

Zechariah Chapters 10-11- John Karmelich

1. I decided to call this lesson "Accountability". My question of the moment is are we accountable to God and what does that mean? Aren't Christians saved by grace? The answers are woven in these chapters: Let me explain: Chapter 10 focuses on positive things that will happen to God's people in the distant future. Chapter 11 focuses on the ways Israel and the world will suffer for failing to use our lives as a witness for God. The key point here is God holds us accountable for what we do know or could know about Him. Salvation begins with believing Jesus is God, paid the full price for our sins as well as believing He's in charge of our lives. The important question of course is "now what". It is the fact we're accountable to Him about that knowledge. That's an obvious underlying message for us in this entire study. So if we're accountable, what do we do? Glad you asked. It's about using some of our time and resources to make a difference for Him.
 - a) Now if that isn't a tough way to open a lesson, I don't know what is. Remember that this isn't the end of the book. It's just Zechariah's key point in these two chapters of a fourteen chapter book. The good news is it's not all tough sledding. What's interesting is we'll get two verses in this section which are quoted in the New Testament. Those verses are about Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It fits well in a discussion about accountability. That issue is here as an example of understanding how we're accountable to God for the time and resources He's given us.
 - b) If you've been reading through all my Zechariah lessons, you might admit like I have, that Zechariah's a pretty weird guy or at the least he has the difficult job of explaining difficult things God has showed him. These two chapters don't lighten up nor will it get easier in the last three chapters. I'm just saying Zechariah is tough sledding, but his book is part of the bible, he's quoted a few times in the New Testament and he's got things to teach us.
 - c) Finally, let me ask the important question. If this text gets into all the depressing things of what happens to people who reject God, why should I study it if I already believe Jesus is God and I already use my life to make a difference for Him? Why should I care about all of these "lost" people? For starters, that's what God calls us to do. Heaven's not a club as if to say, "I'm in, you're not, that's your problem". The reason we are saved in the first place is to use our lives to make a difference for Him to a lost and dying world. In effect, that is the key accountability factor God expects of us as His people!
2. Chapters 10 and 11 continue a vision Zechariah got at the beginning of Chapter 9. Chapter 11 is a change of topic, but the text never says, "And here's what else God told me". So it's logical that it's part of the same vision. Anyway, let me give you a rundown of what we're in for here, and then I will return to the important "why should we care" topic.
 - a) Chapter 10 starts innocently enough. Chapter 9 ended with a promise that God will bless them. A logical question therefore is "how"? I'm a big believer that God never does for us what we can do for ourselves. He doesn't rain down food from heaven every day, but He does promise rain to grow things if we ask Him. Realize that idol's those Israelites dealt with in past generations also promised good weather. So God's saying in effect, "Who are you really trusting in to provide what you can't provide for yourself?"
 - i) Since God brought up the topic of Israelites in past generations ignoring Him, he brings it up here as if to say, "don't repeat the same mistakes".
 - b) The essential idea of most of Chapter 10 is the Israelites in the fairly recent past were lead by people who turned them against God. The text calls them "false shepherds". The bible commonly refers to His people as sheep, as if to imply we're prone to wander unless we get proper guidance.
 - c) Chapter 10 is not all bad. It gives some promises about the coming Messiah (think of His Second Coming) where all of Israel will be reunited again under His rule. This implies a birth of that nation again and they will be a Christian nation one day under His rule!

- d) Yes, there are more details than that, but that's why I go verse by verse through this book. In the meantime, let me give a quick rundown of Chapter 11. The bad news is God doesn't lighten up in this chapter. (Remember it's not the end of the book here, just the end of one particular vision that God gave Zechariah.)
3. Chapter 11 opens with a prediction of another invasion into Israel from the north. The prediction is specific about an army coming from Lebanon, and destroying that place as they work their way south into Israel. The commentaries I read believe this refers to the Romans. Since the last lesson talked about the Greek's (same vision), it would make sense that this next prediction would tie to the Romans, as they're next in history. They're not mentioned by name, so it's logical speculation.
- a) If God seems tough on the Israelites for disobedience in Chapter 10, Chapter 11 reads as if He's furious. For example, Verse 4 says, "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter". All I'm saying here is the text says in effect, "You're doomed, deal with it". It's not about the final end of Israel but about the decline and death of the non-committed to God for a "season".
- b) I'd say the underlying point is because the spiritual and government leaders in Israel were known for corruption during the Roman occupation, God's condemning them to death. The issue isn't individual salvation but judgment for failing to be a good witness for God. I'll just say corruption was common during that time period and the text discusses it.
- c) Again, Rome isn't mentioned by name, but given that the successful revolt against Greece was the big topic of the last chapter, it makes sense given the course of history, that "Zech" is now talking about what happened next in history, which was the Roman period.
- d) Then of course Zechariah gets weird again. He compares God's relationship with Israel to two sticks that were broken. The idea is, just as easily as one can break a stick so God will break His relationship with Israel. Again, it's not permanent punishment because He also promised to give that land to the Israelites. Therefore, Zechariah's simply describing what did occur in history and what will occur until the Second Coming.
