

XVIII. The LORD Is My Shepherd

April 5, 2020 Zechariah 10:1-5

Theme: The Messiah is the Good Shepherd of His people; He provides for their needs and keeps them safe from false religion and poor leaders.

Aim: To turn to our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, for all our needs, cares, and wants in this life and the next.

Key Verses: ³My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his majestic steed in battle. ⁴From him shall come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler—all of them together (Zechariah 10:3-4).

Review

Last week we looked at the Messiah's person and people in Zechariah 9:9-17. The first two verses (9&10) provide a beautiful picture of our Savior's first advent and His accomplishments. Jesus is presented as the coming King, the one who comes in righteousness, having salvation, and humble and gentle in character. This prophecy was fulfilled on Palm Sunday at the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, just five days before His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. He came to provide protection for His people, proclaim peace to the nations, and extend His universal reign over the whole earth. The spread of the gospel to the nations in the church age is the fulfillment of this prophecy, but the ultimate consummation awaits His return in triumph at the second coming.

Verses 9 to 17 of chapter 11 ostensibly describe the Maccabean triumph over Antiochus IV Epiphanes at a historical level of understanding. However, in a spiritual sense, these verses also summarize the entire salvific work of Jesus Christ in the way God delivers and restores His people, equips and prepares them for victory over their enemies, and provides them with peace and prosperity. The success depicted over foreign enemies is symbolic of the greater triumph Christ has won over sin and death.

The Triumphal Entry was merely a foretaste of the eternity of rejoicing that awaits us in heaven. Because *our triumphant Messiah, is righteous in His person and comprehensive in His salvation*, let us rejoice in the salvation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—that we have through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Psalms 23 is one of the best-known and beloved passages in all of Scripture. It uses the metaphor of a shepherd taking care of the sheep as a depiction of God's providential care of His people. In the Psalm, the LORD supplies His sheep's needs and desires, addresses their cares and their fears, and preserves them safe and secure in His presence forever. It is a beautiful portrait of the covenant relationship we have with our Savior:

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures.

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He leads me beside still waters.

³He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:1-6).

The Old Testament is replete with descriptions of God as our Good Shepherd. The first Scriptural reference to God as a shepherd leader is in Jacob's deathbed prophecy:

...his arms were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel) (Genesis 49:24).

In a natural extension of the metaphor, ancient kings were also likened to shepherds. This idea of a sovereign leader as a shepherd over his people goes back to the earliest times, even predating the writing of the Old Testament. The first Biblical example of a human leader referred to as shepherd is in Moses' prayer for a successor:

¹⁵Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶“Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation ¹⁷who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:15-17).

Although many judges, kings, and other leaders were placed over the nation of Israel, all too often they failed in their responsibility to shepherd God's people faithfully, especially in the matters of true covenant religion. As a result, the prophets often denounced the leaders of Israel, and likened the people to sheep without a shepherd (cp. 1 Kgs. 22:17; 2 Chr. 18:16; Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:8). Zechariah uses this same description in the passage we have before us today (in 10:2). Thus, he is following in the footsteps of a long tradition of Biblical writers in employing this metaphor. Baldwin elaborates:

In the poetry of a psalmist and several of the prophets it was developed to express longings after God (Ps. 23; Is. 40:11) and deep desires for a just king (Is. 44:28; Jer. 23:2-4; Mic. 5:4). Ezekiel, with his great gift for extended metaphor and allegory, built a whole chapter on the theme, in the course of which he brought together the coming Davidic king and the ideal shepherd (Ez. 34:23, 24). When Zechariah used the term “shepherd,” the word had thus acquired a significance which the western reader might easily fail to appreciate (Baldwin, p. 172).

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Zechariah, had introduced the concept of God as the shepherd of His people in 9:16 and extends it in verses 2&3 of chapter 10. Our passage today has an inherent contrast built into it between “bad” shepherds, those earthly leaders who failed to lead God’s people “in paths of righteousness,” with the Good Shepherd of Israel. Under the unfaithful leadership of the bad shepherds, the people had failed to seek God and instead had turned to idols and other forms of worship. However, Zechariah provides the solution to this distressing situation by once again making a declarative prophecy concerning the coming King: *The Messiah is the Good Shepherd of His people; He provides for their needs and keeps them safe from false religion and poor leaders.*

A. Bad Shepherds (Zechariah 10:1-3a)

1. Call to Prayer (10:1)

¹Ask rain from the LORD in the season of the spring rain, from the LORD who makes the storm clouds, and he will give them showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field.

Chapter 9 ended with an idyllic picture of peace and security, as young men and women were flourishing amidst a bountiful supply of grain and wine. This scene spoke powerfully to the post-exilic generation, since they were totally dependent upon the annual harvest for their well-being. Today, we have lost much of our agricultural roots. Food comes from a grocery store or a restaurant. Our connection to the land is much more tenuous than in pre-industrial days. But for ancient Israel, the assurance of plentiful crops meant life and prosperity. Conversely, drought and famine were economic, political, and spiritual disasters that threatened society and life itself. Therefore, it is no wonder that ancient pagan cultures focused their religious attention on so-called fertility gods; a deity who could bring rain and ensure the harvest was one worthy of worship.

