

- Let's take another look at our summary slide for the last portion of the book...
- In chapter nine, we saw God's promise of a coming Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ...in chapter ten, we examined the blessings of redemption for the people of Israel...tonight, chapter eleven is very different...it is filled with judgment and slaughter, sorrow and heartbreak...
- To begin, I need to set the stage a bit...first, so far, Zechariah's visions have been encouraging...the Lord has given him "gracious and comforting words" for the people of Judah, as we have seen in the book up to this point...the city of Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt and the worship of Yahweh will be reestablished...second, there will also be a future restoration of the Davidic kingdom...their righteousness will be restored (chapter 5) and their enemies will be destroyed, restoring peace and prosperity (chapter 8)...
- But between Zechariah's day and the eventual Day of the Lord, when **Zechariah 9.16** comes to pass, and **the flock of his people will shine...like the jewels of a crown**, there will come a time of great slaughter and tribulation, when Israel will be tested and refined in the fire of suffering...chapter eleven describes darker days ahead for Israel...the key element we must understand in this chapter is the timing of each of the passages...we'll study it as it is in the text, but Zechariah doesn't record these events in chronological order, so we'll address the timing of each as we go, and that will be critical to seeing the meaning of the chapter...we see the prophecy in three parts, each focused on shepherds...let's begin...

The Ruin of the Wailing Shepherds

- These first three verses describe devastation and judgment using the metaphor of trees...

Open your doors, O Lebanon,

that the fire may devour your cedars!

²Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,

for the glorious trees are ruined!

Wail, oaks of Bashan,

for the thick forest has been felled!

³The sound of the wail of the shepherds,

for their glory is ruined!

The sound of the roar of the lions,

for the thicket of the Jordan is ruined!

- The coming judgment is depicted as destroying the entire nation by naming three specific regions: Lebanon in the far north, Bashan to the south and east, and the banks of the Jordan River further south...Lebanon was well-known for its magnificent cedar trees in the mountains...Solomon imported cedar to build his palace in Jerusalem, which he named the House of the Forest of Lebanon...and the destruction cascades from there, for if the cedars are destroyed, the cypresses in verse two will have no chance of survival...next are the oaks of Bashan, an area east of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, and south of Mount Hermon...lastly are the thickets of the Jordan, dense vegetation along the banks of the river...the point of this description is to emphasize the widespread nature of the destruction that is coming...from the north to the south, the land would be completely devastated...based on what we see here, combined with the rest of the chapter, this prediction was fulfilled by the Roman Empire's destruction of the entire nation of Israel, and particularly Jerusalem, in 70 AD... this conclusion is based on the nature of the symbolism and because of the next passage, where we see Israel's rejection of their True Shepherd...this painting by British artist David Roberts captures only a portion of the horror and death that happened as Jerusalem was destroyed to the ground...

The Rejection of the True Shepherd

- Why would God execute such judgment on His people? It's because of the ultimate sin of Israel: the rejection of their True Shepherd, the Messiah, Jesus Christ...to portray this truth, God tells Zechariah to act out a story, a prophecy physically played out before the nation...
- This was not an uncommon prophetic method...the Lord sometimes directed His prophets to perform physical actions to depict the coming future...Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea all did this, along with Zechariah...

⁴Thus said the Lord my God: **“Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.** ⁵Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished, and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the Lord, I have become rich,’ and **their own shepherds have no pity on them.** ⁶For I **will no longer have pity** on the inhabitants of this land, declares the Lord. Behold, I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor, and each into the hand of his king, and they shall crush the land, and **I will deliver none from their hand.**”

- As we examine this passage, the identity of **the flock doomed to slaughter** is clear: they are the Jewish people...led by their religious leaders, they would reject their long-awaited Messiah, Jesus, when he came...and for this rejection, God would bring an unprecedented judgment upon them through Rome...they were indeed **doomed to slaughter** for their sin
- In verse 5 those who bought and sold the Jews are identified as the Gentile powers, from Assyria to Rome...throughout history, these empires swept through Israel, devastating the land and ravaging the people, seizing the spoils of the land, enriching themselves at Israel's expense...they thought they would go unpunished for their cruelty, as we see in **Jeremiah 50.6-7**... ⁶**“My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains. From mountain to hill they have gone. They have forgotten their fold.** ⁷**All who found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, ‘We are not guilty, for they have sinned against the Lord, their habitation of**

righteousness, the Lord, the hope of their fathers.’ ...but these empires would be held accountable for their sins as well...same chapter, verses 17 and 18...¹⁷ **“Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones.”**¹⁸ **Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.**

