

### “GREATEST TRAGEDY IN HISTORY” (Zechariah 11:1-17)

The Lord promised His people in Zechariah 10 that He would send them a good shepherd to deliver them and lead them. Tragically, Israel turned its back on the Good Shepherd and crucified Him when He came. So before Israel’s glorious future of regathering, physical and spiritual restoration detailed in Zechariah 12-14 it must be preceded by its terrible rebellion and rejection. Zechariah 11 tells part of that story of the apostasy of the nation that led to the rejection of their Messiah.

*Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled. (v1-3)*

This section is a poetic one. The forests and the woods are pictured as weeping when they are caught up in a great fire. The three areas that catch fire are: Lebanon (v1); Bashan (v2); and Jordan (v3). These 3 locations represent a growing judgment of fire that sweeps from the north and descends to the south. Each of them were known for their lush vegetation and forests, like the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan. The powerful majestic lions roamed the Jordan area (cf. 2 Kings 17:25; Jeremiah 49:19) and they will roar in frustration and fear when they lose their homes.



Lebanon, Bashan, and the Jordan represent the whole of the land. The fire here is a metaphor for God’s judgment that will sweep through the land of Israel. Destructive armies of judgment entered Israel from the north, through Lebanon. This leads to the false shepherds or leaders of Israel to wail in grief, “*There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled.*” There are a number of possible judgments that this could refer to. But this is likely speaking of the total destruction of the nation in the Roman Wars of A.D. 66-70 by Titus when he burned Jerusalem, massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews, and scattered the remnants of the Jewish people around the world for nearly two millennia. The Jewish people were led into this rebellion by

blind and foolish leaders just a short time after they turned their backs on the Good Shepherd Messiah. John MacArthur explains,

“Now I really believe that the judgment that God is speaking about here is an actual devastation. It’s not a literal fire that burns trees, but it is an actual devastation. It’s not just a spiritual judgment, but it is a real judgment where real people die real death, where the land of Israel is really judged. In fact in verse 1, Lebanon is told to open its doors. There’s no sense in fighting it. You might as well just throw open the doors and let it happen. And once you see Lebanon go, verse 2, you oaks of Bashan, you might as well wail. The fir tree might as well wail. Why? Cause if the mighty cedar goes, the fir tree isn’t going to be able to stand. In other words, when the high and the mighty are fallen, every lesser tree is going to be unable to escape. From the high and the mighty all the way down the line.”



*Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not. (v4-5)*

In v4-17 the Lord guides Zechariah to act out a prophetic drama for the nation. He was to act the role of the good shepherd to feed the flock, “*Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter.*” God sent faithful shepherds to Israel throughout the centuries, like Zechariah, and finally the greatest shepherd in the Lord Jesus Christ. The feeding of truth only served to prepare them for the great judgment to come when they rejected the Saviour and are, therefore, become “*the flock of the slaughter.*”

The true shepherd was to feed the flock but not to feed off the flock. But all through biblical and church history the false shepherds have ravaged their flocks, “*Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty.*” They boasted in their corruption as evidence of God’s favour, “*and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich.*” Another fruit of such wickedness is the heartless and ruthless indifference to those they have fleeced, “*and their own shepherds pity them not.*” This is what happened to Israel when the Good Shepherd came in His First Coming. The people ran after the false shepherds of the Scribes and the Pharisees and turned their backs on Christ, “*He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*” (John 1:11)

Unfortunately, we have even such men (and some women) in Christianity today milking millions from their deceived congregations. Such false shepherds enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and needy. They too boast that they are “*anointed*” and blessed by God for their great faith and faithfulness.

*For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD; but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them. And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock. Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another. And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD. (v6-11)*

The rejection of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ is detailed here in this section of v6-14). God says He will turn His back of Israel, *“For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them.”* For hundreds of years, from A.D. 70 to A.D. 1948 the whole nation went out of existence, although the Jewish people were miraculously preserved as a distinct race in the diaspora scattered throughout the world.



Zechariah steps up again to act the role of God the faithful shepherd, *“And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.”* This seems to equate with the two sticks used by the Good Shepherd, *“thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”* (Psalm 23:4b) The “rod” was a stronger piece of wood that was used to beat off the wild beasts whereas the “staff” was to help the sheep that was fallen into a hole. So the rod took care of the enemies and the staff took care of the sheep.

