

Title: Woe!  
Text: Zechariah 11.1-17  
Theme: God's judgment on his people and their leaders  
Series: Zechariah #12  
Prop Stmt: A rebellious people invite destruction by rejecting good leaders and serving wicked ones.

As we get closer to November we can anticipate a great deal of hit pieces and mudslinging showing up in our mail. It takes pretty thick skin to run for an office, even if it is city council due to the amount of accusations that one is publicly exposed to. The result is that many good people do not run for office because they simply do not want to expose themselves or their families to all of that. Living in view of the public is hard, but when someone chooses to run for public office, there is a sense in which this exposure is part of the cost they have to count.

Some things in life come with the territory, as they say. Other things seem to hit "out of the blue." So, when you take on a responsibility that is known for being full of adversity, you do not generally wonder, why is this happening to you. However, when something happens, that you never saw coming, then you tend to wonder why and look for a reason or redemptive purpose in it. Sometimes you are able to see one. Now, if you are a follower of Christ, then you know that there is one, or several, or many, but that doesn't mean that you know what they are.

There is no evidence that Zechariah chose to become a prophet. He was born into the priestly tribe of Levi and was an OT priest. He was a priest and God called him to be a prophet. A priest, who was a prophet.... That gets our attention now because we know that everything in the OT points somehow or another to Christ. But, it was not as clear to them, especially when you were living it and Zechariah was living it. He was seeking to be faithful in the midst of a people who were, for the most part, unfaithful. He was speaking the word of God to people who, for the most part, did not want to listen. And now, now, God calls him to do something, not just say something. Often times, God called the OT prophets to do something dramatic, unusual, sometimes embarrassing or even shocking because what they were doing was the message. This was the case with Isaiah had to go around naked for 3 years, Jeremiah had to buy a worthless piece of property, Ezekiel had to cook his food over excrement, Jonah had to go on a short term missions trip to ISIS, and Hosea had to marry a prostitute. Some of the things that these guys did cause us to cringe 2,500 years later. Imagine if you were their momma's.

The same type of thing happens to Zechariah here in chapter 11. He is called to go and do something difficult because that would be the message. At that time, Zechariah had an idea of what the immediate purpose of the message was, but there was a purpose and a meaning far greater than he could ever imagine.

Read Text:

I've organized the sermon into three parts. 1) An overview: in which I will try to answer the question of, what is going on here? What is this text saying? Then 2) The Picture: in which I will try to answer the question of, what was the point? What did this mean to Zechariah and his audience? And finally, 3) The Take-aways: How does this apply?

Zechariah lived around 500 B.C. He was part of a group of Jews who returned from the 70-year exile in Babylon to the land of Judah which is now being called Israel, once more. After the destruction of the Babylonians and decades of neglect the city of Jerusalem; the Temple, the walls, and the surrounding countryside is in ruins. The Jews have returned to the land, but reality has set in. In order to get things back in order, there is a great deal of work that has to be done and there are many things working against them. Their land is under the control (taxation) of another empire. They do not have their own king. They need to rebuild their temple. They need to rebuild their economy.

The W.W.II generation, which is almost gone now, has been rightly called the greatest generation in our country's history because on the whole, they lived for something greater than themselves. They lived for the future. They sacrificed that others might have a better life. That is the difference between good leaders and bad ones. Good leaders live for something greater than themselves and are willing to sacrifice that others might have a better life. Bad leaders take whatever they can get now, and live as if they don't care what kind of a mess they leave for others to face after they are gone.

Zechariah was attempting to be a good leader in the midst of bad ones. The bad leaders are called false shepherds. Some of the false shepherds were in the positions of power in the world empires that ruled over Israel, some of them were in Israel and were exploiting their own people in order to get their best lives now. Zechariah's life and ministry placed him into direct conflict with the false shepherds who were in Israel and his life was a preview of an even greater conflict that would occur between the one true shepherd and the false ones 500 years later.

