

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Lesson 8: The Lord Will Care for His Flock -- Zechariah 10:1–11:17

Picture a flock of sheep on a hillside as the light begins to fail. They are not bad sheep, just sheep, prone to wander, easily frightened, helpless against the wolf, hopeless at finding their own way home. Everything depends on whether there is a shepherd, and on what kind of shepherd he is. A good shepherd will count them, carry the weak one across his shoulders, sleep in the gap of the fold so nothing gets in. A hired hand will count his wages, and when the wolf comes he will run. Zechariah hands us exactly this picture, sheep and shepherds, and tells us our whole life hangs on which kind of shepherd we are following, and which kind we ourselves are becoming.

These chapters open with a strange and tender complaint. The people are looking for help in all the wrong places. When they need rain, they consult household idols and diviners who speak nonsense and offer empty comfort, and so the people 'wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd' (10:2). God looks down on a wandering, harassed flock and His heart moves, but not toward the false shepherds who have fattened themselves on the sheep. His anger is hot against them. And then comes the promise that gives this lesson its title: the Lord Himself will visit His flock, strengthen them, gather them, redeem them, and make them mighty in Him. The true Shepherd is stepping in where the hirelings have failed.

Then chapter 11 turns dark and unforgettable. The prophet is told to act out a parable, to become a shepherd over 'the flock doomed to slaughter.' He takes up two staffs, names them Favor and Union, and tends the sheep, only to be despised. So he breaks his staffs and asks for his wages, and they weigh out his pay: thirty pieces of silver. The Lord calls it, with bitter irony, 'the lordly price at which I was priced by them,' and tells the prophet to throw it to the potter in the house of the Lord. If a shiver runs down your spine reading that, it should. Centuries later, Judas would fling thirty pieces of silver into the temple, and the priests would buy the potter's field with it (Matthew 27:3–10). Here, in Zechariah, is the Good Shepherd being valued at the price of a slave.

So this is not a quaint pastoral poem. It is a lesson about who shepherds your soul. It asks where you run when you are afraid and dry and lost, whether to the living God or to the idols and diviners that always promise and never deliver. It holds up the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock and warns us not to become him, whether we lead a family, a class, or a congregation. And it points us, finally, to the One who said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11), the Shepherd who was sold for silver and bought us back with His blood. Read these chapters slowly, and let the Shepherd find you.

Group Discussion: When the people needed rain, they turned to idols and diviners that gave 'empty comfort' instead of asking the Lord who actually sends the rain (10:1-2). What are the modern 'idols and diviners' we run to for comfort, security, and guidance, and why do they leave us 'wandering like sheep' even when they seem to help for a while?

Personal Reflection: Zechariah pictures God's people as a flock that is either tenderly cared for by the true Shepherd or harassed by worthless ones. Where in your own life are you most tempted to look for guidance and comfort somewhere other than the Lord? Name the specific substitute, and name what it would look like this week to bring that need to the Shepherd instead.

Read Zechariah 10:1-11:17

Study Questions

1. Zechariah opens by telling the people to 'ask rain from the Lord' rather than from idols, because 'the household gods utter nonsense' and the diviners 'give empty consolation' (10:1-2). What does this reveal about God as the true source of every good gift, and about the emptiness of every substitute we put in His place?
2. The text says that because the people followed false comforts, they 'wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd' (10:2). When have you felt that kind of wandering, harassed restlessness in your own walk, and can you trace it back to leaning on something other than the Lord? Be specific about what you were leaning on.
3. God says, 'My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders,' yet in the same breath He says, 'the Lord of hosts cares for his flock' (10:3). What does it tell us about God's heart that His anger at false shepherds and His tender care for His sheep are two sides of the same love?
4. Verses 6 through 8 pile up promises: God will strengthen, save, bring back, and 'whistle for them and gather them in, for I have redeemed them' (10:6-8). Which of these words,

strengthened, saved, gathered, redeemed, do you most need to hear from your Shepherd right now, and why?

5. The Lord promises to make His once-scattered people 'like a mighty warrior' and says 'they shall be radiant' and their hearts 'glad as with wine' (10:5, 7), gathering them not by their strength but because He redeems them (10:8-12). How does this show that the strength and joy of God's people flow from the Shepherd Himself and not from their own resources?
6. In chapter 11 the prophet enacts the role of a shepherd over 'the flock doomed to slaughter,' tending even 'those who bought and sold them' showed no pity (11:4-7). Where is God calling you to shepherd faithfully, in a home, a friendship, a class, or a congregation, even toward people who may not appreciate or deserve it?
7. The rejected shepherd takes two staffs named Favor and Union, and when he is rejected he breaks them, annulling the covenant and breaking the brotherhood (11:7, 10-14). What do the breaking of 'Favor' and 'Union' teach about the costly consequences of rejecting God's appointed Shepherd?
8. When the prophet asks for his wages, the flock weighs out thirty pieces of silver, and the Lord calls it 'the lordly price at which I was priced by them' (11:12-13). In what areas of your life have you, in effect, set a cheap price on the Shepherd, treating Him as worth less than your time, comfort, or loyalty? Be honest about where He gets the leftovers.

9. The thirty pieces of silver thrown to the potter in the house of the Lord (11:12–13) finds its haunting fulfillment when Judas hurls the same silver into the temple and the priests buy the potter's field (Matthew 27:3–10), and the rejected shepherd of Zechariah points to Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11–15). Tracing the thread from Zechariah's enacted parable to Christ rejected for the price of a slave, then to the woe pronounced on the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock (11:15–17), what does this passage reveal about the seriousness of rejecting the Shepherd God sent, about Christ's willing self-giving as the true Shepherd over against every worthless hireling, and about the judgment that awaits selfish spiritual leaders who feed themselves and abandon the sheep?
10. Look back across both chapters, from the people seeking empty comfort from idols, to the Lord's promise to gather and redeem His flock, to the Good Shepherd sold for silver. Name one specific way the true Shepherd is forming you through this passage, whether to stop running to a substitute, to follow Him more wholeheartedly, or to shepherd others more faithfully where He has placed you.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 10:11–18, Jesus the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep; Matthew 27:3–10, the thirty pieces of silver cast into the temple and used to buy the potter's field; Ezekiel 34:1–16, God's woe against the shepherds who feed themselves and His promise to shepherd His flock Himself; 1 Peter 5:1–4, the call to elders to shepherd God's flock as under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd; Jeremiah 2:13, forsaking the fountain of living water for broken cisterns that hold no water.

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