

PostExilicProphets 21-11-17a

Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 17th of November, 2021. We're continuing our study in the book of Zechariah, saw some fascinating things open up in chapter 11, actually chapters 10 through 12 last time.

That's where we will pick up tonight. And we'll be not only in Zechariah, but also in Ezekiel. If you want to be finding the place, uh, you can start in Zechariah and then look for Ezekiel in the vicinity of chapter 34.

These are the two places we're going to be tonight, Zechariah chapter 11 and Ezekiel chapter 34. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our fellowship. Uh, and cultivate the presence and power of God's spirit as we look at the truth of his word together.

Father, what a blessing it is. What a privilege to gather with believers who are enthusiastic about your word, your plan, and your purpose expressed bodily in the Lord Jesus Christ and, uh, into which we enter through him, we have privileges. We have potentials.

We have wonderful blessings and opportunities through him. We thank you for him and his tremendous work of faithfulness, obedience, and love for you and for us that makes our lives possible. We pray that as we look at him through this revelation in Zechariah and in Ezekiel, that your Holy spirit will impress upon us, uh, your grace and your glory, uh, revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and through him in and through us.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Let's quickly remind ourselves where we are in Zechariah.

Uh, looking at the big picture here, God made wonderful promises in Zechariah chapter 10 about the restoration of Judah and Israel. The Lord is going to come. There's going to be glory.

There's going to be power. There's going to be strength in verse six that comes for the house of Judah and the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have mercy on them.

What a wonderful set of promises. You can read that whole chapter when you go to chapter 12, which brackets our target chapter, chapter 11, there is the coming deliverance of Judah. In verse three of chapter 12, God is going to make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples, all who would heave it away will be cut in pieces, even though all the nations of the earth are gathered against it, I will strike every horse with confusion, riders with madness.

I will open my eyes on the house of Judah will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness. The governors of Judah are going to look to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for their strength. We saw that.

And, uh, the governors of Judah are going to be like a fire pan in the wood pile and like a fiery torch in the sheaves. And you know what this is. These are ignition devices.

This is going to be the means by which God ignites the fires of judgment. The presence of these faithful people is going to instigate judgment on these rejecters, these enemies of God and of God's people. The Lord will save the tents of Judah first in verse seven, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah.

The whole region of Judah is going to be equal in importance in strategic use by God to accomplish this victory, not just Jerusalem, but the surrounding region as well, this can only happen at the end of the millennial kingdom. Uh, this use of the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem to be the strength and to be the fire pan, uh, through which God initiates and completes this judgment cannot happen at the end of the tribulation and the battle of Armageddon. Can you think why? Think about Matthew chapter 24.

We haven't gotten there, but we'll be there soon. We're just a few chapters away. And remember what Jesus said to do when you see the abomination of desolation set up in the temple.

What are the people, God's people in Israel supposed to do when they see the antichrist and these abominations taking place, do they stay in the city and become strength and a fortress and a stronghold and a bow and an arrow and a fire pan and so on, what are they supposed to do when they see the antichrist? When you see the abomination of desolation, flee to the hills. Don't take time to go inside the house and get your coat, leave. This is how I know that this is not talking about the first time that the nations are gathered against Jerusalem, because by the time they get gathered, the faithful people have followed Jesus instruction and gotten out of Dodge.

It is the second time that is in view. This is the end of the millennial kingdom, the kingdom itself and Judah in particular, and Jerusalem in particular, in particular are going to be the dwelling place of the faithful. This is where the peaceable kingdom promises are fulfilled, not throughout the entire world, not even throughout the entire kingdom.

It is on Mount Zion. It is in the precincts of Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judah. If you want to talk about blessing by association, uh, those who are, uh, commuting into Jerusalem for those 10 centuries are going to live in Judah.

This is going to be the favored blessed near perfect environment that pertains and the nations in the world. And those people who were not allowed in when the rod came down and they were not allowed to pass under and enter the kingdom proper, much less Judah, much less Jerusalem. These people are going to be increasingly bitter and jealous and angry and what they cannot create themselves.

They want to take by force. We will go in and take Judah and we'll take Jerusalem and we'll, we'll force our way into the kingdom. Is that ring a bell ever since the time of John the Baptist kingdom has been out there and people have tried to muscle their way in.

Well, that's, what's going to happen at Gog Magog when Satan has released, he's going to lead that worldwide rebellion. This is going to be world war four, unless we have one between now and the tribulation, Armageddon's world war three, Gog Magog is world war four. So that's what is in view here.

I will pour out verse 10 on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me whom they pierced. Now this is a two edged sword.

