

Lesson 8

The Shepherd Prophecies

Zechariah 11 contains three distinct messages. Each uses something familiar in Old Testament Israel—the work of shepherds—to set forth its message.

The Shepherds and Cedars of Lebanon

Read Zechariah 11:1–3. Because of the importance of shepherds in Old Testament times, the kings and other leaders of a nation might be called its shepherds. The shepherds of 11:1–3 are the leaders of Lebanon, a nation renowned for its majestic cedar trees.

73. How is the judgment of God upon Lebanon for its unbelief depicted in verses 1–3? What is the reaction of its leaders to this judgment?

74. In what ways can we apply the message of these verses to our own time?

Zechariah Portrays a Shepherd

Read Zechariah 11:4–14. Here we learn how God directed the prophet to take on the role of a shepherd and to carry out certain actions, which foretell certain truths about the suffering and death of Christ.

75. For what sort of “sheep” is Zechariah to serve as a shepherd? How does this point us to the work of Christ (Luke 19:10)?

In Zechariah 11:5–6 we read about God’s judgment on Israel. The people are being judged for following false shepherds, that is, false spiritual leaders. Because the people have followed those who led them into a false faith, the Lord has abandoned them to the consequences of their unbelief. If any reject the Word of God, their punishment might be having God’s Word taken away from them altogether (Amos 8:11). Nevertheless, as we see in the verses that follow, God never abandons His promises of salvation.

76. Zechariah acquires two shepherd's staffs for his work of tending the sheep. What symbolic names does he give them (v. 7)?

77. To what truths about the work of Christ do these two staffs point (Ephesians 2:8–9; 4:3–6)?

Zechariah 11:8 shows us that the prophet's work as a shepherd went unappreciated. Note how this points to the same thing being true of the ministry of Jesus (Luke 13:34–35). Because this work, which came from God, was rejected, the result was judgment from God (Zechariah 11:9).

78. Verses 10 and 11 show the form that judgment from God took. What would the breaking of the prophet's first staff, *Favor* (v. 10), have symbolized? What sort of impact did this action have on the sheep traders, who had opposed the prophet in his work (v. 11)?

Covenant (11:10) is one of the important words and concepts in the Scriptures. God's covenant was His promise that the Israelites, because He had brought them out of Egypt, would be His people, and He, in turn, would be their God (Leviticus 26:9, 12–13). By rejecting God's prophet who brought God's own Word, these sheep traders had rejected and forfeited the blessing of being God's covenant people.

79. Jesus' ministry involved fulfilling God's promise of making a new covenant. The new covenant would supersede the covenant made in connection with the exodus, and it would be established through God's gift of the forgiveness of sins (Jeremiah 31:31–34). How is the truth that Jesus accomplished God's new covenant brought out in 1 Corinthians 11:25? How is this set forth in Hebrews 9:15?

80. What does 2 Corinthians 3:4–6 contribute to our understanding of how the benefits of the new covenant come to us personally?

Zechariah was paid for the work he had done (Zechariah 11:12–13). Since thirty pieces of silver was the payment price for a slave (Exodus 21:32), this payment was a pittance, totally inadequate as pay for the shepherding work the prophet had done. For this reason Zechariah sarcastically calls it "the lordly price at which I was priced by them" (Zechariah 11:13). Since the work of potters was considered somewhat lower class and dirty work, it appears that

“throwing something to the potter” was a way of expressing disdain and showing that the thing had no real value.

81. Read Matthew 27:3–10. Note that the prophecy of Zechariah 11:13 is said to be fulfilled by this episode. What, therefore, does this say about the value of the money Judas received and the regard in which Jesus (and His work) was held by others, such as Judas, the chief priests, and the elders?

We note that Matthew states that the prophecy fulfilled was a prophecy given by Jeremiah rather than Zechariah. Jeremiah also has prophecies regarding “the potter,” namely, Jeremiah 18–19. Matthew intends to indicate that the purchase of the potter’s field with the thirty pieces of silver was the fulfillment of Jeremiah 18–19 as well as of Zechariah 11; he cites the prophecy as coming from Jeremiah because he was a more prominent prophet than Zechariah.

82. Compare verse 14 with verse 10. What is the similarity? What is the significance of the order, “Favor” then “Union” (see, for example, Ephesians 2:13–14)?

83. How is Zechariah 11:4–14 a call to repentance and reflection? What are some of the other truths that we can glean from this prophetic episode?

A Worthless Shepherd

84. Read Zechariah 11:15–17. What sort of shepherd does the prophet depict by this bit of role-playing? How is the message of this episode similar to that of Acts 20:28–30?

85. What do these passages say about the importance of following true spiritual leaders, those who speak to us the true Word of God in all its fullness and certainty?

In Closing

- In your prayer, include a confession of sin and words of thanksgiving to God for His forgiveness in Christ.
- As an alternative closing, your group may wish to participate in a corporate form of confession and forgiveness. The hymnal will have several forms for this, one of which may be appropriate for your group.
- Reread Zechariah 11 sometime during the coming week.
- In preparation for the next session, read Zechariah 12:1–13:6.