

Cedars, Shepherds, and Silver

Part III of The First Burden of Zechariah

- ¹ Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars!
- ² Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled!
- ³ The 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!
- ⁴ Thus said the LORD my God: "Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.
- ⁵ Those 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."¹
- ⁶ For 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."²

¹ "Their own shepherds" refers to the leaders of the Jews as spoken by those who are not Jews ("their"). That means the people buys and selling here are Gentiles (i.e. the nations. See Nehemiah 13:16, "Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself!"

² "For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the earth—oracle of the LORD.—Yes, I will deliver them into each other's power, or into the power of their kings; they will crush the earth, and I will not deliver it out of their power" (NAB).

- 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.³
- 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.
- 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.
- 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!"

³ The LXX uses a word for "peoples" here that is only used for Gentiles.

Silent Mimes

STEVEN WRIGHT SAYS THAT BEFORE HE WAS A COMEDIAN that he had a job as an interpreter for bad mimes. “He’s in a box. He can’t get out.” One day, he played a blank tape at full blast. It drove the mime who lived next door nuts. Then he went to over to the mime’s house and shot him with a silencer. It is easy to make fun of mimes. They can’t argue back. But sometimes, the prophets of God, became just like mimes as they silently acted out the prophecies that came to them in their meetings with the Word of the LORD.

These are called “sign-acts” and are common among the prophets. But perhaps you have never heard of them. One professor describes them as, “The prophet ... mak[ing] a type of non-verbal communication where, in a more dramatic way, he is actually going to act out the

message.”⁴ He does not act on his own, but at the command of God. The message is usually “read” loud and clear by those watching.

Though there are others, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the immediate predecessors of Zechariah, used them often. On one occasion, Jeremiah **buried his loin cloth** in a cleft of a rock by the Euphrates river as a way of conveying the broken covenant between God and Judah. He then undug it. But by then it had become completely worthless and ruined (**Jer 13:1ff**). On another occasion, Jeremiah is told to go and **buy back a field** that was the property of his cousin Hanamel (**32:7ff**). He was to do this just before the Babylonian came into the land and sent them all away into exile. The point was to convey to the people that one day, God would buy them back and bring them back to their own land, though he had punished them for a little while.

Perhaps my favorite sign-act in the Bible is also one of the most bizarre. Ezekiel is told to take a brick and write the name “Jerusalem” on it. He is then to play army-man with it, laying siege works and ramps and little catapults all

⁴ Gary Yates, “Jeremiah, Lecture 17: Prophetic Sign Acts,” (2013): 2, https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/digitalcourses/Yates_Jeremiah/Jeremiah_Yates_Text/Yates_Jeremiah_Lecture_17_PropheticSignActs.pdf, last accessed 9-16-2015.

around it. Then he is to take an iron griddle, a frying pan, and place it between himself and the city and there remain in a horizontal position laying on his left side for 390 days, one day for each year of punishment. After that, he is to turn over and lay down again, this time for 40 days, again one for each year. After this, he is to rise up and bake a barley cake in front of the whole people, cooking it over human dung. The prophet protests, so God relents and lets him cook it over cow dung instead (**Ezek 4**). The point is that the people will eat the “**bread of anxiety and dismay**” at the coming punishment from the LORD who is going to lay siege to Jerusalem. These guys were—colorful characters—to say the least. And it is no wonder that the people treated them the way Steven Wright likes to treat mimes, especially when they do things like this or run around naked for three years to prove some prophetic point (**Isa 20:3**).

The bulk of the passage today contains **three sign-acts** that Zechariah performs (**Zech 4:4-16**). **First**, he is to become shepherd of a flock doomed to be slaughtered by sheep traders (**Zech 11:4**). Not exactly a very wise investment, but better, I suppose, than having to take a

prostitute as a wife like poor old Hosea had to do. The scene plays itself out with the prophet taking up two symbolic staffs, like Ezekiel did in a similar sign-act (**Ezek 37:16-17**). The then dispenses of three other their evil shepherds who were helping him. But then he gives up on the sheep, breaking one of his staffs (“Favor”) in half, and gives the sheep up for slaughter.

