

The False Shepherd

Scripture: Zechariah 11:15–17

Code: 2168

INTRODUCTION

The book of Zechariah is of tremendous prophetic importance in viewing history from the time of Zechariah to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the most significant prophetic events is the rise of an individual commonly known as the Antichrist. Although that it is not specifically his title in the Old Testament, it certainly fits him well. The apostle John said there were many antichrists present in his day (1 John 2:18), but spoke of one who would be the most vehement adversary of God to ever live, apart from Satan himself (1 John 4:3).

As we come to Zechariah 11:15-17, we come face to face with this being. He's not a demon or a fallen angel, but an evil person whom the prophet identifies as a foolish shepherd (v. 15). In verse 17, he is called an impostor (KJV, "idol," archaic for "pretender"). He is a false shepherd, a contrast to the true Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle John, writing in the first century to a wide circle of believers, said, "Little children ... ye have heard that antichrist shall come" (1 John 2:18). So the coming of the Antichrist was common knowledge.

A. His Coming

1. Spoken of by the apostles

The apostle Paul wrote specifically about the coming of this individual: "That man of sin [will] be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3).

2. Alluded to by the Lord

In John 5:43 Jesus says, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive." Jesus was echoing the theme of Zechariah 11: that Israel would reject the true Shepherd and accept a false one. In Matthew 24 Jesus associated the Antichrist as the one responsible for the abomination of desolations, which will occur in the middle of the seven-year covenant he will establish with Israel (vv. 11-15; cf., Dan. 9:27).

3. Foretold by the prophets

One such prophecy is the text we're studying in this chapter, Zechariah 11:15-17. It reads, "The Lord said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd; for, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, who shall not visit those that are cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which standeth still, but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and

tear their claws [hoofs] in pieces. Woe to the idol [false] shepherd that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye; his arm shall be completely dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened." That is one of several Old Testament passages referring to the Antichrist.

B. His Conspiracy

1. Evidence of satanic conflict

God and Satan have been at war ever since Satan fell. Before the world began, Satan sought to be God's equal, saying, "I will ascend into heaven ... I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:13-14). So God threw him out of heaven and a host of the angels followed him. Since that time Satan and the other fallen angels have continued in their rebellion against God. The particular attack Satan has been concentrating on most since the Fall of man has been directed toward the seed promised in Genesis 3:15. That verse promises that a redeemer would fatally wound Satan, symbolized by the serpent. Therefore Satan has been doing everything he can throughout history to stop that seed, who is the Messiah, from arriving. Because God chose Israel as the nation through which the Messiah would come, Satan has always tried to destroy Israel to prevent Him from establishing the Kingdom. As the Messiah who has promised to return, Jesus Christ is still the object of Satan's attacks; and Israel, as the future recipient of many of God's promises, is still persecuted in our day.

a) The "sons of God"

Satan's first attempt to stop the messianic seed from coming was to try to corrupt the human race so that a sinless Messiah, needed to redeem a sinful human race, could never be born. Genesis 6:2 says that "the sons of God" (demons) cohabitated with "the daughters of men" (human women). Satan tried to produce a half-breed race of demonic humans. But Satan's attempt failed when God drowned that entire race in the flood, saving only Noah and his family.

b) Pharaoh

Satan again tried to destroy Israel through the pharaoh of Egypt, who commanded that all male babies born to Israelites be killed. But again God preserved the people of Israel and delivered them out of Egypt by the hand of one man who wasn't slaughtered as a baby, Moses. So Satan's efforts were thwarted again.

c) Mordecai

The book of Esther records how Satan ultimately tried to get the entire nation of Israel wiped out while they were captives in Persia. Through the wisdom and bravery of Mordecai and Esther, the Jewish people were saved from wholesale slaughter.

d) Herod

In the New Testament we read that Herod the Great tried to slaughter every male child under two in the region of Bethlehem to eliminate the prophesied King of the Jews, whom he feared would usurp his throne. But God enabled Jesus the Messiah to escape.

e) Satan

When Jesus began His ministry Satan tried to thwart Him with temptation. But he failed again.

f) The Nazarenes

The people of Nazareth wanted to push Jesus off a cliff for claiming to be the Messiah, but He passed through the midst of them and escaped unharmed (Luke 4:16-30).

g) The religious leaders

Finally Satan succeeded in having Christ nailed to a cross and sealed in a tomb. But that failed because He rose from the grave.

2. Expectations of satanic conflict

Satan is a loser. He's failed every attempt he's made to destroy God's people and their Messiah. But he stubbornly continues to oppose God in this present age. Ephesians 6:12 says, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." We're in a battle against demonic forces and Satan himself. And the war rages on. But Christ assures us in Matthew 16:18, saying, "I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it." The assumption there is that the gates of hell are trying to overcome God's Kingdom.

