

# Zechariah Chapter Eleven

Zechariah 11 could be well summarised as a ‘tale of two shepherds’. It is a sad and surprising tale of suffering and judgment upon the nation of Israel, especially following the picture of blessing and prosperity developed in the preceding chapters (Zechariah 9-10). But such judgment is a necessary result of the nation’s shameful rejection of the Good Shepherd (vv.4-14) which has serious *near* (vv.1-3) and *far* (vv.15-17) consequences. *Stubbs: The chapter shows that the rejection of Christ not only brought defeat and devastation to Israel by the Roman armies in AD70, but ultimately will result in their acceptance in a coming day of the false shepherd.*

## The Removal of the **Wailing** (Failing) Shepherds [11.1-3]

vv.1-3 give an awful picture of complete devastation from the mountains of *Lebanon* in the north to the central region of *Bashan* (east of Galilee) and *Jordan* lowlands in the south. **v.1:** Israel is pictured as a fortress to be conquered, with Lebanon the ‘doors’ or entrance to the land. The devastation is unstoppable, thus the injunction to ‘throw open the doors’. There may be a faint reference to the royal palace and temple in Jerusalem which were referred to as ‘Lebanon’ as they contained so much cedar (Jeremiah 22.23; Ezekiel 17.3-4). But God would bring the judgment of fire



(probably in the form of an invading army) upon them to devour the mighty cedars. **v.2:** The fir (prosperity) and oak (strength) trees are called to ‘howl’ (lament), for the glorious (cedar) trees have been destroyed. If the highest and mightiest of trees have succumbed to the fire on Lebanon’s elevated and densely wooded slopes, what hope is there for them? Bashan, located east of the Jordan, was famous for its oak forests (Ezekiel 27.6) as well as rich pastures and choice cattle (Deuteronomy 32.14). **v.3:** The twofold *lament* (v.2) becomes a twofold ‘voice’ or ‘sound’ in v.3 (rendered ‘listen’, NET). Moving further south to the plain, the shepherds are howling because their ‘glory’ (rich pasture lands) is spoiled. The ‘pride (ornament) of Jordan’ refers to the lush, thick vegetation around the river valley being a favourite haunt of wild beasts including lions (Jeremiah 49.19). The young lions ‘roar’ as their lairs and food supply are destroyed.

It should be noted that trees are often used in Scripture as metaphors of kings (Judges 9.7-15; Ezekiel 31.3). Thus, whilst the trees are literal, it is possible they also stand as symbolic representations of Israel’s rulers. After all, if the land is devastated, those in it will also be destroyed. In summary, there will be no *splendour* (cedars), *strength* (oaks), *sustenance* (howling shepherds) or *shelter* (pride of Jordan spoiled). This is exactly what happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD70 fulfilling the words of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 23.38; Mark 13.1-2; Luke 19.43-44). Hardly a tree was left in the land, most being used for crucifixion. The severity of the judgment is in keeping with the heinous crime.

## The Rejection of the **Worthy** (Faithful) Shepherd [11.4-14]

**v.4:** The Lord (note Zechariah’s *personal* relationship with Him) directs Zechariah to enact a parable before the people to explain the cause of such great judgment. Acting as a representative of Jehovah, even the Messiah himself, Zechariah was to ‘feed the flock of slaughter’ representing God’s shepherd care of His people. The word ‘feed’ (tend) embraces the full range of shepherd duties such as leading, protecting, feeding and healing. Israel is viewed prophetically as already given over to judgment for their rejection of the Good Shepherd – hence the name ‘flock of slaughter’. **v.5:** Israel has long been bartered in the marketplace of Gentile oppressors. Those to whom they were sold (cf. Judges 2.14; 3.8) had no interest in their welfare but rather sought to *slay* or *trade* them for profit, even mockingly blessing the Lord for their gains whilst claiming no guilt for their actions (Jeremiah 50.6-7, 17). This was fulfilled as tens of thousands of Jews were sold into slavery by the Romans in AD70. Even Israel’s own shepherds (i.e. leader and rulers) did not care for the sheep (10.3), seeking their own material and selfish gain. **v.6:** The nation had exhausted even the patience of Jehovah, thus He takes no more pity upon them, delivering every one into the hand of their ‘neighbour’ *and* the king of their choosing. In a statement of rank apostasy, there was no doubt as to the king of their choosing – ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (Matthew 23.37-38). 40 years later, Titus Vespasian came and obliterated (‘smite’ = repeated blows with a hammer) the land, people and city of Jerusalem. Famine and internal strife even caused the Jews to turn upon themselves (‘his neighbour’s hand’), slaughtering more of their own than the Romans.

**v.7:** ‘So I fed the flock’ (JND). In obedience to divine direction (v.4), Zechariah illustrated the ministry of the Good Shepherd. But who heeded his ministry? Who listened to his word? Only the ‘poor (afflicted) of the flock’ (cf. Matthew 5.3; Luke 6.20). When Christ was here, it was only the outcasts and ‘common people’ who heard Him gladly (Mark 12.37). Zechariah thus takes ‘two staves’ (staves), being the common implements of a shepherd – a **rod** to beat away wild beasts, and a **crook** to recover sheep from inaccessible places (Psalm 23.4) – and seeks to shepherd the people. The

two staffs represent the character of God's shepherd ministry to His flock. 'Beauty' has the thought of 'pleasantness' or 'favour'. This is the tender, loving and gracious care of Christ for the sheep. 'Bands' symbolises the binding together in unity of Judah and Israel (cp. John 10.16); Christ sought to gather the lost and wayward sheep together. If Israel had accepted the ministry of the Good Shepherd, *beauty* and *unity* would have resulted. In fact, when Israel is fully restored to God, they will truly be beautiful (Psalm 90.17).

