

Lesson 17

Last week we saw that a key word in the final chapters of Zechariah is shepherd. Another key phrase is "Lord of Hosts." That phrase occurs 282 times in the Old Testament, and is translated "Lord of Hosts" 242 times in the ESV. Of those 242 occurrences, Jeremiah has the most (71), followed by Zechariah (53) and Isaiah (50). But considering how much shorter Zechariah is than either Isaiah or Jeremiah, I think it is fair to say that Zechariah stresses that title for God more than any of the other prophets. One verse in Zechariah (1:3) uses the phrase three times! Why does Zechariah stress that particular title?

Commentaries differ on the precise meaning of Lord of Hosts, but most agree that the hosts are the heavenly hosts and that the title emphasizes God's role as Creator and his role as a Warrior leading the heavenly armies. I think the latter of those two is likely why Zechariah uses that title so often. In this book, we are seeing God leading his armies against the enemies of his people - including the current enemy Persia as well as the coming enemies Greece (as we have already seen) and Rome (as we will soon see). Again we see key theme in this book: when God says something will happen, then that thing will happen and nothing in the earthly or spiritual realms can ever prevent it from happening. And the key promise in this book was God's promise to bless the entire world through Jesus. The Lord of Hosts made that promise, and the Lord of Hosts will perform that promise. So be on the look out for that phrase as we continue our study.

Last week we started Chapter 10, and we saw how it describes Christ in verse 4, and the victory of the church in verse 5. Verse 6 continues that description of the church.

Zechariah 10:6-7

6 And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them. 7 And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it, and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.

Verses 6 and 7 are telling us something about the church that we have already seen several times in this book - the coming eternal kingdom of Christ would be a *unified* kingdom and a *peaceful* kingdom. God would gather all of his people into that kingdom, and there would be no walls or partitions within that kingdom. God would reconcile and unify his people in the church.

Perhaps we should pause and notice just how often those two descriptions of the church are being repeated, not only in Zechariah, but elsewhere in the prophets as we have seen. The church is a unified kingdom and a peaceful kingdom. That has always been God's plan for the church, going all the way back to the great promise to Abraham in Genesis 12.

Verses 6 and 7 use a figure that we have seen before: the Gentiles are depicted by terms that were once applied to the old northern kingdom - those terms are "the house of Joseph" and "they of Ephraim."

The northern tribes had been scattered by the Assyrians 200 years earlier. Hosea had told them that they would become like Gentiles to God, and that is what had happened. But Hosea also told them that one day they would once again be God's people, and that happened in the church.

That is exactly what Paul says in Romans 9:24-26, where Paul quotes the prophet Hosea. And that is what verses 6 and 7 are saying here in Chapter 10. "They shall be as though I had not cast them off." Paul tells us in Romans 9 that that promise was fulfilled in the church, and so we have further confirmation that what we are seeing here in Zechariah is the church.

And all of the blessings in the church will be shared alike by Jew and Gentile. These two verses mention **seven blessings** that they both would enjoy (and that we do enjoy) in the church. They will be strengthened, they will be saved, they will receive mercy, they will be gathered together, they will be heard by God, they will be like mighty men, and they will rejoice.

We could preach an entire sermon on each of these seven blessings that we in the church all enjoy, but those seven blessings and many others are best described by Paul:

Ephesians 1:3-4 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings** in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

We in the church have all spiritual blessings, and that is the prophetic message of verses 6-7. And perhaps the number seven is being used figuratively to say that these seven blessings depict the perfect blessings that we enjoy in the church.

Zechariah 10:8

8 I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased.

Verse 8 is yet another beautiful description of the church. The word translated "hiss" in verse 8 means "whistle," so verse 8 pictures God whistling for his people like a shepherd would whistle to attract his sheep. God is gathering all of his sheep together in the church. Why? Verse 8 answers that question. God is gathering all of his sheep together because he has redeemed them.

Colossians 1:13-14 - Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath **translated** us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have **redemption** through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 8 says that "they shall increase as they have increased." The first "they" refers to the church (the future people of God), while the second "they" refers to Judah (the former and at that time present people of God). Just as ancient Israel had increased as God had promised Abraham in Genesis 22:17, so would the New Testament Israel increase through the preaching of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 3:7 - So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; **but God that giveth the increase.**

The remaining verses in Chapter 10 describe in more detail this gathering by God of the redeemed into the church.

Zechariah 10:9

9 And I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again.

Verse 9 describes the evangelistic efforts that must happen before there can be an increase. "I will sow them among the people." That is not a sowing to scatter, but is instead a sowing of seed for increase. When did this happen? When did God sow his faithful people among the people of the world?

Matthew 28:19-20 - Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I

have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.

Verse 9 is pointing to the great commission.

What happens next? Three things: "they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again."

