

Lesson 19

Last week we looked at verses 6-9 of Chapter 11. Why did we cover only four verses? One reason was that we took some time to review the history of the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in AD 70, and we saw that Rome was not really the one behind that event. Instead, Zechariah tells us that God was judging Jerusalem in that event, as Daniel also tells us, and as Jesus tells us in Matthew 24. Another reason we covered only four verses is that we looked at verse 8, which some say is the most difficult verse in the Bible.

When we ended we were looking at a second group of sheep. The first group were the poor of the flock, which we saw were the faithful remnant for whom God would continue to provide protection. This second group are the unfaithful sheep, and verse 10 will continue describing how they and their leaders were cut off.

Zechariah 11:10-11

10 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. 11 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.

Zechariah's action lesson continues in verse 10. He takes one of the two staves, the one that he earlier named Beauty, and he cuts it into pieces to represent the breaking of God's covenant with the people.

That old covenant had always been conditioned on the people's faithfulness to God, and their complete lack of faithfulness was evident now that they had crucified their promised Messiah. That old covenant was no more. It had been replaced by something better.

Hebrews 8:13 - In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

The Old Testament days of second chances for the Jews were over. Why? Well, why had they been given all of those second chances over the years? Why had their repeated acts of faithlessness not already led to their total and final rejection by God? Why had God done so much to preserve a faithful remnant among them? God had done that so that he could fulfill his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would bless the world through Abraham's seed. That prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. God no longer needed to preserve a faithful remnant of the Jews to bring that promise about -

that promise had come, and, sadly, when it came most of the Jews rejected it.

Verse 11 focuses our time frame down to a single day - the day on which that old covenant was broken by God. What day was that?

Colossians 2:14 - Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

Hebrews 9:16-17 - For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

The day in verse 11 is the day Jesus died on the cross. It was on that day that the old covenant was broken - broken by God in replacing it with the new covenant and broken by the people when they crucified their long promised Messiah.

And where on that day were the poor of the sheep who were waiting upon God? Some of them were gathered around the foot of that cross, but very soon they would all be turning the world upside down. Why? Verse 11 tells us. Because the events on that day and on the days that followed would let them know that it was all done by the word of the Lord. The faithful sheep were viewing these events through the eyes of faith. And soon they would see their resurrected Messiah.

Also, later in AD 70, the faithful sheep who had listened to Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24 would be able to flee the city in time and not be killed by the famine or by the Roman invasion. That escape may also be in view here in verse 11, although the verse is focused on the day of the crucifixion.

How do we know for sure that this prophecy is focused on the death of Christ? If we stopped reading at verse 11, then I think we would have enough evidence to be very confident of that conclusion, but the next few verses raise that confidence level to absolute certainty.

And throughout this chapter we have been wondering *why* these judgments from God were happening to those who were once the faithful people of God. Why was the covenant broken by God? Verses 12 and 13 will conclusively answer that question. The people had made a choice, and they were now suffering the consequences of that choice. They had been given a wonderful opportunity, and they had turned their back on it. What was that choice? What was that opportunity?

Zechariah 11:12-13

12 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. 13 And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.

The book of Zechariah is full of remarkable prophecies, but perhaps none is more remarkable than this one. We see its fulfillment in Matthew 26 and 27.

Matthew 26:14-16 - Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 27:3-10 - Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Before we discuss verses 12-13 in detail, let's first consider a difficulty from the prophecy we just read in Matthew 27. Notice again the final two verses:

Matthew 27:9-10 - Then was fulfilled that which was **spoken by Jeremy the prophet**, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

Those verses from Matthew 27 seem to attribute the quote about the thirty pieces of silver to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah. How do we explain that?

One possible explanation, and my favorite explanation, is to note that Matthew 27 mentions the field as well as the 30 pieces of silver. Zechariah 11:12-13 does not mention the field at all. So perhaps

Matthew 27 alluded to Jeremiah with regard to the field, and if so it was probably to Jeremiah 19.

Jeremiah 19:11 - And shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.