There's coming a time when Satan will pull off another attack. Revelation 12 prophesies about the war Satan and his demons will wage against Michael the archangel and the holy angels. It will be a "Star Wars" beyond anything we could ever imagine. When Michael and the angels win, God will cast Satan and his host to earth. There they will spawn their evil in an unprecedented manner during what is known as the Tribulation, again trying to destroy Israel and prevent their Messiah from returning. His chief agent will be the Antichrist. This man's task will be to set up a world government of evil and eliminate God's people and their returning Messiah.

C. His Character

1. An intellectual genius

Daniel 7:8 describes him as having "eyes like the eyes of a man" (cf., v. 20). The eye is often a symbol of intelligence.

2. An outstanding orator

Daniel 7:8 says the Antichrist will have "a mouth speaking great things" (cf., v. 20). Effective leadership is predicated on the ability to communicate.

3. A master politician

Revelation 6:2 says he will conquer the world having a bow without any arrows. That means he'll conquer peacefully through politics. The world will be looking for someone to bring peace and economic stability. Daniel 11:21 says, "In his estate shall stand up a vile person [the Antichrist], to whom they shall not give the honor of the kingdom; but he shall come in peaceably, and obtain the kingdom by flatteries."

4. A commercial wizard

Daniel 8:25 says, "Through his policy ... he shall cause deceit to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many; he shall stand up against the Prince of princes, but he shall be broken without hand." He will be a wizard at building a world system of economics that feeds his own pocket (cf., Rev. 18).

5. A military genius

According to Daniel 7:23 he "shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces." He will be a military leader without equal. He's going to be everything that Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, the Caesars, and Napoleon Bonaparte were in terms of military ability combined in one individual. Revelation 13:4, 7 says, "They worshiped the beast [the Antichrist],

saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?... It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them; and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations." The Antichrist will conquer the world.

6. A religious leader

Second Thessalonians 2:3-4 identifies him as the "man of sin ... the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." He will command the whole world to worship him.

The Antichrist will be Satan's final effort to thwart Christ from returning and establishing His Kingdom. We don't know who he is, but we do know what the Bible says about him. It's amazing to think that our sophisticated world, with its religious, social, political, and economic diversity, could agree on one leader. But somehow the world will be so ready for him, it will fall at his feet. He will even be able to deceive the nation of Israel--as independent as it now is of other nations--and bring it under his power with the rest of the world.

I believe the Antichrist will come out of a revived Roman empire because Daniel 9:26 says, "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary." The people who destroyed Jerusalem were the Romans in A.D. 70 That implies the Antichrist will be a Gentile from Europe. Daniel 9:27 implies he will make a covenant with Israel for the seven-year period known as the Tribulation. In the midst of it he will violate that covenant and desecrate the Temple, demanding that everyone worship him. That is what Jesus refers to in Matthew 24:15 as "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet."

The Antichrist will begin slaughtering believers during the last half of the Tribulation. Jesus warned that those who witness it should immediately "flee into the mountains" (v. 16). So many people will be killed that if God had not set a limit to the reign of the Antichrist, everyone would die (v. 22). The Antichrist will have total control over the world. Through him Satan will amass the world's strength against Christ when He returns to establish His Kingdom at the end of the Tribulation.

REVIEW

I. THE RAVAGE OF THE WAILING SHEPHERDS (vv. 1-3)

II. THE REJECTION OF THE TRUE SHEPHERD (vv. 4-14)

LESSON

III. THE RECEPTION OF THE FALSE SHEPHERD (vv. 15-17)

The irony of Israel's rejecting the true Shepherd is that they end up receiving a false one. But he

wouldn't appear until centuries later after Zechariah was written. Zechariah 11 jumps from A.D. 70 (v. 14) to the great Tribulation in the end times (v. 15).

A. His Nature (v. 15)

"The Lord said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd."

Having just played the part of Christ, Zechariah now plays the part of the Antichrist. "The instruments of a foolish shepherd" might have been a broken staff or a club with metal on it used to beat stubborn sheep into submission. Whatever the instruments were, they would clearly be inappropriate for a shepherd who wanted to tenderly care for his sheep.

The Hebrew word translated "foolish" in the Old Testament is a synonym for "wicked." The book of Proverbs in many places equates the wicked person with the fool. Proverbs 5:22-23 says, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be held with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." Psalm 14:1 says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." The fool lives in rebellion against God. Foolishness doesn't mean that he's mentally incompetent, but that he is wicked.

