Zechariah 11:7-17

**Digging Deeper in the Word**

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***Zechariah 11:7–17***  
**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. **11** So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of YHWH. **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 YHWH 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 YHWH, to the potter. **14** Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

**15** Then YHWH 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!”

1. Summarize the first part of the chapter, Zech 11:1-6.

Zechariah pronounces judgment upon the leaders – the cedars, the cypresses and the oaks, which represent the strong and powerful leaders. These trees seem to represent the foreign leaders (from Lebanon and Bashan). He also pronounces judgment upon the shepherds, most likely representing the leaders of Israel. God is apparently angry over three things:

a) the flock’s rejection of God (the inhabitants of the land)  
b) the shepherds lack of godly leadership (Israel’s kings)  
c) the oppression by the enemies of Israel (foreign kings)

YHWH says He will no longer pity them, both the shepherds and the flock. Therefore he will allow them to be crushed by the foreign kings. The sentence has been given. They are doomed to destruction because of their sins and the sins of the leaders.

1. In Zech 11:7, who becomes the shepherd?

Zechariah is the shepherd, following God’s command to him in Zech 11:4.

1. The shepherd tends his sheep, kills three shepherds, and then becomes impatient and says he won’t be shepherd any more? Do you think he truly a shepherd watching real sheep, or is this passage just using wording which talks of people as sheep? In other words, do you think he is a ruler of people or is he a shepherd of real sheep? Why?

It seems Zechariah is truly a shepherd watching over real sheep. Zech 11:11 refers to the “sheep traders” that were watching him, and that they knew this was a word from YHWH. And then he asks for his wages from the sheep traders and they pay him. So it seems that Zechariah has hired himself out as a shepherd to watch sheep that have been purchased for slaughter by sheep traders.

1. It is not uncommon for prophets to symbolically “act out” certain prophesies by doing things physically that have symbolic meaning. Can you think of some examples of this from other parts of Scripture?

Isaiah 20. Isaiah goes naked and barefoot for 3 years, as a sign of how Egypt and Cush would be lead away naked as captives of Assyria.

Jeremiah 13:1-11. Jeremiah takes a new loin cloth and wears it for a while, then buries it in the dirt. Later he digs it up and it is spoiled and no longer good. This was to symbolize Israel, made to cling to God in intimacy, but they left him and were made worthless because they followed other gods.

Jeremiah 19:10-13. Jeremiah breaks clay flask in the Hinnom Valley to show how God will break the people of Israel and specifically Jerusalem so that it cannot be mended.

Jeremiah 32:6-14. Jeremiah buys a field and takes the deed and puts it in a clay container to keep safe during the exile, to remind everyone that there will again come a day that land will be bought and sold in Israel.

Ezekiel 4. Ezekiel lays on his side for 390 days and then for 40 more, then is told to eat bread cooked on dung, do symbolize the siege of Jerusalem, and how the people will be taken to a foreign nation.

Ezekiel 5:1-5. Ezekiel cuts his hair and beard and divides it up to show the people of Jerusalem will be destroyed, but a remnant will be saved in his robe.

Ezekiel 12:1-7. Ezekiel packs a bag and digs through the wall to leave the city, covering his eyes so he can’t see the land. This is to symbolize the people going to exile.

Hosea is told to take a prostitute, Gomer, as his wife, and to a daughter named **Lo Ruchamah** “no mercy” and a son named **Lo Ammi** “not my people” to symbolize the dysfunctional marriage between YHWH and Israel.

Acts 21:10-11. The prophet Agabus binds his hands and feet with Paul’s belt to show what will happen to Paul if he goes to Jerusalem.

1. In one month the shepherd “destroys” three other shepherds. Are these actual shepherds that Zechariah has destroyed as a symbolic act? Are these symbolic of kings or leaders that God has destroyed, or will destroy? Interestingly, the word which the ESV translates as “destroy” is Hebrew **kachad** which can mean “hide, get rid of, or destroy”. So this phrase could also be translated “I **got rid of** three shepherds in one month.” What do you think is the symbolism here? How should we interpret this?

Most likely Zechariah was working alongside some evil shepherds. Perhaps they were mistreating the flock or in some other way not doing their job well.

Of course this is also symbolic of God destroying the leaders. Were there really three? If so, we don’t know who these three were. Some have tried to identify three kings who were destroyed just prior to the exile, but it is hard to know for sure. Others have pointed out that the three trees (cedar, cypress, and oak) may be represented by the three shepherds. Perhaps so. These particular shepherds were likely hired by the sheep traders and so represented the foreign leaders, not the leaders of Israel. Likewise, the trees seem to represent the foreign leaders, not Israel.

1. Why did he get rid of the three shepherds? Note that the “but” in the ESV of Zech 11:8 is really the Hebrew **wa** connector which literally means “**and**”. What is the symbolism here?

Apparently the three shepherds despised Zechariah. And Zechariah became impatient with them.

Likewise, the rulers over the people of Israel despise YHWH, and He becomes impatient with them and so he removes them from leadership.