The mention of only one source when the allusion is to two sources would not be unique to Matthew. Mark 1:2-3 refers first to Malachi, then to Isaiah, but Mark ascribes both prophecies to "Isaiah," the major prophet. Jeremiah likewise may have just been given precedence over Zechariah in Matthew 27.

Another possibility has to do with how scrolls were often referenced. The rabbis often referred to a collection of books by the name of the first book in the collection. In the Jewish Tanakh, the prophetic books were in a different order than in our Bible, even though they are all there. The first listed book in the collection of the Prophets was Jeremiah, not Isaiah. Thus, a citation of Jeremiah could be used to refer to a quotation from Zechariah in the scroll of the prophets.

Another possibility is that Jeremiah and Zechariah both made this same prophecy, but only Zechariah wrote it down. Jesus in Matthew 27 would then be telling us that Jeremiah spoke this same prophecy. This would be similar to Jude's citation to what Enoch said in Jude 14 (which was later written down in the non-canonical book of Enoch). Note that Matthew 27 does not say that the prophecy was *written* by Jeremiah, but rather that it was *spoken* by Jeremiah.

Now let's turn back to verses 12-13 in Zechariah 11. Why is this particular prophecy in Zechariah so amazing? Because it was given over five hundred years prior to Christ's betrayal - and it gives the exact amount paid by the chief priests to Jesus' betrayer!

Zechariah, it seems, is performing these actions as part of the action lesson that he is teaching to the people in this chapter. In verse 12, Zechariah, acting as the good shepherd, asks the flock to give him his wages. Here is how the ESV translates that verse: "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them."

Here was the people's opportunity to show their gratitude to God for all that he had done for them. Here was the time for the people to choose - would they follow God or would they not?

What did they owe the good shepherd? That was the question. What was the response?

The flock responds to the good shepherd by weighing out thirty pieces of silver. What was the significance of that amount? It was the price of a slave.

Exodus 21:32 - 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.

That was all the good shepherd was worth to them. Their response is full of mockery and ingratitude. In Zechariah's day this was just an act performed by Zechariah and intended to teach the people a lesson, but in Jesus' day it was no act.

When Jesus came to this earth and asked the people to pay him his due, they responded with a literal thirty pieces of silver, which they paid, not to Jesus, but to Jesus' betrayer. And what was Jesus' due? To what was Jesus entitled?

Revelation 5:12 - Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

But that is not what Jesus received from most of his flock. Instead, they offered Jesus mockery, ingratitude, suffering, and death. "And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (Matthew 21:39). That is what they offered the good shepherd.

And the good shepherd's response to their offer? We see that in verse 13. He rejects their offer, and he rejects them. He refers to their offer with sarcasm as "a goodly price that I was prized at of them," and he orders it to be cast unto the potter. Here is how the ESV translates that verse: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter' - the lordly price at which I was priced by them." Again, we have a remarkable prophecy because Matthew 27 tells us that the actual thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas was later used to buy a potter's field.

But why was the money thrown to a potter? What does that mean? Some suggest that the phrase "throw it to the potter" was a proverbial expression, something like the modern idiom "throw it to the dogs." But there is not much evidence for that view.

Another view is that since the potters were artisans who worked within the temple area ("in the house of the LORD," as verse 13 says), that means they worked under the oversight of the religious leaders. Thus, throwing the money to the potters was in effect throwing the money back toward the religious leaders. But that view doesn't explain why the potters were singled out.

I think the best explanation is that the reference here to a potter is intended to draw the reader's attention back to Jeremiah 19, which we read earlier.

Jeremiah 19:11 - Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again.

With that verse in mind, casting the thirty pieces of silver to the potter in the house of the Lord would be a symbolic action foretelling the impending destruction of Jerusalem. Because of their rejection and betrayal of Christ, Jerusalem would be broken as one breaks a potter's vessel. That view fits very well with the context of Zechariah 11, and perhaps provides the best explanation for why Matthew 27:9 refers to Jeremiah rather than to Zechariah.