- e) Then we get to the verses quoted in the Gospels. The verses are quoted as not being about Jesus, but about Judas who betrayed him. Again, it's part of my belief that every aspect of the life of Jesus is predicted somewhere in the Old Testament. What is amazing to realize about the prediction is that Zechariah was talking about "proper pay" for his ministry. He was then given "30 pieces of silver". That's the price paid for a worthless slave as stated in the book of Exodus. What's amazing about this prediction is when the religious leaders offered that price to Judas for Jesus, they were saying in effect, "His value is the same as a worthless slave". The verse also mentions using that money for a potter's field. Judas also gave that money back and it was used for a potter's field. Anyway, that's the connection.
- f) Bottom line, most of Chapter 11 is a future condemnation of the Israelites for failing to be a good witness for God and given how history played out, it appears almost certainly to be referring to events around the Roman time period when they occupied Israel.
4. OK John, we know how much you love history and tying it to the bible. Remember you're talking to a bunch of devout Christians who already believe the bible is God's word. So break down and tell us why should we care about all this horrid stuff? Why should I read further if already accept the fact that God punishes these people? As the old saying goes, "The issue isn't them, but us". A reason God made this part of the bible is so that the Israelites would have no excuse when all this occurs. It's as if God can say, "Hey, I warned you." More importantly, the issue for us is that God wants us to use our lives as a witness to a lost and dying world around us, i.e., accountability!
- a) Let me put it this way: God created us so that we can use our lives as a witness for Him. Our attitude about nonbelievers should never be "too bad for you". People should see the love in our hearts and the fact we care about them and want to help them. That alone will get people to ask, "Why aren't you like everyone else only caring about yourselves?" That is how we share Jesus with others!
- b) In the meantime, I've been "yapping" for two pages now. I'm pretty sure it's time for me to break down and start the verse by verse commentary. So let's begin:

5. Chapter 10, Verse 1: Ask the LORD for rain in the springtime; it is the LORD who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.
 - a) After all that "negative talk" in the introduction, Chapter 10 opens innocently enough. It makes a simple point about asking God for rain, to help the crops grow.
 - b) Specifically, it asks for "spring" rain. Israel is mostly dry climate. They'll usually get rain in the fall and again in the spring. Manmade irrigation systems didn't exist then, so rain was necessary for plant life to grow well. If you read my lesson on Chapter 9, you'll recall it ended by comparing the health and well being of the Israelites to crops that grow well. Anyway, this verse is an extension of that idea.
 - c) Let me repeat and expand upon a point I made in the introduction. God doesn't say to us or them, "Kick back, at home, I'll plant food and deliver it to your mouth". Instead, we are to pray for things we can't do ourselves. God still expects us to "work the land", but we're to pray for things we can't do such as have rain come down.
 - i) If that's true why does God allow droughts? Sometimes I think it's so we will seek Him as a community. I sort of picture God responding to group prayer as, "Hey it is nice to hear from all of you, been awhile!" I can't explain weather cycles. I don't know why droughts exist "here" and floods exist "there". I'm sure part of it has to do with natural cycles of weather, the curse place on the earth, etc. I just know that He calls on us to pray for things beyond our control and to be grateful for how He has blessed us and the "rain" here is a simple example of that.
 - d) As I also hinted at in the introduction, another reason this specific example is given, was because the false gods the Israelites worshipped in the past also claimed they could bring good weather. This is God saying in effect, "Who are you going to trust anyway, the true God who controls all things or a non-god deity that makes you feel good for obeying just because "everyone else is doing it"?"
 - e) Speaking of seeking things other than God Himself, let's look at Verse 2.
6. Verse 2: The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.
 - a) One of the great questions to ponder in the bible is why does God allow "false visions" to occur? Here we read of people seeking what they think is God getting a bunch of visions as to what people should be doing. Obviously, those who seek such false gods think they are real or they wouldn't bother. I'm positive God allows demons to have some power as to show that God's power is greater than theirs. Therefore, those who seek demonic stuff do get some legitimate power, but the key point is God's power is greater.
 - b) I know I'm getting into "spooky stuff" here, but false diviners have existed all through our history. Let's be honest, they wouldn't be in business unless they're making a profit. Yes, I know a lot of it is fake, but I'm also convinced some of it is real, and God allows it, if for no other reason than to prove He's greater than all of that, and we're to seek Him and not turn to "alternative bad choices".
 - c) Speaking of points I made in the introduction, remember what we're called to do once we are saved: Use our lives as a witness for Jesus to people around us. Our Christian attitude should never be, "I'm in, you're not, too bad for you!" The fact that Verse 2 describes lots of people as "lost sheep without a shepherd" is in effect a call for us to lead people to God so they too can use their lives to make a difference for Him.
 - d) Let me put it this way: Obviously, God doesn't call all of us into the professional ministry. Of course, we still have to live lives, get our chores done and provide for ourselves. What I am getting at is life should be more than that. I love to ask people, "If you money isn't an issue, what would you want to do all day?" I get all kinds of answers. Then I say, if that's what you enjoy doing, why don't you allocate your time to work toward that goal? How can you use that desire to make a difference for God? That's the greatest way to live life, and that's what God's encouraging us to do, by ignoring "false shepherds" here.

