

PostExilicProphets 21-11-10b

Let's resume our study now. This is going to be an abbreviated study for our second session. We have some weather conditions here that may cut us off even before I get a chance to draw to a close, but I'm going to condense the point here and cut straight to the chase.

There are two things we can learn right away from chapter 11 with the Yogi Berra School of Interpretation, which is you can observe a lot by watching. And we're watching and observing what is in this chapter. And again, as we read it, we see that while God has just given promises of comfort, deliverance, encouragement, and blessing for his flock in chapter 10, he seems to be saying just the opposite in chapter 11.

Lebanon, this wonderful place. Remember Lebanon and Gilead are the places they're going to come and spread out and prosper in the surrounding context. Here, open your doors, Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars.

Wail, O Cyprus, because the cedars have burned up and fallen and the mighty are ruined. So this is a sort of a chain reaction you might imagine. Notice that you've got the cedars of Lebanon that catch fire and burn and fall.

So the cypresses, these are like the juniper trees, juniper or cypress trees, they're looking and these mighty cedars have fallen and they're next. And the oaks of Bashan then wail, just like the cypresses or the junipers, because the thick forest has come down. And all of the remaining trees that grow by the river Jordan, the jungle of the Jordan, the lush forestation on each bank of the Jordan is in ruins.

But we're going to crack this puzzle that has over 41 different solutions here. Who are the three shepherds that are dismissed and removed and appear no more in one month? Down in verse eight. I dismissed the three shepherds in one month.

My soul loathed them and their soul also abhorred me. This is the opposite of a mutual admiration society. This is a mutual disrespect society.

So do you notice anything here about how many shepherds there are and how many kinds of trees there are? Yes, you do. There's three, right? There are cypresses, there are junipers, which are cypresses. There's the cedars of Lebanon, the cypresses, and the oaks.

And they are representative of and emblematic as sort of leaders for all of the trees that grow by the Jordan. The Jordan River defines the land of Israel from the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea, right? It's integral. So this is a clue.

So of all of the proposed solutions, let me just cut to the chase here because time is short and I will tell you what I think and why I think it. Context suggests that the flock of God winds up being shepherded by these three bad shepherds. They are all shepherding at once and they are

all dismissed, removed, and one surmises destroyed in a month.

In one month, three shepherds are dismissed. Now, this is a symbolic action on the part of Zechariah. There probably were three actual shepherds just as Isaiah went around naked for three years and Jeremiah wore the yoke and wives die and the prophet is not to mourn and so on.

There are many symbolic actions that took place in the days of the, especially the Old Testament prophets. Same thing here. But let me give you a little information because who do you think Zechariah represents here as the one who truly cares for the flock and the one who is going to deal with the shepherds? He personally dismisses these shepherds and he does it quickly, expeditiously.

Who would Zechariah be symbolically representing here? This would be the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. I am the door of the sheep and those who try to crawl over the wall are robbers and so on, right? So who did the Lord Jesus break as powers over the people? Let me read you a little description here about the ancient Jewish court system that was the supreme religious body in the land of Israel during the time of the temple. It is called the Sanhedrin.

If you go to the Jewish encyclopedia and other authoritative descriptions of this body, you find that the Sanhedrin, the great Sanhedrin, the one that met in Jerusalem was composed of 71 members, including its presidents. There was a president and a vice-president, so to speak, that accounted for two of the 71. And so there are 69 members, three groups, exactly three, each contributing in normal times, 23 members, 23, 46, 69.

23 members from the chamber of the priests, that's number one, these are your chief priests and your other senior priests, 23 members of the Sanhedrin from the priests. Secondly, the chamber of the scribes, the doctors of the law, the scholars, the legal experts, 23 members. And finally, the chamber of the elders.

These are the, like the Congress coming from the people, representing those who work for a living, who are landowners and have businesses and industries and so on. Priests are professional priests, scholars are professional scholars. These guys, the priests don't even own any land, right? Ostensibly they are Levites and don't own property.

