

CHAPTER XL

A PARABLE OF SHEPHERDS

RUIN OF HOSTILE POWERS . . . Zechariah 11:1-3

RV . . . Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. Wail, O fir-tree, for the cedar is fallen, because the goodly ones are destroyed: wail, O ye oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest is come down. A voice of the wailing of the shepherds! for their glory is destroyed: a voice of the roaring of young lions! for the pride of the Jordan is laid waste.

LXX . . . Open thy doors, O Libanus, and let the fire devour thy cedars. Let the pine howl, because the cedar has fallen; for the mighty men have been greatly afflicted: howl, ye oaks of the land of Basan; for the thickly planted forest has been torn down. There is a voice of the shepherds mourning; for their greatness is brought low: a voice of roaring lions; for the pride of Jordan is brought down.

COMMENTS

It has been suggested that these verses alluding to Bashan and Lebanon describe an invasion of Israel. Bearing in mind the context (uninterrupted in the original text by a chapter heading or number) this seems very unlikely. It is more likely a threat of destruction against the enemies of Judah, particularly since great forests are used occasionally to symbolize military power (cp. *Isaiah 10:34*). The *shepherds* of verse three are the leaders of these hostile powers. *Devouring fire* (v. 1), symbol of irremediable destruction, is to come swiftly upon those powers whose rulers would then *howl* in despair like the lions driven out of the jungle along the Jordan.

The entire passage (10:3-11:3) is designed to point up the difference between the Jewish nation and its Gentile neighbors, especially those who have historically oppressed the Jews. It looks forward to the day when the shoe will be on the other foot. This could only happen when the Jews, both northern and southern, were returned to their homelands and established as an independent state.

FAITHFUL AND FOOLISH SHEPHERDS . . . Zechariah 11:4-17

RV . . . Thus said Jehovah my God: Feed the flock of slaughter; whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be Jehovah, for I am rich; and their own

shepherds pity them not. For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith Jehovah; but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbor's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them. So I fed the flock of slaughter, verily the poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock. And I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul also loathed me. Then said I, I will not feed you: that which dieth, let it die; and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let them that are left eat every one the flesh of another. And I took my staff Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples. And it was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that gave heed unto me knew that it was the word of Jehovah. And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my hire; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver. And Jehovah said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, the goodly price that I was prized at by them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of Jehovah. Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. And Jehovah said unto me, Take unto thee yet again the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, who will not visit those that are cut off, neither will seek those that are scattered, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat sheep, and will tear their hoofs in pieces. Woe to the worthless 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.

LXX . . . Thus saith the Lord Almighty, Feed the sheep of the slaughter; which their possessors have slain, and have not repented; and they that sold them said, Blessed be the Lord; for we have become rich; and their shepherds have suffered no sorrow for them. Therefore I will no longer have mercy upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the Lord: but, behold, I will deliver up the men every one into the hand of his neighbour, and into the hand of his king; and they shall destroy the land, and I will not rescue out of their hand. And I will tend the flock of slaughter in the land of Chanaan: and I will take for myself two rods; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Line; and I will tend the flock. And I will cut off three shep-

herds in one month; and my soul shall grieve over them, for their souls cried out against me. And I said, I will not tend you: that which dies, let it die; and that which falls off, let it fall off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of his neighbor. And I will take my beautiful staff, and cast it away, that I may break my covenant which I made with all the people. And it shall be broken in that day; and the Chananites, the sheep that are kept for me, shall know that it is the word of the Lord. And I will say to them, If it be good in your eyes, give me my price, or refuse it. And they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, Drop them into the furnace, and I will see if it is good metal, as I was proved for their sakes. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them into the furnace in the house of the Lord. And I cast away my second rod, even Line, that I might break the possession between Juda and Israel. And the Lord said to me, Take yet to thee shepherd's implements belonging to an unskilful shepherd. For, behold, I will raise up a shepherd against the land: he shall not visit that which is perishing, and he shall not seek that which is scattered, and he shall not heal that which is bruised, nor guide that which is whole: but he shall devour the flesh of the choice ones, and shall dislocate the joints of their necks. Alas for the vain shepherds that have forsaken the sheep! the sword shall be upon the arms of such a one, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be completely withered, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