The post-exilic generation had returned from Babylon to restore true worship in the Jerusalem temple, but they got off to a rocky start. The temple reconstruction project stalled for sixteen long years, and those days were times of want, not of plenty:

⁵Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:5-6).

Even after the temple construction was completed, it seems as if the people of God still suffered difficult economic straits. Thus, when Zechariah spoke of plentiful harvest, he got the peoples’ attention. Phillips pictures the original listeners of Zechariah’s prophecy asking how to ensure that the rains fell in the appropriate seasons to assure a full ingathering: “‘That’s what we’re interested in, preacher,’ came the calls to the prophet. ‘Tell us how to get what we need, tell us how to bring the rains to help the harvest!’” (Phillips, p. 221).

Verse 1 of chapter 10 is the answer to this request. But like most prophetic replies, it doesn’t merely respond to the specific question, but it addresses the underlying, unspoken spiritual issue of the people. It is an exhortation to pray to God and ask Him to provide for their needs, in this case the “spring rain” or the “latter rain.” The growing season in Israel was different than in the US. Most crops were sown in the late fall, when the rainy season started, as the “former rain”

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were necessary for proper germination of the planted seeds. In the spring time, the “latter rains” helped the grain to bud and the ear to grow and ensured the crops ripened for harvest. The summer months were dry and hot and unsuitable for agriculture.

On the surface, Zechariah’s command in verse 1 seems like a rather obvious and straightforward statement. Although the farmers were responsible to sow the crops, only the LORD could bring the needed former and latter rains (cp. Dt. 11:14; Jer. 3:3; Joel 2:23; James 5:7) that the Israelites required to ensure the harvest. They wanted rain, and so they needed to turn to the one who controlled the rain, to the one *who makes the storm clouds*, for their daily needs.

Indeed, Zechariah’s larger message here is one of trust. Who do you trust to be your shepherd, to provide for and protect you? Already in our study of Zechariah chapters 7-9 we’ve been exposed to great covenant promises, to assurances of a coming King, to protection and salvation and victory and prosperity and eternal security. How can we believe and trust in such grand and great promises, that seem so far away and so difficult to understand? It starts by trusting in God for our daily provision: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Mt. 6:11). If we can trust Him in the small things of life, then we can grow in faith to trust Him in the big things as well. God is sovereign over the weather; so, let’s trust Him to provide for our need of rain. “He is the Lord of the rain, and furthermore, He is the good and gracious God who answers prayer: *He will give them showers of rain, to everyone the vegetation in the field*” (Phillips, p. 221).

Since rain is often used in the Scripture as a symbol of spiritual blessing (e.g., Is. 55:10-11; Ez. 34:26; Hos. 10:12), we can directly apply this exhortation to our own spiritual needs. Do we experience times of spiritual drought and leanness? Are our Christian lives lacking in assurance or joy or satisfaction? If so, pray for showers of blessing from the God “who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly place” (Eph. 1:3).

Baron draws three applications from verse 1 regarding prayer (Baron, p. 340). *First*, God promises to give when we ask for what we require. The LORD is a God who hears and answers prayer. He delights in satisfying the needs of His people. Jesus said, “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Mt. 21:22; cp. Mk. 11:24). *Second*, God is able to answer our prayers in greater ways than we can imagine. Zechariah says, *Ask rain from the LORD*; in response, the prophet says that He will not simply give a little precipitation, but rather that He provides *showers of rain*. Paul tells us that God “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:21). The LORD may not answer our prayers in the manner we expect; but He can and will answer them in ways greater than we can imagine. *Third*, God answers our prayers specifically to meet our individual needs. Zechariah says He will give *to everyone the vegetation in the field*, that is, His bountiful care and provision is designed to meet the specific needs of each petitioner. You may need rain for “broccoli,” while another requires water for “cauliflower”; but each one receives what they need from the One who gives every good and every perfect gift (cp. James 1:17).

2. Censure of Idolatry (10:2a)

²*For the household gods utter nonsense, and the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation.*

As we come to verse 2, we are given an insight as to why Zechariah felt it necessary to encourage the post-exilic generation to ask God for rain in order to make their crops to grow. Perhaps the Jews were tempted to seek alternate sources of power and insight from the pagan

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nations around them. Certainly, the sins of idolatry and false religion had been a serious failing of the nation of Israel prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. The Old Testament abounds with warnings from the prophets against the dangers and evils of abandoning the LORD to worship false gods. “While verse 1 is a call to true religion through faith and prayer, verse 2 exposes and condemns false and idolatrous religion” (Phillips, p. 223).

