

Zechariah 11:1–17

The Rejected Shepherd and the Rise of a False Shepherd

Zechariah 11 is sobering. It looks back and forward at the same time:

- It anticipates national judgment on Israel, especially through Rome.
- It previews the first coming of Jesus, the true Shepherd, and His rejection.
- It points ahead to a future false shepherd—a destructive, self-serving leader whom many will tragically follow.

This chapter forces us to ask serious questions:

- Who is really shepherding my life?
- What is my price for Jesus?
- Am I following the true Shepherd—or a counterfeit?

1. Judgment from the North and Corrupt Shepherds (Zechariah 11:1–6)

Open your doors, O Lebanon,
That fire may devour your cedars.
Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,
Because the mighty trees are ruined.
Wail, O oaks of Bashan,
For the thick forest has come down.
There is the sound of wailing shepherds!
For their glory is in ruins.
There is the sound of roaring lions!
For the pride of the Jordan is in ruins.
Thus says the Lord my God, “Feed the flock for slaughter,
Whose owners slaughter them and feel no guilt;
Those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich’;
And their shepherds do not pity them.
For I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land,” says the Lord.
“But indeed I will give everyone into his neighbor’s hand
And into the hand of his king.
They shall attack the land, and I will not deliver them from their hand.”

The chapter opens with poetic language describing devastation coming from the north—Lebanon, Bashan, the Jordan. Historically, Rome invaded from the north and eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in the year 70, killing multitudes and ending Israel’s national self-rule for centuries.

But God’s focus is not only on political collapse; He exposes **corrupt shepherds**:

- They “slaughter” the flock and feel no guilt.
- They say, “Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich,” as they profit off the people.
- They do not truly care for those under their authority.

By the time of Jesus, the priesthood and spiritual leadership in Jerusalem had become deeply compromised. Many leaders were more concerned with power, control, and profit than with the glory of God or the good of the people. When Jesus cleansed the temple—driving out the moneychangers and those who were profiting from sacrifices—He declared,

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

They were using people’s desire to worship God as an opportunity to enrich themselves. That was true then, and it can still be true today whenever spiritual roles become platforms for exploitation rather than service.

God is not indifferent to this. He warns that a time comes when He allows consequences to fall. When leaders persist in corrupting His people and hardening their hearts, He may remove restraints and let judgment run its course.

2. The True Shepherd with Two Staffs: Beauty and Union (Zechariah 11:7–11)

So I fed the flock for slaughter, in particular the poor of the flock. I took for myself two staffs: the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bonds; and I fed the flock.

I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Then I said, “I will not feed you. Let what is dying die, and what is perishing perish. Let those that are left eat each other’s flesh.”

And I took my staff, Beauty, and cut it in two, that I might break the covenant which I had made with all the peoples.

So it was broken on that day. Thus the poor of the flock, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord.

Here the Lord Himself steps in as Shepherd, especially to care for “the poor of the flock”—those who humbly listen and respond. He carries two staffs:

- Beauty (grace, favor)
- Bonds (unity, union)

He also “dismisses the three shepherds,” a symbolic reference to the class of leaders who were failing the people—prophets, priests, and rulers. God declares that there is mutual rejection: His soul loathed their hypocrisy; their souls abhorred Him and His ways.

Then something striking happens:

He breaks the staff called Beauty to symbolize the breaking of His covenant relationship with the nation as they had known it. When they rejected His gracious rule, they forfeited their place of favor. The “poor of the flock” recognized that what God was doing—and what was about to happen—was truly His word.

In the fullness of time, Jesus came as the Good Shepherd. He fed the poor and needy, healed the broken, and taught with authority. But the leadership as a whole rejected Him. When they turned away from Him, they turned away from the grace offered in Him.

Today, we are not under the old covenant of law as a way of approaching God. The only way for Jew or Gentile to come to God is through faith in Jesus Christ—through the new covenant established in His blood. The law cannot make us right with God; only Jesus can.

3. Thirty Pieces of Silver and the Potter's Field (Zechariah 11:12–13)

Then I said to them, “If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.” So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter.

This is one of the most remarkable prophecies in Scripture, given centuries before Jesus was born.

The “wages” of the Shepherd are thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave. That is how little they valued Him. God Himself speaks with holy sarcasm: “That princely price they set on Me.”

In the Gospels, Judas went to the chief priests and asked,

“What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?”

And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.

Later, when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was filled with remorse. He went back to the leaders, threw the money into the temple, and went out and hanged himself. The leaders, unwilling to put “blood money” back into the treasury, used it to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers.

Zechariah had already mentioned:

- Thirty pieces of silver
- Thrown in the house of the Lord
- Given to the potter

The combination of these details points unmistakably to Jesus. This is not vague prediction; it is precise, concrete, and fulfilled in the events surrounding His betrayal and death.

