

ZECHARIAH

Chapter Eleven

Introduction

God has a flair for the dramatic. He often called upon His prophets to live-out a drama for their audience:

1. Jeremiah was told to wear an unwashed linen sash around his waist, then go and bury it under a rock by the Euphrates River in Babylon. After many days, Jeremiah was told to retrieve the deteriorated sash and wear it around his waist. It was a drama of God's relationship to Israel. They were like a sash which He desired to wear with pride... But they had become unclean and God must send them to captivity in Babylon.
2. Hosea was told to "take a wife of harlotry." He married a prostitute named Gomer and his life with her became a drama of God's love for Israel even though the Jews were spiritual prostitutes in their relationship with Him.
3. Ezekiel lived-out many such dramas. In one he was told to shave his head and beard and weigh-out and divide the hairs. One-third of his hair was burned; one-third was struck with a sword; one-third was scattered in the wind. A small number of hairs were hidden in the hem of his garment. Thus he represented that one-third of the population of Jerusalem would be burned; one-third would be killed by the sword; and one-third would be taken away captive to Babylon. A few would suffer persecution but be spared as God's remnant.

Zechariah now joined this elite company of prophetic actors. He had a dual role to play on the stage of Jerusalem: He was to dramatize the Faithful Shepherd, then the Foolish Shepherd. In the drama, the Jews refused to follow the Faithful Shepherd, but received the Foolish Shepherd instead. In both cases they would be slaughtered.

The Faithful Shepherd of Zechariah's drama is Jesus Christ in His first coming to earth. The Foolish Shepherd is the man the Bible

identifies as the antiChrist. The drama depicts the fact that the Jews refused to follow Jesus Christ but will receive antiChrist.

In addition to this primary interpretation, we will make an application of these dramas in our own lives as believers in the Church Age. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 If You Refuse Faithful Shepherding You Will Be Left For Slaughter, and #2 If You Receive Foolish Shepherding You Will Be Led To Slaughter.

#1 If You Refuse Faithful Shepherding
You Will Be Left For Slaughter
(v1-14)

The construction of the Temple in Jerusalem had been completed. Zechariah comes on the scene with a prophecy and a drama that looks into the far future.

Charles Feinberg was a Christian of Jewish heritage who wrote commentaries on the Bible. According to Feinberg, Jewish writing often follows a pattern in which an effect is stated first, then afterwards the cause is presented.

That is certainly true in chapter eleven. In verses one, two, and three you see the effect, or the conclusion: Some great destruction is coming upon Jerusalem and its Temple. Then, once Zechariah has your attention, he gives you the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in verses four through fourteen. The cause would be that the Jews would refuse to follow their Faithful Shepherd when He came to them.

We begin, then, with the conclusion:

Zechariah 11:1 Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars.
Zechariah 11:2 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.
Zechariah 11:3 *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.

Zechariah was describing some future destruction that would come upon Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, like "Lebanon" and "Bashan." Because he said "open your doors, O Lebanon," and because the Temple was at that time constructed of cedars from

Lebanon, some commentators see the prediction of the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. Certainly the Temple would be destroyed; but the destruction Zechariah was announcing would go far beyond the doors of the Temple and include the city and all the surrounding area. The “forests” would literally be destroyed, along with all the grazing land. The Temple, Jerusalem, the entire land promised to Israel would be overrun and destroyed.

If this were all the information Zechariah provided, we would have no idea when this would occur. But remembering the Hebrew style of stating the effect, we look farther into the text for the cause. The cause, we shall see, is the refusal of the Jews to follow their Faithful Shepherd. The Faithful Shepherd, we shall see, was Jesus in His first coming. Thus the destruction spoken of here would be the one in 70AD when Titus and the Roman Legions would burn the Temple.

Zechariah 11:4 Thus says the LORD my God, “Feed the flock for slaughter,
Zechariah 11:5 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.
Zechariah 11:6 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.”

Zechariah still has not stated the cause of the destruction. This is still some of the effect. After stating the future destruction, he put it in terms of a flock of sheep that would be left unprotected by any shepherds, left for slaughter. The Jews would recognize themselves as God’s flock being left for slaughter. Their own shepherds – their leaders – would fail in their responsibilities to care for the people. God would withdraw His own hand of protection and allow foreign oppressors to overrun them.