7. Verse 3: "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle.
- a) Let me discuss the idea of "God's anger" first. A perfect God does not get in "moods". We may see things going wrong and think "God must be angry right now" or if everything is good at the moment, we may think God's in a good mood. The way I view a perfect God is He is always perfectly loving toward us. He's always perfectly angry at sin. It isn't any type of mood swing, it's understanding characteristics about Him.
 - b) One of the great questions people ponder is how can God send people to hell eternally for one lifetime of acting badly? Part of the answer is to accept the fact that God's perfect. If He's perfectly angry at sin, if He's perfectly angry at disobedience for how He desires us to live, then, hell has to be eternal. It's not like God can say, "Ok, 10,000 years in hell, that is enough punishment for rejecting Me." Hell is about giving people what they want, life without His presence. It has to be eternal, because that's what many people want!
 - c) OK, now that I've got my "God's anger" speech out of my system, let's get back to the text as to the specific thing God's angry about: Israel's leaders. Just as God holds Christians to a higher standard as we know more about Him than nonbelievers, so He holds leaders to a higher standard, as they're in charge and they're accountable to God for being that way.
 - i) Let's put it this way: If you have any sort of leadership role, be it in government or even in church, we're not only accountable to higher leaders or those we lead, we are also accountable to God for that role. If that doesn't scare you into seeking a time of prayer about it, I'm not doing my job! Christians should ask God to guide us as part of our daily prayer life and then make the best decisions possible given the situation in front of us trusting He is guiding us as we seek Him.
 - d) Meanwhile, I said this section of Zechariah is bad news, and I meant it. This verse tells us that God's "ticked off" about how the Israel leaders were acting as they were failing to do their jobs right. By the way, this is a reason why most commentators think this part of his message came years later than the first part of this book. The theory is, "God's temple's all finished and now He's focusing on Israel's leaders in this part of the book". We don't have a "time stamp" on this vision by Zechariah, so it's just speculation.
 - e) The good news of this verse is Zechariah is predicting, "If the leaders of My people fail to do their job, I'll do it for them!" Yes, it's a prediction of God Himself coming to rule over this world one day, which is what Christians believe is the main purpose of Jesus Second Coming or as my religious Jewish friends say, "The coming of the Messiah". I could give my standard "Why is God waiting so long" speech, but let's just say you and I wouldn't be a part of it if Jesus "set up shop" say one hundred years ago!
 - f) Finally, let me discuss the last phrase translated "make them like a proud horse in battle". Remember that Zechariah is using images people can relate to: In ancient battles, horses were a big part of war. A good "war horse" is trained well to not be afraid of the battle, as it goes forth as the rider commands. The idea is just as a war horse is well trained, so God desires we be well trained to live as He wants us to live. It's the idea of daily reading of God's word, daily seeking Him in prayer and spending time with other believers will get us to be like a well trained "war horse". OK I've beaten that point to death, let's move on.
8. Verse 4: From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.
- a) A logical question to ponder here is how do we know Zechariah's talking about the ruling of the Messiah here? Remember that the priests were from the tribe of Levi. That's who is being described as the bad spiritual leaders. Jesus is from the tribe of Judah. Zechariah is predicting someone will come from the tribe of Judah who'll be the type of leader that He desires to have over His people. Let's put time in perspective here. Religious Israelites as well as us Christians have now been waiting for millenniums for The Messiah to show up. How do we know this will still happen? Again, think bible accuracy to date, as a start.

- b) The next thing to realize is eternity is infinitely longer than this life. I think of this life as a preparation class for eternity. The better prepared we are now, the more we'll appreciate how God wants us to live for that eternity. Realizing Jesus will return "to set up shop" also means we have to "do our homework" to prepare for that eternity, as it'll be our future as well as the future of all people who accept God's truth as THE truth.
- c) OK then, what is it we're to accept about Jesus' return? Back to Verse 4:
 - i) The term "cornerstone" is the idea of the foundation of our faith. It's like saying He is the beginning of our faith and the beginning of our purpose for living.
 - ii) The second term is "tent peg". Again, one has to think in "those times". A tent peg is the centerpiece of a tent that holds it up. The word picture is about all things in life "hanging" on what Jesus has done, is doing and will do in our lives. Again it is a word picture for us to see everything good in life we do "hangs" on Jesus.
 - iii) The third term is "battle bow". It's the idea that Jesus "fights our fights for us". We tend not to think of Jesus as our battle leader, but He is. It's the idea that we can do all things by His power. Let me explain that better. It's about us having the power to do His will, not our own. I may have a desire to be the world's fastest runner or the world's greatest musician, but the issue is "Is that God's will for our lives?" Yes, we have to practice at whatever skills God gives us, and He wants us to be the best at whatever we're called to do. My point is simply that we're to realize God is our leader. Think of it as a war, and God's leading us to victory in that war!