## **I. An overview (What's going on here?)**

This chapter breaks down into three clearly discernible sections: (name all 3)

### **A. The pronouncement of judgment on the false shepherds (1-3)**

Look at v.3. "The sound of the wail of the shepherds." These 3 verses are a song of lament that Zechariah sings in anticipation of the despair that the false shepherds will experience when they face the judgment of God for their sins. We all know people who think that they are a law unto themselves and can do whatever they want without consequences. Everyone will face God and those who have been given positions of responsibility who use that to abuse and intimidate those under their care will face a greater judgment. But, even though everyone will face God after death, there are some who get a taste of God's eternal wrath now. And these false shepherds, these leaders and rulers over Israel who lived as if they could do whatever they wanted are facing their demise and it is terrifying.

The leaders are likened unto mighty trees that are burned and chopped down, and impressive forests that are destroyed by fire so much that the lions are roaring as their home around them is destroyed. Mighty trees like cypress, cedars and oaks, as well as large and thick forests are images of imposing leaders who appear to be impossible to remove. In spite of how entrenched these leaders appear, how threatening and intimidating these men sound, they will wail and cry in despair. Their days are numbered.

### **B. The experience of Zechariah as a shepherd (4-14)**

This next section is fascinating. God commands Zechariah to become a shepherd because God is going to use Zechariah's experience as a shepherd to be an illustration of the message that he preaches. God chose Zechariah to preach and write to his people and now God is calling Zechariah to become an illustration in his own sermon. He says in v.4 to "*become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.*" Wow that does not sound like a real promising position does it? And it isn't. This job is like the epitome of dysfunction. Have you ever taken a job and once you got into it, you realized that this is a disaster. This is really bad. The owners and managers are atrocious and the workers are even worse. And you have absolutely no idea how this company has even survived.

I have a friend whose job was to go into companies that were in receivership, or similar states of crisis, and find out what was going on. Could it be turned around? Could anything be salvaged otherwise a lot of people are going to lose their jobs and this work is going to go out of the area or perhaps out of the country. He would walk into some of the most chaotic situations you ever imagined. Owners were fighting, managers were backstabbing one another and workers were miserable. Well that is what Zechariah is in. In this case, Zechariah knows that what he is doing is a picture somehow of God's relationship with his people because he brings two staves with him to the job. The one is called "Favor" and the other is called "Union." "Favor" speaks of God's favor on his people and "Union" speaks of the uniting of Judah and Israel. Zechariah is hoping that his nation would regain its former glory. He brings these two staves to his new job, but quickly finds out why they are called "doomed to slaughter."

For one, they have shepherds who buy them and slaughter them and never get punished for it. In other words, they treat the sheep however they want. There are other shepherds who sell the sheep and claim that God is blessing them because they are getting rich from it. But, even though for the moment, these shepherds may be making money; they are not blessed by God. God is becoming more and angrier with them because they don't care about the sheep. They have no pity on the sheep. And secondly, the sheep are awful. Even though they had bad shepherds, they hated Zechariah. The text says that they detested him. Zechariah steps into this mess and he ends up removing three of the shepherds because they were so bad. But, the sheep were not grateful and turned on him.

I have talked with police officers who have said that they hate getting calls about domestic abuse. They will go into a home where a guy has been abusing a girl; they have an altercation with him, which is always dangerous, end up arresting him, only to get

attacked by the girl. It's nuts. This is what Zechariah experiences. He takes out the bad shepherds and the sheep turn on him. So, Zechariah says, "That's it. I'm done." And he quits. They hated the one who could help them, so he leaves them to themselves. He's done. And in order to make his point clear, he takes the staff named "favor" and he breaks it, which was symbolic of God annulling the covenant that he had made with them. Zechariah says that they all knew what that meant.