Remember the effect of the stone cut without hands, the rock of salvation. It's the same rock, but it has two different effects, doesn't it? You either fall on the rock and are broken in humility and allow God to remake and regenerate and make the new creation in Christ or the rock, that same rock falls on people and grinds them to powder. When they are operating in the last half of Romans chapter one, they know him as God, but they do not honor him as God.

They are not thankful. They become empty in their imagination, vain and foolish, pursuing silly things. And their foolish hearts are darkened and God gives them over to the things that they choose.

And all we can do is try to pluck ones who have any semblance of repentance out of the fire, hating the garment spotted by the flesh. But there is a time to touch not the unclean thing, to come out from among them and be separate and have no truck with those who are adamant in their refusal and in their rejection. Because to stay is like remaining behind in Sodom.

If Lot had not let the angels drag him and his wife and daughters out of there, he would have perished in the fire and brimstone. And however reluctant we may be, we have to go forth out of places that are about to be judged by God and go forth away from people who are lining themselves up for judgment by God. In that day, verse 11, there shall be a great morning in Jerusalem like the morning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

Morning in Armageddon. There was morning once before. Nobody likes to see slaughter.

Nobody wants to. God is not happy about having to judge and take lives and futures away from people. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. And there's nothing wrong with mourning over those who put themselves in a place of judgment. It's sad.

It's not a cause of celebration. It's tragic, but necessary. And between chapter 12, this deliverance of Judah, and between chapter 10, the restoration of Judah and Israel, you have this chapter 11, and we looked at it last time.

Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars. Wail, O Cyprus, for the cedar has fallen because the mighty trees are ruined. Wail, O Cyprus, for 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. Sound of roaring lions, for the pride of the Jordan is in ruins.

The plentitude, the lush forestation around that freshen of the river Jordan is in ruins. I mentioned last time that these trees are significant. And you'll remember that the end of chapter 10, when you go up to verse 10, I will bring them back from the land of Egypt and gather them from Assyria.

I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon until there is no more room found for them. You know where Lebanon is? It's north of Israel. This is where these wonderful cedars used to grow in super abundance.

Hiram, king of Tyre, supplied wonderful cedar logs to Solomon when he built the first temple. So what do you know about this cedar? It is used in the temple. The second tree that is mentioned is the cypress.

What do you know about cypress or juniper trees? Well, we'll come to that. Just like we're doing chapter 10 and chapter 12, and then coming back to chapter 11, we're doing the cedar and we're going to do the oaks of Bashan and we'll come back to the cypress. But the third tree that is mentioned here in verse 2 of chapter 11 are the oaks of Bashan.

So you've got the cedars that are going to burn and you've got the oaks of Bashan that are going to come down with the rest of the forest and be destroyed. Well, this ties in to the mention of Lebanon and Gilead up above. This is our clue about the bracket.

You have Lebanon and Gilead mentioned. Here's a Bible trivia question. Where is Gilead? I can remember when I was a little boy, my dad was a choir director at whichever church we were at at the time.

He did that in nearly every church we were in at one time or another. And they did a special piece of music and it was called There is a Balm in Gilead. It's really beautiful tune.

I haven't heard it in decades, but there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul. Well, where's Gilead? Anybody remember? It is on the east side of the Jordan. This is where Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh and one other tribe decided to stay.

It was Naphtali or somebody stayed over on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead because it was so lush and so verdant. And remember when Joshua went into the land that they had to send back to these two and a half tribes and say, hey, you know, just because you're staying over here doesn't mean you shouldn't come help us fight to fulfill God's command and eradicate these Canaanites. And they said, yes, we will come.

And so they sent their armies across, even though that was not where they would ultimately dwell. And it was quite a, quite a time during the conquest of the land. But that's Gilead.

It's on the eastern side. It is bordered on the north by a place called Bashan. You may remember that there was a guy named Og.

What was he king of? King of Bashan, Og, king of Bashan. He had the northern half of Gilead, basically. To the south of him was another guy named Sihon.

Remember what he was king of? He was king of the area south of Bashan. And north of Moab and Ammon. So the southern border of Gilead is Moab and Ammon.

And up north you have Bashan. And Bashan, because of its hills and being on the northern part of this verdant area, was famous for its oaks in the same way that Lebanon was famous for its cedars. So if these trees are all going to catch fire and this fire is going to come down and destroy those who are attacking Jerusalem, from what cardinal direction is the fire going to come? The north.

Lebanon is north of Judah. Bashan, across the Jordan, is north of Jerusalem. Judah.

So the fire that breaks out in these trees is going to start in the north. The cedars and the oaks are going to catch fire and it's going to burn down the Jordan River, which travels which direction? It's not an east-west river. It's a north-south river.