Verses four, five, and six are like the plot of the drama... They are like a movie trailer, giving certain key elements. The drama hits the streets of Jerusalem for its opening day beginning in verse seven.

Zechariah 11:7 So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staves: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock.

Zechariah went out in the costume and with the implements of a Faithful Shepherd. The Faithful Shepherd would come to feed and

watch over them. But they would refuse Him and become the “flock for slaughter” previously described.

Zechariah draws special attention to two of the implements of the Faithful Shepherd, the two “staffs.” These would be the crooked staff you often identify with shepherds, and a shorter staff you might identify as a club. The crooked staff would be used to pull the sheep out from danger and to gently guide them; the club was used not against the sheep, but against predators who would attack the sheep... Or it was used to part their thick wool so the shepherd could examine them for cuts or rashes or parasites.

These two staffs were implements that spoke of the Faithful Shepherd’s care and concern for His sheep. They are appropriately named “Beauty” and “Bonds.” Beauty means *grace* or *favor*, bonds means *unity*. Bonds of love between brothers are what he had in mind. Zechariah went around acting-out the part of the Faithful Shepherd.

One day as he was acting-out this drama, Zechariah broke the staff called Beauty. It was to convey the message contained in verses eight, nine, and ten.

Zechariah 11:8 I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Zechariah 11:9 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.”

Zechariah 11:10 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.

The broken staff represented the breaking of a covenant. We’ll see in a moment that, because the Jews refused to follow their Faithful Shepherd, God would for a time withdraw His promise to protect them in their land.

Who are the “three shepherds” of verse eight that were “dismissed... in one month?” Once you get the whole context of this chapter, it seems that these three shepherds represent the three offices of leadership that God had established over His people – prophets, priests, and kings. Their Faithful Shepherd would combine and embody all three offices. Once they rejected the Faithful Shepherd Who Himself fulfilled all three of these offices, God would dismiss

them as a nation. If they would refuse God's Prophet/Priest/King, *they would have none!*

Zechariah 11:11 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.

The word "poor" means *afflicted*. This seems to indicate that some of the flock would see and understand what was happening when the nation as a whole refused their Faithful Shepherd. These would be ones who, in fact, received Him as their Prophet/Priest/King.

Now we are ready for the stunning climax of Zechariah's drama – the scene that ties it all together for us:

Zechariah 11:12 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.

Zechariah 11:13 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.

The Faithful Shepherd deserved His due. When He asked for "wages," "they weighed out thirty pieces of silver." The Faithful Shepherd was insulted! He sarcastically called it "a princely price they set on me." He told them to "throw it to the potter" and did so "in the house of the Lord."

Thirty pieces of silver was the price set in the Book of Exodus that you paid to reimburse someone for a slave who had been gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). It would be an insult to pay a Faithful Shepherd a wage of thirty pieces of silver.

Far more meaningful is the fact that, in the New Testament, **thirty pieces of silver was the price paid to Judas when he betrayed Jesus Christ to the Jewish authorities!** Judas ended-up throwing the money down in the Temple; but it was then used to buy the Potter's Field.

This last scene ties everything together. God would send His Faithful Shepherd – the Lord, Jesus Christ. He would offer them the kingdom on earth, with Himself as its Prophet/Priest/King. The Jewish authorities would refuse to follow Him. They would treat Him as a "gored slave." God would withdraw His protection and allow the

Romans to burn the Temple and destroy the city. As a result, they would be left without prophet, priest, or king as and be dispersed throughout the world. You read the conclusion in verse fourteen:

Zechariah 11:14 Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

This is exactly what occurred, as depicted in the living drama. It has been going on for twenty-five hundred years – ever since Jesus was crucified.

There is a principle we can glean for ourselves. Jesus is **our** Faithful Shepherd. **We** are part of His flock, too. According to John 10:16, we are the “other sheep who are not of this fold” but who He “must bring” into His fold. The apostle Peter called Jesus “the Shepherd... of our souls” (1Peter 2:25).