- Worse, **their own shepherds have no pity on them**...the leaders of Israel were heartless, concerned only for themselves and having no care for the people, particularly the poor...
- Worst of all, we see in verse 6 **the Lord will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land**...Israel had abandoned the Lord...as Zechariah said in 7.12, ¹² **They made their hearts diamond-hard...Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. He would not deliver...**
- The hard lesson is that a people can turn from the Lord in such a persistent and stubborn way that the Lord gives them up to judgment...just before Jerusalem and Judah fell to the Babylonians, we read this from II Chronicles 36.15-16...¹⁵ **The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.**¹⁶ **But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.** That’s true also of the people at the time of their rejection of Jesus the Messiah, some 450 years after Zechariah’s day, as the religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, led the people to reject the Lord...
- How will God do this? **Behold, I will cause each of them to fall into the hand of his neighbor, and each into the hand of his king,** ...He will incite violence within Israel, but worse, He will cause them to fall into **the hand of his king**...there was no Jewish king, so who was the king? The answer is in John 19.14b-15... (Pilate) **said to the Jews, “Behold your**

King!” (speaking of Jesus) ¹⁵ They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” They spoke the truth, for they had delivered themselves over to Caesar...they had rejected their rightful sovereign King, Jesus, and instead placed themselves under the Gentile authority of Rome...and the irony is this...listen to a prior conversation in **John 11.47-53...** ⁴⁷ **So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.** The Jews feared that if Jesus lived, He would bring down the wrath of Rome on Israel, and the religious leaders would lose both their place and their nation...but by rejecting Jesus, and participating in his execution, the Jews actually brought upon themselves the wrath and judgment of God, and that through Rome...what they feared the most and tried to avoid is the very judgment God brought upon them...

- Zechariah speaks again...

⁷ So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders. And I took two staffs, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep. ⁸ In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. ⁹ So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour

the flesh of one another.”¹⁰ And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples.¹¹ So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord.

- As the True Shepherd, the Messiah, Zechariah uses two staffs: “Favor” and “Union” ...the first represents God’s grace on the nation, and the other represents God’s unity with His people, and their unity as a nation...with these two staffs, Zechariah cared for the flock, doing what shepherds did, and tended the sheep...leading them to pasture and water, protecting them from predators, caring for the young, the sick, and the aged, seeking out those who had wandered away from the fold...
- But this relationship didn’t last long, for Zechariah soon steps down...verse 8 is difficult to understand...we aren’t exactly sure what is meant by the “three shepherds”...my best understanding is this: based on what follows and the use of the word “shepherds,” I think it’s likely that the phrase represents Israel’s false shepherds, the Jewish religious leaders: the elders, scribes, and Pharisees, who were the false shepherds throughout Jewish history...they were the ones, often allied with political leaders, who led the people into idolatry and apostasy and ultimately collaborated with the Romans to put Jesus to death...in **“one month”** – a period of time, probably indicating all or the final part of Jesus’s earthly ministry – he “destroyed” them...not physically, but spiritually, refuting their false teaching at every turn...for his part, Jesus famously pronounced judgments and woes against the Pharisees, and the Gospels are full of accounts of conflict between the two, including nine mentions in John’s gospel alone of attempts to kill Jesus...so, **I became impatient with them, and they also detested me** is a pretty accurate description of the relationship on both sides...
- Finally, as Jesus approached Jerusalem, we see God’s patience run out...**Luke 19.41-44**...⁴¹ **And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,** ⁴² **saying, “Would that you,**

even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

- So as Jesus finally moved forward to His passion week, the full weight of **John 1.11** came to pass... ¹¹ **He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.** Zechariah, playing the part of Messiah, predicts the coming judgment...God’s grace had run out for that generation, ⁹ **So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another.”** And that is exactly what happened during Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem and the nation, right down to the cannibalism... ¹⁰ **And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. ¹¹ So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord.** They rejected him, and so chose judgment instead of grace...and as Zechariah broke the staff called “Favor,” the die was cast for the unbelieving Jews of that day...
- Having left the role of the True Shepherd, Zechariah acts out the role of the one who became Christ’s betrayer, Judas Iscariot... ¹² **Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. ¹³ Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. ¹⁴ Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. No doubt you all recall this story from **Matthew 27.3-5**... ³ **Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the****

elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

- The prophecy was fulfilled just as it was given...and **Exodus 21.32** tells us the reason for the price of exactly thirty pieces of silver... ³² **If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.** The King of Israel, their Savior, the very Son of God Himself, was valued by the Jewish religious leaders at the price of a dead slave...
- The rejection is complete as the staff of Union is broken, effectively dissolving the nation and sentencing the Jews to be dispersed throughout the Gentile nations...¹⁴ **Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.**

The Raising Up of the Foolish Shepherd

- Now, as the play progresses, Zechariah takes on the third and final role: the foolish shepherd...