After giving the sheep up, the prophet collects his wages and his **second act** commanded by the LORD is to throw the sum of money at the potter, who happened to be in the temple of the LORD (**13**). He then breaks his final staff (Union) in a complete reversal of Ezekiel’s sign-act (where the prophet had taken two sticks and made them one, the two sticks being the Northern and Southern nations of Israel). Zechariah’s breaking of the staff symbolizes that Israel will again be given over by God.

After this, **third and finally**, he is commanded to take up again the staff of a shepherd as a sign that some other shepherd is coming in the near future. This Shepherd will be a wicked man and will bring the people back into ruin and exile. All of this takes place without direct words. It

was merely actions and the people watching his bizarre behavior (11).

Three Sign Acts of Zechariah 11

The first sign-act (11:4–12, 14)

exhortation (4–5)

explanation (6)

execution (7–12, 14)

second sign-act (11:13)

exhortation (13a)

execution (13b).

The third sign-act (15–16)

exhortation (v 15)

explanation (v 16)

On either end of this long section of the chapter, you have two poems. The last is a single verse and it basically summarizes this “worthless shepherd” and says that God will punish him for his treatment of the sheep. At the front end is a three verse poem that talks about trees, shepherds, and lions. This poem also talks about God’s vengeance upon wicked rulers and sets the stage for the sign acts.

It is also worth noting where this passage falls in the overall structure of Zechariah. **The center of the book** was like the center hinge of a door, and the book turns on this hinge. That hinge was about Messiah, and he was called “the Branch.” A branch, of course, is a piece of wood, and this is a theme that is all over the first poem in our passage: cedars, cypresses, trees, oaks, a forest, and a thicket. On either side of this center hinge you have the visions and the burdens (which we are in now). These each have their own center hinges. The center of the visions was the fourth vision (**Zech 3:1-10**). It was also about the Messiah as represented by the clothing of the priest-king Joshua (who was himself not a king). Meredith Kline explains how the sign-acts in our chapter function the same way, as the prophet Zechariah is now taking upon himself the role of a king and a priest as he leads and intercedes for the sheep he purchases. Thus, it should not surprise you to hear that our passage is the center piece of the burdens and makes the third of the three hinges of this amazing little book. Based on the other two hinges, do you think you can guess what this one is pointing you to?

I want to do three things in the rest of this sermon. 1. We need to identify the immediate audience of these poems and signs. Who are they? What is being said to or about them? 3. I want to consider the “covenant” that is made in vs. 10. I don’t think people have given enough consideration to this passage in covenant theology. 3. I want to look at how this entire chapter points forward from Zechariah’s day into the age of Messiah that would soon dawn upon the world.

Sheep and Shepherds

Sheep

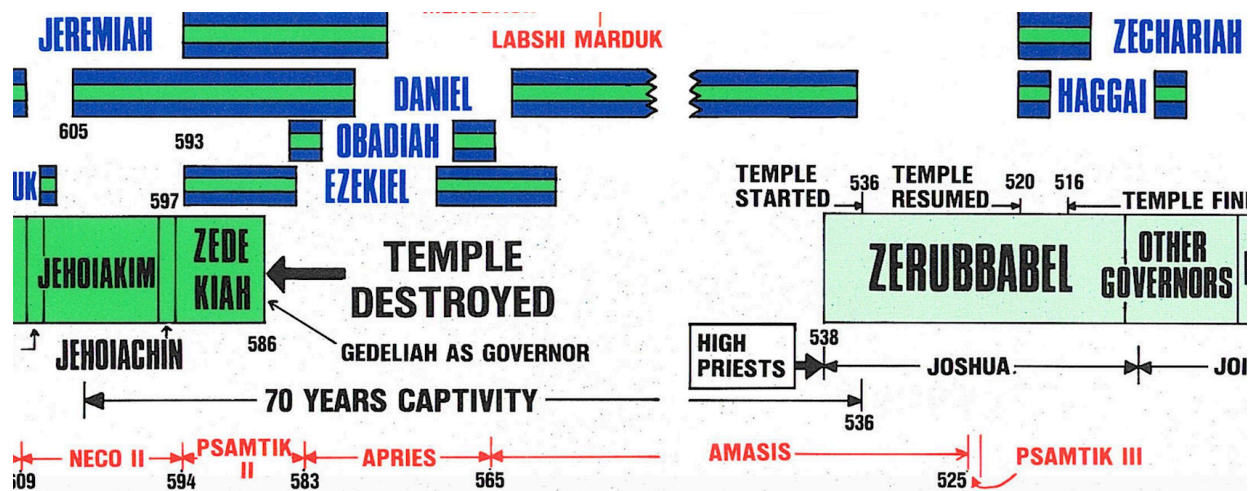
Given that Zechariah is a prophet to the Jewish people, it makes sense that his own people are partial recipients of this blessings and curses of this chapter. So where are the Jews here? While they may partly be in the first poem (as partial members of the club called “shepherds,” we will talk about shepherds later), they really appear as a group as [the sheep](#) or the flock doomed to slaughter ([Zech 11:4](#)). Now, this is strange language, given that we are in a time when the people have just come back from exile, back from the land of no return, back from being doomed and sent away to slaughter into Babylon. Yet, for some reason, the