So fire breaks out in the north, travels through all of this forestation on each side of the Jordan, and that comes right down. What's the first town the Israelites came to when they crossed the Jordan after the exodus and the 40 years of wandering? They're going to the Contra, what was that town? Jericho, which was eventually rebuilt. That's where the road went that the good Samaritan and the man that was mugged, that road from Jerusalem to Jericho, well, that goes right on down to the Jordan, the same place where the bad water was made good by Elisha.

And you have the young guys who were mad at Elisha because they had been making money hauling water from the Jordan to the town. Now the town's water is good and they're out of a job. So they come out and say, go up, old bald head, and bears tear them up.

Same area. So when you think of Jericho, the first instance, it's the first place where there's judgment on the Canaanites, despite the warning that was posted on the whitewashed cliffs where the entire law was written, Rahab read it, Rahab understood, she was spared, everybody else in Jericho gets judged and ultimately throughout the rest of the land, the man who rebuilt Jericho after it was destroyed, what happened to his first son? Judgment. What happened to his last son? Judgment.

What happens when the waters are restored by the prophet Elisha and those young men come out? Judgment through the bears. So over and over again, this area between Jerusalem and the Jordan is a place of judgment. Now, I don't have time to rehearse.

There are even more things you could go into. Look at what happens with Elijah and Elisha and the Jordan and crossing and coming back with prophets on one side and these two on the other

and the double portion of the spirit and all the rest of it. But we're looking at these trees.

So I will strengthen them in the Lord, it says at the end of chapter 10, and they shall walk up and down in his name, says the Lord. These are those who pass through the sea with affliction and strike the waves of the sea. The depths of the river shall dry up the depths of the river.

This river is the river Euphrates. It was like the Nile is to Egypt. The Euphrates was to Babylon and drying up the river.

If you dry up the Nile, Egypt's power is broken. If you dry up the river Euphrates, the power of Babylon is broken. The power of Assyria is in view and Nineveh and all of these, the pride of Assyria shall be brought down.

The scepter of Egypt shall depart that will strengthen them in the Lord. They shall walk up and down in his name, says the Lord. Then you get to chapter 11.

Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fires may devour your cedars. Wail, O Cyprus, for the cedar has fallen because the mighty are ruined. Wail, Oaks of Bashan.

Lebanon and Gilead, these places that are areas of prosperity in chapter 10 and a blessing are now going to be the source of judgment. Why? Well, keep reading. 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. Praise God. I'm rich.

And their shepherds do not pity them. 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.

I will not deliver them from their hand. So I, Zechariah, fed the flock for slaughter, in particular, the poor of the flock. And you can see the text note down there that the Septuagint translates this, in particular, the Canaanites.

I took for myself two staffs, the one I called beauty and the other I called bonds, and I fed the flock. Well, let me go through this a little bit. We talked about the three shepherds that come in the next verse.

Verse eight, I dismissed three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them and their soul also abhorred me. 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 into that I might break the covenant with which I had made with all the peoples.

It was broken on that day. Thus, the Canaanites, if you follow the text note of the flock who are watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. People can recognize God and God's spirit

and God's word and still hate it, still despise it, still push against it.

I said to them, if it is agreeable to you, give me my wages. And if not refrain, they wait out for my wages, 30 pieces of silver. Let's go back up and talk about these two staffs.

The idea here is that these individuals have set themselves up to do the work of the Lord, they have set themselves up to be shepherds, and they have to be eradicated, they have to be run out by the true shepherd to be dismissed. If you keep your place here and turn to Ezekiel chapter 34, as I mentioned over the last couple of weeks, the prophecies of Ezekiel were well known in Zechariah's day. As you will remember, when we went through Ezekiel, he was by the river Kabar in the Babylonian captivity, and he shared and acted out these prophecies throughout the captivity.

So they were fresh. The ink was hardly dry. So when you get to Ezekiel, you can see the heading on chapter 34 is Irresponsible Shepherds.

But this is preceded, the context of 34 is in 33. So look up to chapter 33, verse 30. God is talking to Ezekiel and he says, as for you, son of man, which God calls Ezekiel several times, as for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses, and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.

So they come to you as people do. They sit before you as my people and they hear your words, but they do not do them. You remember me using the word scary last week, people are talking about Ezekiel as they stand beside the walls as they're at their doorways and they're saying, oh, you've got to come and hear what the word of the Lord is that Ezekiel is presenting.

So they do come and they sit as people do and they hear your words, but they do not do them for with their mouth. They show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

And when this comes to pass, surely it will come. Then they will know that a prophet has been among them. They're hearing the words, they're ignoring them and not doing them.

