

That woe against the worthless shepherd scares me.

It's not so much that I'm worried that *I* will desert the flock –

it's rather, that I serve on the Candidates & Credentials Committee of our presbytery.

It can be easy sometimes to get focused on all the academic requirements.

Does he know his theology – his church history –

does it matter that he doesn't really know much about the Moabites?

But the *real question* – the most important question –

the question that we are always trying to figure out the answer to –

is one that we can't just ask the candidate!!

“Are you ready to shepherd the flock of Jesus Christ?”

When do you say:

“Brother, you're not ready!!”?

And, “if you start down this path, it may destroy you – and others!”?

### **Israel and the Nations: The Burden of the Word of the LORD (9:1-11:17)**

Chapters 9-11 are all talking about how God will bring judgment on Israel's enemies,  
and how the king will return to Jerusalem (ch 9)–

*but* the problem is that destructive leaders continue to plague Israel (ch 10) –  
and so those leaders will receive the same judgment as the nations (ch 11).

The key phrase in 9:1 is the second sentence:

“For the LORD has an eye on mankind and on all the tribes of Israel.”

As we saw last week, Chapter 9 concluded with the promise that the King would come to Jerusalem,  
like Solomon of old, riding on a donkey.

And he would speak *peace* (shalom) to the nations.

And when the King returns to Jerusalem –

when peace is established in God's holy city,

then the LORD of hosts will protect his people and bless them.

So, this is God's *promise* – and this is *Israel's future*.

Zechariah reminds those who are currently building the temple –

that this is where they are going.

But right now?!

We've got a problem!

And that is where Zechariah turns in chapter 10:

**1. The LORD of Hosts Will Restore His People *in Spite of* Their Shepherds (10:1-12)**  
**a. The Plight of God’s Wandering Sheep (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.*

This is the season of the spring rain.

No – Zechariah is not just talking about *rain*.  
(It is true that the LORD *is* the one who makes the storm clouds –  
and he is the one who brings rain – and drought!)  
But in the return from exile, it is spring again.  
It is time for the spring rains –  
it is time for the word to go forth and water the earth,  
bringing forth the fruit of salvation!

And verse 2 bears this out:

<sup>2</sup> *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.*

These are the things that people tended to trust in Zechariah’s day.

They wanted someone to give them comfort and hope and assurance.  
Sound familiar?!  
The people of Zechariah’s day were a lot like us!

Now, you might be wondering – “Why didn’t they go to Zechariah?!  
They have a *true prophet* among them!  
Why didn’t they just go to him??!!”

Because Zechariah was a true prophet.

That’s why!

Prophets are not fortune tellers.

You don’t see the prophets going around telling fortune –  
telling people – “if you want good crops this year,  
you should do X, Y, or Z.”

The prophets were called to speak the word of the LORD to Israel.

Sure, occasionally they do speak a word to particular individuals –  
but only as a way of giving an example to the whole people.

Yes, you occasionally have prophets interpreting dreams –  
but they always insist that the power of interpretation  
did not belong to them.

The prophets were not called to be fortune tellers and diviners.  
They were called to *preach* the word of God to the people.

Much of what passes for ‘prophecy’ in our day is really just fortune-telling.  
Most of the time, when a so-called ‘prophet’ speaks a ‘word’ over someone nowadays,  
saying that God “told me” X, Y, or Z –  
they are speaking lies in the name of the LORD.  
They are taking God’s name in vain.

Of course, most of these ‘so-called prophets’ are actually very keenly insightful people  
(that’s why they think that they are prophets –  
because they really see things about other people!  
The problem is that they confuse their natural insight with the voice of God!)

It would be tempting to say that it’s no big deal –  
because they are well-meaning people with generally good spiritual insight...  
  
but think about what it does to those who rely on them!?

Think of how many people today rely on health-and-wealth preachers!  
So-called ‘prophets’ who promise their followers “success”!  
Even supposedly ‘solid’ Reformed churches are not immune to this.  
There is a tendency even in Reformed churches to say  
that if you follow a good capitalist work ethic,  
work hard, be a good consumer –  
then you too can have a comfortable upper-middle class lifestyle!!

“They utter nonsense...they give empty consolation...”  
Why do we think that a comfortable upper-middle class lifestyle  
should be even remotely a goal for a Christian?  
If we are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,  
then whatever we have – whatever position we are in –  
should all be used in the service of Christ –  
not as a way of promoting our own kingdoms!

