

Zech. 10-11 The Good Shepherd

Chapters 9-11 go together as they speak of God ruling over his people. In cp. 9 we see God's king coming in humility and eventually in power to rule over God's people. And this rule will be from sea to sea, from the "river" to the ends of the earth (vv. 9-10). In cps. 10-11 the theme is still God ruling over his people, but the context changes from "king" to "shepherd." The "King" is also the "Shepherd." With this in mind, I want to highlight 4 general truths, with 4 applications at the end.

1. God is Israel's Shepherd. Now, God is not walking around physically in the field carrying a shepherd's crook and leading sheep in a field. This is a picture given by Zechariah that all of Israel would have understood. Think back to their history. From Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to the Israelites in Egypt, they were always shepherds. They knew what it was like to care for flocks of sheep, and other livestock. And throughout the OT, God is often described as the ONE who is the "pastor" or the "shepherd" over his people. Right before Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, he says to Joseph, **"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day"** (Gen. 48:15). In Isaiah 40:11 we read: **"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young."** In Ezek. 34:15 God says, **"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD."** There are so many pictures in the OT, but which one is the most famous? I think of David's words in Ps. 23:1 **"The Lord is my shepherd."** It is interesting that this picture of being a shepherd is the most beloved and most comforting thought. Ps. 23 is read at more Christian and non-Christian funerals than any other passage in the Bible.

We all get this picture. A shepherd cares for his sheep. He loves them. He leads them to good pastures. He protects them from predators and from the elements. He goes after them when they are lost. He gathers them when they are apart. We will see these truths as we continue through the passage . . . God is Israel's "good" shepherd.

2. Israel rejects God and follows evil shepherds. We see this throughout Israel's history. God sends good leaders who are his "shepherds" over his people. And through these leaders God shepherds his people. He sends judges, priests like Samuel, Kings such as David and Solomon, Josiah, etc. The prophets are also shepherds. They are sent by God with his words to shepherd his people and to do good to them. But, as a whole, what does Israel do? They reject God. They reject God's shepherds. Instead of seeking God for blessings, they look to household gods. Look at. 10:1-2: **"Ask rain from the LORD in the season of the spring rain, from the LORD who makes the storm clouds, and he will give them showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field. For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation. Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd."** Instead of looking to God who provides rain to water the crops, they look to their own gods. This is idolatry.

3. God judges these shepherds and those who follow them. We see this in v. 3: **“My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders.”** (Now, let me say briefly that this judgment has already happened as they are being brought back from Babylonian captivity. There is a general time of peace as they rebuild the temple and reinhabit the land. At the same time, we know that these words of judgment will happen again in varying degrees going forward as Israel rejects God as their shepherd, and then in a big way many years later in 70 AD. So, I think these words both picture Israel in the past and in their future. And though there is mystery, the truth is the same. God will judge ALL idolatry, whether it be the nations or Israel in the end.)

But, in the context of Israel God tells Zechariah to take part in some kind of mock play in order to picture for Israel, what God is doing in judgment. He tells Zechariah to become their shepherd, though they are doomed for judgment. Verse 4: **“Thus said the Lord my God; Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.”** And then in 7 we read: **“So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter by the sheep traders. And I took two staffs, one named Favor, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep. 8 In one month I destroyed three shepherds** (great mystery as to who these are). **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 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.”** And then in vv. 15-17 the process of judgment upon God’s flock is summed up. In these verses we see a picture of disobedient sheep who reject God as their shepherd, and he turns them over to disobedient shepherds. And what happens? God leaves them in their idolatry. And, at least for a time, God does not shepherd Israel. (Speak briefly to the fact that there is always a remnant who trust God as shepherd.)

4. God does not leave Israel without a Shepherd. In the end, God will not leave his people without a shepherd (as we saw in cp. 9 that God would not leave them without a king). In order to show this I want us to walk through chapter 11 more closely. What were the names of Zechariah’s shepherd staffs? The first is called **“Favor,”** the second is called **“Union.”** I believe these pictures were meant to display and summarize ALL the blessings of God upon his people, Israel. Think about the picture. God, as the good shepherd of his people, gives *“favor”* to his people. The first time we see this word *“favor”* in the OT is with Noah. As God judges the world for their sin and their ways of evil, the Bible says But, **“Noah found ‘favor’ in the eyes of the Lord”** (Gen. 6:8). This word is also translated as “kindness” or “grace.” A good example is also Joseph as Gen. 39:21 says, **“But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love**

and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” In that story, the warden gave Joseph a special status as he was in charge of much of the prison. I am sure he received many benefits during his time, whether it was a better cell, more food, respect from other prisoners, and other favors.

Well, this is exactly what God does with Israel compared to other nations. Let me read some of favorite verses from Isaiah 41:8-10: **“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

Now, look back at verses 3-12 for more pictures of God’s favor upon Israel. Verse 3: God “cares” for his flock. Verse 3-5: “He strengthens them in battle.” Verse 6: He gives “*strength*” and “*salvation*.” He has “*compassion*” on them (v. 6). Verse 7: He makes their hearts “*glad*” and this runs through their families. Verse 9: He “*gathers*” them and “*redeems*” them. He gives them “*life*.” When God shepherds his people, there are literally “showers” of blessings. King David’s words in Ps. 23 sum up God’s favor. (Read)

Also, in this text we see a 2nd staff called “Union.” One of the evidences that God shepherds his people is unity. There is “one” flock; there is “one” people. Do you remember Israel’s history. They were united when they came out of Egypt. They were united as 12 tribes under Saul, David, and Solomon. But, because of sin (particularly with David and then Solomon), the 12 tribes divide through civil war. From King Rehoboam in the south and King Jeroboam in the north, and kings that follow, there is always fighting, there is no unity as a people. More than 100 years before Judah was carried into captivity, the northern kingdom (also called Israel) was carried away by the Assyrians. There is no unity. I think there begins to be some unity after Babylonian captivity, but for the most part the Jews have always been scattered all over the world. Yet, in our text (and throughout Zechariah and the other prophets) there is always the promise of unity. And, unity is evidence that there is ONE shepherd and one flock.

