

God Remembered
Zechariah 11
Chapter 17
“The Price of Rejection”

Israel's Shepherds: Good and Bad

*Open your gates, Lebanon, and fire will consume your cedars.
Wail, cypress, for the cedar has fallen; the glorious trees are destroyed!
Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the stately forest has fallen!
Listen to the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is destroyed.
Listen to the roar of young lions, for the thickets of the Jordan are destroyed.*

The LORD my God says this: “Shepherd the flock intended for slaughter. Those who buy them slaughter them but are not punished. Those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the LORD because I have become rich!’ Even their own shepherds have no compassion for them. Indeed, I will no longer have compassion on the inhabitants of the land” — this is the LORD’S declaration. “Instead, I will turn everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will devastate the land, and I will not rescue it from their hand.”

So I shepherded the flock intended for slaughter, the oppressed of the flock. I took two staffs, calling one Favor and the other Union, and I shepherded the flock. In one month I got rid of three shepherds. I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. Then I said, “I will no longer shepherd you. Let what is dying die, and let what is perishing perish; let the rest devour each other’s flesh.” Next I took my staff called Favor and cut it in two, annulling the covenant I had made with all the peoples. It was annulled on that day, and so the oppressed of the flock who were watching me knew that it was the word of the LORD. Then I said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” So they weighed my wages, thirty pieces of silver.

“Throw it to the potter,” the LORD said to me — this magnificent price I was valued by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the LORD, to the potter. Then I cut in two my second staff, Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

The LORD also said to me, “Take the equipment of a foolish shepherd. I am about to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are perishing, and he will not seek the lost or heal the broken. He will not sustain the healthy, but he will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.

*Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock!
May a sword strike his arm and his right eye!
May his arm wither away and his right eye go completely blind!”*

Zechariah 11

The eleventh chapter of *Zechariah* is both dark and poetical, and therefore, difficult to understand. But upon careful study the interpretation of it is quite poignant. In fact, I personally find it to be one of, if not the very saddest, chapter in all of Scripture. For it speaks of a time that Israel will indeed pay the price for their rejection of The Messiah King, Who would come especially for them. As we know, He was despised and rejected, coming to His own who received Him not. And because of this rejection, the land was brought under a curse. Oh, there will be a day for Israel's restoration, as we have already discovered in previous chapters. But for now, theirs is a story of discouragement and dissolution.

The first three verses of this passage are a poetic description of Israel's coming destruction and its people being scattered abroad. This is a foretelling of what was to come upon the nation's rejection of The Messiah Shepherd, Who was to come to the flock of His pasture. There are in fact two kinds of shepherds in view within this prophecy. The false shepherds and The True Shepherd. This is an important distinction for "shepherds" in the Scripture are those who have been commanded to lead God's flock. When a shepherd leads the flock astray, then it is God Who holds him accountable.

The shepherds who were in charge of the flock in Jesus' day were none other than those who made up the body of The Sanhedrin (Israel's religious "*Supreme Court*" if you will), namely the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It was these wicked men who had condemned Christ, the True Messiah to death. They refused to accept His Lordship and threatened the people with religious expulsion if they chose to follow Him. These are the Shepherds who grew rich and fat at the people's expense, while not lifting a finger to ease their burdens (***Zechariah 11:5, Matthew 23:4***). It is upon these foolish shepherds that God pronounces His judgment.

God also promised to "*no longer have compassion for the land*" (***vs. 6***), because of their rejection of His Son. He decrees that He will "***turn them over to their neighbor and his king***". This prophecy was fulfilled in 70AD during Rome's destruction of Jerusalem after the nation of Israel rebelled against the empire. The temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people were driven from their land and scattered throughout the world. The Romans renamed the area "*Palestine*", derived from the word Philistine, the arch enemies of King David. They did this as an insult to the Jewish people, as if to say, "Your beloved homeland is now the property of your arch enemies."

God declares that He had carefully shepherded this flock, even though they had been intended for slaughter. The Good Shepherd had presided over the land with what He describes as "*two staves*" (***vs 7***) reminiscent of David's 23rd Psalm, where he declares "***Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me***" (***Psalm 23:4***). The LORD describes these two staves as "*Favor and Union*", meaning that as the Shepherd of Israel, He had protected them from without, to keep their enemies at bay, and from within, to keep them unified as a nation. After the rejection of their rightful Messiah, Shepherd, King, God declared that He would no longer protect them in this manner. And they were subsequently turned over to their enemies and scattered.