First, those in distant lands where God has been long forgotten will remember God. When we go into all the world, the proclamation of the gospel will cause them to know God and to know what God demands of them.

Second, "they shall live with their children." What does that mean?

Let's start with the first half: "they shall live." Through their obedience to the gospel, they would live. They would have everlasting life. The just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17).

And then the second half: "they shall live with their children." Where else have we seen that promise applied to the church?

Acts 2:38-39 - Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, **and to your children**, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Notice that both of the groups mentioned in Acts 2:39 (your children and those that are afar off) are mentioned here in Zechariah 10:9. There can be no doubt that we are reading here about the church. When the people turned to God, not only would they live, but their children would live as well if they also obeyed the gospel. The promise was to them and to their children.

The third thing we see in verse 9 is that they will "turn again." They will no longer live in the kingdom of darkness. They will no longer wander in the wilderness of sin, idolatry, and spiritual bondage. They will repent.

After the gospel has been proclaimed, and after some have heard and obeyed the gospel, what happens next? What happens next is that God brings his people out of the bondage of sin and death and brings them into the kingdom of his dear son - and that is what verse 10 shows us.

Zechariah 10:10

10 I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them.

Egypt and Assyria were great historical lands of captivity. To any Jew, Egypt and Assyria meant bondage and oppression, so they are used here as a figure for the bondage of sin and death.

What about Gilead and Lebanon? What do they represent?

They were the areas east and west of the Jordan that had been depopulated when the northern kingdom was carried away by the Assyrians. Once again, we see the beautiful figure of a people who were not God's people once again being declared God's people. This is the work of reconciliation. When did that happen?

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 - And all things are of God, who hath **reconciled** us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of **reconciliation**; To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling** the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of **reconciliation**.

Ephesians 1:9-10 - Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times **he might gather together in one all things in Christ**.

How many would be reconciled? The end of verse 10 says that there will be so many that there will not be enough room for them all.

But I thought that only few would find the way that leadeth unto life (Matthew 7:14). How can there be such a large number of the saved? Two answers.

First, the intent here is less on the headcount and more on the lack of any geographical constraints. Unlike the old Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem is universal and open to all who will obey the gospel. The old promised land will not be big enough to contain all of God's people in the coming kingdom. There will no longer be any geographic constraints on the city of God. We saw this same thing all the way back in Zechariah 2 with the vision of the measuring line.

Second, the same number can be *small* when viewed in light of the world's population but *large* when

viewed in light of the population of the people of God at the time of Zechariah, which was quite small. Compared with the small group of exiles gathered around Zechariah, the number of people in the church, past and present, is a huge number.

Zechariah 10:11

11 And he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall depart away.

Verse 11 is a beautiful description of the work of Christ for the people of God. Just as God led ancient Israel through the Red Sea to escape the bondage of Egypt, so Jesus would lead his people through the sea to give them a way of escape from the bondage of sin.

But notice the description here of that way of escape - it is through the sea *with affliction*. It is through *suffering* that the Messiah would make a path to freedom for those held captive by sin. That suffering is both the suffering of the cross and the suffering of his own temptations.

Hebrews 2:17-18 - Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that **he himself hath suffered being tempted**, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

1 Peter 3:18 - For Christ also hath once **suffered** for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

Verse 11 tells the rivers would be dried up, which means that the people would be given a way of escape. They would still need to walk over the dry land, but that way was now available to them.

The power of Egypt and Assyria would be broken. What that means is that the power of sin and death to enslave people would be broken.

Hebrews 2:14-15 - Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death **he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil**; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

If someone chose to remain in bondage, that would be their choice - but the rivers were now dry; the way was now clear; Jesus had provided a way of escape to those who would choose to take it.

Why remain in Egypt and Assyria when Jesus has created a dry river bed over which you can easily escape? That same question can be asked today. Many hear the gospel week in and week out, and yet they choose to reject the way of escape and to instead remain in Egypt and Assyria, the wilderness of bondage, sin, and death. Why? Someday they will ask themselves that question, but it will be too late.

Zechariah 10:12

12 And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.

Those rescued from bondage would be *strengthened* by God, and they would walk *in his name*. We in the church are strengthened by Christ, and we do all things in the name of Christ.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ which **strengtheneth** me.

Colossians 3:17 - And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

What have we seen in Chapter 10? We have seen a description of Christ, the Messiah, and of the kingdom of the Christ, the church, and those descriptions perfectly match the descriptions of Christ and the church of Christ that we read in the New Testament.

Chapter 11

Zechariah 11 is one of the most fascinating chapters in the Bible. If you love history, then you will particularly enjoy this chapter because we will need to pause several times to review the historical context of these wonderful prophecies - some of which predate their fulfillment by nearly six hundred years!