Of course, that all got corrupted in the latter days and they actually had vast holdings. But in the ideal, you've got these who are working in the realm of religious expertise, what is holy and what is not. Who is it that a leper is to show himself to if he finds himself cleansed? Go, Jesus said, show yourself to whom? The priests, declaring what is right and what is wrong, what is holy and what is unholy, what is undefiled and what is defiled.

Arbiters of what is acceptable and what is corrupt. This sacrifice is good, this one is not. This animal is blemished, this one is accepted.

This disease has spread or this disease is cured. That's the priests. One third of the government of Israel, meeting and residing and presiding in the temple.

They met there every day except for Sabbaths and feast days. Sanhedrin convened in Jerusalem at the temple every day. Every day except Saturday and high feast days.

Every day except the Sabbath. Priests, scribes and elders. It is very informative when you read the gospels as we are studying the gospel of Matthew and note representatives of what group or groups are questioning Jesus, plotting against Jesus, questioning Jesus.

It'll be the chief priests and the elders. Sometimes it is the scribes and the chief priests. Sometimes it is, you just look and they are the components of this governing body and they are doing reconnaissance and then they're going back to the next meeting to get policy decisions.

So they meet together, they convene together, they form a unified, actually it wasn't unified, but they form a unit in terms of the Sanhedrin as a governing body. And the Sanhedrin all rose together and they all fell together. Because once the Lord Jesus was rejected by his people and sentenced to death by the Sanhedrin within a month, they are out.

Now they're gonna continue to function, but you think about the resurrection and you think about the 40 days where the Lord Jesus appeared and the coming of the age of the church on the day of Pentecost. And in the space of a month, their power is broken and they no longer preside over the religious life or the spiritual life of the people. Jesus commissions his disciples, he breathes on them the Holy Spirit.

And within that month, it ends a few days after that, formally at the Feast of Pentecost. But when you're rounding off in the space of a month, these three shepherds are destroyed. That's what I think.

Now, what application do we draw from this? There were people who should have been sheep, should have been responding to God who is the shepherd of Israel and instead set themselves up to be shepherds. Woe to the shepherds. You go to Ezekiel and they liked the good parts of Ezekiel, the prophecies of coming deliverance and prosperity.

They didn't like the parts that talked about the unfaithful shepherds. Remember that? And they didn't respond to it. They were selective in the scripture that they paid attention to.

So the breaking of these two staffs is symbolic of God breaking covenant. And you say, well, I thought the covenants were unconditional. I thought they were going to be fulfilled.

They are. Who has opted out of the covenant with God? Some of the sheep. In fact, I would say most of the sheep.

If they opt out of their part of the covenant, God opts out of his part of the covenant. So is God keeping covenant? And is God breaking covenant? Yes to both. It is conditioned on response.

We are heirs of the new covenant founded on new and better promises. What do you think will happen to us as the people of God if we do not value, honor, and fulfill our part of that covenant? The very same thing that happens to God's people. Some of God's people are going to enter into Lebanon and Gilead and be blessed.

Others, fire is going to break out in Lebanon and burn the cedars to the ground and take the cypresses and the oaks and any other surrounding trees up and down the Jordan banks with them. They're all the people. But those who are prideful, those who are arrogant and set themselves up to be leaders, at such time as you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles.

You're not ready to be a shepherd. You are blind. And the arm with which you try to lead is going to be struck.

And the eye that you try to see with is going to be blinded. And you're going to be burned to the ground. You're going to be fired as the false shepherd that you are.

And God is going to put his shepherd in his place. You can go back to King Saul and see the pattern emerge. Just because you've been anointed King doesn't mean you're going to remain King.

Just because God, remember that God made a covenant promise that if Saul was obedient and faithful, he and his house would be a dynasty in Israel. And it didn't even go to the second generation. Jonathan didn't even get to wear the crown because Saul was disobedient.