 - a) So who are we fighting? Spiritual battles are a part of it. Fear of failure is a part of it. Realizing God wants us to overcome our fears and our weakness means we can make a difference for Him no matter what we're called to do in life or no matter our status or position in life.
 - d) The verse ends by coming "full circle". It says all human leaders come from Him. It's the idea of our accountability to Him for that leadership role with the "ultimate leader" being one who will take charge one day.
- 9. Verse 5: Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.
 - a) My first question about Verse 5 is, if Verse 4 is another prediction about life under Jesus' rule, who are the "together" people? Looking at the next few verses, this is describing the Israelites living under the Messiah's rule. (As I said in the introduction, not everything in this chapter is bad news. Zechariah "interrupts" the condemnation with some good news of the future world of the Messiah ruling over it and this is one of those verses).
 - b) So does Jesus wipe out Israel's enemies all by Himself when He returns or are there others to help in that day? Apparently, Jesus will lead them to victory in that day. OK then why should I care about all of this? As I like to say, "I'm pro-Israel because the God I worship's pro-Israel." That doesn't mean I agree with every decision they make. It means I'll defend their right to be there as the God I worship will rule there one day. Also reading of Israel winning in "that day" reminds us that the God we worship is also a military leader.
 - i) Remember how the last chapter discussed Alexander the Great? Well, verses like this one remind us who's the greatest military leader of all time. I know we like to think of Jesus as this mild mannered person that people loved. However, Jesus is also a "man of war" when the need arises.
 - ii) But if Jesus is God, can't He just wipe out enemies with a "finger snap"? Sure. By getting Israelites in that day to fight on His behalf it's another reminder to all that He's in charge, accept it, deal with it and live as He commands us to live!
 - c) Anyway, all that talk about Jesus leading an army to victory "in that day" is summarized in this verse with references to fighting and even overthrowing horsemen. Yes, I suppose in modern warfare, it'll be tanks and planes, but again Zechariah is using language of his day that people can relate to. This "talk" continues in the next verse.

10. Verse 6: "I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them. ⁷ The Ephraimites will become like mighty men, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in the LORD.
- a) Stop and remember the "state of Israel" when Zechariah wrote this. Israel was divided in two nations for a few centuries. The Assyrians took the Northern Kingdom into captivity roughly two hundred years prior to Zechariah. The Southern Kingdom ended less than a century earlier. Israelites at this point in history were scattered all over the Middle East, other than a small percentage of them who moved back to their homeland.
 - b) That's important because these verses reference the Ephraimites, the largest tribal area of the Northern Kingdom and Judah who was the dominant tribe of the Southern Kingdom. The "house of Joseph" is another nickname for the Northern Kingdom as Ephraim's father was Joseph. All I'm saying is whenever Jesus returns all of Israel will be a land where all of the Israelites can move to in that day.
 - c) OK John, pause and take a deep breath. How do we know this isn't talking about the time period of the Greeks and Romans when Israel got repopulated with Israelites? As I love to say, "prophecy is pattern". The "first rebirth of Israel" happened after the Persians, but the nation was part of other empires. Also the Romans in killed roughly 1.6 million people in the year 70AD. My point is I can't see Zechariah writing about all this "happy talk" if that ended the way it did. That's why I see this whole section as being "Millennial" meaning it is describing the time when Jesus rules over Israel "in that day".
 - d) The key point is that when all this happens, the land of Israel will be full of Israelites from all their tribes back in that land. OK, a few more verse of good news, and then we'll get back to accountability bad news again!
11. Verse 8: I will signal for them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before. ⁹ Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return.
- a) Stop and think of all the efforts to wipe out Israel as a nation over the millenniums. It was not just Hitler, there have been attacks on them all through history. I'm positive demonic forces are behind such attacks for the simple reason that if they wipe out Israel as a nation then Satan wins. With that said, notice Verse 9 says that although I (God) is scattering the Israelites around the world, "they will return".
 - b) So does this mean all Israelites have to return there for Jesus to return? No. It just means it'll be a desire for many Israelites to return there to live. Over the past 50 years since that land became a country again, Jewish refugees from all over the world have moved there.
 - c) Is modern Israel a fulfillment of this prophecy? Yes and no. Yes in that I'm positive this is the beginning of the preparation for Jesus return. Could I be wrong, sure. I simply see so many predictions that have come true in the bible, which gives me the confidence that the world is still moving on God's timing.
 - d) Coming back to these verses, the key point is God's promising Israelites will return to that land. Could it refer to life under the Greeks and Romans? Partially true. Could it refer to today? Partially true. Yet the great promise of the world living under the Messiah's rule one day, let's be honest, would draw many more Israelites back to their homeland.
 - e) Meanwhile, the "return" factor continues:
12. Verse 10: I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will not be room enough for them.
- a) Assyria as an empire was "long dead" when Zechariah wrote this. The idea isn't empires but places the Israelites of his day could relate to. It's like saying, "God's will bring all of His people back from all over the place". Again, I see "prophecy as pattern" here, as it did describe life in the Greek and Roman time, but also describes the rebirth of that nation!