Zechariah 11:1-3

1 Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. 2 Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen; because the mighty are spoiled: howl, O ye oaks of Bashan; for the forest of the vintage is come down. 3 There is a voice of the howling of the shepherds; for their glory is spoiled: a voice of the roaring of young lions; for the pride of Jordan is spoiled.

"Open thy doors, O Lebanon!" Lebanon is about as far north of Jerusalem as Austin is from Houston. These "doors" are the passes around Lebanon that provided access to Palestine from the north. Something is coming from the north, and to anyone living in Jerusalem that was always a very ominous message. And that which is coming is coming so "that the fire may devour thy cedars." Lebanon was known for its cedar trees.

Psalm 29:5 - The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

Whatever is coming is very powerful and is full of fire and fury. And it will come sweeping in from the north.

The cedar trees in Lebanon and northern Palestine would be the first to go, but the fir trees in southern Palestine would also be affected. Those southern fir trees are told to howl for two reasons. First, they would soon suffer the same fate as the northern cedars. And, second, "because the mighty are spoiled." If they thought their mighty leaders would be able to save them, they would be sadly disappointed.

The "oaks of Bashan" were east of the Jordan River, and they would also be affected by what was coming. They are told to "howl" because their protecting forest has been destroyed. If the forest of Lebanon has been brought down, then the open country of Bashan cannot possibly escape.

The trees are not the only thing howling. In verse 3, there is also the howling of the shepherds. Why? Because their glory has been spoiled. The land has been ravaged, and there is no place of protection for them or for their sheep. And there is "a voice of the roaring of young lions." Why? Because "the pride of Jordan is spoiled." Again, the land has been devastated, and the lions' usual habitat no longer offers any protection.

What we are seeing here is figurative language describing an unstoppable and ferocious invasion of Palestine from the north. We should not be surprised to see such an invasion. Except for Egyptian invasions, invasions of Palestine almost always came from the north. And if we started listing such invasions throughout history, we would have a very long list. We saw one earlier in this very book with

a prophecy about Alexander the Great. So the real question is to figure out *which* invasion from the north is being described here.

Let's turn that question around. What invasion from the north would we expect to see at this point in the text? (This question is much easier for us to answer than for the initial readers of Zechariah to answer because their future is our history. Remember that the prophecies in these chapters were written centuries prior to their fulfillment.) What have we seen so far in Chapters 9-11? The two major historical events we have seen are the invasion of Palestine by Alexander the Great and the Maccabean Revolt by the Jews against one of the Greek kingdoms that followed after the death of Alexander. What would we expect to see next?

The answer is that we would expect to see the conquest of Palestine by the next great power in the vision of Daniel 2 - the Romans. And that is what we see here in the opening verses of Zechariah 11 - four hundred years before it occurred! We will find further confirmation that the Romans are in view here as we proceed through the chapter.

But we were just seeing a description of the church. Do you mean to say we have suddenly jumped *back* in time nearly a century from the establishment of the church? Yes. And we have seen such jumps before in this book.

One reason that these final chapters of Zechariah are so challenging is that the focus keeps shifting. Chapters 9-11 are describing what will happen to the Jewish people, but God has frequently paused to jump forward in time to describe the coming Messiah and his kingdom. The reason for those jumps is clear - they explain *why* the other prophecies are so important. They explain why Alexander the Great was important. They explain why the Maccabean Revolt was so important, and in this chapter they will explain why the Romans were so important.

Chapter 11 begins by describing a great invasion from the north by a power that is destructive and unstoppable. Nothing is spared by this invader; it conquers everything from the north to the south. Let's pause for a brief historical review.

The ruling dynasty of Judea between the testaments was known as the Hasmonean dynasty. The name "Hasmonean" comes from the great-grandfather of Mattathias, the priest and father of the Maccabean brothers we talked about in an earlier lesson.

The Hasmonean dynasty had been established under the leadership of Simon Maccabaeus, twenty years after his brother Judah Maccabee defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt.

From 140 to 116 BC, the Hasmonean dynasty ruled almost autonomously from the Seleucids, but from 110 BC, with the Seleucid empire disintegrating, the Hasmonean dynasty became fully independent.

Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II were great-grandsons of Simon Maccabaeus. They became pawns in a conflict between two famous Romans - Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. In 64 BC, Pompey added Syria and Lebanon to the Roman Empire.

Where did Pompey go after Lebanon? History tells us, and the opening verses of Zechariah 11 also tell us - Pompey went to Palestine. This is the great invasion from the north that is described in these opening verses.

In 63 BC, Jerusalem was besieged and conquered by Pompey. Pompey himself entered the Holy of Holies, but he did not remove anything. The next day he ordered the temple cleansed and its rituals resumed. Pompey then headed back to Rome. Judea remained autonomous but was required to pay tribute.

