

The True Shepherd

Zechariah 11

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Now no one would preach on Zechariah 11 unless he was a seminary student who was assigned to do it. No one would voluntarily do this. But I thought, on a Sunday night like this when we're going to have the really committed people--those who aren't at home in a sugar coma for overeating over the weekend, those of you who are serious about the Word of God--that it would be a wonderful exercise for us to look at Zechariah chapter 11, one of the more challenging chapters in the Old Testament. And as I said, it is not a chapter that you would probably ever hear anybody preach on because it is a challenge to any interpreter. But in order to get us into this chapter, let me just...let me just start with something very familiar. We are all highly aware of the recent situation escalating in the land of Israel where the Palestinians and the Hamas folks have long been their enemies. They periodically escalate the assaults and coming from Gaza in the south, as you know, hundreds and hundreds of missiles have been raining down on Israel and approximately even getting into Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and great population centers of the land, and this is a picture of the difficulty that the people of Israel have in surviving. We all know they have equally serious enemies surrounding them in other countries--of course Iran, their archenemy who would by every self-confession want to obliterate them from the planet. We know they sit in a very fragile place surrounded by enemies. And they're continually under assault, and that threatens continually to escalate; may well escalate, as we all understand.

And that raises the question about why this is happening. Hasn't God promised to His people that He would give them a future? And the answer, of course, is yes, we know that; we know the promises of the Old Testament and the New Testament for a future kingdom for Israel, a future salvation for Israel. We know that. The promise then of Scripture is that He will preserve the Jews. He will preserve Israel. God declares that. He will preserve His people Israel. And we're watching that happen.

While God has promised to preserve them, He has not necessarily promised to protect them. In fact, if you look at history, you will see that they have been largely unprotected throughout their history since the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are beleaguered by virtually conqueror after conqueror, after conqueror. They have been killed and slaughtered. And, of course, it reached its apex under Hitler and Stalin. And it goes on even now. So again, just for clarification, God has promised to preserve them for a future salvation and kingdom, but not necessarily to protect them. They will not go out of existence, but they are currently under the curse of God. And all that is coming against them and has come against them through the centuries is part of God's judgment. They are currently under judgment.

Why are they under judgment? Because they have rejected God, because they have rejected the Word of God. And both of those are obvious because they rejected the Christ of God, sent by God and declared and defined in the Word of God. So they have rejected God, the Scripture, and the

Christ of God, their Messiah. That puts them in the position they are in.

Now there are some ways that you can see this and look at it in the prophets of the Old Testament, because they foresaw very difficult times for Israel. But one of the clearest and most compelling is here in the eleventh chapter of Zechariah. So if we can back out of the current headlines, long ago, way back 500 years before Christ, we're going to find ourselves in Zechariah chapter 11 looking at the reasons why Israel is suffering what it has been suffering and is currently suffering.

Now a little bit about Zechariah. Zechariah was a prophet, also a priest. Zechariah had come back from the Babylonian Captivity (we call him a post-exilic prophet). Israel had gone into captivity, you remember, in Babylon for seventy years. He had come back in the reestablishment of the nation. That's when he did his prophetic work. His message, generally speaking, was a message of hope. In fact, if you want to get a summation of his message, you can go back to chapter 1 and read, "The Lord answered the angel who was speaking with me with gracious words, comforting words." The message of Zechariah is a message of comfort. Captivity is over; the long seventy-year discipline of being hauled off into Babylon is in the past. You're back; you're rebuilding, rebuilding the city, rebuilding the wall, rebuilding the temple, and here comes good and comforting words. So Zechariah's message is a message of comfort, and thus it is a message of salvation. And you find that throughout the book.

Just to give you a couple of glimpses of it. In chapter 9 you read in verse 9, for example, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation." And it even says He is "humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey," which prophecy was fulfilled in the way that Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem at the beginning of Passion Week when they threw the palm branches at His feet. So the message is a message of the coming of the King and salvation.

