

Session 11 The Forerunner Message in Zechariah 11

I. INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

- A. **Summary:** The Lord promised to deliver, empower, bless, and regather Israel (Zech. 9-10). She rejected her Messiah, so is disciplined by God (Zech. 11) before she may enjoy all His promises.
- B. The question arises, what will happen to the Gentile nations who oppress Israel in the end times? Zechariah received *two oracles* (Zech. 9-11 and Zech. 12-14)—each are three chapters—that answer the question of how God will remove the opposition of the Gentiles. The general theme of both oracles is the Lord as King bringing judgment and blessing to Israel and the nations as He defeats all the opposing world powers in context to establishing His kingdom openly in all nations.
- C. Outline of Zechariah 11
- Zechariah 11** Israel rejected her Messiah and thus is disciplined by the Lord
- 11:1-3** God's judgment on the land of Israel
- 11:4-14** Israel's rejection of the Good Shepherd—Jesus
- 11:15-17** The Lord raises up the foolish shepherd—the Antichrist
- D. Israel was deceived when they rejected Jesus, the good Shepherd (11:4-14), and will again be deceived in accepting the Antichrist, called the “foolish and worthless shepherd” (11:15-17). The Lord will cause this to turn out for Israel's good as they will enjoy a glorious salvation (Rom. 8:28).
- E. The governmental leaders of Israel will receive the Antichrist as their “shepherd king,” allowing him a base “in their land” and full access to their temple (11:16; cf. Dan. 11:45; 2 Thes. 2:3-4).
- ¹⁶***For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land [the Antichrist]... (Zech. 11:16)***
- ⁴⁵***He [the Antichrist] shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas [Mediterranean Sea and Dead Sea] and the glorious holy mountain [Jerusalem]. (Dan. 11:45)***
- ⁴***...so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. (2 Thes. 2:4)***
- F. The government of Israel has never officially received “another” as their Messiah (Jn. 5:43).
- ⁴³***I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me [as Messiah and King]; if another comes in his own name [the Antichrist], him you will receive [as Messiah]. (Jn. 5:43)***
- G. **Summary:** God disciplined Israel through the invasion of the Roman army in AD 66-70 (11:1-3). They were disciplined for rejecting Jesus, the Good Shepherd (11:4-14), and will be disciplined again for accepting the Antichrist, the foolish shepherd in the land of Israel (11:15-17).
- H. In the end times, there will be a committed messianic community experiencing revival and being inspired by the two witnesses while the abomination of desolation is set up in the city.
- I. Zechariah used symbolic actions to prophetically describe Israel's two most powerful shepherds — Jesus, the good shepherd (11:4-14), and the Antichrist, the wicked shepherd (11:15-17).