He tells the men who hired him, the sheep traders, to pay him his wages if they wanted, but he was quitting. So, they paid him 30 measly pieces of silver. He was cheated. 30 pieces of silver is what someone paid for an injured slave. This flock had no respect of the love and care that Zechariah had, but that is the point. But, the sermon of his life was not done. God then told him to take the money and go to the Temple and throw it on the ground to the potter, which he did. Then he took the staff named "union" and he broke it.

### **C. The pronouncement of judgment on the flock and the false shepherd. (15-17)**

The last few verses are a two-fold pronouncement of judgment. Since the flock rejected a good shepherd, God is going to give them a shepherd they deserve. They are going to get a shepherd who is bent on destroying them. But he won't, at least not completely. The last verse is another song of lament about this worthless shepherd, because God is going to destroy him. That's the overview. What does it mean?

## **II. The Picture**

This chapter, in and of itself does not really have anything obviously hopeful in it, does it? I say obviously, because there are some hints of hope that I will point out. These hints are further developed in the next two chapters, but for the most part this chapter is full of some depressing news, because the condition in Israel was depressing. What we see here is a picture of the present life of Israel in Zechariah's day and the future life of Israel.

### **A. Of the present life of Israel**

Israel had suffered grievously at the hands of cruel leaders and that pattern was continuing. The Assyrians and Babylonians were hateful to them and things were not going to turn around. God gave them another "second chance" and they were reverting right back to what they had done before. In spite of returning to the land, and reconstructing the temple, their returning to the Lord did not last all that long. Oh there were some peaks of glory during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the last prophet, Malachi is full of warnings to the priests (false shepherds) and the people alike for their rebellion, arrogance and refusal to repent. When the empire of Alexander the Great was divided up between his 4 generals, Israel was once more, just another territory in a literal game of Risk. Situated between the Ptolemaic dynasty to the south (Egypt) and the Seleucid dynasty to the north (Assyria), Israel became the doormat between these two powers and suffered again and again. Because they rejected the true shepherds, they ended up being ruled by false ones and the result was a life of continual hardship. But,

this pattern pointed forward. Zechariah's message had an immediate and a future purpose.

## **B. Of the future life of Israel**

### a. Christ (Shepherd)

As you have no doubt picked up on, Zechariah is a Christ-figure here. When Christ came to his own, they were suffering under two layers of oppression: the Romans and their own government of the Sanhedrin. When Christ exposed the sins of the false shepherds (Pharisees) the Pharisees got the people to detest and reject Christ. It made no sense, but Zechariah foretold it. And even the price that he was paid (30 pieces of silver) was itself part of a prophecy of the money that Judas Iscariot was paid to turn on Christ. The price of 30 pieces of silver to get rid of Zechariah was the same paid to Judas Iscariot to get rid of Christ. Zechariah threw the money at the potter in the temple, and the money that Judas Iscariot threw back into the temple was used to buy the potter's field. So, the entire scene not only was a message for Israel during Zechariah's day, but it pointed forward to Christ. But there is more. The language of v.16 speaks of a false shepherd (singular) vs. plural as before. So, just as Zechariah's life points forward to Christ, I think this prophecy points forward to the antichrist, who is the ultimate false shepherd.

### b. Antichrist (Ultimate false shepherd) (15-17)

For most of her existence Israel has been hated. Unless you understand Ishmael and Isaac, you will never understand the heart of politics in the Mideast. Israel is vulnerable. She is an extremely small land mass surrounded by many hostile neighbors. My understanding of the end-times involves the emergence of a leader who the world looks to as the savior. His ascendancy to power will be formally marked by a covenant of peace that he is able to sign with Israel. The Jews, who refused to be married to Christ, will hop in bed with this guy. But this guy won't love them, care for them, or die for them. Instead, after earning their trust, he will turn on them and attempt to turn the entire world against them and finally and forever, destroy the nation of Israel. But, as the next 3 chapters lay-out, it will not work. God keeps his promises.

## **III. The Takeaways**

Here is what I want you to put in your take-home containers and put in the fridge this afternoon, and then throughout the week, take it out, nuke it in the microwave and chew on it some more, ok?