- b) Next, let me discuss the "there will not be room enough for them". If every person who came from a Jewish background moved back there, "real estate would be an issue". If you read the last few chapters of Ezekiel, he describes the territory they control in the future day Jesus "Sets up shop" there. Let's just say it's a lot bigger than it is today. The land of Israel will include a good part of Syria, Iran and Jordan. We get a "hint" of that expansion need in this verse.
 - c) Therefore, let me discuss the last two verses of this chapter, and then I'm overdue for one of my "why should we care" sermons. Hang tight, it's coming:
13. Verse 11: They will pass through the sea of trouble; the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away. ¹² I will strengthen them in the LORD and in his name they will walk," declares the LORD.
- a) This is the end of the "good news" section. The "simple version" is that God's will make it physically possible for the Israelites to return to their land one day.
 - b) I will admit, this is "strange stuff". Is Zechariah describing the last century as Israelites do return to that land? What does the Nile "drying up" represent? Remember at the time of this prediction, Assyria is no longer an entity as the Babylonians destroyed them and then the Persians defeated the Babylonians. So what gives? Is this literal or figurative? We are not sure if the word translated, "Nile" refers to the Nile River. The Hebrew word is mainly used for "River" and that's a guess above. What I suspect all this means is just as some of the Israelites returned to the land after the Persians took over, most will return some day in the future. I don't know which river will dry up to make it possible, but the point here is simply that God's going to make it possible for them to return.
 - c) So is modern Israel a fulfillment of all of this? Yes and no. It's what I call "a start" but I'm speculating when Jesus returns it'll make Israel "religious" again, (most Israelites living in that land today are secular) as well as get more to return there.
 - d) OK, time for my "why should I care" lecture before I get into all the "Chapter 11 bad stuff": First, the fact that Israelites are back in the land after 2,000 years is validation of the bible as God's word. No other nation has ever been scattered, reunited and got their own land again other than Israel. There's a classic saying that goes, "If you ever have doubts of the bible being God's word, study the history of the Jewish people!" The other reason we are to care about this stuff is because if the bible is accurate about history "to date", then we've got to accept it'll be true about when Jesus returns. Even if we accept that, what do we do until then? What God's called Christians to do: Be a living witness for Him. How? What do you enjoy doing? What project is your church taking on? The point is to keep moving and "do something". God can't lead us if we're just sitting there! If we commit our time to Him, He promises to guide us to make that difference for Him.
 - e) OK then, "enough of the positive". Time for the bad news of Chapter 11.
14. Chapter 11, Verse 1: Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! ² Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen; the stately trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down! ³ Listen to the wail of the shepherds; their rich pastures are destroyed! Listen to the roar of the lions; the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!
- a) One thing we have got to admit about Zechariah: When we think he can't get any weirder, he never fails to let us down. In the final few verses of Chapter 10, he discussed ways that the Jewish people will return to their homeland. Now Verse 1 "turns on a dime" to tell us about the "ruin" of Lebanon. To understand, realize that when armies have invaded Israel they have usually come from a north direction through Lebanon. That's because there is a mountain pass to get there. The question of the moment is, why describe this destruction? Why is it in the bible and why should we care? OK, let's begin.
 - b) I've read commentaries that this applies to the Romans. This destruction path does not fit with anything the Greeks did when they marched through there. Since prophecy is future oriented, "next in line is the Romans" and that's how their army approached Israel.

- c) Let me focus on the "technical" for a moment, and then I'll do the important "why should we care" issue. In Zechariah's colorful way, he's describing a large army traveling through that area. The idea of trees falling, is most likely referring to an army cutting them down to be used for "battering rams" and to build siege walls around cities. Remember that the main way armies won in those days was to surround a city, starve it out or make weapons to destroy a city's walls. Armies would also eat their way through farmland. I suspect the roar of lions reference is about an army going through there, or more literally a lion's roar due to a lack of "game" to capture.
- i) Ok John, all this ancient history is nice and let's assume for a minute it was true at some point to describe attacks on Israel. Why should we care about this? Yes we get the idea that God cares for His people and is using Zechariah to warn them of this attack, but let's face it, this is all ancient history. What we are to get out of this is a realization that God cares for His people. Since God knows history before it is written it's like saying to us, "History is going to happen this way in the future, so make plans to deal with what is definitely coming down the road!"
- ii) Let me explain this another way: I'm positive all the "bad stuff" of Revelation is a definite. Since I'm sure the bible is accurate to date, it'll be accurate about what is to occur in the future. So what do we do until then, do we panic? Of course not. It's about realizing what'll become of this world. It's a reminder to focus on what is important, using our lives to make a difference for Jesus because let's be honest, the rest of it will burn up like this forest north of Israel did about two millenniums ago. Think about all of this as another reminder of what is really important in life and how we should be using the time God gives us to make a difference for Him.
- iii) Now that I've scared everyone half to death, let's get back to Zechariah's bad news:
15. Verse 4: This is what the LORD my God says: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. ⁵ Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise the LORD, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them. ⁶ For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," declares the LORD. "I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands."