II. GOD’S JUDGMENT ON THE LAND OF ISRAEL (ZECH. 11:1-3)

- A. Zechariah described a military invasion that would affect the whole land of Israel (11:1-3). This is a prediction of God’s judgment on Israel through Rome’s military invasion of Israel in AD 66-70, starting in Lebanon in the north and moving south to Jerusalem. This passage will be fulfilled again when Gentile nations under the Antichrist gather to Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) in the northern part of Israel as a military staging area used to mobilize hostile armies to attack Jerusalem in the south.
- ¹Open your doors, **O Lebanon**, that fire may devour your cedars. ²Wail, **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. ³There 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** [near Jerusalem] is in ruins. (Zech. 11:1-3)*
- B. Jesus prophesied Jerusalem’s destruction by an invasion which occurred in AD 70 (Lk. 19:44). Rome’s military invasion of Israel occurred because she rejected her Messiah as seen in 11:4-14.
- ⁴¹He saw...[Jerusalem] and wept over it, ⁴²saying...⁴³“For days will come on you when **your enemies will...** ⁴⁴**level you...**because you did not know the time of your visitation.” (Lk. 19:41-44)*
- C. As the Roman army advanced toward Jerusalem, they cut down trees to use the wood to build temporary dwellings, military fortresses, to make weapons, to cook, etc. Military campaigns often took years and used many resources in an invaded land, including wood, crops, livestock, etc.
- D. **Open your doors, O Lebanon:** Lebanon in the *north* was called to open its doors or gates; thus, to lay down its defenses so that the Roman army could enter their land without a fight so that its cedar trees could be used for the fires that served Rome’s military purposes.
- E. **Wail, O Cypress:** Cypress trees were to wail in anguish as they watched the cedars of Lebanon burn. If the more majestic cedars burned, then surely the lowly cypress trees would not escape the fire.
- F. **Wail, oaks of Bashan:** This refers to land *east* of the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. Bashan was known for its thick forest of oak trees (Isa. 2:13; Ezek. 27:6). The Roman attack moved from Lebanon in the north in a southeast path down to Bashan, eventually south to Jerusalem by Jordan.
- G. **Wailing shepherds:** The shepherds cried, seeing the ruin of “their glory”—their flocks. The pasture lands were destroyed by the invading armies of Rome, so Israel’s flocks had no food to eat.
- H. **Pride of the Jordan:** The pride of the Jordan or the thickets around the Jordan river in the *south* (about 20 miles from Jerusalem) were destroyed by the Roman army. The lions who lived in the thickets roared because the Romans destroyed the area which included their lairs and food supplies.
- I. God’s judgment on Israel in 11:1-3 was due to their rejection of the Messiah depicted in 11:4-14.
- J. There seems to be parallels between an attack from the north in 11:1-3 (fulfilled in part by the Roman invasion) and an attack from the north in 9:1-8 (fulfilled in part by Alexander the Great).

III. ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD—JESUS (ZECH. 11:4-14)

- A. **Summary:** God sent Israel the best shepherd (11:4-6; cf. 9:9; 10:4), but they rejected Him (11:7-14). **Four groups:** 1. Rome as the owners (buyers); 2. The sellers as the Sanhedrin in alliance with Rome; 3. The common people who are sold out; 4. The poor or the remnant of Israel who fear God.
- B. The Lord told Zechariah to feed a flock of sheep that were to be slaughtered and sold (11:4-6).
⁴...“Feed the flock for slaughter, ⁵whose 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. ⁶For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land...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.” (Zech. 11:4-6)
- C. **Feed the flock:** The Lord commanded Zechariah to take a job as a head shepherd.
- D. **The flock for slaughter:** Israel was a flock “marked for slaughter” because the Lord saw their increasing national hardness of heart that would eventually result in their rejection of Jesus.
- E. **Owners slaughter them:** The owners who “bought” Israel refer to the Romans who controlled them. The Hebrew word translated “owners” is *goneehen*; it can be translated as “buyers” or “possessors.”
- F. **Those who sell them:** The political and spiritual leaders of Israel were bad shepherds who “sold” Israel to Rome to gain personal benefits from supporting Rome’s policies and heavy taxation.
- G. **Say “Blessed be the Lord”:** When Israel’s leadership sold their people to the Romans, they said, “Blessed be the Lord, I am rich.” They used religious language to justify their actions.
- H. **Their shepherds do not pity them** (11:5): The Jewish shepherds sold their people to the Romans.
- I. **The Lord will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land** (11:6): This prophetic declaration is a most terrifying judgment. The Lord sent the Romans (11:1-3) to discipline Israel for rejecting Jesus (11:12).
⁶I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land...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...” (Zech. 11:6)
- J. **The Lord will give everyone into his neighbor’s hand:** The Lord’s discipline includes allowing social strife, civil disorder, and oppression (11:6; cf. 8:10; Mt. 24:10).
¹⁰There was no peace...for I set all men, everyone, against his neighbor. (Zech. 8:10)
¹⁰And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. (Mt. 24:10)
- K. **The Lord will give Israel into the hand of his king:** The Lord gave Israel into the hands of Roman kings. Pilate stood Jesus before the Jewish leaders and asked if he should crucify their king. They said, “We have no king but Caesar” (Jn. 19:15). Therefore, the Lord gave Israel into the hands of the king they espoused. Jesus declared, “Your house is left unto you desolate” (Mt. 23:38).

