

Zechariah 11:1-17 – The Good Shepherd

Borrowing from Mark J. Boda's outline, chapter 9 involved the return of God, the king and the people. Both chapters 9 and 10 speak of God defeating the enemies of his people. Chapter 10 spoke of strengthening Judah and bringing back the northern tribes of Israel. Chapter 11 is another challenging passage which deals with good and bad leaders.

Read Zechariah 11:1-3.

The big question for chapter 11 is whether it primarily describes past, present or future events. I say "primarily" because, as we have seen, there is sometimes a present meaning which also looks to the future. Lebanon was known for its great cedar trees. They were used in the building of the first temple. Bashan was known for its great oaks. Verses 1-3 deal with God's judgment. What did the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan represent? Shepherds could represent Israel's / Judah's leaders or they could represent foreign leaders. For lions, see Jeremiah 50:17. (11:1-3)

Read Zechariah 11:4-14.

Now things get really interesting. This passage is referred to as a sign act. We already saw a sign act in 6:9-15 where Zechariah was told to put a crown on Joshua the high priest's head and then put the crown in the temple. In verse 4, ESV and NIV have "[become] shepherd [of] the flock". KJV has "feed the flock". NASB splits the difference and has "pasture the flock". What did God tell Zechariah to do? (11:4)

What three groups are found in verse 5? What was true of each of these groups? Contrast this with how a good shepherd would treat his sheep? (11:5)

In verse 6, what did God say he would do to the inhabitants of the land? Mark J. Boda believes that this passage primarily concerns the end of Zerubbabel's leadership. Anthony R. Patterson believes this passage is primarily about the past events leading up to and including the exile. Others see this passage as primarily dealing with the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Do you think verse 6, relative to Zechariah, was talking about past, present or future events? (11:6)

In verse 7, what did Zechariah say that he did? There are generally three ways to understand what Zechariah did. Either he literally became a shepherd of sheep, he took a leadership role (shepherd = leader), or he took on the appearance of a shepherd and literally had two staves. Which do you think is the best interpretation? Or do you think there is another way to understand this sign act? What were the names of his two staves? (11:7)

In verse 8, what was meant by “I destroyed the three shepherds”? KJV has “cut off” instead of destroyed. NASB has “did away with” while NIV has “got rid of”. There is little information given to try to definitively determine who these three shepherds were. Who was Zechariah impatient with? Who detested Zechariah? Was it the sheep or the three shepherds? (11:8)

In verse 9, Zechariah said that he would no longer be the sheep’s shepherd. What did Zechariah say should happen to the sheep? In verse 10, what did he do with his staff named “Favor”? What did the breaking of the staff signify? Which covenant was annulled / broken? In verse 11, ESV has “the sheep traders”. KJV has “poor of the flock”. NASB has “afflicted of the flock”. NIV has “oppressed of the flock”. The same phrase appeared in verse 7. How did this group react when they saw Zechariah break the staff? (11:9-11)

In verse 12, Zechariah asked to be paid for the time he was shepherd, if they were willing to pay him. The “you/they” are either the sheep traders (ESV) or the afflicted of the flock (KJV, NASB, NIV). What wages did they give Zechariah? In verse 13, what did God tell Zechariah to do with the money? Where is this verse quoted in the New Testament? (11:12-13)

In verse 14, Zechariah broke the staff named “Union”. What did the breaking of this staff signify? (11:14)

Read Zechariah 11:15-17.

In verse 15, what did God tell Zechariah to do? This is the second sign act of the chapter. We are not told what the equipment was. (11:15)

In verse 16, how would the foolish shepherd treat his sheep in contrast to how a good shepherd would treat his sheep? (11:16)

In verse 17, what was God’s judgment on the worthless shepherd? Who was/is this worthless shepherd? (11:17)