- a) If you thought Verses 1-3 were depressing, realize Zechariah is just getting warmed up. In these verses when the text says "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter", realize the sheep refers to human lives. It's saying horrid destruction is coming, and God will not have pity on the people of His land. So is this describing the Roman overthrow of Israel? Probably. I say that because coming up in the next verse is the prediction of Judas betraying Jesus as it pretty much happened. However, before we get to that, let's focus on these verses.
- b) So if this is describing the "death of Israel" in the future, why is it here? Why can't the text just say, "Run for your life everyone, a huge army is coming that will control most of that world for centuries!" According to a historian named Josephus who lived during the time of the Romans destroying Israel, he said over 1.6 million people were killed. That leads us to the big question of why does God allow all of that to happen? I mentioned in the study of the last chapter that Jesus effectively said that the land is being destroyed because those Israelites failed to recognize the time of Jesus coming. (Matthew 23:38 and Luke 13:35).
- c) My point is these verses describing Israel's destruction are also predicting what Jesus also predicted in those passages. So who are the "shepherds" who do the damage? I'd argue it refers to the Romans who were in control of that area at that time. The important question is if God loves people as much as the bible claims He does, why would He allow this? The answer is "accountability". Let me explain:
- d) It's about realizing God created us with a purpose. That purpose is for us who realize He is God to use our lives as a witness for Him. Failure to do so means suffering. Were there individuals who sought God at that time? Yes, but there is also "corporate responsibility" as God expects us as a society (church, group, nation) to honor Him as God.

- e) Let me put it this way, a short time from now, you'll probably forget the details about of how Zechariah said "Israel is going down!" However, I promise you will remember our accountability to God because that affects us here and now! Does that mean if I fail to be a good witness for God a foreign army will take over my home? No, but I'm positive that God loves us too much to "leave us alone". Just as God went to that drastic of a measure to get Israel to realize how much they've blown it, so God won't hesitate to use other ways to get us to realize that we're wasting our lives if we're not living as a witness for Him.
 - f) Yes this is "tough sledding here", but the point is God loves us so much, He'll do whatever it takes to draw us as a church, nation or society back to Him and He's not above going to this type of extreme when those He's called are ignoring Him.
 - g) I'm sure the Jewish people living at that time were going through their "God rituals". The mistake is thinking God's happy with us because we've performed ritual "A and B" today. What God cares about is our hearts for Him. What He cares about is using our lives as a witness for Him and not performing specific rituals "to keep Him off our backs!"
 - h) With that tough statement made, realize Zechariah's not letting up here:
16. Verse 7: So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. ⁸ In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them ⁹ and said, "I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh." ¹⁰ Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. ¹¹ It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD.
- a) If you've been a regular bible reader for awhile, you'd notice that it loves to compare us to a bunch of sheep and our leaders as shepherds. Jesus refers to Himself as "the" shepherd as to remind us of who's really in charge. Let me discuss the "why" for a moment: Sheep are one of the dumbest animals in terms of wandering away. They can easily be attacked by predators as they have no natural defense mechanisms. Therefore, they need people to lead them and protect them. God looks at people the same way. He looks at all the dumb decisions we make and realizes we're like a bunch of sheep who need guidance as to how to live life. One of the main reasons the bible was written was so that we understand why we're here in the first place and what's our purpose for living.
 - b) Speaking of sheep and shepherds, remember that in Zechariah's time, most people there knew what shepherds were. Most people understood their job and what they did. They used sticks to guide the sheep and keep them moving how they wanted them to move.
 - c) With that picture in mind, Zechariah describes two "shepherd's sticks". He gives each of those sticks names: "Favor and Union". We don't have to guess what they mean as Zech tells us. Verse 10 says "Favor" is God's relationship with all nations. Verse 14 coming up tells that that "Union" refers to God's relationship with the nation of Israel.
 - d) Time for an explanation: God figures that we should be able to look at the world around us and figure something greater than us must have created it. Let us be honest, either we can believe we all came from God or we all came from the carbon molecule. Even if one believed in lots of gods, eventually one has to come to a single entity that created all those things. The point here is God holds us accountable for what we do know about Him. We have a built in understanding that murder and stealing is wrong. All people are built with a need to worship something. My point is that's how God created us. What Zechariah is getting at here is God promises to give us life with a useful purpose (to make a difference for Him) or else we suffer the consequences. The point as it relates to these verses is God is promising an end to that relationship when we as a society fail to honor God as God.
 - i) The Romans killed lots of people to rule the world. They enslaved far more. The point is God used the Romans to unite a good portion of Europe, Asia and Africa so that the Gospel could spread quickly over a large territory.

- ii) At the same time, God punished the world as a failure to realize there is a single god that controls all things. In one sense, this is talking about sending people to hell for the simple reason they don't want God to rule over their lives eternally. It is also describing punishment at that time for failing to realize God controls all of the world and we have to deal with it whether we like it or not.