IV. ZECHARIAH PREFIGURED JESUS AS THE GOOD SHEPHERD (ZECH. 11:7-10)

- A. Zechariah prefigured Jesus as the Good Shepherd who has authority over the two staffs (11:7-11).
⁷So I fed the flock for slaughter....I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty [Favor] and the other...Bonds [Union]...⁸I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul abhorred me. ⁹Then I said, “I will not feed you. Let what is dying die...Let those that are left eat each other’s flesh.”¹⁰I took my staff, Beauty [Favor], and cut it in two... (Zech. 11:7-10)
- B. *I fed the flock*: Zechariah was a prophetic picture of Jesus coming to feed Israel (11:4, 7).
- C. *I took two staffs*: Shepherds often carried two staffs when going out to feed their flock (11:7). One staff was to *protect* the sheep by beating off wild animals and the other to *direct* them to green pastures. The names of the two staffs had prophetic significance related to the coming judgment.
- D. *Beauty*: This can be translated as “*Favor*.” When Zechariah cut this staff in two (11:10), it represented God lifting His protection and allowing the nations (Rome) to attack Israel. In other words, God’s beauty or favor kept hostile Gentile nations from destroying Israel (11:10).
- E. *Bonds*: This can be translated as “*Union*.” This pictured the Lord keeping the bond of brotherhood among the Jewish people. God’s grace operates to hinder nations from great strife.
- F. *I dismissed three shepherds*: Zechariah fired three shepherds who were working under him (11:8). One main view is to see this as prefiguring Jesus dismissing *three classes of shepherds* (leaders)—*elders, chief priests, and scribes*. Jesus named these three classes of leaders (in the Sanhedrin) who rejected Him. These “positions” ended as a result of Rome destroying Jerusalem (AD 70).
²²“The Son of Man must...be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes...” (Lk. 9:22)
- G. *In one month*: This possibly speaks of the *month* leading up to Jesus’ death, during which three classes of leadership decided to kill Him. This was the month their fate was sealed.
- H. *My soul loathed them* (11:8): Matthew 23 expressed how Jesus felt about these false shepherds.
²⁷“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees...you are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness...²⁸...full of hypocrisy and lawlessness...”³³Serpents, brood of vipers!... (Mt. 23:27-33)
- I. *Their soul abhorred Me* (11:8): They hated Jesus without a cause (Jn. 15:25). Their hatred was expressed in concluding that Jesus was demonized and mad (Jn. 10:20).
²⁰Many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?” (Jn. 10:20)
- J. *Then I said, “I will not feed you”*: The Lord would not feed or provide, protect, or direct neither Israel nor the three main classes of Israel’s leadership. Her rejection of the good shepherd (11:7-14) is the reason for her judgment in 11:1-3 and the dismissal of the three classes of leadership in 11:8.
- K. *Let what is dying die*: The Lord turned Israel over to their fate without divine protection, provision, or direction. Some died, while some engaged in cannibalism in the siege of Jerusalem in AD 66-70.

V. ZECHARIAH’S PROPHETIC ACT: BREAKING THE STAFF OF FAVOR (ZECH 11:10-11)

- A. ***I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two:*** Zechariah’s next prophetic act was to break the staff called *Beauty* or *Favor* that was mentioned in 11:7. The Lord temporarily “cut in two” His staff of favor over Israel that restrained the Gentile powers from oppressing them. Breaking the staff of favor signified Israel losing God’s protection from Rome’s military aggression towards them.
- ¹⁰And I took my staff, Beauty [Favor], and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples [Gentile nations]. ¹¹So 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. (Zech. 11:10-11)***
- B. ***I might break the covenant which I made with all the peoples:*** The term, “covenant,” is used here in the sense of His agreement or policy rather than a formal covenant similar to the covenants with Israel that are recorded in Scripture. Covenant here refers to the Lord’s policy to restrain the nations from assaulting Israel. God had made a “determination” to keep the Gentiles from destroying Israel.
1. The Hebrew word *bērît* translated here as covenant can refer to an agreement or a contract.
 2. Abner sought to make a *bērît*—a political alliance with David (2 Sam. 3:12; cf. Josh. 9:6; 1 Sam. 18:3; 23:18).
- C. ***It was broken on that day:*** On the day that the Good Shepherd broke His agreement to restrain the nations from attacking Israel, He withdrew protective care from Israel (Mt. 23:38; Lk. 19:41-44).
- ⁴¹“If you had known....especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace...⁴³For days will come upon you when your enemies will...close you in on every side, ⁴⁴and level you, and your children within you, to the ground.... because you did not know the time of your visitation.” (Lk. 19:41-44)***
- D. ***The poor of the flock:*** The godly remnant “watched” or “gave heed” to the Lord’s word about breaking off His protection of Israel. The poor in 11:11 are the same as those in 11:7. They “knew” or understood the implications for Zechariah’s prophetic acts and God’s plan to discipline Israel.
- E. The poor paid close attention to Zechariah’s words, and believed that what he spoke was true instead of being offended at this prophecy (11:11).

