile nation, the world empire of Rome that came to slaughter.

But verse 6 adds another dimension, a most interesting dimension. Pardon me, the end of verse 5. It says, "And their own shepherds pity them not." It wasn't bad enough that the Gentile nations came in and slaughtered, and notice also in verse 5 that the Gentile nations sold them and made money. And that's true. They sold literally tens of thousands of Jews after 70 A.D., they sold them into slavery. Read Josephus, he outlines that. So they came, they slaughtered, they sold them. And if that isn't bad enough, their own shepherds didn't show them any pity.

In other words, the very leaders of Israel themselves didn't do anything to defend their people. The leaders of Israel themselves never did anything to prevent judgment. They never did anything to stop them from being butchered. They never taught them any spiritual truth. They never gave them the message of God. The priests and the elders and the scribes were so corrupted that they were guilty of lording it over the people. They were guilty of ripping off the people. They were guilty of becoming fat and rich at the expense of the populace.

And then verse 6 says, and this is the ultimate, "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 neighbor'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."

You know something? It's sad when foreigners make merchandise of Israel. It's even sadder when their own leaders show them not enough pity and mercy to teach them the truth of God and to care for them. But you want to know something? The saddest thing of all is when God Himself says I don't pity them anymore either. That's when Ichabod has been written. God turns His back. And you know why God did that? Because they rejected the Messiah. God says, "I will no more pity them, I will deliver the men...watch this...every one into his neighbor's hand." And the historians tells us that they themselves while in the city because of the confusion, because of the famine, and because of the fights and the arguments among the divisions within the people slaughtered more people among themselves in civil strife than the Romans killed.

And He says, notice this, "And then I will deliver them...watch this, this is fantastic...I will deliver them into the hand of his king and they shall smite the land and out of their hand I will not deliver them." Who is their king? Well, at 70 A.D. who was the king of Israel? They didn't have any. They didn't have any. You say, "Well, what...this prophecy couldn't come to pass." Listen to this. Judah chose a king, they chose a king right at the time Jesus was there. They had the king, Jesus, the King of Kings. They mocked Him, they spit on Him, they said, "We will not have this man to...what?...to reign over us." They didn't want that king. Then they turned around and said, "We have no king but

Caesar," isn't that interesting? So by the choice of the Jews, who was their king at that time of history? Caesar. Look at this, "I will deliver the men, every one into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of his king." And who was it that came to destroy the nation? Caesar. See? Accurate to the very designation of Caesar.

On the fateful eve of Passover, Pilate brought Jesus out before the Jews and mocking said, "Behold your king. And they screamed, Away with Him, crucify Him. And Pilate said, Shall I crucify your king? And the chief priests who were the leaders answered, We have no king but Caesar." And they made their awful choice and just what Zechariah said came true, they put themselves in Caesar's hand and Caesar devoured them.

You see, they decided to kill the true King to avoid a Roman takeover. Remember in John 11 they were saying, "Boy, if we don't get rid of Jesus, the Romans are going to come in here and take us over. We've got to get rid of this trouble maker." So they killed the real King to avoid a Roman takeover. And the very thing they feared and killed their Messiah to avoid was the sentence of God that took place on their nation. Destruction by Rome.

Now verse 7 resumes the thought of verse 4. So, He says to Zechariah, "Feed the flock of the slaughter, play out the part. Messiah comes, He's going to feed the people before the slaughter." And so, says Zechariah in verse 7, and it's just the way the Hebrew translates, now watch, "So I fed the flock of slaughter." Zechariah apparently carried out his role, so I fed the flock of slaughter. Watch...and who listened? "Even you, O...what?...poor of the flock." Stop there.

Who listened? Zechariah says, "Well I did it, I started to teach and only the poor of the flock heard." When Jesus came and fulfilled this little play that Zechariah carried out, He came to feed the flock. And you know who listened? Only the poor. Did you know that? And Jesus knew that from the very beginning. And so at the very start He said, "Blessed are the...what?...poor in spirit." And Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "Not many noble and not many mighty." Jesus came to Israel and nobody listened but the poor of the flock. Incidentally, the Hebrew word for "poor" refers...it's used in many ways, when it's used in an economic sense, it means those without any means, the poor, the destitute economically. When it's used to speak of disease, it means somebody who is wretched or somebody who is afflicted. So, it's simply saying it was the sick and the afflicted and the wretched and the poor and the commoners who heard.