The world will willingly accept the Antichrist as its shepherd, but will recognize too late that he doesn't carry a staff in his hand, but a club. He will allow the false church to exist (Rev. 17:1-6) once the true church has been raptured and taken to heaven. He will slaughter not only the false church after a period of toleration (Rev. 17:7-18), but also two-thirds of the Jewish people (Zech. 13:8).

B. His Work (v. 16)

1. Allowed by God (v. 16a)

"For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land."

Notice it is God who permits the wicked shepherd to arise. Nothing ever happens outside His sovereign plan. God is no victim. He is not biting his nails, hoping everything goes all right, nor second-guessing Satan. He will allow the Antichrist to do what he will do just like he allowed Satan to afflict Job within the boundaries He had set.

2. Avoided by neglect (v. 16b)

a) "[He] shall not visit those that are cut off."

The Antichrist will not seek out sheep who have been separated from the flock and therefore vulnerable to the elements and wild beasts. The true shepherd goes out and finds the sheep that have been isolated or wounded, but this one doesn't even bother to look for them because the flock's welfare is not his concern.

b) "Neither shall seek the young one."

The foolish shepherd has no concern for the little lambs who get lost and cannot keep up with the flock. The true shepherd, however, leaves the ninety-nine to find the one that's lost (Luke 15:4).

c) "Nor heal that which is broken."

Frequently a sheep would break a leg, so the good shepherd would make a splint to allow the leg to

heal. The foolish shepherd will not be interested in salving the wounds of his sheep.

d) "Nor feed that which standeth still."

This refers to the strong sheep who require a minimum amount of help. They don't have to be chased, found, or mended. Nothing needs to be done except feed them, but the foolish shepherd doesn't even do that. To the strong who need the least help, he is no help at all. To the weak, wounded, lost, and dying, he is absolutely indifferent.

If you were watching Zechariah perform this parable you'd say, "This is a terrible shepherd!" He is the opposite of everything he should be. But the prophet isn't through yet. Although the foolish shepherd fails to do what he should do, he also does some things that he shouldn't do.

3. Accomplished for personal gain (v. 16c)

a) "He shall eat the flesh of the fat."

The foolish shepherd will eat the fat sheep from his own flock. He is greedy and selfish, devouring his sheep rather than feeding them. When the Antichrist comes, it will be all hearts and flowers for three and a half years until the abomination of desolation takes place. Then he will devour Israel in an unprecedented slaughter. Zechariah 13:8-9 says, "It shall come to pass that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts in it shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them as gold is tested." The Antichrist will kill two-thirds of the people in Israel believers (Zech. 13:8). Only God in His mercy spares one third of Israel, hiding them away in Edom (Rev. 12:6). He will also kill those Gentiles who become believers during the Tribulation and refuse to take his mark (Rev. 7:9-14; 20:4).

b) "[He shall] tear their claws [hooves] in pieces."

If you've ever eaten spare ribs or a T-bone steak when you're really hungry, you probably cleaned off the bone to get at every last morsel. That is the picture in this verse. The Antichrist will not only eat the flesh of the fat sheep, but will tear their hooves to pieces to consume every last bit.

No doubt the people in Zechariah's day were shocked by this characterization of a shepherd who would do absolutely opposite of what they expected. But ironically that is the shepherd they will choose during the Tribulation. They turned their back on the real one and will receive a foolish one.

I have a great love for Israel. When I meet Jewish people, I often tell them that my best friends are Jewish--Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, and John! I almost wish I were Jewish and could become a believer during the Tribulation so that I could have the thrill of recognizing my Messiah and entering the earthly Kingdom in my physical body. (But being raptured with the church and returning with Christ in a glorified body is nothing to be sneezed at!)

Sadly, before the day of Israel's salvation there's going to come this terrible period when they line up with the wrong ruler. In spite of their great hope and confidence in him, he will devour them down to the very hoof.

C. His Punishment (v. 17)

"Woe to the idol [worthless] shepherd that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye; his arm shall be completely dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened."

1. Symbolized

"Woe" signifies a curse. Zechariah condemns the worthless shepherd who will forsake the flock. God will come with a sword of judgment and cut off his right arm, a symbol of strength. The Antichrist's power will be torn away from him. His right eye, probably a reference to intelligence, will be darkened to the point of mental incompetency, and he will shrivel under the judgment of God.

2. Stated

a) The court of condemnation

This judgment upon the Antichrist is also prophesied in Daniel 7. After abusing his power and persecuting the people of God, the Antichrist will have to answer to God. Verses 9-10 say, "I beheld till the thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened." Daniel envisioned God in all of His majestic glory, surrounded by the angelic host.

b) The termination of tyranny

Daniel 7:11-12 says, "I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn [Antichrist] spoke; I beheld even till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time." Daniel's vision of four beasts (vv. 1-8) represented the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. They were all eventually conquered, but they still retained a measure of their influence. However in the case of the revived Roman empire, the Antichrist will be destroyed with no dominion remaining. He will lose his power and life at the same time.