He goes on to say that on that day He disposed of what He called "*three shepherds*" (***vs. 8***), this is most likely a reference to Israel's three branches of government; namely the *prophets, priests, and kings*. For after the Roman incursion, there would no longer be a people for these branches to preside. Thereby, God pronounces a death sentence upon those who had His Son crucified:

...*"I will no longer shepherd you. Let what is dying die, and let what is perishing perish; let the rest devour each other's flesh."* Next I took My staff called Favor and cut it in two, annulling the covenant I had made with all the peoples. It was annulled on that day, and so the oppressed of the flock who were watching Me knew that it was The Word of The LORD. **Zechariah 11:9-11**

It is important to note that not all of Israel rejected The LORD Jesus, however. And God refers to those faithful Believers as "*the oppressed of the flock*". What a perfect description of those who were so horribly persecuted for their faith in Christ, for they recognized their True Shepherd and were willing to lay down their lives to follow Him!

The twelfth verse of this passage is probably the most telling of them all. God, in essence, demands as answer to the question as to what is the value the people placed upon The Good Shepherd

as it were. It is basically the equivalent of Christ asking the people, **“Who do you say that I AM”** in **Mark 8:27-29**. The answer as to what the false shepherds felt was The Savior’s worth was as demeaning as it is foreshadowing. Thirty pieces of silver! This was a demeaning answer for it is the compensation for a slave gored to death by an ox in the law of Moses (**Exodus 21:32**). In essence, what the people were saying to The Christ is that His value to them was no more than a dead slave!

We know from the gospels that The Pharisees gave Judas thirty pieces of silver to betray Christ. And just as Zechariah prophesied, that money was subsequently thrown back at the priests at the temple as a result of Judas’ remorse (**vs. 13-14, Matthew 27:5-10**). Just as was prophesied, after the money was returned, it was *“given to the potter”*. In Matthew’s gospel, the pharisees used the returned coins to purchase a “potter’s field” in which to bury the poor.

Many people are unaware of the origin of the term “potters field”. In those days, makers of pottery would purchase pieces of ground that were filled with clay. The clay was dug up to use for sculpting and firing pottery. As the field was excavated, long trenches were left open. These fields, once their clay supply was exhausted, were often used for the burial of the poor and indigent, because so little effort was needed to bury them since the trenches were already dug. All that was needed was to dispose of the poor man’s body in the trench, and then cover it with dirt, thereby, requiring as little time as was possible to dispose of the unwanted soul.

What a poor price to be paid for The One and Only Son of God! But that was His value to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Just enough to purchase a poor man’s graveyard. I am reminded here of Christ’s words to the man who wanted to bury his father before he could follow after The LORD:

“Let the dead, bury their own dead...”

Luke 9:60b

After their rejection of Him, God cut His staff called *“union”*, thus causing the people to be scattered abroad. And since they rejected The True Shepherd, namely Christ, God, in the last days, will clear the way for the ultimate “false shepherd” (**vs. 15-17**), namely the anti-christ. This false shepherd will pretend to love and care for the people of Israel, when in reality, he is merely using them as a means to an end, for he is devoid of love and mercy. And as The LORD has spoken:

“...will not care for those who are perishing, and he will not seek the lost or heal the broken. He will not sustain the healthy, but he will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves.”

Zechariah 11:16b

For seven long and horrific years of literal hell on earth, this evil despot will rule the world. He will demand to be worshipped as god, and will destroy any who would dare to speak evil against him. His unbridled arrogance and satanically inspired hatred for God’s chosen people will be revealed at the mid-tribulation point, when he breaks his covenant with them and places an image of himself in the most holy place in their temple, thus demanding their sole allegiance and worship. But in the end, he will not prosper. For Christ will return and strike down this foolish and demonic shepherd with the breath by the power of His Own Word (**2 Thessalonians 2:8**). Thus leading to The LORD’S declaration as to his fate:

Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock! May a sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm wither away. And his right eye go completely blind!

Zechariah 11:17

In the Scriptures, one’s right arm was a symbol of his power and his right eye a symbol of his wisdom. When Christ returns, the anti-christ will be stripped of his power and will have no discerning ability to overcome. He will in fact be rendered completely ineffective in an instant and will be cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone, along with the his puppet, the false prophet who supported him (**Revelation 19:20**). And then, the nation shall once more be restored under the rule of Christ the True Shepherd, the King of kings and LORD of lords.

For our God... Remembers!