The death of Pompey in 48 BC, the death of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, and the Roman civil wars that followed temporarily relaxed Rome's grip on the Hasmonean kingdom, but that did not last very long. The Hasmoneans were soon crushed by the Romans under two more famous Romans - Mark Antony and Octavian. (Octavian would later become Augustus, the first emperor of Rome.)

The installation by Rome of Herod the Great as king in 37 BC made Israel a Roman client state, and that installation officially marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty.

The origin of the Hasmonean dynasty is recorded in the apocryphal books of First and Second Maccabees. The other primary source for the Hasmonean dynasty is the first book of *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus.

What we see in these opening verses of Chapter 11 is a figurative description of the Roman conquest of Palestine. It is interesting that we see similar symbols (burning trees and lions) in the book of Revelation - but there they are used to describe Rome's *payback* rather than Rome's *conquests*!

No one should be surprised about what we see here. We have been waiting for the arrival of the Romans ever since Daniel 2, and what we see here in Chapter 11 is yet another prophecy that Rome would be next in line after the Greeks. (Keep in mind that when this prophecy was written, the Greeks had not yet taken over. These prophecies about Rome are looking forward beyond Persia by two entire kingdoms - Greece and Rome!)

And this invasion certainly looks like bad news, but is it really? Remember Daniel 2:44 - "**And in the days of these kings** shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

Absent Rome, we would never have had the church!

Yes, some bad things were going to happen when Rome showed up, but Rome was part of God's plan to bless the entire world through Christ! And Rome also played an important role in Jerusalem's future, as Daniel told us, as Jesus told us in Matthew 24, and as this chapter will also tell us.

Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, Pompey, and the first century Roman emperors from Augustus to Domitian - they all have something in common. They thought they were in charge, but they were badly mistaken. They were simply playing a role that God had laid out for them centuries before they were born! Most of them lived and died without ever knowing that, but Nebuchadnezzar knew it - at least he did after he was sent out into the field to live like an ox for a few years!

Daniel 4:33-35 - The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: **and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?**

And Cyrus? If he had looked at a scroll of Isaiah, he would have found his own name there, written long before he was born! And Alexander? According to Josephus, he was shown the verses in Daniel that described his conquest.

One of the most wonderful pieces of evidence for God outside the Bible is the secular history of the world between the testaments. To all but the most blind, that history clearly shows God moving all of the pieces into place. And how else can we describe the rise of Alexander or the rise of Rome? History can't answer those questions, but the Bible does. They rose from obscurity to conquer the world because it was God's will that they do so. Why? So that God could fulfill his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 - a promise that was made two thousand years before the events described in this chapter!

Zechariah 11:4-5

4 Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter; 5 Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.

Verse 4 introduces the primary theme of Chapter 11 - **who will lead the people?** Who will be their shepherd? In a sense, that is the primary theme of the entire Bible! In whom will man trust? Whom will man follow?

Zechariah is about to perform some actions in this chapter that are intended to teach the people an important lesson about their leaders, just as Zechariah was earlier asked in Chapter 6 to perform an action by placing crowns on the head of the high priest to teach the people something about their promised Messiah.

Zechariah is addressed in verse 4, and he is told to "feed the flock of the slaughter." What does that mean? It means two things.

First, it means that the people's leaders weren't doing their job. Otherwise why would Zechariah be asked to do their job? But notice that this verse is not directed at the leaders of Zechariah's day but rather at the leaders at the time of the Roman conquest. It is a prophecy and a warning of what was to come.

Second, verse 4 also tells us that the flock was headed to slaughter. They were destined for destruction at the hands of those leaders.

Verse 5 tells us four things the leaders of the people did to the people - they possessed them, they killed them, they sold them, and they had no pity on them.

The leaders thought they owned the people. They thought the people were theirs to do with as they pleased. The leaders made decisions that enriched themselves and that led to the death of those they were leading. They were so brazen that, far from feeling guilty, they thanked God for the money that they made by selling out the people under their care! And they had no compassion on those who were suffering under their leadership.

It would be hard to imagine worse leaders than that! But are such leaders really all that unusual? Haven't we seen such leaders all throughout history? Don't we see such leaders today? The problem

with earthly leaders is that they are *earthly* leaders! Earthly leaders are tempted toward pride and greed, and many fall into those traps.

Paul even warns about those same two dangers for leaders in the church.

1 Timothy 3:2-6 - A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, **not greedy of filthy lucre**; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, **lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.**

No earthly leader is immune to the dangers of greed and pride.

So if no earthly leader is immune to these temptations, and if many earthly leaders yield to those temptations, then what is the answer? Stay tuned! Chapter 11 will provide a solution to that problem! But first the sad description of the people continues in verse 6.

#Zechariah