



Zechariah 11:12-13

The Price of a Slave

Traitor. It is a horrible, detestable vulgar word. It is the blackest ingratitude of supreme contempt for other people. In the passage before us an even greater insult is the wage of the traitor.

In one of the most remarkable prophetic visions in the Bible the Hebrew prophet Zechariah sees himself taking the role of the Good Shepherd. The wicked shepherds had neglected and oppressed the poor sheep of Israel. The faithful Shepherd regards it as His sacred duty to shepherd His sheep. God in His grace sought to reunite the lost sheep of the house of Israel. With two staves, the Messiah, typified by Zechariah, began his work in vv. 8-11.

The two staves are called Favor, and Union (v. 7). The beautiful staff called Favor in the NASB, is full of grace, loving-kindness, friendliness and pleasantness. God made a covenant with Israel out of His love. The other staff Union meaning cords, binding, or union reminds us of the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (v. 14).

Because of their obstinate rebellion in v. 9, the Shepherd, symbolized by the prophet, will no longer pasture them so He cut into pieces His staff Favor. He withdraws His grace and turns them over to their enemies. ”

The New Testament parallel is to be found in Luke 19:41-44 when Christ wept over Jerusalem saying, For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation (vv. 43-44). A little later Jesus said, “. . . and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (21:24).

THE REJECTION OF THE SHEPHERD

In the verses that follow we see the justice of God upon the nation. It comes in punishment of their ingratitude and contemptuous treatment of the Good Shepherd (vv. 12-14). Instead of humble, repentance, faith, love and obedience they treated Him with contempt and hatred. The prophet asked for his wages due a faithful shepherd. The wages God desired were a humble heart of repentance and faith. That is the only return worthy of the Good Shepherd. With devilish ingenuity they offer Him a wage and at the same time add insult to their hated rejection of Him.

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Carefully they weigh out thirty pieces of silver, the exact sum fixed in God's Law as payment to the owner of a slave gored to death by an ox (Ex. 21:32). Imagine the faithful Shepherd, Jehovah their Righteousness (Jer. 23:6), worth no more to them than the price of a lowly slave! (Acts 3:13-15). Jehovah is one with his Messenger and to insult the Messenger is to insult Jehovah.

Hengstenberg reminds us of the Lord looking for figs on the fig tree of the Jewish nation, at a time when it has lost its capacity to produce what God desired (Matt. 21:19). The parallel passage in Mark tells us Jesus went into the temple and cleansed it (11:12-18).

In verse 12 we see Zechariah acting the role of the coming Messiah. Because the people rejected the Good Shepherd's ministry, He asked as His wages only the price of a slave. The goodly sum was literally the magnificence of the value at which I was valued by them! "

The religious and civil leaders negotiated the price, not as shepherds, but as part of the flock itself.

In his vision the prophet cast the silver in the house of the Lord. The prophet writes with vivid words:

I said to them, If it is good in your sight, give *me* my wages; but if not, never mind! So they weighed out thirty *shekels* of silver as my wages. Then the Lord said to me, Throw it to the potter, *that* magnificent price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty *shekels* of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD. "

Thirty shekels of silver

They weighed out thirty pieces of silver which is the price of a slave. Before money was coined rings or bars of silver were used for money. The silver was weighed on a scale and therefore the unit of weight was called a shekel.

The allusion is to the sum of compensation for a slave that had been killed (Ex. 21:32) and the price at which a slave could be purchased (Hos. 3:2). So when they weighed out thirty shekels they made him understand clearly they did not estimate his service higher than the labor of a household slave. Hengstenberg says to offer such a wage was in fact more offensive than a direct refusal. Yahweh's response was an ironical "splendid value that has been set upon Me. It was an insult to God! Yahweh regarded the wages paid to His shepherd as paid to Himself. This is how much they valued His work on their behalf as a nation. Therefore, God commands the prophet to throw this miserable sum of silver to the potter. He was casting away the money.

Laetsch tries to bring out the play on words in vv. 12, 13. They weighed; cast it away! I cast; and again, the price I was priced. "

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The insignificant remuneration paid to the betrayer was really an expression of contempt towards the shepherd, correctly observes Hengstenberg. The insult would seem to make it evident that they intended to take the life of the Good Shepherd (cf. 12:10; 13:7).

Keil and Delitzsch conclude: "Jehovah Himself speaks of these wages as the price at which He was valued by the people; and it is only from the gospel history that we learn that it was not Jehovah the super-terrestrial God, but the Son of God, who became incarnate in Christ, i.e. the Messiah, who was betrayed and sold for such a price as this."

THE HISTORICAL FULFILLMENT

The statement "I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD" has puzzled the scholars who have refused to accept the historical fulfillment in the New Testament. Matthew 27:3-10 gives the historical record of the omniscient Ruler of the universe in control of events. The same thirty pieces of silver paid out to Judas Iscariot by the chief priests for delivering Jesus to them (Matt. 26:15) were cast into the house of the Lord by Judas (27:5). The chief priests took the same silver pieces and gave them to the potter from whom they bought the field to bury strangers (vv. 6-7).