You see that message again down in verse 16, "The Lord their God will save them in that day as a flock of His people; for they are as the stones of a crown, sparkling in His land." This is wonderful comfort to a people who are very small and very insignificant, just escaping captivity. They're nothing compared to the greatness that they once knew, but they have a future.

In chapter 10 you have very similar sentiments given. For example, in verse 6, "I will strengthen the house of Judah, I will save the house of Joseph, I will bring them back, because I have had compassion on them; and they will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them." And then again in verse 12, "'I will strengthen them in the Lord, and in His name they will walk,' declares the Lord."

Well this, of course, is the tone of the book of Zechariah, comforting and gracious words, with the exception of chapter 11, in particular. Chapter 11 shows us why currently the promises of salvation are not realized. Chapter 11 shows us why the promises and blessings of salvation are withheld from Israel. Now why the kingdom has been postponed; why they do not receive the blessings of the kingdom promised to Abraham, promised to David, and promised to the prophets. This reminds us that the promises of God for salvation and blessing come only to the obedient, only to the faithful, only to believers in His Word--only to those made righteous and not to the sinful, and not to the rejecters of God and the rejecters of His Word and the rejecters of His Messiah, even though they be the people of Israel.

So as we look at chapter 11, we're going to see the prophetic layout that gives us the insight into why Israel's salvation and the kingdom have been postponed. Now, I'm not going to necessarily turn this into a sermon, so I'm just going to kind of take you through this chapter. It's going to be an adventure to unpack it for you. And I think you'll enjoy what you hear.

To begin with, in the opening three verses, we have the most poetic section of the entire book of Zechariah. And Zechariah is a full, rich book of fourteen chapters; this is the most poetic section in the whole book. And that's how this chapter begins, with poetry, as often in the Old Testament. Let me read those opening three verses.

“Open your doors, O Lebanon, that a fire may feed on your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the glorious trees have been destroyed; wail, O oaks of Bashan, for the impenetrable forest has come down. There is a sound of the shepherds' wail, for their glory is ruined; there is a sound of the young lions' roar, for the pride of the Jordan is ruined.”

Now the word “ruined” in verse 3, used twice, is the same word as the word “destroyed” in verse 2. So this is a...this is a poem about destruction. The prophet is speaking of the complete destruction of the land of Israel, the complete destruction. How do I know that? He starts in Lebanon, which is the farthest point north, and he ends up in Jordan in the south. And in the middle is the region of Bashan. So Lebanon to Jordan stretches from north to south through the whole land of Israel. The Holy Spirit then, with poetic imagery through the prophet Zechariah, gives a dramatic picture of the ruin and the ravaging of the land of Israel from top to bottom. And the judgment here starts in the north, in the highlands, and sweeps down to the south in the lowlands. If you know anything about the land of Israel, you know that the further north you go, the higher it gets and the further south you go, the lower it gets, to the Dead Sea, which is actually below sea level. The picture of judgment then is the judgment starts at the top and rolls all the way to the bottom. This judgment, obviously, is a result of God's wrath, and the cause of His wrath will be explained in verses 4 through 14.

Now the primary idea here is of physical destruction. It may be, in some ways, figurative of the destruction that also came on life and limb. But its primary purpose is to define for us a future time in Israel's life when terrible, devastating destruction will sweep across the land. And the imagery is very graphic, metaphorical, “Open your doors, O Lebanon.” Lebanon is told to open its doors to the coming fury of the enemy. The enemy is coming with fire. And again Lebanon is a mountain, a range of mountains, near Lebanon on the Syrian-Palestine or Israel border far in the north. And it is pictured...Israel is pictured as a fortress and Lebanon is the doors. That section of Israel, the fortified city then is to open its doors. In other words, it is useless to try to resist the coming devastation. Throw the doors open; the devastation is unstoppable. You might as well let the fire come, and it will come, and it will destroy the cedars. The cedars were the familiar trees in Lebanon. You've heard of the cedars of Lebanon, of course. They were massive, massive trees of a kind of the pine forest family, but massive trees. They would grow to be like some of the trees in California that you can drive a car through--huge, huge trees, and they would go as high as a hundred and fifty feet. They will all be devastated and consumed and destroyed in the hyperbole of this destruction.

