

GOD'S WORTHLESS SHEPHERD
ZECHARIAH 11:15-17

I don't know about you, but it's hard to know from year to year what I should and shouldn't eat — what's good for me and what's bad for me? High fat? Low fat? Eggs or no eggs? Carbs or no carbs? Meat? Vegetarian? Or vegan? A few years ago, the *Spartanburg Herald Journal* summarized the problem this way:

The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British and Americans. The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans. In conclusion, eat and drink what you like. Speaking English apparently kills you.

More seriously, medical doctor William Isley has observed, "The medical literature contains thousands of articles which have now been corrected, disregarded, or even have been shown to be flagrantly wrong despite the presence of 'statically significant [probability] value[s]....'" In other words, it seems that no one knows what food groups are good for us.

Because we are created human beings with built-in weaknesses and inabilities, and because we are also *fallen* human beings who struggle with sinful inclinations (even as redeemed people), it's not surprising that we make errors in judgment and evaluation about a great many circumstances (including what to eat). This has been a problem since Genesis 3 and Adam's sin. We are not immune from the problem, and God's chosen people Israel were not immune either.

In Zechariah 9, the prophet foretold the coming of the Messiah (9:9) and in 11:12 he prophesied the rejection of the Messiah as Israel's King. In response to their ungodly evaluation of the Shepherd King, God promised to send another shepherd to Israel — a shepherd that would be a judgment on Israel —

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Israel *would* have a shepherd; if she would not have the Good Shepherd, she would have a worthless shepherd. This passage identifies **three qualities** of the coming worthless shepherd of Israel:

1. The **CHARACTER** of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 15)
2. The **CONDUCT** of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 16)
 - ✓ What the worthless shepherd doesn't do
 - ✓ What the worthless shepherd does do
3. The **CONDEMNATION** of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 17)

BECAUSE ISRAEL JUDGED GOD'S GOOD SHEPHERD AS WORTHLESS,

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1. The CHARACTER of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 15)

- In v. 4, Zechariah was commanded by God to “play the role” of (exemplify) the Good Shepherd. That shepherd was rejected by the nation (v. 12b), so now Zechariah is again commanded to take the role of a shepherd, but this is a vastly different shepherd.
 - ✓ The shepherd of v. 4 (the Messiah) was to be a blessing to the nation.
 - ✓ This shepherd will be a judgment on the nation for their rebellion.
 - ✓ This judgment exemplified the judgments of vv. 10 and 14 — that generation would not receive the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, and that generation would not be the unified nation under the one Shepherd-King).
- What is *this* shepherd like?
 - ✓ He is a **shepherd** (he is a leader — the word **shepherd** refers to both political and religious leaders, so he could be either). It is a reminder that by rejecting Christ they don't remove leadership from their lives. They *will* have a leader to follow; the only question is whether he will be godly or evil.
 - ✓ He has **equipment** appropriate for shepherds.
 - Shepherds had a variety of tools/instruments — staff for protection and direction, a sling and smooth stones for protection, a pouch (1 Sam 17:40), a pipe for whistling to call the flock (Jg. 5:16), and leather clothing for his own protection in various kinds of weather (Lev 13:49).
 - But this phrase also notes that the **equipment** is particular to the foolish shepherd. It's unclear what that might be; it likely means the equipment is used in ways contrary to the design — so instead of the staff protecting and guiding the sheep, it is used against the sheep (v. 16).
 - ✓ What is this shepherd like? Fundamentally, his character is **foolish**.
 - This word is often used in Psalms and Proverbs to refer to the man who is without God (e.g., Prov. 1:7; 15:5; cf. Jer. 4:22). To be foolish is to be intentionally ignorant of God and rebellious against God. The fool is not the one who makes “silly” decisions; he is a sinful rebel.
 - There is nothing good in this shepherd. He is antithetic to the Lord. He hates God (and thus hates God's people). He acts as if God does not exist (Ps. 14:1).
 - ✓ The Israelites have repeatedly exchanged the shepherding care of God for *this kind* of shepherd. They have a rebellious leader because they also were rebellious. And this is their future as well.
- Given that this shepherd is in the future, that leads to the question, Who is this foolish shepherd?
 - ✓ This shepherd has been identified as Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa, a variety of Israel's rulers from the decline of the Maccabean period to the rejection of Christ, and the Roman Empire, particularly Titus, who was the general of the Roman army that destroyed Jerusalem (70 AD).