LORD is telling Zechariah that the people are doomed to slaughter ... again!

Why? “Those 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” (5). There are three groups of people here: sheep (Jews), shepherds (?), and buyers/sellers (?). Who are these last two groups? First we need to figure out who the shepherds are.

Shepherds

The term was used in the previous chapter (10:2-3) of people who wander for lack of a shepherd. There, the idea was that God was their shepherd, but they had turned away from God to gods, and demons, and dead ancestors, as false prophets lead them into supernatural adultery. These false prophets along with the priests of Israel are the shepherds of Israel. Ezekiel 34, a passage that is very much in Zechariah’s mind throughout this chapter, speaks like this, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel” (vs. 2). Ezekiel prophesied during the reign of only one king (Zedekiah), and he was most likely long gone. So these shepherds do not refer to the kings of Israel here.



However, the term “shepherd” is very often used for **kings**. David as Shepherd-King is used often in the Bible. But Gentiles are also called shepherds. The LORD “**says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’**” (**Isa 44:28**). Outside of the Bible, shepherds were used by intertestamental Jews to perhaps refers to the **heavenly sons of God** as well. 1 Enoch talks about “**seventy shepherds**” (**1 En 89:58ff**). While it is possible that this could refer to the Sanhedrin,⁵ it is equally as possible that it refers to the heavenly seventy.⁶

⁵ Heiser takes the view that these are human shepherds. Michael Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature.” A Dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004: 230.

⁶ “That the seventy shepherds are angels has been disputed, mainly because they are described in terms that the Bible attributes to human leaders called “shepherds” (see Excursus: The Biblical Sources of the Idea of the Negligent Shepherds). Their heavenly nature seems certain, however. In the imagery of this apocalypse, all identifiable human beings in the historical survey are symbolized as animals.” George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A*

Cedars and Other “Trees”

Both the Gentile and heavenly rulers ideas are important for the first three verses of our chapter, which we will look at briefly now. Seemingly otherwise out of place, this poem connects the previous chapter with this one by telling **Lebanon** to open its doors (**Zech 11:1**). He had just mentioned both **Lebanon** and **Assyria** just a couple verses earlier (**10:10**). Lebanon and Assyria are both **Gentile** lands.

There is direct allusion here to Jeremiah, as Zechariah knows his Bible well (who knows, he may have even known both Jeremiah and Ezekiel personally). Here is the language: “**Wail, you shepherds, and cry out, and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come, and you shall fall like a choice vessel ... A voice-- the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock! For the LORD is laying waste their pasture**” (**Jer 25:34, 36**). Ezekiel 34 is also very similar.

Zechariah then talks about the famous **trees of Lebanon** (made famous by David and Solomon who worked with **Hiram king of Tyre** to help make the temple; **2 Sam 5:11**;

Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 390.

1 Kgs 7:13). It lists many different tree types of that beautiful region: cedars, cypresses, oaks, forests, and thickets.⁷ The thing is, both Isaiah and Ezekiel talk about the cedars of Lebanon in prophecies (Isa 2:13-18; 14:8ff; Ezek 31:2ff). These prophecies each have in mind two levels of prophetic recipients: a human king and a heavenly ruling counterpart—i.e. the sons of God, the seventy.