And, as we go through the history of Israel, generally, what do we see? This is a good question. Zechariah was written when? About 500 years before the time of Christ. And what do we see? Well, in Zechariah’s day, there was “favor” to an extent. There was some “union,” though never complete. I think generally, Israel always leaned more toward disobedience and idolatry (though there was always a remnant). It is interesting that for about 400 years from the time of Malachi until John the Baptist, there is no formal prophecy, no real “word” from God as there was in times past. Yet, we see these promises made to Israel. In the Book of Zechariah we see that God says, “*I will give you ‘favor’ and I will ‘unify’ you as a people.*” And in fact, we see that God’s people will be found not only in Israel but where? They are found in the surrounding nations and in nations further away, even to the ends of the earth. So, my question is: “*Has God rejected his*

people Israel?" NO! He promises to be their shepherd. So, how do we make sense of this? I think you already know!

Turn with me to John 10. Here, Jesus comes to Israel and he says, "I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD." He is not saying, "I am "a" shepherd" or "I am "a" good shepherd." He is saying, "I am 'THE' good shepherd." He had already stated in another place that there is only ONE who is good (God) (Matt. 19:17). And, the people, particularly the leaders, would have known how many times in the OT, God pictured is as the only "GOOD" Shepherd. They would have known that only God can bring "Favor" and "Unity" as a shepherd to his people. And Jesus says, "I AM" that shepherd of whom the OT speaks. He makes this clear in the passage that there is ONLY ONE shepherd.

Look with me starting in v. 7: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 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. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 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."** Let me make some observations/applications about this passage.

i. Because Jesus is the good Shepherd, we are not waiting for another. In this passage, Jesus says, **"I am the door" and if anyone enters the sheepfold, he must come through the door**" (v. 7). Jesus is both the "door" and the good shepherd. He is the fulfillment of God's promises to shepherd his people. This means the Jews of Jesus' day rejected God's shepherd. John says, **"He came to his own, but his own did not receive him"** (John 1:11). They thought he was blasphemous because he claimed to be the Shepherd spoken of in Zechariah and the other prophets. Let me ask, *"In Zechariah's mock play as a rejected shepherd, how much was he worth to the people? What were his wages?"* 30 pieces of silver, which was the price of a common slave. And after receiving the silver, what did shepherd do? He gave it back into the temple fund as if to say, *"That's all you think I'm worth, 30 pieces of silver."* When we come to the NT, how much did Judas think Jesus was worth? How much did the Jews leaders think he was worth? 30 pieces of silver. Let me ask you, *"How much do you think he is worth?"* Today, have you really counted the cost?

ii. As the good Shepherd, Jesus gives favor to his people. (staff of favor) In v. 10 we read: **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”** Brothers and sisters, ALL God’s blessings come down to you in Jesus Christ! ALL! ALL God’s favor! ALL God’s grace! ALL God’s lovingkindness! This means we cannot seek the blessings of God outside of Christ. Do you remember all the blessings from cp. 10? Salvation, strength, care, compassion, joy, redemption, life, etc. And these are the tip of the iceberg! This means you will not find any of the blessings of God in the things of this world. This would be idolatry! (10:1-2). This is why the Apostle John ends his 1st Letter with the words **“Little Children, keep yourselves from idols”** (1 John 5:21). And the best way to know where and how the Good Shepherd leads is found in the Bible.

iii. As the good Shepherd, Jesus gives unity to his people. (staff of unity) Brothers and sisters, this why Jesus came. Turn with me to John 17. Right before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed for his people. Look at vv. 20-22. He says, **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one . . .”** In Jesus, there is only one people, taken from both Jew and Gentile. This is why Paul can write to the Gentiles at Ephesus: he has created **“one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility”** (Eph. 2:15-16). This is one of the reasons I am not a Presbyterian that sees a “mixed” community even in the New Covenant. There is no mixed community in the NT. ALL of them are the flock. And there is only one shepherd.

iv. The MEANS Jesus uses to bring favor and unity to his people is by laying down his life. In v. 11 Jesus says, **“I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”** This means there is no favor, there is no unity, without the death of God’s shepherd. This is the gospel! This is where we see the greatest work of our shepherd. As the “good” shepherd, as the incarnate Son of God, he laid down his life on the cross as a sinless sacrifice. No other shepherd could do this because no shepherd was sinless. This is what make sense of the OT prophecies with their fulfillment in Christ. This is the greatest of ALL news!

In closing, I think of Rom. 11 when Paul says, **“Has God rejected his people? By no means.”** Today, Jesus is the Good Shepherd of his people. As the Church of Jesus Christ, we have been given favor. We are unified through the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of the world rejects him and follows other shepherds. This will lead to great judgment, unless there is repentance.