- ✓ Since much of this prophecy has been centered around the rejection of Christ in His first advent, it certainly could be any of the Roman leaders then, including (or especially) Titus.
 - ✓ But as in all these prophecies, Zechariah seems to be looking toward something greater — in v. 17 he is called ***the worthless shepherd*** — a particular shepherd.
 - ✓ There is one who will lead Israel in a particularly ruthless manner — it is the antithesis to the Messiah, the Antichrist. A similar picture of the Antichrist is in **Dan. 11:36-39**. And **Rev. 13:5-8** affirms that God is the source of the Antichrist's brief power (for judgment against Israel).
 - ✓ Whether this worthless shepherd is the Antichrist or not, he is a particularly powerful and evil leader and this serves as a warning for all that is coming against Israel and the world for rebellion.
 - ✓ This is a particular judgment against Israel for the rejection of the Messiah; but all people will stand before God the Judge and be evaluated for their rejection of Christ. It will not go well. If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, you need forgiveness of sin and a new way to live — and Jesus provides both. But you must repent of your sin (turn away) and have faith in Christ (believe that He paid the penalty for your sin and provides a new way to live, **2 Cor. 5:21**). Would you begin believing today?
- We have read of the character of this worthless shepherd. And we know that character produces actions — we do what we are. So what does this worthless shepherd do? What does his heart produce?

2. The **CONDUCT** of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 16)

- **What the worthless shepherd doesn't do** — four actions fundamental to shepherding that he ignores
 - ✓ **He doesn't care for the endangered**
 - Those who are ***perishing*** are ones who are “lost” — they have endured some calamity or distress that has put them in danger of death. It is the same word “annihilated” (vv. 8-9).
 - The sheep have been entrusted to the care of this shepherd and he knows they are in danger and he does ***not care***. The word is the same as “visit” in **10:3**. The shepherd should “visit” the sheep, and instead he neglects the flock. He is apathetic to the needs of the sheep (**Jn. 10:12f**).
 - Contrast that with the Great Shepherd (**Ps. 23:3-4; Jn. 10:11**). When the Good Shepherd sees His sheep in danger, He not only goes to them, but He gives his life for them.
 - ✓ **He doesn't seek the young** — ***[or] seek the scattered***.
 - The word ***scattered*** is often translated “young” — both youthful animals and people are prone to wandering into places where there is trouble and danger (Prov. 7:7; **22:15**).
 - And this worthless shepherd will not ***seek*** (pursue) those who have wandered. He will ignore his most basic responsibility — keep the flock together and find the lost and wandering. “How could a shepherd turn his back on tender, defenseless lambs? How could anyone, much less a leader charged with safeguarding the well-being of all the people, turn his back on children? What kind

of national future could a leader contemplate if he willingly allowed the children, the future hope of the nation, to be lost?" [Klein] A leader who will be sent in judgment for rejecting Messiah.

➤ Contrast that with Israel's true Shepherd (Ps. 23:2; Is. 40:11; Jn. 10:3).

✓ **He doesn't heal the wounded (*heal the broken*)**

➤ The one who is **broken** may have suffered harm because of his own actions, or suffered from the actions of others. In either case, it is the responsibility of the shepherd to give medicine.

➤ God the Shepherd is a divine healer (cf. Is. 30:26; 42:3-4; 57:19; Hos. 6:1; Mt. 18:12-14).

✓ **He doesn't feed the hungry (maintain the healthy) — *sustain the one standing*.**

➤ The word **sustain** often has the idea of sustaining someone by providing food.

➤ The shepherd not only is to care for the sheep that are in trouble (the first three in this verse) but also care for those who are healthy and have ordinary needs.

➤ Some sheep stay in the fold and do not suffer injury, and do well on their own. Yet they need provision to continue standing and enduring. They need continued feeding and nurturing care. This shepherd is unconcerned for the long-term welfare of either the hurt or healthy sheep.

➤ The Good Shepherd feeds and cares for all His sheep (Ps. 23:1-2, 5-6; Jn. 10:2, 16; 21:15-17).

✓ This shepherd is the antithesis of God the Shepherd (Ps. 23) and Jesus, the Great Shepherd (Jn. 10).

✓ But even worse than what they don't do (their apathy as shepherds) is what they actually do...

• **What the worthless shepherd does do**

✓ **He feeds on the sheep — he *will devour the flesh of the fat sheep*.**

➤ The shepherd eats and consumes something that is illegitimate to eat.

➤ The sheep have been entrusted to him for care and nurture not for personal consumption.

➤ Instead of feeding the sheep, he feeds *on them*. He uses and destroys only to fulfill his own selfish desires. He is self-serving and greedy in his passions.

➤ Many examples of false shepherds come to mind. This shepherd is the epitome of the ultimate wicked man who destroys (Ps. 10:4; 14:1). He is known as "lawless" (1 Th. 2:7) and all assoc.

➤ But even more this is the greatest false shepherd, the Antichrist, who is called "the beast" because he is so destructive ("wild animal," Rev. 13:4ff).

➤ Again, contrast this with the Great Shepherd who serves the sheep and never uses the sheep for His own personal advantage (Ps. 23:5; Mk. 10:45)

✓ **He maims the sheep — he will *tear off their hoofs*.**

➤ Some sheep he eats and consumes and others he maims, makes worthless, and destroys for no good reason. He doesn't protect them, he doesn't eat them, he harms them so they are useless.

➤ You might understand a hungry shepherd eating a sheep (even though it would be wrong to consume something entrusted to him). There is no good reason for this; it is senseless.