1. Zech 11:9, he says “I will not be your shepherd.” Who is he talking to here?

It could be the sheep traders, or it could be the sheep. I think it makes most sense to understand Zechariah talking to the sheep traders. He won’t be a shepherd for them anymore. He doesn’t like the way the other shepherds are treating the sheep, and will no longer have more part in it. Let the flock perish, he says, as apparently they don’t seem to care.

Here is a place to point out that some versions translate “the sheep traders” as “the poor of the flock” instead. This is a very different meaning. The reason is that there is discrepancy between the Hebrew Masoretic Text, which has “the poor of the flock” and Septuagint (LXX) which has “the sheep traders / Canaanites”. The ESV chose to follow the LXX because it seems to make the most sense in the context, especially when you look at verse 11. In verse 11, Zechariah asks for his wages from the sheep traders, which makes sense. If you translated the phrase “the poor of the flock,” you would have Zechariah asking for his wages from the poor of the very flock he was shepherding. This just would not make sense.

1. Explain what the shepherd does with his two staffs in Zech 11:4-13, and what this symbolized.

He broke in two the staff named “Favor”, symbolizing the annulling of the covenant that God made with his people.

Then he broke in two the staff named Union, symbolizing the breaking up of the nation of Israel into two.

1. Zech 11:10 says he “annulled” the covenant. The Hebrew word is **parar.**  See if you can find the meaning of **parar**. How does this differ from the meaning of the English word “annul”? In most general terms, the covenant of YHWH with His people can be summarized by the phrase “You will be my people and I will be your God.” What does it mean that he will **parar** this covenant?

**Parar** means to “break or invalidate”. The English work “annul” has a slightly different meaning, indicating the covenant was revoked and the new condition as if the covenant never existed. However the meaning the phrase seems to be that since the people did not live up to their end of the covenant that God was no longer going to keep his end.

**“You will be my people and I will be your God.”** Since the people no longer saw YHWH as their God, He was no longer going to see them as his people.

1. If we had only Zechariah 11 to read, we might conclude that God abandoned His people, and broke all his covenant promises with them. Did God break his promises to his people?

No. God made some “unconditional” promises to Abraham (because of his faith and obedience). Those promises concerned blessings to his offspring, and to the whole world. These promises would be fulfilled. But **part** of the covenant with the offspring was that “you will be my people and I will be your God”. That meant the people were to live in obedience to God’s commands, and then they would be under God’s protection as His people. They didn’t do their part, so God said His part wouldn’t be done either.

1. If Zechariah is the shepherd who is breaking his staff, how do we understand the last part of Zech 11:10? Who is breaking the covenant “I had made with all the peoples”? How are we to understand this?

The prophet speaks the message of God. Sometimes it is as if God is speaking in first person through the prophet’s mouth. So Zechariah is the one breaking the staff, but then as he breaks it he speaks as through it is the voice of YHWH using Zechariah as his mouthpiece.

1. In Zech 11:12 Zechariah stops his work as shepherd for the sheep traders, and they pay him 30 pieces of silver. What does that remind you of (Matt 26:14-16)? Also look at Exodus 21:32. What is the value of 30 pieces of silver?

***Matthew 26:14–16*** (ESV)  
**14** Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests **15** and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” **And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.** **16** And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

***Exodus 21:32*** (ESV)  
**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.

Yeshua was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. This was the value of a slave.

1. What was done with the 30 pieces of silver? What is a potter? Look at Matt 27:3-10. What are some of the ways in which this Zechariah passage parallels or foreshadows the events of the Matthew passage?

***Matthew 27:3–10*** (ESV)  
**3** Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, **4** saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” **5** And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. **6** 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.” **7** So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. **8** Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. **9** Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, 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, **10** and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

The silver was given to a potter – one who makes pots from clay. The potters field would most likely be a field of clay from which he obtained his clay for the pots.

Zechariah, the shepherd, represents YHWH and Yeshua (for they are one).

The sheep traders parallel the chief priests and/or the political leaders of Israel… leaders who are abusing their flock, leading for their own gain, and not truly caring for the people.

1. It is interesting that Zech 11:12 says, sarcastically, that the 30 pieces of silver is “the lordly (glorious) price at which I was priced by them.” Zechariah is being paid a wage, yet he equates it as the amount that “he was priced at,” as if this was the value of him as a person. Why? Who is really being rejected as worthless?

Zechariah is representing YHWH and they are really rejecting YHWH. Not just his service, but His being their God. They are saying we don’t need you as our God to help us… here is 30 pieces of silver. This is what we think you are worth… now go away! It was as if the value of YHWH as their shepherd, as their God, was only 30 pieces of silver, no different than the cost of a common slave.

The same thing is shown with Yeshua, who is rejected and sold for the same price. Their only means of salvation, of bringing them into an intimate and lasting relationship with YHWH was through Yeshua. And that was, in effect, only worth 30 pieces of silver to them.

1. What events are prophesied of symbolized by the breaking of each of the staffs, Favor and Union? As you answer remember that Zechariah takes place about 520 BC.