Zechariah 11:14

14 Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Zechariah's action lesson continues in verse 14. He now cuts up the the staff, the one that he had earlier named Bands, and he says that it depicts a break in the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

We first saw that staff named Bands back in verse 7, where it depicted the bands that were holding together the people of God. The people in view here are no longer the people of God, which means that those bands are no longer needed or provided.

In our historical review of the destruction of Jerusalem, we saw how internal strife and civil wars killed more people than did the Romans. The people turned on each other, and that is what is being shown here by the breaking of this staff named Bands.

But why was their former unity described as the brotherhood between Judah and Israel? That language is a vivid reminder of the great disunity that occurred after the death of Solomon when the kingdom was split into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. That split led to great apostasy and idolatry, to the eventual destruction of the northern tribes, and to the eventual exile of the southern tribes.

That split after Solomon was very bad, but the splits that would occur here would be much worse. These splits would lead to the destruction of the city and to the death or enslavement of the people.

And worse, this destruction would be God's final word on the subject.

Matthew 21:43 - Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

With the cutting up of these two staves, the history of Jerusalem as the city of God and the history of the Jews as the chosen people of God came to an end. That breaking occurred at the cross, and the final sentence against them and their city was carried out in AD 70 as Jesus had foretold in Matthew 24, and as Daniel and Zechariah had also foretold.

Before, when the people had fallen away and had been punished, God would send them comfort. Will that happen here? No. Instead, God will send them a foolish shepherd in place of the good shepherd they rejected.

In Matthew 23:38, Jesus told Jerusalem, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." What we are about to see in the closing verses of Chapter 11 is the complete finality of that utter desolation.

Zechariah 11:15-16

15 And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. 16 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.

Before we identify this foolish shepherd, who will also be acted out by Zechariah as part of his teaching actions, let's ask a question - what has led up to this point? Why would God raise up a foolish shepherd?

The prophetic events in these closing verses in Chapter 11 can all be traced back to a specific event in the life of Christ. We often say that the unbelieving Jews rejected Christ as their King - and that is certainly true. But - and this is the key point - the Jews did not reject the idea that they were ruled by a king. They simply rejected the idea that Jesus was their king. How do we know that?

John 19:15 - But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, **We have no king but Caesar.**

Only six words in English, but what an incredible and unbelievable statement to have ever come from the mouths of those who were once the people of God, and who thought they remained so as they made that statement! **"We have no king but Caesar!"**

- Remember the crowns that Zechariah placed on the head of Joshua the high priest in Chapter 6? These people did not.
- Remember the promise to David in Psalm 89:36? "His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me." These people did not.
- Remember the promise in Jeremiah 33:17? "David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel." These people did not.
- Remember the great Messianic prophecy in Psalm 45:6? "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." These people did not.

Instead what we hear from these people is the statement, "We have no king but Caesar."

Did you ever stop to think about how awful that statement must have sounded to God? One of those Caesars would be the "man of sin" prophesied in Daniel and in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. **What that means is that these chief priests were choosing the son of perdition over the son of God!**

So where are we? We are faced with a people who want Caesar as their king rather than Jesus. And, as God so often does, God is about to give them exactly what they want. And often that is the worst punishment of all - when God gives someone exactly what he asks for!

In verse 15, Zechariah is told to take up the instruments of a foolish shepherd. These instruments would include the rod and the staff as well as other items typically carried by a shepherd. We are not told exactly how Zechariah would use these items to show himself as a foolish shepherd.

Verse 16 says that God would raise up this foolish shepherd in the land. That the foolish shepherd is raised "in the land" suggests he would rule over a larger area than just Jerusalem, or what remained of Jerusalem.

Verse 16 also tells us what the foolish shepherd would do and what he would not do. In short, the foolish shepherd would do the opposite of what a wise shepherd would do in caring for his sheep.