Daniel 7:24-27 gives an angelic interpretation of Daniel's vision earlier in the chapter. "The ten horns out of this kingdom [the revived Roman empire] are ten kings that shall arise; and another shall rise after them" (v. 24). Ten rulers will head a ten-nation confederacy of the revived Roman empire, which significantly parallels the European Common Market of today. From among them the Antichrist will arise and "he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints ... and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time" (v. 25). In other words, the Antichrist will blaspheme God and slaughter His people for three and a half years. But then his reign will end: "The judgment shall sit; and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it unto the end" (v. 26). Christ will come in judgment upon the Antichrist and his government, and will establish God's earthly Kingdom.

3. Supported

a) His power deployed

Daniel 8:23 says, "In the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and continue, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people." The Antichrist, also designated in Daniel as "the little horn" (7:8) and "the prince that shall come" (9:26) will have incredible power because behind him is Satan. His destruction will be so intense that people will be in awe of it.

b) His punishment delineated

Daniel 8:25 says, "He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes, but he shall be broken without hand." When the Antichrist opposes Christ Himself, who returns as the Prince of princes, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16), there won't even be a struggle--he'll be shattered. Revelation 19:20 reiterates the judgment upon the Antichrist and his cohort: "The beast was taken, and with him the false prophet These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." Revelation 20:10 says, "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." The Antichrist's dominion will be destroyed. He will be tormented in hell throughout eternity with Satan and all those who occupy Satan's kingdom. God will severely judge the false shepherd of Zechariah 11.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Apart from Satan himself, who is the most vehement adversary of God that will ever live?
2. Why was the coming of the Antichrist common knowledge among the early Christians?
3. Explain the promise of Genesis 3:15 and why it has caused Satan to focus his attack on Israel.
4. What was Satan's first attempt in preventing the Messiah from coming (Gen. 6:2)?
5. Give a biblical example of how Satan tried to destroy Israel. Also give an example of how he tried to prevent Christ from fulfilling His work of redemption.
6. In spite of Satan's continued attempts to oppose God and His people, how do we know that he will never ultimately succeed (Matt. 16:18)?
7. When will Satan begin to spawn his evil in an unprecedented manner?
8. Although he will have tremendous military backing, how will the Antichrist apparently take over the world (Dan. 11:21)?
9. In what sense will the Antichrist be a religious leader (2 Thess. 2:3-4)?
10. What is amazing about our sophisticated society agreeing to follow the Antichrist?
11. How will the Antichrist violate his covenant with Israel?
12. What indicates that the Antichrist will arise out of a revived Roman empire (Dan. 9:26)?
13. What is the irony of Israel's rejection of the true Shepherd?
14. How was Zechariah told to characterize the Antichrist (v. 15)?
15. According to verse 16, who allows the Antichrist to arise?
16. What will the Antichrist neglect to do (v. 16b)?
17. Explain what the Antichrist will do for his personal gain (v. 16c)?
18. How does verse 17 symbolize judgment upon the Antichrist?
19. After the Antichrist is judged in the presence of the Ancient of days in Daniel 7, what fate does he encounter (Dan. 7:12)?

20.What can be seen as a modern-day parallel of the ten kings who will precede the arrival of the Antichrist?

21.According to Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, where does the Antichrist spend eternity?

Pondering the Principles

1.It is easy to get caught up in the speculations that often surround end-time events and lose our focus on Christ. Some of the Thessalonians were "shaken in mind" and "troubled" because they thought they had missed the rapture (2 Thess. 2:2). Paul never had an attitude of being so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good. Rather he could say at the end of his life, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Commit those verses to memory and evaluate where your focus is.

2. It's easy to be emotionally overwhelmed when considering the intense evil of Satan and the Antichrist. But praise God that the devastation of the Tribulation will end when "the Sun of righteousness [rises] with healing in his wings (Mal. 4:2). Let "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by Martin Luther encourage your heart:

And tho this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thru us.

The prince of darkness grim--we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure--One little word shall fell him.

Thank the Lord for enabling us to have victory in the spiritual battles we encounter daily.

3. Sadly, the dark cloud of judgment can never be removed from Jewish people who have died, rejecting Christ. Ask the Lord to help you reach out to those who still have time to embrace their Messiah, telling them that their true shepherd still loves them and wants them as His sheep. Praise God also for His mercy in one day regathering His people, even though they will align themselves with the false shepherd.

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