And again in the imagery here, and this is kind of consistent with the way the Hebrew thought, when the higher and the mighty fell, everything below fell in sequence as well. So the high and the mighty at the elevated point in Lebanon, the great trees, the greatest trees, the most magnificent, the largest and the highest places began to fall, everyone below began to fall as well. And verse 2, “Wail, O

cypress"...as the devastation comes..."for the cedar has fallen." If the cedar falls, the cypress will also fall. Another kind of tree less formidable than the cedar. If the cedars are not spared, much less the cypress (another word for the cypress)...would be a fir tree...like a Christmas tree to one degree or another, but not of the stature of the cedars. For if the glorious trees, the greater trees have been destroyed, then the lesser trees will not survive.

"O wail, O oaks of Bashan, for the impenetrable forest has come down." When the most glorious trees are destroyed, everything else comes as well. Bashan was the northern territory across the Jordan, and it was known, at least in Isaiah 2 and Ezekiel 27, for splendid oak trees. So you have the massive cedars coming down. You have the pine forest being consumed. And then you have the oak trees coming down as well, and the oaks are personified to wail because the impenetrable forest has come down, the inaccessible, literally impenetrable, forests from Lebanon stretching all the way down into the lands of Israel will be destroyed.

And then it comes all the way into the lower Jordan Valley; there is the sound of the shepherd's wail. When you get down into the southern area, into the Jordan Valley, you have the meadows and the rolling hills and the vineyards and the raising of the sheep and the animals. And so comes the judgment. The shepherds begin to wail for their glory is ruined. There is a sound of the young lion's roar, for the pride of the Jordan is ruined. That's a poetic reference to the thick growth that had adorned the Jordan Valley in its central and lower section. It was a favorite haunt of lions. After the captivity, by the way, when Israel was hauled out of there and nobody lived there, according to 2 Kings and even in Jeremiah a couple of times, it developed a larger population of wild beasts.

When the judgment comes then, it's going to sweep down through the land. The young lions are those already weaned that have the greatest appetite. They are hence the fiercest hunters and they are seen roaring because the devastating of God has destroyed their lairs and destroyed their food supply. So the thought of destruction here is very clear. And it is such devastation that the word "destroyed" is used in verse 2, and then the same word is used in verse 3, translated in the NAS by the word "ruined."

What you have then here is this vigorous picture of a scene of complete devastation and judgment on the land that sweeps in and engulfs everything. Now remember, this is a land to which great promises have been made, great promises. Promises just reiterated that I read you in chapter 1, chapter 9, chapter 10, and there are many others scattered throughout this book. And everybody is affected--the shepherds wail because their pasture lands are destroyed; the animals wail; the trees wail; the whole thing is personified in a horror of sadness. I guess we could say that it opens with the wailing shepherds, the wailing shepherds who howl at the ravaging judgment brought on their land.

Now...now you understand those three verses? All right, what event is that talking about? What event is that talking about? What destruction does this refer to? And the soundest and most consistent interpretation of this both from Jewish and Christian commentators is that this describes the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Both Christian commentators and Jewish commentators see it that way. Almost all historic commentators see this as a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem that resulted in--mark it--the dissolution of the Jewish state, the dissolution of the Jewish state. And this will become clear as to its interpretation as we move through this section.

So the general warning of the ravaging comes in the opening three verses. And then the second point I want you to see is the reason, the reason for the ravaging. The ravaging, you could call it, the

ravaging of the wailing shepherds, followed by the rejection of the true Shepherd. And there, in a sense, I gave you away the point, because verses 4 through 14 in a most amazing and unique way show us that the judgment came upon Israel with lasting results which we still see today because they rejected their Messiah, because they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I'm going to do my best to make this clear to you and easy to understand. Just know this: it didn't start out that way for me. But I'm here to do the hard work and share with you the good results. It is really an astounding picture of the rejection of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, at His first coming which immediately resulted, you remember, in judgment pronounced on the people of Israel on the nation. Your nation is now desolate, Jesus said, because you've rejected Me. And it was a few years after that that the destruction came at the hands of the Romans. You have the destruction then described in verses 1 to 3, and you have the rejection described in verses 4 down through verse 14.