 - e) I don't have to get into a detailed explain for the "breaking of the other stick" because we get by now the idea that God held the Jewish nation accountable for failing to realize that Jesus was the Messiah. Does that mean if that nation accepted Him, He would have then overthrown Rome and "that's that"? No. It's hard enough just to understand how history unfolded the way it did then to speculate on what didn't happen or could have happened.
 - f) The key word again is accountability. God holds the world and in particular the Israelites accountable for what they do know about Him or could know about Him. A failure to do what God calls us to do with that knowledge means suffering or death in this lifetime. It is a hard reality, but a reality none the less. What about "successful" people who ignore all this "God stuff"? The short answer is that's all the joy they'll get for eternity.
 - g) With all that said, time to get back to the verses. I already beat to death the idea of people being like sheep and God punishing those He has called for failing to be a good witness for Him. I also made it clear that God holds the entire world accountable based on what we know or could know about Him. In a sense, the main issue isn't salvation, the issue is what have we done with it? That's where the accountability comes in the picture.
 - h) One more "footnote" before I move on: Verse 8 mentions "Three shepherds" that God did get rid of in one month. One commentator I read said there are over 40 different theories on who are those three shepherds. I think the easiest explanation is it refers to leaders in Israel at that time. Think of the biblical term "Pastors, priests and kings". It is the idea of those being in charge being held to a higher standard as they should know better. Could there be three specific people Zechariah had in mind? Probably. However, in the general sense of tying that reference to the rest of the passage, just as God holds all people and in specifics, those He's called to be a witness for Him, it makes sense that leaders are held to a higher standard given their roles as leaders.
 - i) With all that said, Zechariah now gets personal in Verse 12:
17. Verse 12: I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.
- a) I could see Zechariah thinking at this point, "Well all of this may be well and good for all people in the future, but what about me?" There comes a point where we start thinking, "All of this stuff is important, but I got to eat too, so where's my pay?"
 - b) Apparently Zechariah asked the leaders of Israel, "Hey guys, I've been busy speaking all of these things God told me to say, but where's my check for telling you the future"?
 - c) We may not realize it reading this in English, but the 30 pieces of silver was an insult. In the book of Exodus, the price for a "worthless slave" was 30 pieces of silver just as it was here in this verse. (See Exodus 21:32.)
 - i) My point is the leaders of Israel were saying to Zechariah, "We are not impressed with what you have to say, so we'll give you the bare minimum".
 - ii) Yes that's the exact amount that Judas got for betraying Jesus. The message Judas was getting was in effect, "We're so unimpressed with Jesus, we'll give you what a worthless slave is worth if you betray him for us (to get Jesus off our backs)."
 - d) Before I move on, Matthew 27:9 quotes this passage, but Matthew claims it was written by Jeremiah, and not Zechariah. The most likely explanation is that the Jewish scrolls used in the time of Jesus, had the minor prophets (including Zechariah) written on the same scroll as Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah was the "lead book" on that scroll, so when Matthew says this quote came from Jeremiah, he's referring to the scroll, and not the actual author of the book. It's a bit trivial, but it explains that reference.

18. Verse 13: And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.
- a) Keep in mind, this was written over 500 years before Jesus was on the scene. The entire Old Testament is well known for being translated into Greek a few hundred years before Jesus ever came on the scene. It's no coincidence this incident points to the Judas' story!
 - b) Let's recall some facts from the "Judas betrayal story" in the Gospels: he was also offered 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. When Judas said he betrayed someone who was innocent of the charges of being a false messiah, Judas did return the money to the temple. The head priests knew it was "blood money" and by their logic, couldn't put it in the "general funds". However, they had a loophole where it could be used to pay expenses and they used that money to buy a potter's field as a place to put strangers who die in their midst. (See Matthew 27:7.)
 - c) I'm pretty sure Zechariah didn't realize he was acting out prophecy 500 years before all of that occurred when God told him to take that silver and give it to a potter. Zechariah was insulted by that fee, and God told him to throw it to the potter by throwing the money "to the house of the LORD to the potter". I don't know if that means he gave it at some potter who worked there. What's important is he did exactly what God told him to do.
 - d) The point for us is I'm convinced every aspect of Jesus' life is hinted out somewhere in the Old Testament and here is another example of that. Since Judas hung himself soon after this event, I seriously doubt Judas considered realized he was fulfilling prophecy.
 - e) Here's a question to ponder: Since Judas was sorry for what he did, is he saved? Jesus did pronounce a "woe" on him in Matthew 26:24. First, eternal judgment is God's job not ours. Let's be honest, betraying Jesus isn't a smart thing for eternal judgment time! I'll bet Judas thought Jesus had a gift to do miracles and was innocent of what he was charged of by the priests, but I don't think he died believing Jesus was God. That's a reality of history and it fits well in this chapter dealing with accountability and judgment.
 - f) Meanwhile, back to Zechariah pronouncing judgment on the Israelites.
19. Verse 14: Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.
- a) Remember I said there were two sticks that God broke? One represented His relationship with all people and the other represents His relationship with the Israelites (His people).