VI. ZECHARIAH’S PROPHETIC ACTS: THROWING THE SILVER AND CUTTING THE STAFF (ZECH 11:12-14)

- A. When Zechariah ended his job of feeding the flock of sheep, he asked the other shepherds to pay him the wages that they felt he deserved for his services. They paid him 30 pieces of silver.
- ¹²Then 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. ¹³The 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. ¹⁴Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.” (Zech. 11:12-14)***

- B. **30 pieces of silver:** This was the amount required in payment for a slave who was gored to death by an ox—to reimburse for the labor that was lost by his absence (Ex. 21:32). This small amount of money was an insult for all that Jesus the Good Shepherd did in “feeding” the flock of Israel in His 3½ years of ministry. They considered the value of His ministry to be equal to the work of a slave. Matthew clearly identified this passage as referring to Jesus (Mt. 26:15; 27:3, 9).
- C. **Throw it to the potter (11:13):** The Lord told Zechariah to throw the silver to the potter in the temple courtyard. This was a proverbial way of expressing disdain for the wages, since potters were usually very poor. The money was thrown down in the temple and then used to buy a field, a burying ground, for a potter, since most could not afford one (Mt. 27:3-10).
- D. **Princely price:** With sarcasm he referred to this as the “princely price” they set upon Jesus.
- E. **Cut the staff called Bonds (11:14):** Zechariah’s next prophetic act was to break the staff called *Bonds* or *Union* (mentioned in 11:7). When the Lord “cut in two” His staff of unity, it meant that He was going to allow great strife to divide them. Israel experienced extreme political, social, and religious instability leading up to AD 70. Josephus claimed that barbarity of the Jews against each other was similar to the way the Romans treated them.
- F. The Lord will raise up the Antichrist as a foolish and worthless shepherd (11:15-17). The two most powerful shepherds in Israel’s history are highlighted in Zechariah 11: the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and the foolish shepherd, the Antichrist. The leadership of Israel will accept him and allow him to establish his palace in the land (Dan. 11:45) and put his image in their temple (2 Thes. 2:3-4). Thus, he will be firmly rooted “in the land.” Israel’s government will open the door to let him come in.
- ¹⁵...“Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off...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. ¹⁷Woe 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.” (Zech. 11:15-17)
- G. **Take the implements of a foolish shepherd:** Zechariah was told to perform another prophetic act that involved taking up certain tools that a foolish shepherd would use.
- H. **Foolish shepherd:** The word “foolish” can be rendered wicked. This prophecy finds its fulfillment in the Antichrist, who will make a covenant with Israel (Isa. 28:15-18; Dan. 9:27; 11:45; Jn. 5:43). This foolish shepherd is in contrast to Jesus the Good Shepherd in this eschatological oracle.
- I. **He will eat the flesh and tear the hooves:** He will seek to totally devour the Jewish people. To split the hooves means to search frantically for the last morsel of flesh from the sheep—to consume them. Israel’s the end-time crisis described in 11:16-17 will far surpass the Roman crisis in 11:1-3.
- J. **His arm shall completely wither:** The arm is the emblem of power; his power will not prevail.
- K. **His right eye shall be totally blinded:** The eye is the emblem of knowledge or intelligence.