COMMENTS

Between the time Zechariah and the establishment of the Jewish people as described in the last section, there was to be another period during which they will feel the wrath of Jehovah. The time of the fulfillment of this prediction is fixed beyond question by the verses twelve and thirteen. The verses are applied very literally to the betrayal of Jesus in *Matthew* 26:5, 27:9-10. Therefore, the prediction of the passage must have to do with the "hardening in part" (*Romans* 11:25) which caused Him to take the kingdom from the Jews and give it to the church. "A nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." (*Matthew* 21:33-43)

The prediction is presented allegorically. The nation is the flock, the Messiah is the faithful Shepherd. Because of their stubbornness, the Shepherd turns from them as they sell Him for thirty pieces of silver. The key is verse ten in which Jehovah severs His covenant relationship with the nation.

(Verses 4-5) As we turn to a detailed examination of the passage, we are immediately confronted with a strange command given by Jehovah to the prophet, "Feed the flock of slaughter." The term "flock of slaughter" is what gives the command a strange ring. We will find it again in verse seven.

The Jews, during the Roman period, were like sheep, bought and sold by their *shepherds*, *ie.* rulers who not only used the people for their own aggrandizement, but actually thanked God for their evilly procured riches and power. They felt no guilt for using the people to accomplish their own ends.

It would be difficult to imagine a more vivid description of the Herods, and the temple priests who served in their puppet government of the Jews.

With the people at the mercy of such leadership, the prophet is called upon to feed the flock as one exposed for slaughter.

(Verse 6) The consequence of the leadership of the Herods and the self-seeking priests of his day was that described here. It became a time for riots, for the guerilla warfare of the Zealots, for false Messiahs and finally anarchy which brought the legions of Rome down upon them in a fury. God delivered them into the hand of the king (emperor) who did indeed smite the land. And, as He warns here, God did not intervene.

When the armies of Titus marched against Jerusalem in a campaign which ended on September 7, 70 A.D., it was the last of a chain of events which included a call by the Sanhedrin to the Roman procurator, Florus, and the puppet king, Herod Agrippa II, for military aid. The tumult in Judea grew into anarchy as a result of the Jews' refusal to accept Roman occupation. Conditions worsened, despite frequent changes of procurators by imperial appointment.

The Jews broke up into factions at all social, religious and economic levels. Even the appointment of high priests brought riot.

Rome's answer to such conditions in occupied lands was unchanging . . . the swift decisive use of the *Makaira* . . . the short sword.

The death of Festus in 62 A.D. left the power of Judean government in the hands of Annas the high priest. His calling of a clandestine session of the Sanhedrin at which James, the just, and other leading Christians were condemned, alienated whatever Gentile sympathy may have survived to this point.

At the same time, Herod's temple, which had been under construction for decades was completed, throwing hundreds of workers into unemployment.

Shortly thereafter, Albinus arrived to succeed Festus as procurator. Unable to control the Zealots, he was replaced in 64 A.D. by Gessius Florus.

Gessius was a true Roman, relying on brute force. He was greeted by riots in Caesarea of such proportion that hundreds of Jews fled the land never to return.

In 66 A.D. Gessius raided the temple treasury to make up a 40 talent deficit in the tribute demanded annually by Rome. The result was near revolution, averted only by a speech in which Agrippa convinced the Jews that such action would bring about the final utter destruction of the Jewish nation by Rome. (*Acts 12:21-23*)

Shortly thereafter, Agrippa left Jerusalem. During his absence the revolutionary forces again threatened war. Realizing the inevitable consequences of this threatened action, the Sanhedrin sent for military assistance.

In late summer of 66 A.D. Galles left Antioch for Jerusalem with 44,000 battle-hardened legionnaires. He arrived in September, having been delayed by a revolt in Galilee, long a breeding ground for the Zealot Sicari.

By this time, the revolutionaries controlled Jerusalem and Galles was unable to breach the walls.

The rebels not only stood firm, but routed the Romans, killing 6,000 of them as they retreated to Caesarea.

In response to this defeat of Roman force, Nero reacted by sending his greatest general Titus Flavius Vespasian to restore order in Palestine.

Titus arrived in Galilee, re-establishing Roman control there, and went into winter quarters with fifty thousand troops.

Meanwhile, the Jews who had succeeded in holding Jerusalem against Galles, began to fight among themselves and anarchy again gripped the city. Such was the state of affairs when Titus lay siege from Mount Scopus in the summer of 68 A.D.