**v.8:** 'Three shepherds' would be 'cut off' or 'renounced' in 'one month'. It is likely not three specific, individual shepherds in view, but representative of three groups or classes of leaders, possibly the elders, chief priests and scribes (cf. Luke 9.22) or Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees (cf. Matthew 22.15-16, 23). In a short period of time prior to His crucifixion, He put them 'to silence' with the authority of His word. Christ Himself 'loathed' them, literally, 'my soul was short with them'. Christ was weary of their hypocrisy, opposition and unbelief (cf. Isaiah 1.13-14). On their part they 'abhorred' Him – the Hebrew word expressing intense disgust to the point of nausea. **v.9:** God is longsuffering, but His patience was exhausted. In withdrawing His shepherd care, *three* types of calamity came upon His people – death from famine, destruction at the hand of their enemies and civil strife even in the form of eating 'the flesh of another' (cf. Jeremiah 19.9) – sadly this was literally fulfilled during the siege of Jerusalem in AD70. **v.10:** The first staff, beauty, is chopped to pieces signifying the withdrawal of the beautifying ministry and favour of the Good Shepherd. The breaking of the staff symbolised the breaking of a covenant (agreement) God had made with 'all the peoples' (the *plural* always referring to Gentile nations, cf. 8.22; 10). In the context, this seems to refer to Divine restraint placed upon surrounding nations to protect Israel, a covenant which will be enlarged in a future day (cf. Hosea 2.18; Ezekiel 34.25). Now their house was left *desolate* (Matthew 23.37-38; Luke 19.41-44; Leviticus 26.17). **v.11:** Only the 'poor of the flock' (believing remnant) recognised that this was deserved, divine judgment – they had a spiritual perception which originated from 'waiting' upon the Lord. They fixed their eyes on Him and gave heed to His word.

**v.12:** Now that his shepherd ministry had been rejected and terminated, Zechariah requests a financial evaluation of his services. There was no need to give any wages at all, only what seemed 'good in their eyes'. They appraised his wages at 'thirty pieces of silver' – the value of a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21.32). Thus Israel valued the ministry of the Good Shepherd as equivalent to a common, dead slave and nothing more. The amount was contemptible. *Unger: The sum they weighed represents more of an affront (insult) than if they had paid him nothing. It was a wickedly calculated amount designed to give vent to their scorn and venomous hatred of Him. What value do we place upon the Saviour? Do we give Him the price of complete obedience and devotion?* **v.13:** Zechariah was directed to 'cast' the 'goodly' price (note the irony) as a mark of contempt for something unclean. The money was to be thrown down in the house of the Lord 'to go to' the potter, i.e. end up in his possession (Unger). This was remarkably fulfilled when Judas 'cast down the pieces of silver in the temple' and the chief priests took the same to buy the 'potter's field' (cf. Matthew 27.3-10). It is also possible, but unlikely, the money was thrown directly to a potter who was permanently situated in or near the temple due to the demand for earthenware sacrificial vessels (cf. Leviticus 6.28). *Note. Matthew attributes the prophecy to Jeremiah rather than Zechariah (Matthew 27.9). This may be because Matthew is quoting from both prophets (cf. Jeremiah 18.1-4; 32.6-9) and, in many Hebrew manuscripts, Jeremiah's name heads the volume of prophetic writings.* **v.14:** The rejection of the Shepherd necessitated the breaking of the second staff, 'bands'. The nation was no longer in a position of favour with God, thus the brotherhood 'among Judah and Israel' was destroyed, leaving a state of discord and misery. Internal dissention escalated in the years of siege before AD70, even between family members. National unity would not now be realised until a future millennial day (Ezekiel 37.16-28). Christ is the centre of unity for God's people – if He is not given central place, there will be no unity amongst God's people.

#### The Reception of the **Worthless** (False) Shepherd [11.15-17]

**v.15:** After impersonating the *Good Shepherd*, Zechariah is called upon to impersonate the *godless shepherd*. *Phillips: Having rejected the Good Shepherd (and having persisted in this rejection for some two thousand years), the Jews will be easily deceived by the evil shepherd.* This man will be raised up according to Divine purpose during the tribulation. *John 5.43: I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.*

- His **character**. The word 'foolish' [evili] suggests moral deficiency, wickedness, ungodliness and sin (Psalm 14.1). His designation as a shepherd 'in the land' is suggestive of the false messiah, i.e. the second beast of Revelation 13.11.
- **v.16:** His **conduct**. These features are the very antithesis of the true Shepherd (cp. Ezekiel 34.12-16; Isaiah 40.11). This false shepherd will not: seek after those which are perishing (cp. Luke 15.4); or seek the 'young one' (cp. Luke 18.16). Neither does he attend to a sheep with broken limbs (cp. Luke 7.22) or even nourish the healthy. Rather he slaughters his own flock (cf. Mark 13.14), even tearing off their hoofs to consume every last morsel of flesh.
- **v.17:** His **condemnation**. This man is further designated as the 'idol shepherd', i.e. worthless or useless as proved by his forsaking of the flock at the time of greatest need. God will bring the sword against his right arm, paralysing his strength and power. His right eye will be darkened suggesting the blinding of his intelligence and moral perception. His destiny in the lake of fire is assured (Revelation 19.20).