Not much has changed since Zechariah’s day.  
People wander like sheep – they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd.

And notice God’s response!  
God’s anger does not *start* with the sheep for their wandering.

Rather, God is angry with those who have failed to care for the sheep!

David was the shepherd-king.

It was pretty common for kings in the ancient world to describe themselves as shepherds.

But it was especially appropriate for those who followed after David.

The shepherds of Israel were the rulers of all sorts (prophets, priests, and kings).

### **b. God's Anger Against the Shepherds (10:3-5)**

<sup>3</sup> *“My anger is hot against the shepherds,  
and I will punish the leaders;<sup>[d]</sup>  
for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah,  
and will make them like his majestic steed in battle.*

The ESV fails to capture clearly what is going on in verse 3.

The same verb is used in both the first and the second statement.

I will *punish* the leaders.

For the LORD of hosts *cares* for his flock.

The same word is translated *punish* in the first line – but *cares* in the second line.

Now, I will grant that it is hard to find an English word that captures both senses of *paqad* here!

The word means “to visit” or “to attend to.”

It is often used to speak of how the LORD visits his people  
(either in blessing or in judgment).

Here it is used *both ways* in the same verse!

The Lord will visit the leaders (the male goats)

because the LORD of hosts visits his flock.

Of course, the context of the rest of the verse makes clear what sort of visitations these are!

God will visit the male goats (the leaders of the flock) in judgment,  
because he *does* visit his flock, the house of Judah, in mercy,  
making them like his majestic steed in battle!

That's a great image:

a flock of sheep or goats will become a “majestic steed in battle”!

And from the LORD:

<sup>4</sup> *From him shall come the cornerstone,  
from him the tent peg,  
from him the battle bow,  
from him every ruler—all of them together.*

<sup>5</sup> *They shall be like mighty men in battle,  
trampling the foe in the mud of the streets;*

*they shall fight because the LORD is with them,  
and they shall put to shame the riders on horses.*

When God visits his people, they will triumph over their foes!

I do wish that *paqad* got translated ‘visited’ here –  
because there was another Zechariah –  
the father of John the Baptist –  
who said,

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
<sup>69</sup> and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup> as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
<sup>71</sup> that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us” (Luke 1).

In other words, Zechariah (the father of John) sees the fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy!  
When God visits his people – he saves them from their enemies  
(which also means that he brings judgment upon their enemies!).

And when this happens,

from him – from the LORD – will come the cornerstone, the tent peg, the battle bow.  
All of these terms are used for leaders in the OT.

The cornerstone is the term used in Psalm 118 –

“the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...”  
or Isaiah 28 – “behold I lay in Zion a precious cornerstone...”

The tent peg was an image used in Ezra 9

to speak of how God had left them a tent peg in his holy place  
(an echo of Isaiah 22 – where Sheba the steward was called a peg  
that would hold the key for the house of David).

The battle bow is an image of warfare throughout the OT.

So from the LORD comes every ruler – all of them together!

Think about what happens when the LORD visits his people –  
when the LORD visits judgment upon wicked and foolish rulers –  
when the LORD establishes wise and just rulers –  
both in the church and in society –  
what happens when you have good rulers?!

### **c. The Promise: Judah and Ephraim Restored from the Nations (10:6-12)**

<sup>6</sup> *“I will strengthen the house of Judah,  
and I will save the house of Joseph.  
I will bring them back because I have compassion on them,*

*and they shall be as though I had not rejected them,  
for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Then Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior,  
and their hearts shall be glad as with wine.  
Their children shall see it and be glad;  
their hearts shall rejoice in the LORD.*

Judah and Joseph shall be reunited.

In the time of Zechariah it had been over 200 years since Ephraim was a nation. The ten northern tribes had been exiled – and were never heard from again. Samaria was inhabited by a mixed race – a blend of Israelite and Gentile – the Samaritans – who did not recognize David as their king – and so rejected every part of Scripture that focused on David (in other words, everything from the book of Judges onward – because every book of the OT from Judges through Malachi is all oriented around David!).

But God says that he will bring back Judah and Ephraim.