A brief respite came to the Jews upon the death of Nero in June of 68 A.D. and the period of turmoil in which three emperors in quick succession were overthrown in Rome. This led the army of Titus Vespasian to decide to place their general on the imperial throne. To accomplish this it was necessary to settle matters quickly in Jerusalem.

Titus gave Jerusalem a chance to surrender. When his offer was refused, the bloodbath began. By July 5 the tower of Antonia, in the northwest corner of the temple area, was occupied by Legionnaires. The carnage in the temple itself, where the revolutionaries fought to the

last man, was the worst to that time in Jewish history. Over a million Jews died in the siege by the time the last Sicari committed suicide at Massada.

As emperor, Titus Vespasian, issued a decree that the Jewish religion should be ended for all time. The priesthood and Sanhedrin were abolished, the temple tax was now paid to the shrine of Jupiter. A colony of Roman veterans was settled near the ruins of the demolished capital of Judaism.

But it was not finally over. In 131 A.D., one Bar Cocheba, with the endorsement of the leading rabbi, Akiba, was accepted by the Jews as Messiah. The result was a desperate religious war which ended when Vespasian's successor, Hadrian, utterly flattened the city of Jerusalem and caused it to be ploughed as a field.

Upon the sight Hadrian erected Colonia Aelia Capitolina, a colony dedicated to Jupiter capitolinus. It was the end of the Jewish state until 1948. It was the last time the Jews would control the temple site until June, 1967.

(Verse 7) In response to Jehovah's command, the prophet fed the flock destined for slaughter. "*The poor of the flock*" here is more accurately "*the most miserable of sheep.*" (Re: marginal rendering in the Standard Edition)

In this verse the prophet's role blends forward into that of the Messiah. As was done by real shepherds, he took two staffs. They are named *grace* and *binders*, or unity. (*Beauty* here in the English version expresses graciousness rather than physical beauty. *Bands* is an attempt to render for smooth reading a word which means binders.)

The first of the staffs, *grace*, represents the divine favor of Jehovah in guaranteeing to protect the Jews against outside forces. The second symbolizes the unity which was to prevail between the tribes of Joseph and Judah following the return from exile.

(Verse 8) The response to the shepherding of the post-exilic prophets on the part of the Jews was such that "*their soul loathed me.*" It was seen ultimately in the rejection of Him Who presented Himself to them as "the Good Shepherd." (cp. *John 10:11*) There can be little doubt that Jesus had these verses in mind when He called Himself the Good Shepherd.

Verse nine, in which the prophet states his intention not to feed the flock, but rather to let it die, brings to mind two key New Testament passages. One in which Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of her historic failure to heed the prophets (*Luke 13:33-35*) and the other one in which He predicted the destruction of the city (*Luke 21:5-6*).

The cannibalism described here was fulfilled literally when, during the final days of the siege of Titus, those who held out in the temple area ate the bodies of their fallen comrades.

(Verses 10-11) The symbolic breaking of the staff of grace (beauty) has significance which cannot be overstated. It is cut asunder "*That I might break my covenant.*" The Jews came into being as a people because of the covenant. Their national identity was established in the Law given upon their agreement to keep the covenant. (cf. *Exodus 19:5-9*) Generation after generation, century upon century, they had failed to do so.

God's patience was mistaken as slackness by this stiffnecked people. We saw how they refused to believe the warnings of the pre-exilic prophets on the ground that Jehovah would not so treat His people. Punished by the destruction of the northern kingdom and the captivity of the southern, they refused to rebuild His temple after their release.

In the intervening years, between the return from Babylon and the coming of Jesus, their concern turned completely from the covenant intended to bless all races of people to fanatic nationalism. The promised Seed of Abraham became, to them, a warrior . . . a revolutionist who would make them masters of the world. When He refused such a kingdom, they convicted Him of trumped-up charges and nailed Him, by the hands of lawless men, (*Acts 2:23*) to a cross. *From this time forward the fulfillment of the covenant and the fate of the Jew per se are two entirely separate matters.*

A covenant is always conditional. The failure of one party frees the other from the terms of the covenant. In all justice, God could have terminated His relationship to the Jews many times in the Old Testament period. When the time finally came that He did take the kingdom from them, only the remnant saw the justice of it.