At first we might think the breaking of Favor represents the conquering of Israel, first by Assyria and later by Babylon. But that took place in about 70 years before the time of Zechariah’s prophesy. And we might think that the breaking of Union would symbolize the civil war, when the house of Israel rebelled against the house of Judah, but that happened nearly 400 years prior to the time of Zechariah.

We know from the Apostolic Scriptures that the 30 pieces of silver prophesies about the betrayal (or “selling”) of the Messiah, so maybe the staffs are portent for other events of this same period.

The breaking of Favor could represent the destruction of the Jewish system as it was known in that day. The temple was destroyed, so clearly the presence of YHWH was no longer in the holy of holies (which no longer existed). The sacrificial system was now impossible to keep. YHWH removed himself from the Jewish leadership, and as Rome attacked the leaders and the people were scattered. The Jews were to become a displaced people.

Perhaps the breaking of Union foreshadows the schism that occurred with the followers of Yeshua. This split through the middle of the people of Israel, and began a split that has never healed. Furthermore, as the followers of the Way grew in number, they became more and more Gentile. Gentiles are often associated with the House of Joseph / Ephraim / Israel, since the sons of Joseph were from his Egyptian wife and therefore half Gentile. History shows how this split caused a division that became one of great animosity on both sides.

1. Read Ezekiel 37:15-28. How does this relate to the two broken staffs (Favor and Union) of Zechariah?

***Ezekiel 37:15–28*** (ESV)  
**15** The word of YHWH came to me: **16** “Son of man, take a stick and write on it, ‘**For Judah**, and the people of Israel associated with him’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘**For Joseph** (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ **17** And **join them one to another into one stick**, that they may become one in your hand. **18** And when your people say to you, ‘Will you not tell us what you mean by these?’ **19** say to them, Thus says Adonai YHWH: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him. And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand. **20** When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, **21** then say to them, Thus says Adonai YHWH: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. **22** And **I will make them one nation in the land**, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. **23** They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and **they shall be my people, and I will be their God**. **24** “My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. **25** They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. **26** I will make **a covenant of peace** with them. It shall be an **everlasting covenant** with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. **27** My dwelling place shall be with them, and **I will be their God, and they shall be my people**. **28** Then the nations will know that I am YHWH who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.”

The breaking up of the covenant (Favor) and the breaking up of Israel (Union) will not last forever. YHWH will restore both.

1. In Zech 11:15, he is told to once again be shepherd, but this time what kind of a shepherd is he to be?

A foolish shepherd.

1. What is the character of this second type of shepherd?

God will raise up “in the land” a bad shepherd… one who does not care about those being destroyed. He looks like a shepherd but does not act like one. Instead of protecting, he **devours**. In other words, he uses the flock for his own purposes.

1. Contrast the bad shepherd with the qualities of the good shepherd. Consider both Ezek 34:1-24 and John 10:11-18.

***Ezekiel 34:1–10*** (ESV)  
**1** The word of YHWH came to me: **2** “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says Adonai YHWH: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? **3** You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. **4** The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. **5** So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; **6** they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. **7** “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH : **8** As I live, declares Adonai YHWH, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, **9** therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of YHWH : **10** Thus says Adonai YHWH, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

***Ezekiel 34:11–24***   
**11** “For thus says Adonai YHWH: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. **12** As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. **13** And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. **14** I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares Adonai YHWH. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. **17** “As for you, my flock, thus says Adonai YHWH: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. **18** Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? **19** And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? **20** “Therefore, thus says Adonai YHWH to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. **21** Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, **22** I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. **23** And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. **24** And I, YHWH, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am YHWH; I have spoken.

***John 10:11–18***   
**11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17** For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

It is clear that YHWH is sending the Messiah as the good shepherd to care for his people. He will rescue them and care for them. He will protect them, not devour them (or use them for his purposes).

1. If we see in the first shepherd a representation of YHWH and His Messiah, what might this second shepherd represent?

Perhaps it alludes to the anti-Messiah. One like a shepherd who pretends to shepherd the flock, but in fact is set on devouring it.

* See 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7. “Even now are there many antichrists.”
* Also Daniel speaks of the “little horn”, see Dan. 7:24, 25; 8:23–25.
* False messiahs are referred to in Matt. 24:5, 23, 24.
* Paul speaks of the “man of sin” in 2 Thess. 2:3, 4, 8–10.
* In Revelation we see a connection with the “beast from the sea”, Rev. 13:1; 17:1–18.

1. What is the prophetic destiny of this worthless shepherd, according to Zechariah? Why do you think he wounded in this way? Why wasn’t he killed?

His right eye, and his arm will be destroyed. The right eye is the “aiming eye”.

Without an arm and right eye, the shepherd cannot do the job of a shepherd. He is powerless, and therefore no longer a threat to the God’s sheep.

As this related to the anti-Messiah, perhaps this symbolizes his being thrown into the abyss. He is not actually killed, but he is put out of commission.

Note that while this oracle seems to end with a negative event, the remainder of Zechariah will focus on the good Shepherd to come and the final victory that He will bring.

1. This passage speaks to us about real events in the latter days, as well as God’s expectation of leaders. What does it say to you, personally?