It does not turn the corner into interpretation and application. It is not making a difference. It's not sinking down into the soil and producing fruit.

They are going to come to a point when judgment falls, where they're going to remember and know that Ezekiel truly was a prophet, which means they are without excuse. Do you hear a familiar note when we come to Zechariah and it says, when the rod is broken in chapter 11, verse 11, the poor of the flock who were watching me knew that it was the word of the Lord. Whether this is the poor or the Canaanites, there are a couple of text problems in this, uh, chapter that are, uh, interesting to look at.

Uh, and this is certainly one of them, but context will solve it for us as it always does. So we'll come back to this, but notice the link between that section of Ezekiel. I was reminded this past week that in the original, there are no chapter and verse divisions.

And somebody was saying, well, that's the cause of our problems. It's these chapter and verse divisions. If we would take those out, people wouldn't proof text and run amok with scripture.

Oh, please. If you think it's just the fault of the chapters and verses and not the human heart and our magnificent ability to goof things up, uh, these are a wonderful navigation aid. It is helpful to remember that these were inserted much later, you know, in the last five or 600 years is when these appeared.

And prior to that, they weren't, uh, numbered and so on. And, uh, publishers starting in maybe the 1500s started putting in these chapters and later the verses it's wonderfully helpful so that we can all get to the same place at roughly the same time. But the last part of Ezekiel 33 and the first part of 34 really belong together.

When this comes to pass. So then in verse in chapter 34 of Ezekiel, the word of the Lord came to me saying, son of man prophesy against the shepherds of Israel prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves should not the shepherds feed the flocks. You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool.

You slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost. But with force and cruelty, you have ruled them.

Now, just thinking about the strongly implied link between this context and Zechariah chapter 11, do you think the word should be translated Kenanites or the poor what's Ezekiel talking about here? You've not strengthened the weak. You've not healed those who were sick. You've not bound up what was broken.

You haven't brought back what was driven away. You haven't sought what was lost. What did Jesus say? The son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

I'm the good shepherd. The shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Parable of the 100 sheep, 99 in the fold, one out on the hills.

The shepherd goes out. The parable of the lost sheep, Luke chapter 15. So in Ezekiel chapter 34, you've got sheep that are poorly shepherded with the result that you've got a lot of sick and afflicted sheep, poor sheep.

Verse five, they were scattered because no shepherd. They became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill.

Yes, my flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth and no one was seeking or searching. Now, let me ask you a question. This is a question I ask myself.

I always ask myself these questions before I ask you. It's like a lawyer is not supposed to ask a witness a question. He doesn't already know the answer to because, you know, cases have been lost through such folly.

But let me ask this question. These are God's sheep. He says they are mine and they are needy.

They are hungry. They are weak. They need strength.

They need feeding. They need support. And the shepherds that have been assigned and appointed to provide this care don't provide it.

With the result that these sheep are scattered and they're all over the hills, they are lost, they are in harm's way. How did this happen? Why didn't God immediately, as soon as the first sheep started going astray, say, hey, wait a minute and send a faithful shepherd to come and corral them back in? Why didn't he come and discipline the bad shepherds right off the bat? Why didn't God act to prevent? Here's my question now. Why did God not act to prevent hardship for his afflicted sheep? Why didn't God stop it? Did he lack the power? It's obviously a silly argument.

Did he lack the desire? Did he not really love these sheep? So it was okay for them to be mistreated and eaten by the shepherds and scattered across the hills. Does God not really love these sheep? Does he not care for their interests? Why are the sheep allowed to suffer? Phrasing the question that way helps us get to the answer, doesn't it? I've perused any number of commentaries on both Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 11, and I couldn't find anybody who tackled this question. These are God's sheep.

These are God's people, and they are abused, they are misused, they are mistreated. They are suffering, in some cases, at the cost of their lives. Sheep that are eaten are not alive anymore.

They are sheared for the benefit of these shepherds, and this goes on for a fair period of time. Why didn't God immediately act from heaven? Why didn't God immediately shelter and secure and bless these sheep, his people? Why does he allow them to suffer? One thing you can say for sure, nothing happens in God's universe that is not a part of God's plan and God's purpose. To say that there are things that happen outside his plan and purpose is to say that God doesn't really have enough power to control his own creation.

We know that he does. Was God unaware that this was going on? No. Was he unable to fix it? No.

Did he lack concern or love for the sheep? No. So we can conclude that God has a purpose in allowing these sheep to suffer, and in some cases, to be overcome, right? What does Romans 8, 28 say? We know that all things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who

are called according to his purpose, called according to his purpose. There is a purpose in suffering.