¹⁵ Then the Lord said to me, “Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶ For behold, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs.

¹⁷ “Woe to my worthless shepherd,

who deserts the flock!

May the sword strike his arm

and his right eye!

Let his arm be wholly withered,

his right eye utterly blinded!”

- So far we've seen the rejection of Israel's True Shepherd in 30 AD, which resulted in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ; promised judgment of Israel which was fulfilled in 70 AD; and now we are introduced to a third shepherd over Israel: a foolish shepherd...
- The Hebrew word translated "foolish" here is a single-use word in the OT...it means devoid of wisdom or good sense or judgment, but in related words there is an element of insolence or ungodliness, and even wickedness...**Psalm 14.1** illustrates...**The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.**
- And what is the "equipment" of a foolish shepherd? Certainly not the normal shepherd's staff, used to care for the sheep...some have suggested a metal club to beat or even kill the sheep...but in truth, we don't specifically know...
- So who is Zechariah playing in this role of a foolish shepherd? What shepherd – representing a caregiver, leader, even king – would treat Israel in this way?
- Daniel tells us in **Daniel 9.27**...he speaks of one called the "little horn" and "the prince who is to come"...this world leader will make a covenant with Israel for seven years, then at the halfway point, break the covenant and begin to slaughter the Jews...this can be none other than the one the NT calls the "antichrist"...
- So back to our timing: the Messiah is publicly proclaimed as Israel's True Shepherd in on Palm Sunday in about 30 AD...he is received by only the "poor of the flock," the believing remnant of the nation but is rejected by the Jewish religious leaders and most of the people, and is killed on a Roman cross...because of this rejection, God brings great judgment on the nation in 70 AD as the Roman Empire crushes Israel, sending the Jews into a long period of dispersion throughout the Gentile nations...now, between verse 14 and verse 15, the timeline jumps from 30 AD to the tribulation period, almost 2,000 years so far, for eventually, in the final days, Israel will, unbelievably, receive a different Shepherd, a False

Shepherd, and establish a covenant with him, which he will betray, triggering an unprecedented slaughter of the Jewish people...

- We see the content of Zechariah 11 also given in **Daniel 9.24-27**, as Gabriel explains to Daniel...all three passages in this chapter are mentioned in Daniel 9...the rejection of Christ as the True Shepherd of Israel, the destruction of the capital and the nation by the “people of the prince who is to come,” and the reception of the False Shepherd by the people of Israel, even to the point of cutting a covenant with him...I encourage you to carefully read that chapter...the judgment of this world leader is recorded in **Revelation 19.19-21**...
- There is obviously more here than I have time to address, but we are sure of this: the foolish shepherd of Zechariah is also the “little horn” of Daniel, and the Beast of Revelation...the apostle John calls him “the antichrist,” Satan’s counterfeit savior who will lead the world astray and exercise dominion over the earth...
- How will he relate to Israel? Verse 16 tells us of the way he will treat God’s people, Israel, and by extension, all those who remain faithful to God...all these descriptions are the exact opposite of the care of the True Shepherd...
 - **He does not care for those being destroyed**...in fact, he himself is the destroyer...
 - **He does not seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy**...those who need his help are abandoned...even those who need no special care, the healthy ones, are denied pasture and water...
 - **He devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs**...his actions are worse than neglect...he consumes the fat ones, even picking at their hoofs...
- This describes the devastation and destruction of Israel in the Tribulation period at the hands of the antichrist...but God’s judgment of this man is coming...

¹⁷ “**Woe to my worthless shepherd,**

who deserts the flock!

May the sword strike his arm

and his right eye!

Let his arm be wholly withered,

his right eye utterly blinded!”

- God pronounces a curse on this worthless shepherd...while it's possible the language about his arm and right eye could be literal, it seems more likely that the point is the complete destruction of his incredible power, symbolized by the arm, and his intelligence, symbolized by his right eye...he will be entirely crushed and ultimately judged severely by the Lord...

Application

- There is much here that we can learn and apply...
 - God is patient, but even His patience will finally come to an end
 - Remain faithful, like Zechariah, to the Lord and His word
 - Persistent sin will eventually result in divine judgment
 - Study God's word, and seek God's plans and purposes