And that's true, isn't it? Isn't it Mark 12:37 that says, "And then the common people heard Him gladly?" The leaders didn't. It was the poor. And incidentally, the word "poor" here, and I don't think I'll take the time to take it all over the place and show you, but let me just tell you this, "poor" is a term that often refers to the believing remnant in the Old Testament. The concept of "poor" refers to the believing remnant. In Psalm 10 it is used that way. in Psalm 14 it is used that way. And in Psalm 18. It is used to refer to the believing remnant.

So, Jesus came, He fed the flock of Israel, the covenant people set for butchering. And the butchering came to pass because only a few believed, just the poor...just the poor. I think it's stated well by John's gospel, chapter 1, it says, "He came unto His own and His own...what?...received Him not. But, as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the sons of God." So the elect remnant came to be fed.

Barron(?) writes on this passage these words, "He fed all, but the poor of the flock alone, those who were despised of men because they would not follow the pride of the high priests and scribes and Pharisees believed on Him," end quote. He's right.

Now Zechariah carries out another little act in the play. Look at verse 7. "And I took unto me two staves." Now shepherds used to carry two sticks. Did you know that? Remember Psalm 23, "Thy rod and thy staff..." two. You know what the rod was for? Beating off the wild beasts. You know what the staff was for? Gently helping the sheep that was caught over the cliff. One was a firm thing and one was something of gentleness, but they carried two sticks.

Now watch, he says, "I took unto me two sticks, the one I called Beauty, or graciousness, or grace or favor, or blessing, and the other I called Bands, or unity, or binders." Now here's the symbolism. Here is the prophet, he grabs two sticks. "And I fed the flock holding these two sticks."

You say, "What in the world is this?" Well, first stick was graciousness. And it speaks of God's loving gracious tender care. And you know, you have to admit that when Jesus came, He was gentle and He was loving and He was kind and He was merciful and He was gracious and He was forgiving. And you know, even reflecting back, the Apostle Paul talks about the gentleness of Christ. And the text says that He was meek and lowly. And it talks about His humility. And there was a graciousness, even in confronting apostate Israel. By the time Jesus came, they were so apostate it was incredible, so far departed from Old Testament truth. And yet He was gentle and yet He was gracious.

And the second stick that he had in his hand was called Unity or union or binder, something that ties everything together. And this speaks of the fact that He had a unifying ministry. What Jesus came to do was to gather one flock, one flock to get all the lost sheep and all the wayward sheep and get them all in the fold. So He came graciously and He came with a ministry of unity. And it was in that spirit that He fed the flock of slaughter.

Look at verse 8, "These three shepherds also I cut off in one month and my soul loathed them and their soul also abhorred me." Now here we come to a verse very difficult to interpret along with every other verse in this chapter. You haven't found it as difficult as I did, but difficult. There are 40 different views of this one verse...40 views. I'm only going to give you 38...no I'm not. Very difficult

verse. Really, the reason I say this is because I'm doing the best I can but I don't want you to go out and say, "This is the absolute only possible interpretation." It hangs together for me, but then again, I'm not always all that bright.

Verse 8, "Three shepherds will I cut off." Now who are the three shepherds? Well, they're not, you know, Manny, Moe and Jack, or three particular, you know, three guys with three names, you know, three particular Joes. They speak...some people say they speak of the priests and the elders and the scribes and that when the Lord came, He was gracious and He was so unifying to the populace, but, boy, when it came down to the priests and the elders and the scribes, He really cut them off. And one month means in a short time. He just leveled them. And if you read in Matthew, you read that He really did let them have it, didn't He? He blistered them with scathing denunciation and judgmental talk. And so it may well be that this is just a denunciation of the priests and the elders and the scribes who...who so abhorred Him as He loathed them.