Now I need to give you a little bit more background. The prophets of the Old Testament are a fascinating group. Sometimes they spoke and God put words in their mouth, and those words became their divinely inspired prophecy, or preaching, or message. But sometimes they also did object lessons. Sometimes they acted, and some of the things they did were very, very strange things. If you read through the book of Ezekiel, that is a real adventure in the range of communication that a prophet might use. Ezekiel gave great messages from God, great words that came to him from heaven and he passed them on. But he also gave object lessons, non-verbal object lessons. For example, on one occasion God told him to take a brick and do something with a brick to make His point that would be in chapter 4 of Ezekiel. In chapter 24, God says go get a pot and go get a boiling pot, and set it all up and I want you to communicate a message through this boiling pot.

On another occasion God communicated a message through Ezekiel by having Ezekiel change his underwear--a very strange and bizarre thing. On another occasion God had Ezekiel communicate by lying on one side for a while and then flipping over and lying on the other side for a while. So remember now, in those times without the full, rich, in-hand Scriptures, God used all kinds of object lessons to communicate the ABC's of His divine revelation.

On one occasion, Isaiah was told (chapter 8) to get a tablet, and God wanted him to use this tablet as a format to communicate a message. On one of the more really extensive symbolic acts that was done by Hosea, he was actually told to go to the slave market and buy back his harlot wife and that the very act of buying her back and treating her as if she was a virgin bride was a symbol of God's willingness to take back adulterous Israel.

So the prophets not only gave verbal messages, they gave object lessons as well. And that is exactly what Zechariah does here. He uses himself as a symbol. He uses himself as an object lesson, and the prophecy is in what he does, it's in what he does. Let me say it this way. He acts as if he is the Messiah. Okay? He becomes a symbolic messiah. He carries out actions that speak of Messiah and particularly Messiah's rejection. What we see here, then, is Zechariah's symbolic act, and that symbolic act in itself, which he was told to do by God, becomes a prophecy fulfilled by the true Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah Himself. The general outline kind of goes like this: the prophet Zechariah is to represent the Lord, the true Shepherd, the Messiah. He is commanded to feed Israel. In obedience to the command, he takes on the task to endeavor to feed them so that they can eat and be spiritually nourished and escape destruction. But as we see, Zechariah puts

himself into that role but is rejected. Because he is rejected, he pronounces judgment on them, doom on them. And that's the role that he plays in this chapter. And that is exactly what happened when Messiah came, as you know. He endeavored to feed them, to nurture them with truth, and they rejected Him, and He turned to pronounce judgment on them.

So Zechariah then plays a shepherd in a symbolic, one-man play as if he is the living model of the coming Messiah. And the first thing He's supposed to do, verse 4, "Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter." Why does God say that? Because He knows what they're going to do. He knows they're going to reject Him. "Pasture the flock doomed to slaughter." Take the role of the Messiah, go...literally you could translate it "tend," that's a Hebrew word, that word "pasture," and it's a complete word. It means to care for, feed, lead, and nurse, care for in every sense--a kind of a Psalm 23, Good Shepherd role in its fullness.

But notice that the people of God are here identified not as the flock of God, but literally "the flock of slaughter" in the Hebrew. The word "doomed" isn't there, the flock of slaughter, but it's certainly implied. That's the covenant nation seen as sheep headed for the butcher shop. This is Israel. This is the covenant people of God given over to God's judgment as a result of sin, sin against the Lord, the Messiah, when He comes as demonstrated in the role that Zechariah plays. So first of all, he is to feed and lead and guide and disseminate divine truth to the people. But they're a flock headed to the slaughter house.