Matthew 27:9-10 reads, "Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; and they gave them for the Potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Keil and Delitzsch make this observation: "The payment of the wages to the shepherd in the prophetic announcement is simply the symbolical form in which the nation manifests its ingratitude for the love and fidelity shown towards it by the shepherd, and the sign that it will no longer have him as its shepherd, and therefore a sign of the blackest ingratitude, and of hard-heartedness in return for the love displayed by the shepherd. The same ingratitude and the same hardness of heart are manifested in the resolution of the representatives of the Jewish nation, the high priests and elders, to put Jesus their Savior to death, and to take Him prisoner by bribing the betrayer. The payment of thirty silverlings to the betrayer was in fact the wages with which the Jewish nation repaid Jesus for what He had done for the salvation of Israel; and the contemptible sum which they paid to the betrayer was an expression of the deep contempt which they felt for Jesus. . . . The high priests would not put the money into the divine treasury, because it was blood-money, but applied it to the purchase of a potter's field, which received the name of a field of blood. . . . The prophecy was almost literally fulfilled; but, so far as the sense is concerned, it was so exactly fulfilled, that every one could see that the same God who had spoken through the prophet, had by the secret operation of His omnipotent power, which extends even to the ungodly, so arranged the matter that Judas threw the money into the temple, to bring it before the face of God as blood-money, and to call down the vengeance of God upon the nation, and that the high priest, by purchasing the potter's field for this money, which received the name of field of blood in consequence unto this day (Matt. 27:8), perpetuated the memorial of the sin committed against their Messiah."

Everything that happened that fateful day was in accordance with the purpose of God. We should not be amazed at how exactly the prophecy was fulfilled. God did it!

The priests carried the money away from the temple, as being impure, and bought a wretched piece of ground in the very same valley, which had once before been defiled by innocent blood and had called down the vengeance of God upon Jerusalem, as predicted by Jeremiah, and on the very same spot where Jeremiah had formerly proclaimed to the people their rejection by the Lord. Here, then, was the blood-money deposited (Matt. 27:6), the reward for betraying the innocent blood (v. 4), from which the field received the name of field of blood (v. 8; Acts 1:19), and here did it lie as a witness against Israel, a pledge by which the nation

field of blood (v. 8; Acts 1:19), and here did it lie as a witness against Israel, a pledge by which the nation had bound itself to submit to the punishment of God . . . Tradition also places the field of blood in the valley of Hinnon, in perfect accordance with the results when you compare the words of Jeremiah and Zechariah with the New Testament accounts (Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*).

Did Matthew make a mistake calling Zechariah Jeremiah in 27:9? Did he get confused and write Jeremiah when he was quoting Zechariah? Matthew says the word spoken by the prophet was fulfilled by the purchase of the potter's field for thirty shekels of silver, the price of the Messiah. However, Jeremiah says nothing of the betrayal, but says the Lord directed him to buy the field (v. 10; Jer. 32:6-8). Zechariah mentions the price. It seems reasonable that Matthew combines both of these prophecies and gives credit to the major prophet Jeremiah whose information he stresses in the purchase of the field. Matthew does the same thing in 21:5 where he combines two prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah and gives the credit to the famous prophet. Mark 1:2 does the same thing with Malachi and Isaiah giving credit to Isaiah. The Minor Prophets are rarely quoted by name though their information is frequently used throughout the New Testament. Hosea, Joel and Jonah are the only ones named, but others are quoted without citing them. Matthew had the words of our verse in mind for a long time before he wrote them at this point in his Gospel.

THE BROKEN STAFF

In verse fourteen as a result of the shameful payment for his service, the Shepherd breaks his second staff as a sign that He will no longer feed the ungrateful nation and leave it to its bitter fate. He breaks or destroys the relationship between Judah and Israel. It is a divine decree. They are completely ripe for judgment.

The religious leaders would have no king but Caesar (John 19:15). Therefore God delivered them into the hands of their self-chosen king, the Roman emperor. This made it convenient for the Roman soldiers carried out the destruction prophesied. That was the judgment upon Judah as a nation (1 Thess. 2:16; Isa. 6:1-13; 65:1-14; Acts 28:23-28; Rom. 9:22-23; 11:7f). God sent no deliverer.

But even this chastisement works for God's eternal purpose with Israel as seen in Romans 11:1-36. Their hearts were hardened for a time until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. When the church is complete all Israel will be saved. This need not mean every Jew without a single exception, but Israel as a whole, the nation who is the eternal objects of God's electing love. It will no longer be just a saved remnant, but a saved mass of people. The hardening will have terminated and evangelistic wildfire will break out among the Jewish people. There is no ground for spiritualization here because the reference is to the Jewish people as a whole nation. The rejection of Israel is not permanent.

As we have seen the context refers to the days of the Messiah, so the reference to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem would be expected in the same setting. The invading armies of Rome A. D. 70-71 devastated the entire land of Judah and Jerusalem. Because of her rejection of Him, the Jewish nation would be rejected by her Lord and His Shepherd (vv. 4-14). Verse nine was literally fulfilled in the Roman invasion of Jerusalem when the Jews destroyed one another in the fury of their contentious spirit. In desperation they were left no other choice but literally to eat one another's flesh. "

The effort of the Good Shepherd was not all in vain. There was a remnant of Jewish people who discerned the Messiah in the Shepherd and believed on Jesus Christ as the anointed of the Lord and were saved. The ruin of the nation by the Roman war was accelerated soon after the rejection of Christ by the majority.

It is my prayer that you will let Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Messiah become the desire of your heart. He will give you His perfect peace right now if you will believe on Him. If you need help in knowing Him in an intimate personal relationship here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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