But I would just add this thought. Where it says "My soul loathed them," that's...that is a very, very difficult thing for me to accept, you know, that Jesus Christ hated them. And as I looked into the Hebrew word I found something that was very helpful to me. The Hebrew word does not mean that, it means simply this, literally it means "My soul was short with them." And if you follow it through, it has to do with a shortness of patience where God really says, "And I just lost My patience with them, I had given them enough time and it came to an end." It isn't hatred, it is the running out of God's patience. So He says My patience was exhausted and so I cut them off. My patience was exhausted with them and they hated Me.

When Jesus came, He had those two sticks...grace and unity. And He tried to gather His people but the false leaders, the elders, the scribes, the priests, just cut Him off. He was exhausted with them...repeated rejection.

And then you know what happened? He turned to the remnant in verse 9 that didn't believe and said, and again it's Zechariah acting it out, "I will not feed you, that which dies, let it die." It sounds like Romans 1, doesn't it? He gave them up. He gave them over to a reprobate mind. "And that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off and let the rest eat everyone the flesh of another." Ohh, cannibalism. He says, "All right," He says, "the poor have come and they've been gathered in by the two sticks of grace and unity and we are one in this unique way. But the false leaders I cut off and the rest that will not hear, then go ahead and die and go ahead and be cut off." And He really turns them over to the terrible judgment of 70 A.D. where the Romans came, as I said, and judged them. And He says, "The rest of them, let them eat each other." And as I told you, Josephus records the terrible cannibalism that occurred. And so, Israel is abandoned to destruction.

In verse 10 He says, "So I took My staff called Graciousness and I cut it in half and I broke My covenant which I had made with all the nations." Boy, this is so severe, it's just shocking.

Well, what is this You made with the nations? Well, God says I had a...I had a covenant of protecting Israel and I was...My covenant, My promise was that no nation would be able to destroy Israel, I just broke that and I will allow this nation to come in and do their devastation. That's what He's saying. I break that staff called Graciousness. I'm not going to be gentle anymore. That agreement is over. I'm going to let that nation come in and judgment. And they did. Verse 11 says, "And it was broken in that day." Seventy A.D., boy, the judgment came. The staff of Graciousness was shattered.

And then it says, I love this, "And so the poor of the flock that waited on Me knew it was the Word of the Lord." You know who the poor of the flock were? In 70 A.D.? The church, the believing community. And you know what? They knew. They knew it was the Lord. They knew God was judging. They knew God was coming down in wrath on an apostate nation. They knew. They were the poor of the flock. They were the believing remnant. They knew. They were the ones that waited on the Lord. They knew God when He spoke and they knew God when He acted. They knew.

At this point you're saying to yourself, "Boy, God was severe, wasn't He?" Oh yeah, very severe. And just so you don't think that He was too severe, He adds this little vignette in verse 12 and 13, watch this: "And I said to them, If you think good, give Me My price. And if not, don't. So they weighed for My price 30 pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me," that is to Zechariah who is acting this out, "Cast the silver to the potter, a lordly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the 30 pieces of silver and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord."

Now what is that reminiscent of? What is that prophesying? Judas. Now listen to this. By the time you get to the end of verse 11, you might be a little queasy in your stomach about God and you might be saying, "God, how could You be so severe? How could You be so strong? How could You be so judgmental? I mean, so violent?" And He says, "Well, let Me just remind you about how they treated Me." He says, "When I was...when it was all done, I said, What am I worth to you? I've come and I've healed and I've raised the dead and I've told you the truth and I've offered you Myself and I've offered you eternal life. What am I worth?" Look at verse 12, "If you think good, give Me My price. And if I'm no good, don't give Me anything." But to the world, they didn't have any value on Him. So they weren't going to give Him a high price. And they didn't want to just ignore Him and give Him no price, so they said You're worth 30 pieces of silver. That was worse than no price at all because 30 pieces of silver was compensation paid for a slave that had been gored by an ox, Exodus 21:32.