We see this in John's gospel (with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4) and in the book of Acts – where the Samaritans are brought into the family of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> *“I will whistle for them and gather them in,  
for I have redeemed them,  
and they shall be as many as they were before.*  
<sup>9</sup> *Though I scattered them among the nations,  
yet in far countries they shall remember me,  
and with their children they shall live and return.*  
<sup>10</sup> *I will bring them home from the land of Egypt,  
and gather them from Assyria,  
and I will bring them to the land of Gilead and to Lebanon,  
till there is no room for them.*

They and their children shall return – from all the nations – all the far countries.

Notice that in verses 8-10 the focus is on *them* – the people of God – as God restores them and brings them home.

But then in verse 11 it switches from the plural to the singular:

<sup>11</sup> *He shall pass through the sea of troubles  
and strike down the waves of the sea,  
and all the depths of the Nile shall be dried up.  
The pride of Assyria shall be laid low,  
and the scepter of Egypt shall depart.*

After all, there is not only the restoration of *Israel* –  
there is also the restoration of the *House of David* –  
the coming King (which we heard about last time).  
The sea is commonly used as a picture of the chaotic power of the nations.  
But the Son of David will pass through the sea of troubles  
and strike down the waves of the sea.  
When Jesus walks on water – and commands the waves to “be still” –  
he demonstrates that he is indeed the one whom Zechariah predicted.  
But *more importantly* Jesus passed through the sea of troubles  
when he went to the cross.  
He took the suffering of his people upon himself.

And when Jesus came, he did overthrow the pride of Assyria and the scepter of Egypt –  
as both Assyria and Egypt bowed the knee –  
and became early centers of the Christian faith.

Of course, it is worth pointing out that even by the time of Zechariah,  
Assyria no longer existed as a nation!  
When the prophets use the language of “Egypt and Assyria” –  
they are remembering the Exodus and the Exile.  
The nations that opposed and oppressed God’s people  
will themselves be converted into God’s people!

But we shouldn’t be surprised by that:  
after all, it’s what verse 12 says will happen:

*<sup>12</sup> I will make them strong in the LORD,  
and they shall walk in his name,”  
declares the LORD.*

Don’t be afraid when the nations oppose you.  
Don’t worry.  
It may take a few hundred years – maybe a thousand years or more –  
but God will do it.  
For the last thirteen hundred years,  
the middle east has been increasingly hostile to the word and people of God.  
But today Egypt and Assyria are once again seeing growing conversions to Jesus.

In chapter 11, the oracle concerning Israel and the Nations concludes  
with a call to wail over the fall of the shepherds –  
and Zechariah’s enactment of God’s judgment.

## 2. When Shepherds Fail (11:1-17)

### a. “Their Glory Is Ruined” – The Fall of the Shepherds (11:1-3)

*Open your doors, O Lebanon,  
that the fire may devour your cedars!  
<sup>2</sup> 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!*

The first two verses speak of the destruction of the great trees.

The cedars and cypresses of Lebanon – and the oaks of Bashan.

I like how one commentator says it:

“In this surreal depiction, these symbols of glory crash,  
charred and smoking, to the forest floor,  
their personified wails piercing the sound of the rushing flames.”  
(McComiskey, 1188)

As we see in the book of Revelation as well –  
when humanity idolizes creation,  
the result is the destruction of creation.

If you worship the creature rather than the Creator –  
you bring destruction upon the creature that you worship.

What is this doing here?

It is setting up verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> *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!*

Why are the shepherds wailing?

Are they weeping for the plight of their sheep?

No.

They weep because “their glory is ruined.”

They are not concerned for the flock –

they are concerned only with their reputation – their influence – their glory.

The ‘young lions’ (another reference to the leaders of Judah)

roar as they lament the ruin of the thicket of the Jordan.

The leaders of Judah have turned their power – their influence – into their idol.



And if you love something more than you love the Lord your God?  
You sabotage that thing.  
You destroy that thing.

Leaders are especially prone to *loving* their power – their glory.

**b. Zechariah Enacts the Story (11:4-17)**

**i. The Call: Become Shepherd of the Flock Doomed to Slaughter (v4-6)**

*<sup>4</sup> Thus said the LORD my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, declares the LORD.*

In verse 4, God calls Zechariah to become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.  
Zechariah will become an illustration – enacting the story of God’s people.

Zechariah goes into the sheep-trading business.

The buyers slaughter the sheep –  
and neither their owners nor their shepherds have any pity,  
but “bless God” that they have become rich.