Remember, in Zechariah’s drama, there were “the afflicted of the flock” who believed in the Faithful Shepherd. These were the first Christians – all Jews – who after the resurrection of Jesus took the Gospel to the whole world.

Could we ever be “left for slaughter?” It is all too possible for us as Christians to refuse faithful shepherding. I’m not talking about your refusal to follow an earthly pastor and his advice, although that can sometimes be a symptom of it. I’m talking about any time you know God’s way and God’s will but refuse to obey it. You are then refusing His faithful shepherding... *And you’re gonna get slaughtered!*

By “slaughtered” I don’t mean you will forfeit your salvation. I mean that you cannot succeed in life if you refuse to follow the Lord’s plan for it. If you try marriage, or family, or anything else on your own, refusing God’s clear principles found in His Word, you’ll end up in a disaster.

#2 If You Receive Foolish Shepherding
You’ll Be Led To Slaughter
(v15-17)

Zechariah’s drama must have done well at the box office, because it had a sequel – “Shepherding Two – The Foolish Shepherd.”

Zechariah 11:15 And the LORD said to me, "Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.

We're not told exactly how Zechariah portrayed the Foolish Shepherd. We're not told what implements a foolish shepherd would have. It may have been a staff without a crook on the end, rendering it useless; it may have been a club that was disproportionate to that carried by the faithful shepherd, indicating he intended to use it against the sheep by beating them.

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. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.

God would "raise-up" this foolish shepherd. In other words, God would allow this foolish shepherd to come to His people... **And they will receive him!** He is described as "eat[ing their] flesh." He will prove to be more of a **beast** than a shepherd.

Zechariah 11:17 "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."

I wonder if Zechariah did his own stunts! Somehow he portrayed a wound to the arm and right eye of the foolish shepherd.

I am calling him the "foolish" shepherd, which is how the word is translated in some Bibles. It can also be translated *worthless*. Perhaps most revealing is the good-ole KJV, where he is called the "idol shepherd."

There can be no doubt that this person is the future antiChrist of the Tribulation period. He has many names in Scripture, including "the Beast," which fits his description in Zechariah. Jesus said to the Jews who refused Him at His first coming,

John 5:43 *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.*

It is interesting to note that the antiChrist is described in Revelation chapter thirteen as receiving a mortal wound to his head. In that same chapter, his partner, the false prophet, sets up an idol to him – an idol of the "idol shepherd."

The future antiChrist will enforce a peace treaty with the Jews, bringing calm to the Middle East and giving the Jews the ability to rebuild their Temple. But the peace, and their worship at the Temple, will be short-lived. After three and one half years the antiChrist will enter the Temple and demand to be worshipped as God. This will usher in tremendous persecution against Jews and culminate in the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ in His Second Coming.

The entire Church Age, which began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two and which continues until the Rapture, fits in-between verses fourteen and fifteen. You and I have no relationship at all to the antiChrist. We must be removed before he can be revealed (2Thessalonians 2).

Still, I would make this application from what we've learned: **Don't receive foolish shepherding!** There is a lot of false teaching and a lot of false teachers out in the world... **And in the church!** The apostle John warned of many antiChrists who would come – many false teachers who would come in the spirit of antiChrist. The apostle Paul warned that they would be among us – right in the Church itself.

How and why do you receive foolish shepherding? There are many things we could cite. The apostle Paul said that we receive foolish shepherding because we have "itching ears," indicating we listen to what we want to hear rather than to what we need to hear. He also warned us to be a little skeptical – to be like the Bereans who took the time to check-out what they heard by comparing it to the written Word of God. Jude, in his little epistle, as well as Peter, told you to check-out the character and lifestyle of those who claim to be teachers of the Word of God.

It is not popular to point out false teaching. Still, much of the New Testament is dedicated to warning you to *not* receive false teachers or false teaching. They will lead you to the slaughter.

Conclusion

In a less dramatic way than Zechariah, God still intends for you to live out a drama before your audience of family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors.

The apostle Paul encouraged you to consider yourselves living letters (Second Corinthians 3:2-3). Your trials and triumphs are like a script. Through your attitude and actions in both trials and triumphs you are performing a drama for others that tells them what it is like to be loved by the living God.