There was a covenant promise made to Saul and it was not fulfilled because Saul failed in the first generation. There was covenant promise made to David and that covenant was fulfilled because in every generation, there were Davidic heirs somewhere in the family who were either themselves or through their progeny going to be able to fulfill that. And so you have Josiah and you have Hezekiah and you have faithful kings.

It never goes to the third generation. You never have three generation curse kicking in in the rulership of Judah. There's always someone somewhere in David's line willing to be faithful and willing to serve as that link.

Are there hardships? Are there judgments? Does Judah eventually go out? Yes, there are, but there is restoration. There is recovery. There is blessing and prosperity on the other side of that.

Here's the summary and here's where we're going to close. The people of God are going to pass through the waters of affliction. They're going to have to fight back and smite the waves of the roaring sea.

They will pass through the waters of affliction, but they're going to get there. We should not be surprised that we face hard times. Here's what we're going to see next time.

Here's what we don't have time to cover tonight. What is the mechanism by which these sheep are identified and separated? What is the mechanism by which these bad unholy shepherds are outed and removed? Hardship. You don't lay a table full of blessings before the people and find out who's good and who's not.

It is the sun that rises on the seed planted in the soil that exposes that which is shallow and that which is deep. It requires the heat of the day to separate and to expose. When we face affliction, you can look at it as hard times, as a grinding adversity.

Oh Lord, deliver me, I want out of this. It's painful, it's uncomfortable. But another way to look at it, a better way to look at it, a biblical way to look at it is this is my chance to prove that I am one of the sheep that is going to enter into the green pastures and rest beside the still waters.

I am one of those who is going to enter into Lebanon and into Gilead and be blessed. I am one of those who is going to live in Judah and in Jerusalem and be counted on when the chips are down for God to use, for fire to break forth and take the enemies out. But the only way that can be demonstrated is in hardship, in adversity.

This is what shows who we are. The testing of our faith produces durability. We're going to endure to the end and be delivered.

He that endures to the end will be delivered. It's scripture, that's us. Hardship is our chance to prove it.

In the same way that a pop quiz or a test or a midterm exam or a final proves whether we know the material or not. There is no blessing without passing through the sea of affliction. You cannot get there.

In this world, you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. If you're an overcomer in that, the way Jesus was an overcomer, we will sit with him on his throne. We will walk with him in white.

We will have the white stone and the new name. We will partake of the hidden manna. All of those wonderful overcomer blessings.

You can't be an overcomer if there's nothing to overcome. That's what chapter 11 is pointing out. These are the ones who did not overcome.

They tried to be shepherds, masters of the scene. Somebody mentioned Abba earlier in one of their songs, you know, Voulez-vous, you know, it's all about the moment and prevailing in the moment. And masters of the scene, another one of their songs, I'm the dancing queen.

I'm taking charge. I know the game. I know how to play this game.

It's temporary. It's ephemeral. It's fleeting.

Go for what is permanent. Go for what is eternal. These people missed it.

And chapter 11 is what happens to them. And they are mixed in with the very same flock that we saw in chapter 10 and that we're gonna see in chapter 12. There is a winnowing process.

How do you separate wheat from chaff? You've got to beat it with a stick and you've got to throw it up in the wind and see what is heavy enough to land next to the winnower and what gets blown away and is fit only for burning. Chaff. He will gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff is gonna burn with unquenchable fire.

That's the key to chapter 10, chapter 11, and chapter 12. Different groups from the same group, different outcomes and different fates from those who started out together. Shepherds versus shepherds, sheep versus sheep.

Who are we gonna be? That is the burning question. And we'll pick it up next time. But weather indicates to me that we need to close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how powerfully it communicates to us, it convicts us, it motivates us and encourages us to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that we can do that, that we will be ready, willing, and able.

We pray that you will bless our insight, bless our meditations and our reflections, bless our conversation and our fellowship in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.