These human kings are all Gentiles (Babylon, Egypt, Assyria). They are who I want to focus on. When we think about Jerusalem of old, where Zechariah is clearly acting out his silent play, most of us probably think that the only people here were Jews. It is just natural to think that way. And thus, we would think that the recipients would be Jews. But, of course, it isn't at all true. In fact, in Zechariah's day, Jerusalem was the property of the Persians. Therefore, the shepherds spoken of by Zechariah, while including Jewish priests and false prophets, and perhaps also including the heavenly rulers, must certainly include the Gentile rulers who actually have control over

⁷ The word for a "thicket" reminds us of the trees, but can also be translated as "pride," which in English gives a great double-entendre on the "lions" that are also mentioned in this poem.

the people at this time. In fact, I believe they are the main audience in the first three verses.⁸

Buyers/Sellers

So what about the buyers and sellers of vs. 5? Going back to Jerusalem, consider the following very relevant verse from Nehemiah, a contemporary of Zechariah. “Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself!” (Neh 13:16). Tyre-Lebanon. Selling-buying/selling. Gentiles in Jerusalem. This is what Zechariah is talking about. They are watching him too. Therefore, my conclusion is that the buyers and sellers spoken of by Zechariah, while including Jews, again refer primarily to the Gentiles.

With this in mind, let’s think about vv. 5-10. As we have seen, these verses have the sheep, the shepherds, and the buyers/sellers. The sheep are the Jews, the others are mostly Gentiles with perhaps a few Jewish leaders mixed in too. What happens is that the shepherds take the flock of sheep to buyers and sellers for slaughter. This is like when the Babylonian trounced into Jerusalem uninvited and took

⁸ This is the view of Mark Boda in his NIVAC commentary.

the city, killing many of the people inside and looting the temple treasuries. What a terribly ominous beginning to a sign act this is! And what a warning it conveys to us even today.

In doing this they say, “Blessed be the LORD (I take this sarcastically or, if Jews, hypocritically), I have become rich.” War is big money. So is religion, and many evil people are lured in by the riches that can be had through both as the expense of other people. Beware of war-mongers and religious hucksters, of which there are far too many in both camps in our land today. Because you know who gets hurt by them? Not them!

Then it says, “their own shepherds have no pity on them” (5). “Their” is ambiguous, but I think it refers to the buyers and sellers mocking the Jewish shepherds (“their” shepherds, not “our shepherds,” “their leaders,” not “our leaders”) for not caring about their flock, either in times of war or in peace. The poor people are merely sheep lead around to the slaughter by greedy and evil shepherds, not unlike the majority of citizens in every nation of any age who are subject to the disinformation, power-plays,

political machinations, and lust for money of the ruling elite (but I digress).

This Gentile focus continues in the next verse, I believe. The ESV reads quite Jewish and Israel centered: “[this land](#),” “[his king](#),” “[the land](#),” etc. But listen to this translation from the New American Bible: “[For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the earth—oracle of the LORD.—Yes, I will deliver them into each other’s power, or into the power of their kings; they will crush the earth, and I will not deliver it out of their power.](#)” This is a very natural way to translate the verse, if it is talking about a group larger than Israel, which is certainly is, but which for some reason a lot of people miss as they just default to “the prophet is talking to the shepherds of Israel” view (probably getting it from Ezek 34, but Zechariah is not just ripping off Ezekiel, he has his own purposes in mind).

The point here is that God is going to punish wicked shepherds for what they have done to his people. This is a lot like Isaiah 10 which says, “[Ah, Assyria \(note the Gentiles\) the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation \[Israel\] I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take](#)

spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is in his heart to destroy ... When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes ... the Lord GOD of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire. The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away. The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down” (Isa 10:5-7, 12, 16, 18-19).

