

Three Significant Events to Come in Israel's Future

Zechariah 11

Zechariah 11 – *“Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars.*

² Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the mighty trees are ruined.

Wail, O oaks of Bashan for the thick forest has come down. ³ There is the sound of wailing shepherds, for their glory is in ruins. There is the sound of roaring lions, for the pride of the Jordan is in ruins.

⁴ Thus says the Lord my God, “Feed the flock for slaughter, ⁵ whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt; those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich’; and their shepherds do not pity them. ⁶ For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land,” says the Lord. “But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor’s hand and into the hand of his king. They shall attack the land, and I will not deliver them from their hand.”

⁷ So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular, the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock. ⁸ I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. ⁹ Then I said, “I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other’s flesh.” ¹⁰ And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹ So it was broken on that day. Thus, the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. ¹² Then I said to them, “If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.” So, they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

¹³ And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—that princely price they set on me. So, I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter. ¹⁴ Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵ And the Lord said to me, “Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶ For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.

¹⁷ “Woe to the worthless shepherd, who leaves the flock! A sword shall be against his arm and against his right eye; his arm shall completely wither, and his right eye shall be totally blinded.”

Background Notes

The book of Zechariah consists of eight prophetic visions (chapters 1-6), four prophetic messages (chapters 7-8), and two prophetic burdens, or oracles (chapters 9-14). Zechariah 11 is the conclusion of the first prophetic burden that the Lord had given to Zechariah to deliver to the people. In context, Zechariah 11 is really an explanation for the delay in all the blessings predicted for Israel in chapter 10. The blessings were delayed because the people of Israel would reject their true Shepherd. Thus, before the promises of blessing could be fulfilled, Israel would have to undergo God's discipline.

Because the Messiah was rejected, in AD 70 God allowed the Roman armies to sweep in from the north, overrun the country, and destroy the Temple. That devastation is particularly in view in verses 1-3. From the cedars of Lebanon and oaks of Bashan in the north, to the fields of shepherds in the south, and the lush dwelling places of the lions in the Jordan Valley, the land and its inhabitants would suffer at the hands of the Romans.

In verses 4 through the end of the chapter, the Lord told Zechariah to act out or dramatize or “role play” the part of two shepherds. First he was to play the part of the good and true Shepherd (v4-14), and then the part of a foolish and false shepherd (v15-17).

Doctrinal Points

1. Unbelieving Israel rejected the true Shepherd.

In the dramatic presentation, Zechariah acted out the part of the Messiah who would come to feed the flock of Israel. The leaders of Israel (the scribes and Pharisees) were not caring for the sheep. These unfaithful rulers and false shepherds of the nation were using the people for their own material gain (v5)! Doesn't this sound like some so-called “spiritual leaders” today, who even praise the Lord for the wealth they have gained from fleecing the flock. God holds spiritual leaders responsible to do their jobs and care for God's flock in a godly and proper way – both then and today.

Verse 6: *“But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor's hand and into the hand of his king.”* What an accurate description of the attitude of the Jews towards Jesus Christ at the time of crucifixion. Remember how they cried out to Pilate, *“We have no king but Caesar!”* (John 19:15).

In the role-play, Zechariah took two shepherd staffs. One was called “beauty” or “favor,” and the other was called “bonds” or “union.” The staff of “favor” represented the covenant of God to protect the people, and the staff of “union” represented unity within the people of Israel and Judah. Both staffs would be broken. The “poor of the flock” (v7, v11) probably describes those relatively few people who accepted the Lord as Messiah at His first coming, and were greatly persecuted by the Jewish leaders.

What is the interpretation of verse 8? *“I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.”* Most likely, this is a reference to the three offices in Israel that the Lord removed: the office of the prophet, the office of the priest, and the office of the king. Although there are Jews today, those offices no longer exist within Judaism.

Verse 9: *“Then I said, “I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other's flesh.”* According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, when the Romans besieged Jerusalem in AD 70, 1.5 million people died! The starving people of Jerusalem were actually reduced to practicing cannibalism.

In the role-play, Zechariah broke the two staffs – thus showing that God’s protection would be removed so the Romans would be free to sweep in against Jerusalem, and any unity in Israel would be impossible. The Jewish people would be dispersed worldwide.

Sandwiched in between the breaking of the two staffs is the acting out of our Lord’s betrayal by Judas for thirty pieces of silver – the price of a slave. *“So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver... that princely price they set on me”* (v12-13). What an insult!

Matthew 26:14-15 gives the account of the fulfillment of that prophecy: *“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?” And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.”* See also Matthew 27:3-8. Zechariah acted this out to portray Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. Unbelieving Israel rejected the true Shepherd.

2. Unbelieving Israel will accept a false shepherd.

Verse 15: *“And the Lord said to me, “Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.”* The Lord told Zechariah to act out the role of a “foolish shepherd.” Who is this foolish shepherd? If the “good shepherd” represented the Messiah, then we believe that the Church Age, the present time, must be hidden between verses 14-17, and this “foolish shepherd” is the coming “antichrist” of the last days.

In John 5:43, when the Lord Jesus said, *“I have come in My Father’s name and you do not receive Me. If another comes in his own name, him you will receive...”* – He was speaking of the coming antichrist. This “antichrist” is the same person as the “man of sin” or “man of lawlessness” who is discussed in 2 Thessalonians 2, and, also, one of the “beasts” of Revelation 13.

Listen to the description of this foolish shepherd in Zechariah 11:16: *“For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand.”* Notice that this so-called “shepherd” has no concern for the people that he is supposed to serve. And notice – verse 16 says that **God** will raise up this foolish shepherd in the land. This “antichrist” and his activities are all **under God’s control!** The fact that this foolish shepherd will be raised up in the land leads me to believe that the “antichrist” of the last days will be Jewish.

Verse 17 is encouraging news. The foolish shepherd will be conquered and removed. His arm will be withered, and thus it will have no strength. His eye will be blinded, and thus it will be worthless. At the coming of the Lord, the antichrist of the last days will be cut down and eliminated. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says: *“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and destroy with the brightness of His coming.”*

How does all of this fit in with Zechariah's many predictions of the spiritual revival of Israel in the last days? Fortunately, not all the Jewish people will turn to and follow the antichrist of the last days, just as not all Gentiles will turn to the antichrist and receive the mark of the beast. 144,000 Jewish evangelists of the Tribulation period (Revelation 7) will lead many in Israel to saving faith in the true Messiah, who will soon return to set up His kingdom.

Unfortunately, many in Israel in those days will not believe this gospel of the kingdom and will turn to the antichrist. Unbelieving Israel will accept a false shepherd.

Practical Application

Don't despise dramatic presentations!

God uses dramatic presentations! God instructed Zechariah to use drama to get across the truth He wanted to convey to the people. Probably more people listened to Zechariah's message because he was acting it out. Dramatic presentations can be very effective!

Zechariah was not the only prophet God called to do dramatic presentations. Jeremiah and Ezekiel did many object lessons and dramatic presentations.

This practical application may not apply to you, but some Christians are suspicious of dramatic presentations in church – and some Christians are fiercely opposed to the use of drama! However, in view of the fact that God used drama to catch the peoples' attention and convey His message, I believe those Christians may need to rethink their negative position.

Although it's true that dramatic presentations are not appropriate for every time and place, there is a time and place for good and applicable drama - and film.

So - don't despise dramatic presentations!