They said, "I'll tell You what You're worth, You're worth a slave's price, that's all." You see the mockery that was? They didn't treat Jesus with high value. They didn't treat Him with indifference. They treated Him like a slave. And that's why He judged them so severely because He was their King. You see that. He was their God. He was Yahweh in human flesh. And these verses are to bring out the force of the rejection. They weren't indifferent and they weren't valuing Him, they treated Him like a slave gored by an ox, that's all He was worth. They were contemptible. They spit

on Him.

"And the Lord said to me," verse 13, "Cast it to the potter. And so he went into the house of the Lord and threw it to the potter." Do you know that's exactly what happened with the 30 pieces? Judas went back into temple and he threw the 30 pieces on the ground...read it in the New Testament, it's all there in Matthew 27. He threw it on the ground and they scooped it up and they went out and they gave it to a potter to buy his field.

Beloved, when the Bible talks, this is God speaking because only God could predict those events, right? Never ceases to amaze me some pea-brain character comes along and says, "Well, I don't believe the Bible." Yeah, well you tell me how else every detail of the betrayal of Judas can take place. Judas wasn't trying to fulfill Zechariah 11. Neither were the people who bought the potter's field.

And then in verse 14 He says, "So, when it was so severe of rejection, I cut the other staff, Unity, that I might break the brotherhood of between Judah and Israel." You know what He means by that? I destroyed the nation. I broke the other band that held the nation together and the state went into dispersion. It went into dissolution, it was scattered.

They killed each other. They slaughtered each other. They were scattered all over the world. This all happened, people, every single thing Zechariah said. The message here is clear then. The message of what we studied already in this chapter is that the...before the destruction of Jerusalem, Jehovah will appear in the person of Jesus Christ and He'll attempt to feed His flock of slaughter. Only the poor of the flock would follow His Word and the rest, especially the leaders, will reject. The good shepherd, the King will have no more value to them than a common slave to be mocked and scoffed at. And the people as a consequence will be given over to judgment, severe serious judgment. The judgment will compass death, famine, war and civil strife and the result will be the destruction of the nation. And it happened. The nation went out of existence, the Jews scattered all over the world because they rejected the true shepherd. And that's why the other shepherds wailed.

Now the incredible thing is, and that's the end of the chapter, and that's for next time we study this, they rejected the true shepherd and the day is coming when they will receive the false shepherd...the Antichrist. That's for next time. Let's pray.

While your heads are bowed, let me just say this to you. It's not easy to preach a message like this. You know, so many times I say to myself, "Oh, it would be so great if I could just kind of have fun with the people and tell stories and say happy things and talk about real practical stuff in your life." And then God says but I called you to preach My Word, MacArthur, not to decide what to say. So I do it. But it isn't easy to talk about judgment like this. But I just want to say this, I hope tonight you know

the true shepherd. I really do. I hope you know the Good Shepherd. I hope you're one of His sheep.

You say, "Well, John, how do you get to be one of His sheep?" Very simple really. All you need to do is accept the fact that He died, rose again for your sins and for your justification, commit your life to Him and He becomes your Shepherd. And read John 10 and see all that that means. And you'll never want it any other way if you really read it with an open mind. I hope you'll make that commitment to Christ.

And listen to this. My heart gets so sad. I'm like David sometimes. The zeal for your house is eaten me up. Reproaches that fall on you are fallen on me. You know, sometimes when I review what people have done to Jesus Christ, it grieves my heart. And then you know what I always think of in the very next thought? Well, what are you doing, MacArthur, to add to His joy or to add to His grief? Did you ever think that? What am I as a Christian doing? Do I often add to the grief of Jesus Christ? It's enough that He should be unloved by so many. And every time I am disobedient to His will in my life, I add some more grief. And that wants...that makes me want to confess to Him and set it right. I hope you feel that way, too. The Lord reaches out to us tonight and He's got both those staves back in His hand, the one called Grace and the one called Unity. And He says I offer you My grace and I want to make you a part of My flock and all you have to do is come and enter His fold by faith.

Father, thank You for our time tonight. Bring some of these folks into the counseling room that this might be the great night of their entering the fold. Help us as Christians to do all we can to add to the joy of the Shepherd, to so live that we cause Him to rejoice. We'll praise You in Jesus' name. Amen.

God bless you, have a great week and we'll see you next Lord's day.

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