The poor of the flock, the remnant *that gave heed* to the prophets knew the termination of the covenant with the Jews was according to the word of Jehovah.

(Verses 12-14) The final act of unfaithfulness came when the Good Shepherd appealed to the Jews for His hire, *ie.* for that which was rightly His in payment for all He had done for them. Even without the covenant, indeed if it had never existed in the first place, His care, protection and even His chastisement of the Jewish people above the other races of the world should have entitled Him to their immediate acceptance and undying allegiance.

Instead they betrayed Him, and sold Him for the price of an injured slave. Thirty pieces of silver (about \$25) was the amount fixed by the law in compensation for the injury of another's slave. (cf. *Exodus* 21:32)

It is no coincidence that this prophecy was fulfilled by one whose chief concern was the establishment of Israel as the ruling world empire. Judas had followed Jesus for three years in the full expectation that He would indeed prove to be another Judas Maccabee, that He would not only free the Jews from Roman rule but establish them as the greatest and final world power. When he saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem on an ass instead of a war horse to the shouts of children instead of the cheers of an army, when he heard Jesus foretell the destruction of the city which, in Jewish ambition, was to become the capital of the Messianic world, it was too much. He bartered his revenge for the price of an injured slave. (cf. *Matthew* 26:5, 27:9-10)

The accuracy of Zechariah's prophecy is seen in the minute fulfillment of it in the detailed disposal of the money paid Judas. Verse thirteen says it was "cast unto the potter." *Matthew* 27:9 quotes the prophecy of *Jeremiah* 18:2, 19:2,11, 32:6-9 in recording that the money returned by Judas prior to his suicide was used to purchase a potters field. *Acts* 1:18-19 mentions this fact also.

Following the crucifixion, and the consequent destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and Hadrian, (see above on verse six), the Jews were scattered throughout the world. The unity which had prevailed following their return from exile was thus broken, an historic event predicted symbolically in verse fourteen by the breaking of the second staff called Bands or unity. The result was a nearly nineteen century postponement of the fulfillment of the promises made in Zechariah, chapter ten.

(Verses 15-17) G. A. Smith is quoted by Professor J. E. McFadyen as saying, concerning the crucifixion of Jesus, "The guilty sacrifice the innocent, but in this execute their own doom. That is the summary of the history of Israel." The message of *Zechariah* 11:15-17 could scarcely be better paraphrased.

Following the crucifixion, as we have seen (see above on 11:6) the nation of the Jews became a political football in the hands of the Herods and a series of inept Roman procurators. These, personified here as the foolish shepherd, presided over the final dissolution of the nation into anarchy and final obliteration.

The foolish shepherd may well have been personified in Bar Cocheba and his ill-fated attempt at revolt against Hadrian. The futility of his military activity is well described here in verse seventeen.

Chapter XL—Questions

A Parable of Shepherds

1. Discuss the symbolism of the forests in 11:1-3.
2. Of what is fire symbolic in verse one?
3. The entire passage (10:3-11:3) is designed to point up the difference between _____ and _____.
4. Between the time of Zechariah and the establishment of the Jewish people as described in chapter ten, there was to be _____.
5. *Zechariah* 11:12-13 is applied literally to _____ in *Matthew* 26:5, 27:9-10.
6. Explain the allegory of the flock and the shepherd in this passage.
7. Why does God promise to sever His covenant relationship to the Jews?
8. What is meant by "flock of slaughter?"
9. What is described in verse six?
10. Review the events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and 135 A.C.
11. Who was Bar Cocheba?
12. What is the symbolism of the two staffs?
13. Who fulfills the picture of the good shepherd in this passage? (Compare *John* 10:11)
14. Why, in verse nine, does the shepherd decide to let the flock die rather than feed it?
15. What was symbolized in the breaking of the two staffs?
16. God's patience was mistaken by the Jews as _____.
17. In the intervening years between the Babylonian exile and the coming of Jesus, the concern of the Jews turned completely from _____ to _____.
18. A covenant is always _____.
19. The final act of unfaithfulness came when _____.
20. Instead of paying him his due, the people _____ him and sold him.
21. What is the significance of the thirty pieces of silver?
22. How does the disposal of the blood money by Judas demonstrate the accuracy of Zechariah's prediction?
23. What happened to the Jewish people immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem in 135 A.D.?