In other words, the leaders of Israel only care about their own wealth and power.  
They care nothing for the sheep.

And God says that because of this – *he* will no longer have pity on the people.  
Does that sound odd at first?  
One would think that God would come to the *rescue* of his flock!

But as we’ll see in the rest of the story –  
the failure of the shepherds is not the only problem in Israel!

*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.”*

The flock is doomed to slaughter for a reason!

So Zechariah enacts the story.

**ii. The Re-enactment Becomes a Pre-enactment (v7-14)**

*<sup>7</sup> So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders. And I took two staves, one I named Favor, the other I named Union. And I tended the sheep.*

Zechariah takes two staves and names one “Favor” (representing the covenant with all peoples), and the other “Union” (representing the brotherhood between Judah and Israel).

And at first, it appears that Zechariah is doing well:

*<sup>8</sup> In one month I destroyed the three shepherds. But I became impatient with them, and they also detested me.*

After a promising start, things go very, very badly.

Israel makes for a troublesome flock –  
and so Zechariah becomes impatient with them –  
and they detested him.

At this point we have to start wondering how literally we should be taking the story!  
You can easily understand how a shepherd could become impatient with the sheep  
but it is less clear what it would mean for sheep to detest a shepherd –  
and even murkier as to how one would know this!!

Of course, the point is very clear!  
Israel is a troublesome flock.  
They refuse to listen to the prophet – their shepherd –  
and so Zechariah says:

*<sup>9</sup> 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.”*

This is a devastating statement.  
He had been called as Israel’s shepherd –  
but now he says, “Forget it – you are too much.”  
Destruction is what you deserve!!

Destruction is what you will get.

*<sup>10</sup> And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. <sup>11</sup> So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the LORD.*

The flock doomed for slaughter is going to get slaughtered!  
If the covenant with all the peoples is annulled,  
then that means that Israel lies open to assault.  
Israel’s protection is gone.

(And yes, after the rebuilding of Jerusalem,  
the city remained under the power of Persia –  
and then the Ptolemies and the Seleucides –  
and after a brief period of independence under the Maccabees,  
they fell to the power of Rome).

But that is only part of the story!

And so Zechariah says to the sheep traders:

*<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Then I broke my second staff Union, annulling the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*

They gave him as his wages 30 pieces of silver.

Many have pointed out that 30 pieces of silver was the price for a slave in the law of Moses. And the LORD tells him to throw this “lordly price” to the potter –  
so Zechariah does –  
he throws thirty pieces of silver “into the house of the LORD, to the potter.”

Remember that the temple is still under construction.

I don’t know what a potter would be doing in the building of the temple –  
perhaps he was simply there to pray!

But Zechariah throws thirty pieces of silver to the potter at the house of the LORD.

And when Zechariah breaks his staff,

he shows that the brotherhood between Judah and Israel is broken.

All of God’s promises to Israel – and to the nations –  
are at an end.

All of this would have seemed rather bizarre to Zechariah’s friends.

But we who know the rest of the story begin to see the point.

The shepherd had to be rejected by the sheep.

The nations would turn against him.

His own people would turn against him.

He would be valued at 30 pieces of silver – the price of a slave.

But Zechariah is not quite finished yet!

### **iii. The Curse of the Foolish Shepherd (v15-17)**

*<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to me, “Take once more the equipment of a foolish shepherd. <sup>16</sup> 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.*

God says that he is raising up “a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed.”  
How can this be?!!

How can the LORD – the shepherd of Joseph –  
raise up a shepherd who will not seek the young?!  
God raises up foolish shepherds in order to show the contrast between them  
and the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep.

And – just like in Ezekiel 34 – God pronounces a curse on the worthless shepherd.

<sup>17</sup> “*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!*”

I know that some of you have been deserted by your shepherds in the past.  
Indeed, when I consider the calling of the shepherd –  
I know that I have too often failed to seek the young  
or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy!  
But God says that shepherds who desert the flock will be judged severely.

Why are worthless shepherds judged so severely?

Because when the shepherds lead the sheep astray,  
the result is that the sheep wind up in *bad places* –  
and so the sheep get destroyed!

Of course, the irony of our story is that the *faithful* shepherd  
will wind up taking the curse of the *worthless* shepherd.

He who knew no sin became sin for us –  
in order that we might become – in him – the righteousness of God.