Verse 5, "Those who buy them slay them and go unpunished, and each of those who sell them says, 'Blessed be the Lord, for I have become rich!' And their own shepherds have no pity on them." That is an astounding insight into the time of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who buy them, slay them, and go unpunished--who are they? Foreign oppressors of Israel, the nations that have oppressed Israel before and leading up to Christ, and after, and since. Though it is true that God sovereignly handed Israel over to the nations for judgment, still the nations are responsible for their sin and cruelty against Israel. Israel here is said to be abused, to be slain by Gentile oppressors who feel no guilt. You see that kind of thing in the words of Jeremiah in chapter 50. The nations come against Israel and seem to have no conscience and seem to suffer no punishment for the slaughter against the people of God. This will escalate. There will be continually nations that buy them, slay them, and go unpunished.

And on top of that, and this is what's so remarkable, there will also be those who sell them. The buyers come from the outside. That's representative of the nations. The seller comes from the inside. This is their own leaders who sell them out for money and show no compassion. Their own shepherds have no pity on them. The nations have no defense. They have no hope. They have been bought by their enemies. They have been sold out by their own leaders who actually are so proud that they say, "Blessed be the Lord for I've become rich. I've become rich by selling my people." That's exactly what the Sadducees did. That's exactly what the leaders of Israel did in making their alliances with Rome and giving Rome the privileges that Rome had in occupying the land of Israel and the reason they allowed Rome to come and do what they did is because Rome put money in the hands of the Jewish religious, elite leadership.

First, God has Zechariah demonstrate the fact that in the future, Gentile nations will buy and sell them like sheep to be butchered and their own leaders will show no compassion on them but sell them off like slaves to make themselves rich. This extends all the way into the destruction of Jerusalem. The Romans came in from the outside and massacred them. The Romans who

destroyed them also sold a hundred thousand of them, according to Josephus, into slavery. And Josephus says they sold them to their own priests, elders, and scribes who corrupted them. That's what their future is going to be like.

Verse 6, and here again is Zechariah in this first-person drama: "For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land," declares the Lord." He says, "Behold, I will cause the men to fall, each into one another's power and into the power of his king; and they will strike the land, and I will not deliver them from their power." That verse seems to look directly at the destruction of Jerusalem. The Lord gives this message in this one-act drama through the prophet Zechariah that there is this awful, horrible event coming when the Lord Himself will no longer pity the people of Israel as they have been un-pitied by their own leaders. He will literally "cause the men to fall...into one another's power...into the power of the king," the external king, who "will strike the land, and I will not deliver them from their power."

From the king? His king? In what sense...in what sense is this king the King of Israel, His king? In what sense does He belong to them? In the sense that they've chosen Him. This is an interesting nuance. When they had an opportunity to choose their King--King Jesus, right?--they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us." And then they said, "We have no king but Caesar." "We have no king but Caesar." The Jews had no king in Zechariah's time. They had no king in Zechariah's time. This is after the exile in Babylon. There was no more king in Israel. And they would have no king in the time of our Lord Jesus. But when they could have embraced the true King, they rejected the true King and they chose their own king. On that fateful eve of Passover, Pilate brought Jesus before the Jews, mocking Him and said, "Behold your king," and they said, "Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him, crucify Him." And Pilate says, "Shall I crucify your king?" And the chief priests and the leaders of the people led the people to say, "We have no king but Caesar."

They made their awful choice. They put themselves in Caesar's hands. And soon after, 70 A.D., Caesar Titus Vespasian came and massacred them and destroyed their city and destroyed their nation, including almost a thousand towns and villages, all the way from the north to the south and side to side, and literally obliterated the state of Israel. They actually decided to kill Jesus because they thought it would keep them in a good and advantageous position with the Romans. That was their thinking. You remember in the eleventh chapter of John, the chief priests and the Pharisees convened to council with regard to this Jesus. "What are we doing? This man is performing many signs. If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation."

They liked it the way it was. They wanted the Romans there because they were selling themselves to the Romans to get rich--those who were in leadership. So they killed their Messiah thinking that He would be a threat to Rome, and to placate Rome yielded up to Rome, and it was Rome that God used to slaughter them. All of that is sort of found in that sixth verse. "I'll cause the men to fall, each into another's power...into the power of his king...they will strike the land...I will not deliver them from their power." Because of the rejection of the true Shepherd, the king that they chose became the king that destroyed them.