### **A. God's judgment is real, and so is his lament.**

God has the capacity to severely judge, yet deeply grieve all at the same time. God's capacity to lament and to be merciful is only understood to the degree that we understand and accept his capacity to judge. The personality and character of God is deep. We cannot fathom him fully, but we can fathom some and we should.

## **B. God uses our lives to illustrate his message.**

He did this with Zechariah and he will most likely use your life at some point to do the same. Do you remember the scene from Revelation 4 and 5, when angelic hosts and the redeemed are gathered around the throne and are crying, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”? He is worthy of our worship because of how perfectly excellent he is. He is worthy of glory because of how powerful and perfect his salvation is. Christ is worth my life. Christ is worth your life. Christ is worth losing your life for and sometimes when the most unexpected things happen, and you wonder, your faithfulness resonates longer and louder than ever.

A brand new biography about Eric Liddell has just been released. Why is that? Why are people still interested in a runner who ran in the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris? Sure, he won the 400 meters race, but how many other guys got gold medals 92 years ago that we are still talking about? Eric turned down fame and glory in order to serve as a missionary in China. He faced grueling and life threatening situations time and time again. The result of his “sacrifice” was he was arrested by the Japanese and died in one of their camps. His final words were, “It’s complete surrender.” To the world, his life was a waste. To Eric, it was gain, all gain. When you win a gold medal and thump your chest, the world is neither amazed nor stunned. When you win a gold medal and point to heaven in gratitude, even then, they are not amazed. When you die in isolation at 43 years of age for the sake of Christ, with joy, people notice.

## **C. You are following the True Shepherd or a false one.**

Christ came to this earth in order to live the life that you could not live and die the death that you could not die. He calls you to lay down your life, pick up his cross and follow him. In other words, he calls you to repent of your sin, trust in him alone as your Savior and follow him as your King. There is no middle ground with him. He demands full surrender. Most people are unwilling to do that. They like some of the benefits of following Christ, such as forgiveness, eternal life, etc., but they balk at the crossroads of faith and commitment. So, along come false shepherds. They promise you that you can have it all now. They promise that you can live however you want; in fact it is your right. You deserve it. But they make promises they cannot keep, and instead of giving you heaven, they can only lead you to hell.

One day a group of tourists were in a bus in Israel. The tour guide pointed out the Bedouin shepherds near the road and said that these shepherds do it the same way that it has been done for more than 2,000 years. The shepherds are in front, leading the flock. They call their sheep by name, the sheep respond to their voice and they know them individually. About that time, they came upon a scene where a man, similarly dressed was behind a group of sheep with a stick in one hand and a whip in another and he was beating the sheep, driving them forward. One of the tourists raised the obvious: “I thought you said that the shepherds never drove their sheep, or beat them. What about that guy?” The tour guide said, “He wasn’t the shepherd. He was the butcher.”

D. What kind of a leader are you?

Do you inspire those around more with fear of your anger, or more with your love of their wholeness and security? Do you care more about controlling everything around you, or building others up? Do you inspire more with encouragement, or intimidate with threat? Does your influence on others (leadership) feel more like that of a true shepherd who cares for the health and protection of the sheep, or a hireling, or even a false shepherd who demands compliance without compassion?

E. God rules over and overrules the rebellion of man.

When the sheep turned on Zechariah, he quit. When they turned on Christ, he gave up his life and died, for them. God is not the cause of man's free choice to rebel, and yet man's choice to sin is not out of God's control. God knows what is going to happen. Zechariah's experience reveals it not only then, but 500 years later and beyond. What is the most amazing aspect is that God uses the free choices of man to carry out his plan that was established from the foundation of the earth. The rejection of Zechariah was a preview of the rejection of Christ, but the rejection of Christ was the occasion for Christ to die on the cross, which was the sacrifice that paid for our sin. No one saw that coming! God worked the greatest redemption out of the greatest betrayal and travesty of justice, ever.