Sign Acts and the Messiah

It is into this that the sign-acts begins. “So I became the shepherd of the flock” (7). Zechariah has to buy a flock of sheep that were to be killed for food. Hopefully he isn’t a pet lover. Or is that the point of the sign? Then he “took two staffs, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. And tended the sheep.” This is **personification**. John

Mellencamp wrote a song that reminds me of this (especially what happens to the staffs later in the chapter):

He was born on the fourth day of July
So his parents called him Independence Day
He married a girl named Justice who gave birth
To a son called Nation
Then she walked away
Independence he would daydream and he'd pretend
That someday him and Justice and Nation would get together
again
But Justice held up in a shotgun shack
And she wouldn't let nobody in
So a Nation cried

The staffs are to be used upon the sheep when they get out of line. But these staffs are the rods of comfort for the sheep, for Israel. At this point they show God's favor towards his recently reunited people: northern and southern kingdoms together again for the first time in hundreds of years.

After this, the prophet “**destroys the three shepherds**” (**Zech 11:8**). Apparently, it was a large flock of sheep, and

he had other shepherds to help him. But three of those shepherds were wicked. So over the course of the month, he got rid of them (literally “cut them off”). The point is, these three shepherds represented some people in the future. **We will consider those shortly.**

But the real turn of events, at least as far as the sheep go begin in the second half of **vs. 8**. So far, things haven’t been going too badly. They were doomed to die, so the prophet of God buys them and it appears that perhaps he will save them, because God’s favor is upon them. “**But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me. 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 I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples” (8-10).**

Covenant with All Peoples

This section introduces us to **the future Messiah** as well as to some covenant. Let’s consider the latter first. We need to think about **Ezekiel 37** here.⁹ In this chapter, Ezekiel is told to take up two sticks and put them together, thereby

⁹ This chapter is very similar to **Ezek 34**, where the prophet calls the leaders shepherds and then makes a covenant of peace with them through the coming Shepherd David (**vs. 24-25**).

making one stick (**vs. 20**). This symbolizes the union between Israel and Judah. He then says, “**I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them**” (**26**). This refers to the new covenant, because it is a Messianic prophecy. “**My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd**” (**24**).

Some commentaries, seeing the establishing of a covenant through the union of two sticks, and the breaking of a covenant through the soon be be destruction of two sticks by Zechariah, seem to make a connection that both prophets have the same covenant in mind.¹⁰ But this can't be the case, since the covenant in Ezekiel is the new covenant and this covenant is the final covenant cut in the blood of Christ. That covenant is made with all peoples, not just Jews. Others offer that it could be talking about the covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David, and that God is annulling them.¹¹ That also isn't right. Most

¹⁰ Cf. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 271.

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, vol. 23, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1992), 408.

seem to think this refers to some **unknown covenant** made recently between God and the Gentile nations.¹²

I have a name for this unknown covenant, but it wasn't made recently. What makes the most sense to me, and I haven't seen this in writing, is that this refers to the **covenant of works**. Like many commentators note, this refers to the Gentiles. We have already seen many reasons for this, and the language "**the covenant I have made with all peoples**" is the smoking gun. "Peoples" is a word that means Gentiles.¹³ Fulfilling their requirement, the covenant of works would certainly prohibit the nations from harming Israel (or any other nation) for their own greed and glory as Isaiah says the Assyrian did. But few want to go here, because the idea of a covenant of works made in the Garden of Eden before the fall just isn't a popular idea

¹² "The words are usually understood as meaning a covenant by which the Jews were protected from other nations." H. G. T. Mitchell, J. M. P. Smith, and J. A. Brewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912). I.E. David Kimchi, *Rabbi David Kimchi's Commentary upon the Prophecies of Zechariah*, trans. A. M'Caul (London: James Duncan, 1837), 124; C. Von Orelli, *The Twelve Minor Prophets: Commentary*, trans. J. S. Banks (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1893), 358; Kaiser, *ibid* (citing Job 5:23; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:18 as examples).

¹³ The LXX uses the word *laous*, the plural for of *laos*. As Kittel explains, the vast majority of the uses of the singular *laos* refer to the Jews. However, the plural, used hardly ever always refers to Gentiles (of the eight occurrences in the NT for example, it is always Gentiles). See Hermann Strathmann, "λαός," in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 4:-29-57.

these days. But I think it makes the most sense. And it is also quite relevant as we begin thinking about how all of this matters to us today.

Messianic Fulfillment

What it does is help us makes the most sense out of the way this chapter is fulfilled in NT prophecy, and as a result, how you benefit and should be greatly blessed by this chapter. Consider first what Zechariah does after he breaks the staff called Favor and annuls the covenant between God and man in terms of its blessings. “So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD” (Zech 11:11). An amazing display of God’s powerful prophecy through silent actions of the prophet. But you better not make fun of this mime.