In the drama, Zechariah took these two staves or sticks - one is called “Beauty” (which has the idea of grace, favour) and the other is called “Bands,” (which has the idea of unity or binding together). These two methods were used to take care of the protection and provision of the flock of Israel, *“and I fed the flock.”* Not all of Israel rejected the feeding of the Good Shepherd. Most of the leadership rejected Him but a remnant of the ordinary people embraced Him, *“And the common people heard him gladly.”* (Mark 12:37) Baron writes on this passage these words, *“He fed all, but the poor of the flock alone, those who were despised of men because they would not follow the pride of the high priests and scribes and Pharisees, believed on Him.”* The Apostle Paul points out that a remnant in his day continued on in saving faith, *“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.”* (Romans 11:5)

The Lord then speaks of three false shepherds that He will judge, *“Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.”* Clearly, they are representative

of the type of false shepherds in this period that deceived Israel. There has been much speculation as to who they represent. Steve Cole gives this explanation,

*“The best view is probably that the three shepherds represent the three main offices in Israel: prophet, priest, and king. “One month” represents a relatively short period of time. Because the religious and political leaders rejected Jesus as Messiah and abused their roles for personal gain, and because in His person Jesus fulfilled the roles of prophet, priest, and king, He abolished those roles during His earthly ministry. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. After A.D. 70, there was no temple and no high priest to offer sacrifices. And after that time there would be no king of the Jews, because there was no Jewish nation.”*

The patience of the Good Shepherd with His errant flock of Israel has a limit. God’s forbearance is not infinite. There will come a time when the door of mercy is closed and He declares, *“Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.”* To indicate this the Shepherd breaks His rod that He used to protect them from their enemies, *“And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people.”* In the siege of Jerusalem, many starved and many were massacred, *“I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off”* and some of the Jews even literally ate each other’s bodies in the famine, *“and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another.”* We know from our historical perspective that in A.D 70 the Lord lifted His rod of protection and allowed the Romans to destroy the Jewish nation, *“And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD.”*



*And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD. Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. (v12-14)*

The Good Shepherd had taken care of His beloved flock for generations. He asked for His wages in faithfully carrying out those duties. In the final insult, they paid him a mere 30 pieces of silver, which was the price of a slave who had been gored by an ox (Exod. 21:32). It was the lowest they could pay. Cole explains,

“This shows how cheaply they valued his service! It was like saying, “You’re about as useful to us as a gored slave!” The Lord, with sarcasm, instructs him to throw this “magnificent price” to the potter. Zechariah does so in the house of the Lord.”

We know from Matthew 27:7 that this blood money was used to purchase a potter’s field, which was a piece of useless land where the potter threw his broken, damaged, and rejected pots.

The Good Shepherd then takes His second staff and breaks it into pieces, “*Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands.*” This was to signify the tearing asunder of the unity of the nation, “*that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*” The Jews turned on each other as their nation collapsed and the civil strife between factions and sects continues till this day. The nation dissolved for 1900 years. The Jews scattered all over the world, because they rejected the true shepherd.

*And the Lord said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened. (v15-17)*

Zechariah now turns to look at the false shepherd of the Antichrist who will come in the last days into the lives of the divided Jewish people. When you reject the true, it is much easier to accept the false. Jesus warned of this danger, “*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.*” (John 5:43) This false shepherd who will arise in the future is described as a “*foolish shepherd*” not because he is intellectually stupid but rather because he is morally corrupt and he is a hardened fool to God’s Word. The prophecy will be ultimately fulfilled in Israel’s embrace of Antichrist and their covenant with him (Daniel 9:27).



The Antichrist will be the best tool Satan can produce of a false imitation of Jesus Christ! In Daniel 8 he is described as the, “*king of fierce countenance*” (Daniel 8:23) and in chapter 11 as a “*vile person.*” (Daniel 11:21) What we can be definitive about is that the Antichrist is a man that will emerge from a ten-ruler confederacy of nations to establish worldwide dominion. He will deceive the Jewish people with a peace agreement and then he will betray them and launch an unprecedented reign of terror against them. The Good Shepherd will lay down His life for the sheep but the Foolish Shepherd will seek to devour the Jews, “*For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the*

*land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.*”

We are told in other passages that he is a great flatterer and a diplomatic genius. This Antichrist will come initially by deception to seize power before using force and intimidation to extend his Empire worldwide. He will not just dominate a handful of kingdoms but eventually the whole world. But his day in the spotlight is short-lived. God will deal with him after the Antichrist has served God’s purpose, “*Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.*” God will strike him down in a final judgment and cast him into the lake of fire, “*And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.*” (Rev. 19:20)



The final Antichrist is one of a long list of little antichrists that have tried to destroy the Jewish people by compromise or persecution. All have failed. All will fail. The Jew has stood at the graveside of every last one of his enemies! They are the invincible race. All the instruments of man’s invention cannot touch the Creator. God will have the last word on the future of all His creatures. At the Name of Jesus every knee will bow.

Israel as a nation have been re-gathered to the land of Israel since 1948 (Zech. 12:6). The next step is their judgment in the Great Tribulation and their deception by the Antichrist. Sodom and Gomorrah are on our streets and televisions. The world economies are in turbulence. Israel is increasingly isolated. Antichrist is coming soon. Many will apostatize and compromise. Everyone is looking for a shepherd to lead them. We need to be sure we follow the right one. Do you know your Good Shepherd? But it won’t end there. For the next part of Zechariah will reveal that the Jews are saved by faith in the Messiah in the Tribulation (Zech. 12:10), and will then become the spiritual light to all the Gentile nations of the world in the millennium (Zech. 8:23; Isa. 45:14; 49:6). This light will shine from Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16-21) as Christ reigns from David’s throne there. (Zech. 14:9; Ezekiel 37:21-25)