Verse 7 kind of resumes the thought of verse 4. And this is again back to Zechariah playing this role. "So I pastured the Lord's flock"...originally the flock now of slaughter..."I pastured the flock of slaughter"...I tended the flock of slaughter..."hence the afflicted of the flock." That's just a beautiful expression. Zechariah no doubt taught the word of God as it was revealed to him, no doubt called

people back to the law of God, back to loving God, back to honoring God. But they were already doomed to slaughter. And the numbers of them slaughtered in 70 A.D. range anywhere from three-four hundred thousand to a million one. It was a massacre of massive proportions.

Jesus came to Israel a few years before the slaughter and tried to pasture the flock doomed to slaughter. He was able to minister to “the afflicted.” That’s a word that means “the wretched,” “the poor”—singles out those who believed in Him. Who were they? They were not the righteous, right? They were the outcasts, the rejected, the tax collectors, the poor. Mark 12:37 says, “The common people heard Him gladly.” It was the poor of the flock, the despised of the flock, the outcasts, the unsynagogued, the tax collectors, the low-lives who heard Him.

So here is Zechariah playing this role as if he is Christ, laying down a prophecy. The implication is that Jesus will come to the doomed flock but the afflicted will respond to Him. And then in verse 7 this: “I took for myself two staves,” literally “two rods,” or “two clubs,” or “two sticks.” “The one I called Favor and the other I called Union; so I pastured the flock.” This is a stick that a shepherd carried. It would be a stout stick, a thick stick to beat off an animal, or to beat off a thief or a robber. This is something that Psalm 23 talks about: “Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort.” It comforts the sheep to...that a shepherd has a stick that he can beat off the enemy with. So he says, “I’m going to have two sticks, two clubs, two rods to beat off any wild beasts that attack the sheep. One is called, essentially “graciousness,” “Favor” or “graciousness.” The other is called “Union” or “unity.” In other words, his ministry was a ministry of grace and a unifying ministry. He was bringing grace, tender, gracious care to His flock. He was offering them that. And He was offering to make of all one flock with one shepherd (John 10:16).

So the Messiah is to come. He is to come marked by grace. He is to come to make one flock of all men under one shepherd. And this is what He said and this is what He taught and this is how He fed them, and Zechariah acts this out.

Then we come to verse 8. “Then I annihilated the three shepherds in one month, for my soul was impatient with them, and their soul also was weary of me.” What is this? There are at least forty interpretations of that verse--four-oh. So I’m not here to tell you with absolute certainty what it means. But I think the oldest and the most common is the best, but it’s not talking about three specific men, three specific shepherds because this is all a metaphoric picture. This is all a prophecy in symbolism. I think they represent groups, and there were essentially three groups in Israel who acted in the role of shepherding: the priests, the elders, and the scribes; the priests, the elders, and the scribes. This may well be and may best seem to be a reference to the priests, the elders, and the scribes.

The idea of a month means a short time. In the drama that he’s playing out, in a short time, when the Messiah comes, He will obliterate the shepherds of Israel. He will annihilate the shepherds of Israel. And what happened in the judgment of 70 A.D., when the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem and destroyed everything, was the end of all of those orders and that has continued through history. Essentially no longer are there priests and elders and scribes.

Some think it had reference to prophet, priest, and king; but they didn’t have a king then, so there was no way to bring that into the picture. But they had priests and elders and scribes. The elders would be the religious leaders of the land who had the power and the authority. They were, according to verse 8, they were “annihilated.” God ended the offices, listen, of the mediators. Those

were the mediators. The offices of mediators, they...they were the ones who stood between the people and God and God and the people, and God obliterated them. Why? "My soul was impatient with them." That's what that word means, impatience. It's a Hebrew word meaning "short tempered," "lost patience." That is really what it means. My...some translations are more strong. It says, "My soul loathed them," but that isn't what it...what is best. "My soul was impatient with them, and their soul was weary of Me." They hated Christ, and Christ ran out of patience with them. They despised Christ, right? Isaiah 53? We saw nothing about Him that was attractive. We despised Him. Christ was exhausted with them who despised Him, the religious leaders of Israel.

