Zechariah 11:1-6

**Digging Deeper in the Word**

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***Zechariah 11:1–6***  
**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 YHWH 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 YHWH, I have become rich,’ and their own shepherds have no pity on them. **6** For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, declares YHWH. 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.

Chapter 11 may be connected to the oracle of Chapter 10, or it may begin a new, but related oracle. Since Chapter 10 ended with the phrase, “declares YHWH”, it seems that there may be break of some sort between the two chapters.

Chapter 11 is a hard chapter to understand. There is a lot of symbolism in this poetic passage, and it is not always clear what the symbols actually represent, or sometimes even whether they are symbols.

1. Zech 11:1 starts out with a pronouncement of doom upon Lebanon and its cedars. Where is Lebanon? What were the two major cities of Lebanon often referred to in Scripture? What do you know of the spiritual beliefs of the people living there?

Lebanon is on the Mediterranean coast just north of Israel. The two principal cities were Tyre and Sidon. These were Phoenician cities. The Phoenicians were know for their very pagan practices, especially child sacrifice as evidenced in Carthage.

1. Why mention cedars? List other Scriptures that you can find which talk about cedars as well as Lebanon. What do you conclude from this?

***1 Kings 5:6***   
**6** Now therefore command that **cedars of Lebanon** be cut for me. And my servants will join your servants, and I will pay you for your servants such wages as you set, for you know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.”

***2 Kings 19:23***   
**23** By your messengers you have mocked Adonai, and you have said, ‘With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon; I felled its **tallest cedars,** its **choicest cypresses**; I entered its farthest lodging place, its most fruitful forest.

***Psalm 29:5***   
**5** The voice of YHWH breaks the **cedars**; YHWH breaks the **cedars of Lebanon.**

***Psalm 104:16***   
**16** The trees of YHWH are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

***Song of Solomon 5:15***   
**15** His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like **Lebanon**, choice as the **cedars**.

***Isaiah 14:8***   
**8** The **cypresses** rejoice at you, the **cedars of Lebanon**, saying, ‘Since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.’

***Isaiah 37:24***   
**24** By your servants you have mocked Adonai, and you have said, With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of **Lebanon**, to cut down its **tallest cedars**, its **choicest cypresses**, to come to its remotest height, its most fruitful forest.

***Isaiah 2:13***   
**13** against all the **cedars of Lebanon**, lofty and lifted up; and against all the **oaks of Bashan**;

***Jeremiah 22:23***   
**23** O inhabitant of **Lebanon**, nested among the **cedars**, how you will be pitied when pangs come upon you, pain as of a woman in labor!”

Lebanon was apparently known for its large cedar trees. In Israel where large trees were scarce, a place with an abundance of large trees was a place of wealth. Large trees were symbols of strength and greatness.

1. In Zech 11:2 the cypress is told to “wail, for the cedar has fallen.” What does “the cedar” here refer to? See if you can find any Scriptures which talk about cypress trees together cedar trees. Where does it seem the cypresses are located?

The cedar refers to the “cedar of Lebanon”. It is these great trees of Lebanon that will fall. At this point, without reading further, the reader would probably assume that these great cedars are symbolic of strong or great people that will be destroyed, perhaps referring to leaders or even kings.

***Isaiah 14:8***   
**8** The **cypresses** rejoice at you, the **cedars of Lebanon**, saying, ‘Since you were laid low, no woodcutter comes up against us.’

***Isaiah 37:24***   
**24** By your servants you have mocked Adonai, and you have said, With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of **Lebanon**, to cut down its **tallest cedars**, its **choicest cypresses**, to come to its remotest height, its most fruitful forest.

The cypresses seem to be majestic trees as well, and are also found in Lebanon.

1. Zech 11:2 talks about the “oaks of Bashan”. Where is Bashan? Who lived there? Can you guess how this place might have been viewed by the Hebrews? See Joshua 13:12, Deuteronomy 3:8-11, and Deuteronomy 3:13.

***Joshua 13:12***   
**12** all the kingdom of Og in Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei (he alone was left of the remnant of the Rephaim); these Moses had struck and driven out.

***Deuteronomy 3:8–11***   
**8** So we took the land at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon **9** (the Sidonians call Hermon Sirion, while the Amorites call it Senir), **10** all the cities of the tableland and all Gilead and all Bashan, as far as Salecah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan. **11** (For only Og the king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim. Behold, his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabbah of the Ammonites? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common cubit.)

***Deuteronomy 3:13***   
**13** The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, that is, all the region of Argob, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh. (All that portion of Bashan is called the land of Rephaim.