“Then I said to them, ‘If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them’” (12). He opens his mouth. He is silent no longer. Unlike the buyers and sellers, Zechariah isn’t doing this for the money. He could care less about that stuff. But if they should happen to pay him ... he has something else in store for them. Another sign.

“And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver” (12).

“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him” (Matt 26:14-16). Since it doesn’t say anything about a fulfillment here in Matthew, a skeptical person might caulk it off as a coincidence. Fine, let’s keep reading.

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” (Zech 11:12-13). Now, no one really knows if thirty pieces of silver was a lot of money (a lordly price) or not very much at all, though most go with a lot of money. Perhaps because they saw that he was a prophet, they decided they had better not cheat him. But that isn’t the important part.

This is the second sign act of the chapter, and that is important because it means Zechariah is throwing the money at the command of Yahweh (the command of Jesus

himself)! Our LORD told him to throw the money to the potter. Then, it explains what Zechariah did, and this is also very important. “So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter” (13). Who is this potter?

Mark Boda explains, “The Hebrew word *hayyoser* is used for those who work with clay as well as metals (Isa 44:9, 10, 12; Hab 2:18).¹⁹ Most likely here it refers to the latter—that is, those responsible to smelt coins and precious metals for the temple.”¹⁴ Thus the LXX says, “... and cast them into the furnace in the house of the LORD.” Whatever they were doing here, it is the destination that is the most important thing: the temple. Really, the chapter of buyers and sellers and temple money reminds me of when Jesus went into the temple and drove out the money changers. Even as they were building the second temple, it had already become a den of robbers.

But let’s think about Matthew and the thirty pieces of silver again. “Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus

¹⁹ [Original note]: On the basis of these prophetic passages, Delcor and Baldwin argue that the silver will become an idol; M. Delcor, “Deux passages difficiles: Zach 12:11 et 11:13,” *VT* 3 (1953): 76–77; Baldwin, *Haggai*, 185.

¹⁴ Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 465.

was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers ... Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet ... saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel" (**Matt 27:3-7, 9**). This time he says it is fulfillment of the OT. You may have thought it was only the Potter's field that was fulfilled here, but no. It is the entire action from the thirty pieces, to throwing into the temple—meaning giving the money back to God—to the potter's field. It is a remarkable prophecy and they had no idea they were fulfilling it. For, do you really think these men, from Judas to the priests who had just crucified Jesus would ever want too be fulfilling a prophecy like this?

Yet, there it is. And I dare say this is only the first of many in this chapter. Indeed, when you consider that the LORD Jesus is focal point of the Judas betrayal, then suddenly, you realize that Zechariah is playing the part of Jesus. He is enacting the life of Christ before their eyes, at the command of the Lord who would one day incarnate in the womb of the virgin Himself. And people say that God doesn't know the future?

What does the Lord come to do? He comes to his sheep, the people of Israel. Jesus told them, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24). Notice, he calls them **sheep**. He comes to be their **shepherd**, their king (and their priest), in place of the Herods and Caesars and Alexanders and Ptolemys and Dariuses of the past and present. Then he protects the sheep from the evil shepherds, teaching them rightly, healing them, leading them. But then he knows that the Jews have forsaken him, so he curses the fig tree of Israel. For this, he is betrayed by Judas and killed by Israel and by Rome.

For this, the covenant with all men is utterly and truly broken. What is worse than killing the Lord himself? And yet it has to be, for in fact, the good news is that Jesus came

to save, and not merely to save Jews, but also many Gentiles. But if the former covenant is not broken and annulled on God's part, as if he sends the whole world away in a divorce, then he is not free to enter into a new covenant through Christ, a covenant that is for Jew first and also for Gentile. This does not mean, in my opinion, that the covenant of works is no longer there in any sense. People still try to live by its terms, and God would justly save anyone who keeps them. God will give to each man according to what he has done. But good luck with that. What we all do is sin, therefore he will give them trouble and distress for breaking the covenant.

