

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The commencement of this chapter relates to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish polity, probably by the Babylonians; at least in the first instance, as the fourth verse speaks of the people thus threatened as the prophet's charge, Zechariah 11:1-6. The prophet then gives an account of the manner in which he discharged his office, and the little value that was put on his labors. And this he does by symbolical actions, a common mode of instruction with the ancient prophets, Zechariah 11:7-14. After the prophet, on account of the unsuccessfulness of his labors, had broken the two crooks which were the true badges of his pastoral office, (to denote the annulling of God's covenant with them, and their consequent divisions and dispersions), he is directed to take instruments calculated to hurt and destroy, perhaps an iron crook, scrip, and stones, to express by these symbols the judgments which God was about to inflict on them by wicked rulers and guides, who should first destroy the flock, and in the end be destroyed themselves, Zechariah 11:15-17. Let us now view this prophecy in another light, as we are authorized to do by Scripture, Matthew 27:7. In this view the prophet, in the person of the Messiah, sets forth the ungrateful returns made to him by the Jews, when he undertook the office of shepherd in guiding and governing them; how they rejected him, and valued him and his labors at the mean and contemptible price of thirty pieces of silver, the paltry sum for which Judas betrayed him. Upon which he threatens to destroy their city and temple; and to give them up to the hands of such guides and governors as should have no regard to their welfare.

Verse 1

Open thy doors, O Lebanon - I will give Mr. Joseph Mede's note upon this verse: -

That which moveth me more than the rest, is in chap. 11, which contains a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and a description of the wickedness of the inhabitants, for which God would give them to the sword, and have no more pity upon them. It is expounded of the destruction by Titus; but methinks such a prophecy was nothing seasonable for Zachary's time, (when the city yet for a great part lay in her ruins, and the temple had not yet recovered hers), nor agreeable to the scope. Zachary's commission, who, together with his colleague Haggai, was sent to encourage the people, lately returned from captivity, to build their temple, and to instaurate their commonwealth. Was this a fit time to foretell the destruction of both, while they were yet but a-building? And by Zachary too, who was to encourage them? Would not this better befit the desolation by Nebuchadnezzar? I really think so. See Mr. J. Mede's 61. Epistle.

Lebanon signifies the temple, because built of materials principally brought from that place.

Verse 2

Howl, fir tree - This seems to point out the fall and destruction of all the mighty men.

Verse 3

Young lions - Princes and rulers. By shepherds, kings or priests may be intended.

Verse 4

Feed the flock of the slaughter - This people resemble a flock of sheep fattened for the shambles; feed, instruct, this people who are about to be slaughtered.

Verse 5

Whose possessors - Governors and false prophets, slay them, by leading them to those things that will bring them to destruction.

And they that sell them - Give them up to idolatry; and bless God, strange to tell, that they get secular advantage by the establishment of this false religion.

Verse 6

For I will no more pity - I have determined to deliver them into the hands of the Chaldeans.

Verse 7

And I will feed the flock of slaughter - I showed them what God had revealed to me relative to the evils coming upon the land; and I did this the more especially for the sake of the poor of the flock.

Two staves - Two shepherds' crooks. One I called Beauty - that probably by which they marked the sheep; dipping the end into vermilion, or some red liquid. And this was done when they were to mark every tenth

sheep, as it came out of the field, when the tithe was to be set apart for the Lord.

The other I called Bands - Probably that with the hook or crook at the head of it, by which the shepherd was wont to catch the sheep by the horns or legs when he wished to bring any to hand.

And I fed the flock - These two rods show the beauty and union of the people, while under God as their Shepherd. It was the delight of God to see them in a state of peace and harmony.

Verse 8

Three shepherds also I cut off in one month - Taking this literally, some think the three shepherds mean the three Maccabees, Judas, Jonathan, and Simon; others, the three wicked high priests, Jason, Alcimus, and Menelaus; others, the three last princes of the Asmonean race, Alexander, Hyrcanus, and Antigonus. Perhaps three orders may be intended:

1. The priesthood.
2. The dictatorship, including the Scribes, Pharisees, etc.
3. The magistracy, the great sanhedrin, and the smaller councils.

These were all annihilated by the Roman conquest.

Verse 9

I will not feed you - I shall instruct you no longer: some of you are appointed to death by famine; others, to be cut off by the sword; and others of you, to such desperation that ye shall destroy one another.

Verse 10

I took my staff - Beauty, and cut it asunder - And thus I showed that I determined no longer to preserve them in their free and glorious state. And thus I brake my covenant with them, which they had broken on their part already.

Verse 11

So the poor of the flock - The pious, who attended to my teaching, saw that this was the word - the design, of God.

Verse 12

If ye think good, give me my price - "Give me my hire." And we find they rated it contemptuously; thirty pieces of silver being the price of a slave, Exodus 21:32.

Verse 13

And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter - Jehovah calls the price of his prophet his own price; and commands that it should not be accepted, but given to a potter, to foreshadow the transaction related Matthew 27:7.

"Earthen vessels were used in the temple; and we may suppose that some Levites were employed within the sacred precincts to furnish them. To these, the humblest of his ministers in the temple, God commands that the degrading price should be cast." This is the substance of the notes on these two verses, given by Abp. Newcome.

We may look at it in another light, Give me my price! חָבֵטִי חָבֵטִי חָבֵטִי (habu sichri), bring my price, or give him any price; that is, Give the money to Judas which you have agreed to give him; for he can neither betray me nor you crucify me, but my own permission. But if not, forbear; take time to consider this bloody business, and in time forbear. For though I permit you to do it, yet remember that the permission does not necessitate you to do it; and the salvation of the world may be effected without this treachery and murder.

See my notes on this place, Matthew 27:9, where I have examined the evidence for the reading of "Zechariah the prophet," instead of "Jeremiah."

Verse 14

That I might break the brotherhood - I cannot, says Newcome, explain this passage, without supposing that the kingdom of Israel subsisted when the prophet wrote it; and that either the wars between Judah and Israel are referred to, (see 2 Kings 16:5), or the captivity of the ten tribes, when the brotherly connection between these kingdoms ceased.

Verse 15

The instruments of a foolish shepherd - Such as a bag without bread, a scrip without measure, and a staff without a hook, etc., things that were needless or of no use; to point out to the Jewish pastors, who took no care of the flock, but devoured them, or ruled them with force and with cruelty.

Verse 16

I will raise up a shepherd in the land - Some wicked king; and Newcome supposes Hoshea may be meant. See 2 Kings 17:1, 2 Kings 17:2, and to such an abominable sovereign the prophecy may well apply.

Verse 17

Wo to the idol shepherd - **וְיָרֵד מִן הַמַּלְאָכִים** (roi haelil), **אֵין עֵשֶׂה** or **אֵין עֵשֶׂה** good for nothing shepherd. The shepherd in name and office, but not performing the work of one. See John 10:11.

The sword shall be upon his arm - Punishment shall be executed upon the wicked Jews, and especially their wicked kings and priests. See Zechariah 11:16.

Arm - the secular power; right eye - the ecclesiastical state.

His arm shall be clean dried up - The secular power shall be broken, and become utterly inefficient.

His right eye shall be utterly darkened - Prophecy shall be restrained; and the whole state, ecclesiastical and civil, shall be so completely eclipsed, that none of their functions shall be performed. This may refer to the worthless and wicked governor mentioned in the preceding verse.

There are several things in this chapter that are very obscure, and we can hardly say what opinion is right; nor is it at all clear whether they refer to a very early or late period of the Jewish history.