We are rightly shocked at Judas for selling out His Master for so little. But we also need to ask: What is my price?

How cheaply do people today trade away their relationship with God—for momentary pleasure, success, status, or comfort?

Jesus once asked,

“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Many sell their souls for far less than thirty pieces of silver.

4. The Broken Bond and the Coming of a Foolish Shepherd (Zechariah 11:14–17)

Then I cut in two my other staff, Bonds, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. And the Lord said to me, “Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.

For indeed I will raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for those who are cut off, nor seek the young, nor heal those that are broken, nor feed those that still stand. But he will eat the flesh of the fat and tear their hooves in pieces.

Woe to the worthless shepherd,
Who leaves the flock!

A sword shall be against his arm
And against his right eye;
His arm shall completely wither,
And his right eye shall be totally blinded.”

After the true Shepherd is rejected and His favor and unity symbolically broken, God warns of another shepherd—a **foolish** and **worthless** shepherd who will arise.

Look at his character:

- He does not care for those who are perishing.
- He does not seek the young.
- He does not heal the broken.
- He does not feed the flock.
- He devours the flock for his own gain.

This is the very opposite of Jesus, who said,

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

This “foolish shepherd” anticipates a future deceptive leader—what the New Testament calls “the man of sin” or “the lawless one,” often referred to as “antichrist.” He will be religious and political, attractive and persuasive, but his heart will be utterly selfish and destructive.

Zechariah even hints at some kind of striking judgment: his arm withered, his right eye blinded. However we understand the details, the point is clear: God will not allow this false shepherd to rule forever. Judgment will fall on him.

For us, the main question is not to obsess over every theory about who this future leader may be, but to ask: Am I prepared to recognize and resist false shepherds now?

Jesus warned that many false Christ’s and false prophets would arise and deceive many. The best protection against deception is not to stare at darkness but to walk closely with the true Shepherd, to be grounded in His Word, and to love the truth.

Practical Application

1. **Be honest about what you value Jesus at.**

Judas valued Jesus at thirty pieces of silver. What is Jesus worth to you in daily life? Are there areas where you are effectively saying, “I will follow You—unless it costs me this”?

2. **Beware of “religious profiteering.”**

Any time spiritual influence is used to exploit rather than serve, it grieves the heart of God. That can happen in churches, ministries, media, or personal relationships. Do not imitate such examples, and do not let them become an excuse to turn away from Jesus Himself, who is perfectly faithful.

3. **Let Jesus shepherd your soul.**

The foolish shepherd uses people; the good Shepherd gave His life for people. Let Him care for your wounds, seek you when you wander, and feed your soul with His Word. Do not settle for substitutes—leaders, movements, or trends that do not reflect His heart.

4. **Stay awake to spiritual deception.**

False shepherds may be impressive, gifted, or popular. They might promise quick fixes, easy spirituality, or worldly success. Measure everything by Scripture and by the character of Christ. Truth and love, humility and holiness—these are marks of the true Shepherd’s work.

A Challenge for Believers

- Have you allowed a “price” in your life—some compromise, some pattern of sin, some fear of people—to undercut your loyalty to Jesus?
- Are you following Him in both belief **and** obedience, or only as long as it fits your preferences?
- Are you willing to resist voices—religious or secular—that pull you away from His teaching, even if they are attractive or widely praised?

Ask the Lord to search your heart:

- “Lord, show me where I have undervalued You.”
- “Give me discernment to recognize false shepherds.”
- “Teach me to follow You as my good Shepherd, in every part of my life.”

An Invitation to Non-Believers

Zechariah 11 points to a painful truth:

The true Shepherd came and was rejected. He was sold for a slave’s price, despised by many of His own people, and handed over to death.

But this was not a tragic accident. It was part of God’s plan to save us.

Jesus willingly went to the cross.

He bore our sin, our guilt, our judgment.

Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross.

On that cross, He took the punishment that we deserve so that we could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

On the third day, God raised Him from the dead.

The resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

He is not just a teacher, not just an example, but the living Son of God who conquered death.

You cannot save yourself. Your good works, your religious efforts, your attempts to fix your own life—they will never be enough to make you right with a holy God. But God, in love, has already made a way through His Son.

You can respond to Him today:

- Admit honestly before God that you are a sinner and cannot earn your way to Him.
- Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.
- Ask Him to forgive you, to make you new, and to be Lord of your life.

When you do, you are not just learning about the Shepherd—you are coming under His care. He will forgive you, receive you, and begin to lead you. He will give you a new heart and a new direction. And when the false shepherds of this world come and go, you will be safe in the hands of the One who laid down His life for you and lives forever.