 - b) The way to look at both of these relationships is not to say no one was saved after this. It's about God putting to a halt His relationship with people with Israel as the central point of His witness of His existence. Remember that within 40 years of Jesus' death on the cross, that's when Israel ended as a nation until 1948. To me, the symbolism of the sticks being broken is about how God is bringing to an end His relationship with Israel as an entity. A big point to grasp is that this "end of a relationship" is not permanent. Just as Israel's back there today, that's proof to me that God's not through with Israel "as an entity".
 - c) Let me try to make this simple: The breaking of the two sticks of God's relationship with the world and with Israel are in effect the "same thing". It doesn't mean no one gets saved at that point. It's a prediction about people in effect having to go "through Israel" in order to be saved. Let me explain, before Jesus paid the price for our sins, salvation worldwide had to do with what knowledge we have about God's existence and what we did with it.
 - d) Since the Israelites had greater knowledge, they're more accountable and held to higher standard than say someone on the other side of the world. By God "breaking that stick", the text is saying a day is coming (Zechariah's perspective) and did come 2,000 years ago from our perspective, where God now says "The price has been paid. Salvation is based on what knowledge we have or could have known about that fact and what we did with it." Yes that's tough. For people living in worlds where Christianity is nonexistent, I trust in a fair God that judges people fairly again based on what we do know or could know.

- e) One more technical note before I go to the last three verses. The text mentions the stick between Judah and Israel. That was the names of the Southern Kingdom and the North one that existed prior to the Babylonian captivity. By Zechariah mentioning both groups, he's saying, God's relationship with all Israelites is coming to an end in the sense that a person's salvation is coming through Jesus and not from "being Jewish" or based on what people do know about that nation. OK then, Verse 15.
20. Verse 15: Then the LORD said to me, "Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶ For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. ¹⁷ "Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!"
- a) Keep a couple of things in mind as Zechariah finishes this three-chapter prophecy. First, that we're not talking about Jesus, as no true prophet would call him a "foolish shepherd". The next thing to remember is that Zechariah is predicting far in the future. Just as he was looking 500 years in the future to Judas a few verses back, he's once again seeing forward into the distant future to the "ultimate" bad guy! Yes, we're dealing with "The" AntiChrist here in these verses. Yes I'm sure there is some shorter term fulfillments of these verses, but after studying the bible for decades now, it appears this is "the bad guy" in focus here.
- b) Let's begin with something the apostle John said. There are many antichrists in the world. The term "antichrist" simply refers to anyone who opposes Jesus rule over the world. The Antichrist is a special entity. My personal view is he'll have a Jewish background so he'll be accepted by many Jewish people. My religious Jewish friends tell me the way they will recognize the Messiah is he will lead in the rebuilding of the temple. The "double-cross" comes after three and a half years after it's built. This entity will demand worship as God. That's when all the bad stuff of Revelation takes place. What's also fascinated is to study a little of Muslim end-time theology. They'll argue Jesus does return, gets married and tells people "Allah is God", not the God of the bible. I suspect (but can't prove) that false Jesus will be the one and only anti-Christ and even have a Jewish background. Is it possible I'll be wrong about some of those facts? Sure. I just trust what the bible does tell me about a man who falsely claims to be the Messiah. That leads me back to these verses:
- c) Whoever Zechariah is talking about, he states this man doesn't care for the lost or helping the injured or feeding people. The basic complaint about this guy is in effect he only cares about himself and doesn't help others. So how do you know this isn't another bad guy, as opposed the "Antichrist"? Because Revelation Chapter 13 definitely is talking about "the" antichrist. Revelation 13:3 reads, "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed." I can't say for sure, that injury does sound a lot like what Zechariah's preaching here. Also in Genesis, when God was dishing out the punishments for Adam, Eve and Satan, part of Satan's punishment is He (Jesus) is going to "bruise your head". Again, that seems a lot like a head injury that we're reading about here in Zechariah. Like I said, it could refer to someone else in history, but I'm getting the suspicion this is end-times stuff.
21. OK John, you beat us over the head pretty hard this lesson on predictions that have come true as well as one's that will come true in the future. The point is not to hide in bed because the devil is roaming around somewhere! The point is to put our lives in perspective. The point is to realize our accountability to God in terms of being a witness for Him. When people tell me they believe Jesus is God, part of me wants to say, "So What?" What I'm more impressed by is people who do something about that belief. That's what the accountability is all about.
- a) Let's be honest, these two chapters laid out some pretty harsh things. It also gave us some wonderful promises about our eternal future. Again, the important question is what're we doing about it? That's why we were created. Time is the most valuable thing we own. It means we are to use it for His glory. With that said, I'll discuss it in my closing prayer.

22. Heavenly Father, First, we thank You that You have chosen us. We can't explain why you've picked us, we're just grateful that You have. With that realization comes responsibility. We ask that by Your power, You embolden us to do Your will today. Help us to realize that Your will for us is not the same will for other believers. Help us to control what we can control, to trust You for what we can't control and give us the wisdom to know the difference. Help us to remember our accountability to You so that we can use our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.