There is a purpose in sometimes being vanquished by evil. We don't come out smelling like roses. We are not secured in the ark and the storm is all outside and we are cozy and warm inside.

There are times when we wind up on the ash heap, scraping ourselves with a broken piece of pottery, and we have not done anything wrong. We have done everything right. So to answer this question, why are God's good sheep suffering, falls in line with why did Job suffer? Why did God allow Satan to reach out and kill his family, take away all of his possessions, and afflict him with a horrific disease? Why did God do that? So thankful for the book of Job, because we have the answer, and what is it? In all of this affliction, Job did not sin with his lips, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

Was he bewildered? Was he discouraged? Did he get depressed? Was he short with his friends who were drawing wrong conclusions and accusing him of things that he was not guilty of? Why did God let Job suffer? Why did God let the Lord Jesus suffer? Why did God let the apostle Paul suffer? Why was Peter imprisoned? Why were the apostles beaten, stoned, shipwrecked in Paul's case, bitten by snakes? Why didn't God put an invisible layer of protection around each one of them so that they could do his holy work? Counterintuitively to the human mind, God's glory shines brightly in times of adversity and brighter than in times of blessing. It is our faithfulness in trial, our trust in God's ultimate vindication, and our ultimate blessing, his ultimate fulfillment of promise that separates us from the world and separates us from the truly immature, the truly weak, the truly uninterested, those who are apathetic, those who are indifferent. Why did God allow Caleb and Joshua to suffer for 40 years with the people in the wilderness, and not let them do anything wrong? They did everything right, and they had to endure the judgment of wandering in the wilderness until everybody they knew died.

Why didn't God slip them across the border and let them hook up with some of Rahab's antecedents or somebody else who was faithful in the land? We fail to trust God in adversity when we ought to trust. What's gonna happen to these sheep that were shorn and eaten and afflicted and scattered in Ezekiel's prophecy? What's their ultimate destination? What's their ultimate fate? What is their future? They are going to be in Judah. They are going to be in Jerusalem for 10 centuries.

They were abused by bad shepherds for a handful of years. They are going to be in the blessedness of the millennial kingdom, and very likely in the blessedness of the kingdom of the father thereafter for a vast chunk of time and into eternity. A momentary light affliction, working an eternal weight of glory.

Anybody that's been in the dentist chair knows that it's worth whatever discomfort you may have to endure. And oftentimes, you know, despite the skill and the best efforts of a dentist, you still feel something. It's just no fun having your tooth pulled.

I can testify. It's no fun. You know, just getting the Novocaine, you're gonna feel a pinch.

You know, they shake your cheek. And the dentist over here in Pryor now has got a thing that reminds me of the butterfly deal they put on my, when they were trying to work my shoulder and do physical therapy. So they put this fluttering thing on my skin.

And I said, what does this do? And they said, well, it just distracts your brain so you don't feel the pain of the therapy in your shoulder. And I thought, okay. Well, the dentist has got the same thing.

It's a little vibrating deal. And you get to thinking about your cheek and you don't notice so much the injection into your bony protrusions in there. But it is worth it.

It's worth the discomfort to have your tooth fixed in a wonderful way so that unlike George Washington, you can chew through meal after meal after meal with no discomfort, no pain whatsoever. Childbirth, one of the most intense experiences humans can have. The ladies who give birth to babies will say, that's a lot of discomfort, but is it worth it? Momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory, long lasting result.

This is what Zachariah is talking about. This is what Ezekiel is talking about. God will allow bad things to happen to good people because when you squeeze a piece of fruit, you find out what's inside.

Is it sweet or is it bitter? Is it healthy or is it rotten? Put it under pressure, you find out. We should not dread. We should not fear.

We should not draw back onto perdition. It is by faith and patience that we inherit the promises. We've got to play guts football sometimes.

How do we do it? Not in our own strength, not with our own willpower. It is power that God provides and God knows them that are his. Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and they come when I call them.

They are the called. If God calls us to adversity, if God calls us to suffering, if he calls us to trial, he's got very, very good reasons for doing it. We may not understand them now, but that's why it's called faith.

It's what we can't see, but we do it out of love for God and out of trust in his promises. That's what this is about. That's why there is adversity on groups that include faithful people.

God knows our names. The very hairs on our head are numbered. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved.

And that's moved from the security and the ultimate reward and blessing that he has in store for us. We'll pause here and take our break, come back. We're going to take a further look at these three shepherds, the three trees, and this sandwich of blessing with judgment in the

middle.

When we come back. Thank you.