Verse 9, "Then I said, 'I will not pasture you.'" I've tried to feed you, tried to minister to you, I'm done. That takes us to Matthew 23, and I need to read it to you because it's such an important portion of Scripture, Matthew 23:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" And he pronounces the curse of desolation on them, the curse of desolation on them.

The curse in the language of Zechariah, these are the future words, if you will, of Messiah: "What is to die, let it die...what is to be annihilated, let it be annihilated; and let those who are left eat one another's flesh." Wow! Death, violence, cannibalism, let it die. This is a disclaimer on the part of the shepherd that exposes the sheep now to a devastating judgment. Let them die at the hands of an evil enemy who annihilates them. And let those who are left eat one another's flesh.

That's what happened, you know, in the siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Did you know that? Cannibalism? That is amply attested to by Josephus, the Jewish historian, to have occurred in the city of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. in the siege. You can read of such things in Jeremiah 19:9. A terrible famine came and people began to eat their children. This is the judgment that God pronounces through this illustrative sort of living illustration of Zechariah in a one-act, one-man drama, playing the role of Messiah.

But it's not over. It gets even more dramatic, if it can. Verse 10, "So I took my staff Favor and cut it in pieces, to break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples." You remember He had two sticks and His ministry was defined by those two sticks? One was grace, forgiveness, favor; and the other was unity, under one shepherd, one flock. I took the first stick, Favor, grace, cut it in pieces because I broke My covenant which I had made with all the peoples. I literally brought an end to the covenant.

Here's the idea that God has agreed to restrain the nations for a time from decimating Israel and made an agreement. That's what that covenant is. I had agreed to protect Israel, be Israel's protector, and He had been--He had been since the time of Zechariah. Five hundred years before He had been the protector of Israel. But He breaks the staff of protection, shatters the staff of protection. You remember, I just read you, Jesus pronounced desolation on Jerusalem. And that desolation was about to come.

Listen to Luke 19:41, "He approached Jerusalem"...Jesus did..."He saw the city...wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes...days will come when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you...surround you...hem you in on every side...they will level you to the ground, you and your children within you...they will not leave...one stone upon another, because you didn't recognize the

time of your visitation.”

And so, verse 11 says, “So it was broken on that day.” So here’s Zechariah acting all this out; he breaks the stick to say there’s coming a day when the rejected Messiah puts an end to grace. “Thus the afflicted”...the weak...“of the flock who were watching me realized that it was the word of the Lord.” Again, this is the believing remnant in Zechariah’s day. This is the believing remnant in Zechariah’s day as there was a believing remnant in Jesus’ day, who had true insight because they had a true faith in the true God.

Zechariah then brings out even further the depth of the sin of rejection of Christ, the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd in verse 12. “I said to them, ‘If it is good in your sight, give me my wages’--give me my wages, pay me, pay me for my ministry.” Not money, show me some fruit such as salvation, holiness, godly fear, devotion, love. We’ll give you your wages. We’ll give them to you. He says, “Give me my wages...if not, never mind!” In other words, if you don’t really want to do it, don’t do it. Oh, we want to do it, “so they weighed out thirty pieces of silver as my wages.” Humph, how interesting. Thirty pieces of silver? You know what that says? The population of Jerusalem said to their Messiah, “Your value is equivalent to a common, ordinary slave and nothing more, nothing more.

Jesus made that point in a parable that He told about how the vineyard owner sent his son and they killed the son the way they had killed all the others. You have no more value to us than a common slave. By the way, thirty pieces of silver, according to Exodus 21:32, was also the required compensation to pay for a slave that had been gored by an ox. We’ll pay your wages. This is what we think of you. Fascinating, right? Because that is exactly what the Jews paid Judas for Jesus, right?--thirty pieces of silver.