➤ "The evil shepherd [will be] notorious for the depths of his ill treatment of the flock..." [Klein]

- If this is the Antichrist, there are numerous examples of his malicious and senseless destruction: cf. **Dan. 11:44**; Jer. 30:7 (no day like the day of Jacob's distress); **Rev. 19:19**. This is why Jesus said that in the last days, the people will run for the mountains (**Mt. 24:15-16**).
- Contrast that with the Great Shepherd (**Is. 40:11**). Your Father will not endanger you.
- Summary —
 - ✓ You can summarize all that the worthless shepherd has done with v. 17 — he **leaves the flock**. He has abandoned his role and the sheep that have been entrusted to him. He is **worthless**.
 - ✓ This worthless shepherd is one who should serve the sheep because they have been entrusted to him. Instead, he takes advantage of the sheep and destroys the sheep. He is careless *and* malicious.
 - ✓ This verse is a reminder that while there is one particularly terrible shepherd coming, there are always false shepherds who do not care well for their sheep. Watch and beware of shepherds who are unfaithful to their task (unfortunately, they are plentiful).
 - ✓ Note also that the beginning of this verse says **behold I am going to raise up...** It is a reminder that the ungodly leader (Antichrist) is there by God's permissive decree. He is God's agent. And as God's agent, we can be comforted and sure that he can only do God's bidding. Like Satan's plans against Job had to be approved by God, this leader can only operate as far as God allows. "The devil is God's devil" and the Antichrist is God's Antichrist. He is facing a certain limit and end...

3. The **CONDEMNATION** of the Worthless Shepherd (v. 17)

- There are things you want to hear God say to you: "Well done, good and faithful servant" and "Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden..." and "I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again and receive you to Myself" and "Take courage, I have overcome the world..."
- There are some things you never want to hear God say to you: one of those is **Woe!**
 - ✓ That is a word that is meant to call attention; it is usually used to introduce a lament or judgment.
 - ✓ It is a "grievous threatening" — and the threat is coming from God.
 - ✓ Whatever this worthless shepherd thinks he can do, God is about to put a stop to it. YHWH will not tolerate unfaithfulness.
 - ✓ And he is **worthless** — he is worth nothing. The word is used synonymously with **foolish** (v. 15). Despite all that he will do to ravage Israel, he is weak and powerless.
- God does two dramatic things to demonstrate his powerlessness:
 - ✓ **A sword will be on his arm** means that his power (indicated by his **arm**) will be cut off/useless.
 - ✓ **[A sword will be] on his right eye** means that his "intelligence is made null and void/senseless.
 - ✓ In summary, his power **will be totally withered** and his mind **will be blind**. He is judged, all his abilities are removed, and he no longer is a danger to Israel.

- ✓ If this is the Antichrist, other passages point to his dramatic end (2 Th. 2:8-10; Rev. 19:20; 20:10).
- ✓ Though there is an unimaginably wicked shepherd coming (things are going to get *much* worse in this world), we are confident of the ultimate destruction of all wicked rulers, of the most wicked ruler, and of sin and death. Christ really has overcome this world (Jn. 16:33).
- ✓ Yes, judgment is coming on Israel and on the earth and it will be more horrible than anything we can imagine. But that judgment will end when God destroys all the wicked rulers and all the wicked people and all sin for all time.

CONCLUSION: What else might we learn about shepherding God's people?

There is a better picture of better shepherds (all the negative descriptions of the evil shepherd can be turned into positive commands for biblical shepherds):

- ✓ God's true shepherds care for the endangered
- ✓ God's true shepherds seek the young (and vulnerable)
- ✓ God's true shepherds heal the hurting and wounded
- ✓ God's true shepherds feed the hungry (and maintain the healthy)
- ✓ God's true shepherds do not take advantage of the sheep (they are servants)
- ✓ God's true shepherds do not maliciously (intentionally) harm the sheep
- ✓ And God's true shepherds train the sheep to shepherd in this way (we work to equip the saints to care for the saints).
- ✓ Many passages expose what shepherding should look like; 1 Pt. 5:1-4 is foundational for us.

There is a better picture of the Great Shepherd (while God gives good shepherds for and in evil days, every shepherd is weak, except the Great Shepherd who will rule eternally, the Messiah-King, Jesus):

- ✓ The Great Shepherd has given His life for His sheep (Jn. 10; 1 Pt. 2:24)
- ✓ The Great Shepherd provides refuge and safety for all His sheep (1 Pt. 2:25a)
- ✓ The Great Shepherd is the Guardian of all His sheep — even in the worst of times (and it will get far worse on this earth), we can be sure that if we are His, He will keep us (1 Pt. 2:25b; Is. 40:11).

God has a worthless shepherd that will be used by God to judge His people. Even more, He has a great Good Shepherd who will destroy the worthless shepherd and preserve His people for all eternity.

Benediction (Greg): Isaiah 40:11