Unless they turn to the mercies of Christ in the new covenant who has kept the terms of that covenant even when they were broken by us. And therefore, all men could now be saved by Christ if they were but willing. They are not willing, which is why they—and we—put him to death. But in his grace, God makes people willing through the proclamation of this Gospel by the Holy Spirit who calls them through it. For why? For he is showing Favor and bringing Union to all men now in Christ. Have you heard that call? Do you realize the mercy and grace

that is upon you this very moment in God allowing you to breathe even one more second?

The Worthless Shepherd

But friend, something terrible happens when you reject Christ. This something is also here at the end of Zechariah's prophecy and it concerns wicked shepherds. The **third sign**-act of this chapter has the LORD one more time telling Zechariah to do something. First, as a sign of judgment (for killing Christ), Zechariah **breaks his staff called union** (**Zech 11:14**). This annuls the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. This is directed at the sheep, not the shepherds. In other words, it creates division, it brings the sword between mother and son, brother and sister. Some follow Christ. Some do not. It is a sword of their own unfaithfulness.

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd’ (**15**). It sounds like maybe Zechariah will come once more to the sheep. But no. He is to take up the staff for a foolish shepherd, not for himself. “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” (16). God is going to put wicked shepherds over the fat sheep, those who are complacent, unfaithful, unbelieving.

Calvin sees the fulfillment of this in the church and (no shocker) in the wicked church of Rome, foolish shepherds over unhealthy sheep. I do not think he is wrong to view it this way. We could also think of many kinds of wicked shepherds that have come into the sheep pen in these last days to deceive and lead astray entire flocks of mindless woolly animals that are being lead to the slaughter and continue “bahhing” on their way, unaware of the disaster that awaits them. There are so many cults in our day that fit this bill, not to mention places that are called churches with evil shepherds that know nothing of biblical doctrine or the teaching of the Apostles. It is a terrible curse that God brings upon people when he does not give to the church Shepherds that care 1. About the truth and 2. About the sheep, the two tables of the law—loving God and his Word and loving the people whom he died for. Some have truth, not love. Others have compassion and no truth. But foolish shepherds are mindless of one or both. Woe to the churches who have over them such shepherds.

The **last verse** is the poem that summarizes this, and it does so in a single individual, who I think represents others that come after him. It is very much, in my mind, an Antichrist kind of verse. “**Woe to my worthless shepherd** (notice the singular), **who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye** (the instruments he needs to carry out his job)! **Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!**” (**Zech 11:17**).

The word “**worthless**” is a word closely associated with idols and demons, which is why I brought up the supernatural possibilities behind the seventy shepherds earlier. The word appeared in the last chapter when God was angry that Israel had no shepherd because the people were too busy consulting the dead, hearing of strange dreams, and diving truth from demons. This is a huge part of what false shepherds are all about. Their doctrine is demonic, though it disguises itself as truth. Their behavior is reprehensibly satanic, as they seek to cover it by deflecting the issue away from their actions.

I believe that the fulfillment of this found its greatest type in the destruction of Israel in 70 and the **Nero** was this shepherd. For after Jesus cursed the fig, the nation was left

to themselves, and then finally, to the Roman. Then, in 70 AD, the temple was again destroyed, the flock was scattered, people literally ate one another, as the text itself says. Nero did horrible things to Christians and Jews alike. But the Jews got the worst of his anger, as over 1,000,000 perished in Jerusalem alone.

But the Christians, remembering our Lord's teaching, fled to the mountains when they saw the armies of Rome, and many were spared. This is because God does not leave his sheep unattended by the Word or the word. Those who will listen to the voice of the Shepherd of the Church will be saved from such dreadful anger on the Day of the LORD when he carries out his final vengeance. Oh, we may not escape the final anger of Antichrist or of Satan who rages so fearfully against us. But we may be confident that there is a better covenant where Favor and Union are upon us in Christ. The Shepherd will not leave or forsake his sheep. He will call to them. They will hear his voice and he will lose none of those given to him by the Father.

But those who deal and trade in bribery and money laundering and turning the temple of the Lord into a den of robbers, who betray the Lord, mock his grace, spurn his

offer of rest, these will be handed over to worthless shepherds. And God save them from the coming delusion that will be so strong that if it were possible, even the elect would be deceived.