- Instead of comforting those who were cut off, the foolish shepherd would not even visit them.
- Instead of seeking those sheep that are the most vulnerable and the most endangered, the foolish shepherd would not seek the young one.
- Instead of healing those sheep that had been injured, the foolish shepherd would not heal those that were broken.
- Instead of feeding the sheep, the foolish shepherd would not even feed those that were standing still, which were the easiest to feed.
- Instead of caring for the sheep, the foolish shepherd would feed himself on the sheep.
- Instead of leading them to green pastures, the foolish shepherd would lead them over places so rough that their hooves would be broken.

In short, this foolish shepherd would care nothing for the sheep, but would seek only to use the sheep for his own advantage.

Who is the foolish shepherd? We can approach that question in two ways. We could ask, who was the leader who ruled that area at and after the destruction of Jerusalem? Or we could ask, who was the leader that the Jews chose over the good shepherd? Both questions have the same answer - Caesar.

The Roman Caesar when Jerusalem fell and for a decade afterward was Vespasian. He is the foolish shepherd, possibly along with his two sons, Titus and Domitian. Titus stayed behind and destroyed the city after Vespasian left for Rome, and Titus later became emperor after his father died. His brother, Domitian, became emperor after Titus died. Together they were known as the Flavian Dynasty, named after Vespasian's grandfather, Titus Flavius Petro.

Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian - I believe that either Vespasian alone or more likely those three together are the foolish shepherd of Zechariah 11. The time frame fits, and the description fits.

Although the Jews may have thought they had no king but Caesar, Caesar cared nothing for them. In fact, two of these three emperors were directly responsible for destroying Jerusalem. The third, Domitian, persecuted the Jews as he did the Christians, and he built the Arch of Titus (which stands to this day) to celebrate the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of his brother.

The key point is this: the unbelieving Jews chose Caesar the foolish shepherd over Christ the good shepherd, and so God gave them what they wanted. And the result? Caesar destroyed their city and killed or enslaved them.

So what happened to that foolish shepherd?

Zechariah 11:17

17 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.

The KJV uses the phrase "idol shepherd." (For those listening, note that it is *idol* shepherd rather than *idle* shepherd.) Other translations have "worthless shepherd."

Why does the KJV use the word "idol"? Because the Hebrew word used there (which does mean "worthless") is most often used in the Old Testament to describe idols and false gods. This shepherd is worthless in the same way that an idol or a false god is worthless.

This description here in verse 17 is a big clue that we are on the right track in identifying this foolish and worthless shepherd with Caesar. Domitian minted coins in which he described himself as the son of god, in reference to his father Vespasian. This (I believe) is how the Apostle Paul described Domitian.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 - Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

These Caesars were false gods, and they demanded worship, which set themselves up as idols. They were, as verse 17 describes them, idol shepherds.

And verse 17 says that this foolish and worthless shepherd would suffer along with those he persecuted. Yes, this foolish shepherd was carrying out a judgment determined by God, but that did not mean this foolish shepherd would not be punished for the evil he had done to them.

In fact, as Paul explains in Romans 9-11, the Jews were in the same boat. God used their rejection of Christ to bless the entire world, but that did not mean the Jews would not be punished for that

rejection. Also, as we see the book of Revelation, this punishment of Caesar was also due to Rome's persecution of the *church* as well as the destruction of Jerusalem.

What is the punishment against Caesar? "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." In short, he and his two sons would die.

The arm and right eye in verse 17 are likely the two sons of Vespasian. Suetonius tells us that Vespasian died of diarrhea in AD 79. Suetonius also says that Titus died of natural causes in AD 81, but most suspect he was poisoned by his loving brother Domitian. Allegedly, Titus' last words were, "I have made but one mistake" - and most likely that one mistake was not killing Domitian before Domitian killed him! Domitian died in AD 96, stabbed to death by his court officials.

Domitian thought he was a god, but Domitian was neither a god nor a son of a god. He was instead the son of a foolish and worthless shepherd, and he and his dynasty came to a brutal end in AD 96, just as Zechariah 11:17 had foretold 600 years earlier.

And, with that, Chapter 11 comes to an end. After the frightening and devastating message of Chapter 11, what do the people need to hear next? Comfort! And that is what the next chapters provide for the faithful people of God.