Bashan is primarily the region east of the Jordan River and north of the Gilead Mountains. It was the region east of the sea of Galilee, and includes what is now the Golan Heights of Israel, and then extending northward. Bashan was originally inhabited by the Amorites, and specifically by the Rephaim (giants of the land). For that reason it was always viewed as a place of evil. The giants were evil, feared people that some thought were related to the gods. In some ways this region came to be viewed as symbolic of Canaanite hell. Later, in Greek and Roman times, Bashan became part of the area known as the Decapolis, the location of totally Hellenistic cities. So it remained a very pagan place, with cities devoted to the gods and goddesses of Greece, and later Rome.

1. Look at Isaiah 2:11-17 where the “oaks of Bashan” and the “cedars of Lebanon” are also referred to together. In the context of this Isaiah passage, what do these trees that “shall be brought low” symbolically refer to”?

The haughty looks of man and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low (Is 2:11). All that is proud is lofty will be brought low (Is 2:12)… the haughtiness of man and the lofty pride of men (Is 2:17). The trees are symbolic of prideful men – those that seem great in the eyes of man.

***Isaiah 2:13***   
**13** against all the **cedars of Lebanon**, lofty and lifted up; and against all the **oaks of Bashan**;

1. The oaks of Bashan are told to “wail, for the thick forest has been felled.” What does “the thick forest” refer to?

The “thick forest” is most likely a poetic or symbolic way of referring back to the “oaks of Bashan.” Another possibility is that it could be a reference back to the cedars of Lebanon. But looking ahead to Zech 11:3b which says “the thicket of the Jordan is ruined”, it would seem that this refers to the area of Bashan which bordered the Jordan River on the east side.

1. Zech 11:3 speaks of shepherds and lions. What are these both symbolic of? With this understanding, what do we now suppose the cedars, cypresses, and oaks as symbolic of?

Shepherds and lions are both symbolic of leaders. The trees, therefore, also are to seen as symbolic of leaders. These are people who are seen as great and mighty leaders, such as kings of the land, but who will fall at the hand of YHWH.

1. Do you think these verses (Zech 11:1-3) are referring to those within Israel, or to foreigners? Why?

It may be that these verses refer to **all** leaders, whether from Israel or from the foreign nations which were oppressing the people of Israel. Lebanon was a foreign land, with foreign kings from Tyre and Sidon. Other prophesies (see for example Ezekiel 27-28) are against these evil kings. Bashan was technically a part of Israel (tribe of East Manasseh), and may refer to the kings of the Israel. So it seems we have in these three verses a prophesy of destruction that is come about to all the leaders, whether foreign or domestic. This is borne out in the subsequent verses, which speak of the sins of both the “buyers” and the “sellers” of the flock.

1. Who is God telling to become a shepherd in Zech 11:4?

YHWH seems to be speaking to Zechariah here, instructing Zechariah to become a shepherd to his people. It is not totally clear, since in the latter part of the chapter (Zech 11:9-10) it seems that YHWH is also acting as the shepherd. But if we focus solely on Zech 11:4 it would seem to require that this refers to Zechariah. It is a command from YHWH to the person He is speaking to. “Become a shepherd” is a 2nd person imperative verb (a command to someone).

1. Zech 11:5 speaks of **those who buy** the sheep and **those who sell** the sheep. Remember this all symbolic. Who are the sheep? Who are those who sell the sheep? Who are those who buy the sheep?

The sheep are God’s people… Israel… this inhabitants of the land.

This who sell refer to the leaders of the people – their own leaders (kings as well as religious leaders, most likely).

Those who buy refer to the leaders of the foreign land – those who conquer the land of Israel and take control over the inhabitants of the land.

1. Notice that Zech 11:5 speaks of those that “slaughter them [the sheep] and go unpunished.” The Hebrew word “them” is actually feminine plural, so it refers to female sheep. What might you guess was the purpose of raising female sheep in contrast with the purpose of raising male sheep? What does this tell you about those that were slaughtering female sheep?

Females were used for breeding and reproducing. They were saved and valued. Only a few males were needed for breeding. Most males were either butchered for food or offered in sacrifice. The foreign rulers were taking God’s people, those who were meant to be fruitful for Him, and killing them, thereby robbing them as well as God of their intended fruit.

1. Zechariah says their own shepherds have become rich at the expense of their flock, and have no pity on them. Compare to Ezekiel 34:1-10. What were the shepherds doing wrong?

***Ezekiel 34:1–6***   
**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.

The leaders were taking advantage of their people. Instead of caring for them and protecting them, they were using them and abusing them.

1. In Zechariah 11:4-6, what is God’s response to this situation? Why does he call them “a flock doomed to be slaughtered?”

YHWH will no longer have pity on them. 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. This passage really speaks to God’s expectation of leaders. What does it say to us, personally?