“Then the Lord said to me,” says Zechariah--take the thirty pieces in this little drama--“throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them.” Throw it away in contempt; throw it away in disgust. “So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.” Boy, that is exactly what happened to the thirty pieces. They paid them to Judas; Judas came back--they were burning a hole in his guilt-ridden hands. He threw them on the floor; the leaders picked them up, went and bought Potter’s Field--and precision is staggering, absolutely staggering.

“Then I cut in pieces my second staff”...Unity, or Union...“to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.” You know what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the national unity was totally destroyed, totally destroyed. Josephus also tells us that in the Roman siege which started before that, several years before that, and ended in the culminating disaster of 70 A.D.; but in the years leading up to and including that, the internal dissension that began to escalate when they were under this Roman siege was really very significant. Josephus writes about internal dissension brought about by the conflicting parties, groups, religious groups, and coming all the way down to brother against brother, family member against family member. And Josephus says that the Jews were caused under the pressure of the Roman assault and siege to strike cruelly and devastatingly at each other, and Josephus even has a comment that they killed more than the Romans killed. And, of course, they were then scattered in 70 A.D. over the world. The nation was broken up.

So in this section of Zechariah, we see why Israel is in the condition it is in now. And it will remain in that condition until chapter 12, verse 10. Will God preserve Israel? Yes. How do I know that? You can read the first nine verses of Zechariah 12. “I’m going to make,” verse 2, “‘Jerusalem a cup that

causes reeling to all the people around; and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will be against Judah. It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. In that day,' declares the Lord, 'I'll strike every horse with bewilderment, his rider with madness...I will watch over the house of Judah, while I strike every horse of the people with blindness.'" God is going to protect His people. "The Lord," verse 7, "...will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not be magnified above Judah. In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem"...etcetera..."in that day," verse 9, "I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem."

Be warned, nations, be warned Arabic nations, in the end you will be destroyed if you go against Jerusalem. But they will be under judgment, not protected, but preserved until verse 10, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son." That's their salvation, isn't it? Until they look on the One they pierced, on the God they pierced--the Son of God crucified--and mourned for Him as an only son; until that time they will be unprotected though preserved. At that time, they will be saved. Chapter 13, verse 1, "A fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity." They will be cleansed.

The message then is clear; the message is clear. Zechariah comes and speaks of good things, gracious things, hopeful things--the future and salvation. But before that comes, there will come a horrible destruction--the destruction of Jerusalem--and Jehovah Himself will appear in the person of Christ, to shepherd Israel. But only a small portion, the weak and afflicted of the flock, will follow His Word. The rest, especially the leaders, will reject Him, and the Good Shepherd will be fully rejected and valued like a common slave, sold for thirty pieces of silver, which ends up being given to a potter for his field. And that is exactly what happened. The people as a consequence of rejecting their Messiah will be given over to death and famine and war and civil strife, and there will be no more grace as judgment falls, and they will be dissolved as a nation as the unity is shattered. And that will go on until they look on the one they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son.

What Israel needs to hear from America is not that we'll give them military support, although that's fine and I would support the defense of any innocent victim to the onslaughts of the horrors of Islamic murder. But what Israel really needs to hear is the gospel of Jesus Christ bring them to the place where they look on the One they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son. But until then, they are under the judgment of God.

So now you know. And you can say I don't know much about Zechariah, but I can tell you about chapter 11, right? Okay.

Father, what a wonderful evening together around Your Word. How...how rare are its treasures. How compelling its truths. A place like this that we would never think about, never look at, never read--loaded, just full of amazing prophetic pictures of Christ, Israel, Roman invasion, the destruction of Jerusalem, hundreds and hundreds of years into the future from Zechariah. And again we affirm Your Word is true, and it presents Your Son and our Savior and the Messiah, truly. We are encouraged by this. We are made confident in the veracity and truthfulness of Scripture where we base our eternal salvation on it. Thank You for Your precious Word. Thank You that we're a part of that afflicted remnant. We have been delivered from the judgment that will fall on the nations, we who

are Gentiles. And among us there are many who are Jews who have also been delivered from the judgment that would fall on that nation; where You have brought us all to Christ and we are safe and secure in Him and looking forward to eternal glory.

Fill our hearts with hope and joy and gratitude, we pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

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