Chapter 12

Chapters 12-14 are some of the most difficult chapters in the entire Bible. There are many different interpretations, and I have tried to find the one (or the ones!) that makes the most sense in the context and time frame of these chapters and makes the most sense in the context of the entire Bible - but my view is certainly not the only possibility.

While we very often can be dogmatic about what these verses are **not** saying (premillennialism, for example), we cannot always be dogmatic about what they are saying - often there are several possibilities, none of which violates other Scriptures.

We can avoid some common traps by taking what I believe is a very common sense approach to these difficult chapters. I do not believe that God would isolate and bury an important doctrine about the new covenant in these obscure chapters. If we are ever tempted to reach a conclusion about the gospel from these chapters, and if that conclusion is found nowhere else in the Bible, then I believe

we should be very hesitant to reach such a conclusion.

These chapters were intended to give the people of Zechariah's day a glimpse of what was coming prior to its full and complete revelation. That full revelation has now occurred and is now available to us in the New Testament. These chapters are a glimpse of what we find in the New Testament.

If what we think we see here in these difficult chapters some truth about the New Testament that is found nowhere in the New Testament, then almost certainly we are not viewing these chapters correctly. These chapters are a glimpse of the New Testament, and so whatever we see here should be seen more fully and clearly in the New Testament. That important guideline will help us not go astray in our interpretation.

Zechariah 12:1

1 The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Chapter 12 begins a new section in the book of Zechariah, and what some may be glad to know is the final section of the book!

We know from the opening words that we are in a new section of the book, "the burden of the word of the Lord," which is the same phrase that we saw in the opening verse of Chapter 9. As we said in Chapter 9, the word "burden" here just means "divine utterance." This is a message from God directed to a specific object, which in this case is "Israel."

The major issue in interpreting this section is to determine what is meant here by Israel. Is it literal, physical Israel? If so, when? In AD 70? At the end of the world? Some other time? Or is it figurative, spiritual Israel? If so, what group corresponds to spiritual Israel, and when?

We just looked at some verses that were directed to physical Israel, and so it might seem natural to conclude the same about these verses (as many do). But there is an immediate problem with that - the previous section brought God's interactions with physical Israel to an end. They rejected his son, and so, as Jesus told us, the kingdom was taken from them and given to another. And then the king they wanted in place of Christ, Caesar, came and destroyed their city. Their house was left desolate. Nothing in Chapters 9-11 suggests in any way that they will be provided another opportunity.

And let's look at that question from another direction. Why would anyone expect to see physical Israel provided another opportunity unique to themselves? Their Messiah has come, and he has established his eternal kingdom. In that kingdom, "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). The Jews have an opportunity in the present age, but it is not an opportunity unique to them as we saw so often in the Old Testament. Instead, their opportunity is everyone's opportunity - to hear and obey the gospel of Christ.

And for all of the premillennial preachers and commentators out there, one important threshold question remains unanswered by them - **why?** Why would God need a special plan for the Jews in the end times? And what would such a special plan apart from the gospel say about the sufficiency of the gospel? And how could we ever reconcile such a plan with Paul's clear statement that there is no difference between Jew and Greek in the church?

God promised Abraham that he would bless the entire world through his seed, and that happened when Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, came into this world. God had promised that his new kingdom would be universal; we have seen that promise many times in Zechariah. Why would God back up? Why would God, having created a universal kingdom in which Jew and Greek are one, back up and again create a special plan just for the Jews?

The unbelieving Jews rejected the mission of Christ; in all kindness, I must ask - how are premillennialists any different? Doesn't premillennialism also reject the mission of Christ when the premillennialists come up with another plan apart from the gospel?

Mark 16:15-16 - Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Does that apply to the Jews or not? Does "every creature" include everyone or not? Premillennialists say no, but the Bible says otherwise.

Physical Israel is not being discussed in this section. Instead, physical Israel was dealt with in the previous section. This section instead turns to spiritual Israel, and it provides a message of comfort and hope to those who must have been very disturbed by reading the fate of physical Israel in the previous chapters.

#Zechariah