It is not clear whether Zechariah is reminding his generation of the besetting sin of Israel before the exile, or if this was a continuing trend after the reconstruction of the temple. In general, it seems as if the sin of idolatry had been eradicated from the nation of Israel, although other sins, such as self-righteousness, certainly crept in. However, the connecting word, *for*, which introduces verse 2, seems to link the warning against idolatry directly to Zechariah’s exhortation to ask God for rain. Mackay comments:

It is...possible to translate the verbs of this verse as referring to the past, and so to see the pre-exilic situation used as a warning that such conduct is no way forward. But though open, national adherence to pagan cults was a thing of the past, there is evidence to suggest that various superstitions and false practices lingered on (cp. Neh. 6:10-13; Mal. 3:5)... It may be that the dejection of the people exposed them to the temptation to revert to the practices of their fathers, which were still current in the heathen communities around them (Mackay, pp. 197-198).

Zechariah warns against two different forms of false, idolatrous religion. First, he says that *the household gods utter nonsense*. The Hebrew word translated “household gods” here is *teraphim*, which were typically small, transportable stone idols. Jacob’s wife Rachel stole her father’s *teraphim* when they moved back to Palestine (Gen. 31:19). They were obviously important to Laban, because he chased after Jacob and searched all their tents for his household gods. However, he could not find them, because Rachel had hidden them in her camel’s saddle and sat upon them to prevent their detection (Gen. 31:34-35). *Teraphim* are also mentioned in Judges 17:5; 18:14ff. ; 1 Sam. 19:13-16; and Hos. 3:4. Apparently, these idols could be used in some way to provide guidance or assistance, as the prophet Ezekiel indicates:

For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination. He shakes the arrows; he consults the *teraphim*; he looks at the liver (Ezekiel 21:21).

The prophet condemns these idols as uttering *nonsense*. In fact, they could make no sound at all, since these graven images were blind, deaf, dumb, and silent. It seems, then, that the nonsense they utter is within the imagination of their owners. In some fashion, clinging to their idols gives them a false sense of comfort or security that has no basis in reality. Rather than submitting to the LORD God and His sovereignty, they irrationally adhere to something that has no power at all. Lest we condemn the ancients as superstitious fools, unenlightened by modern science and contemporary knowledge, all too many idols that replace God in the hearts of men still exist in present-day society. Anything that men turn to instead of God is an idol: politics, relationships, work, accomplishments, philosophies, humanism, sports, entertainment, pleasure, self-esteem, mysticism, non-Christian religions, and the like are just many of the examples of idols that pervade our world today.

Secondly, Zechariah speaks out against those who promulgate false religion: *and the diviners see lies; they tell false dreams and give empty consolation*. “Diviners” were false prophets who saw visions or dreamed dreams to comfort their audiences. A prime example of such a diviner in the

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Old Testament was Balaam (cp. Jos. 13:22), who was hired by Balak the king of Moab to curse the children of Israel (Num. 22:1-6). Balaam certainly had impressive mystical powers, although he was unable to curse Israel, instead blessing them four times. Indeed, the fourth oracle of Balaam even contained a wonderful messianic prophecy (Num. 24:17). However, Balaam's desire was not to do the will of the LORD, but rather to earn the acclaim and wealth of men. Thus, we later learn in the book of Numbers that Balaam was behind the dreadful sin of idolatrous adultery that Israel committed at Baal Peor (Num. 31:9). The apostle Peter gives the final analysis of Balaam:

¹⁵Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness (2 Peter 2:15-16; cp. Jude 11; Rev. 2:14).

The prophet condemns the counsel of such diviners and dreamers as “false” and “lies.” This is not true religion. Zechariah has been speaking about true religion throughout his prophecy. True religion understands our own sinfulness and weakness apart from the living and true God. It relies upon Him instead of ourselves for our every need. It asks Him for rain because we cannot provide it. It responds to Him in faith and works itself out in deeds of love toward both our LORD and our neighbor. It is a faith that agrees with these words from the fifth Night Vision of Zechariah: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). Phillips continues:

True religion is that which looks for salvation by grace alone, through faith in the Savior God has sent. All through Zachariah, the prophet has been pointing to this Savior; true religion asks God for Him, and His saving work in our lives. True religion acknowledges our sin and asks God to remove it. It professes our need and seeks His grace, all for the praise of His name. Whereas false religion listens to idols of its own making, true religion hears the voice of God in His revelation, and then believes and obeys that Word (Phillips, p. 224).

Further, these false prophets can only provide “empty consolation.” They cannot declare true visions of the future. They cannot give real assurance or hope in times of difficulty. Indeed, Phillips says there are few things more dangerous than false comfort:

False comfort tells us we are doing fine, when God says we are sinners in danger of His wrath. False comfort says that God is surely pleased with our worship, when in fact He rejects worship that He has not ordained. False comfort says that since the world applauds, we must be doing great, while in fact the people “like sheep...are afflicted for lack of a shepherd” (10:2b). Instead of true comfort—the comfort that comes from God when He forgives our sins and gives us peace in Jesus Christ—false religion offers mere distractions for foolish hearts, a fleeting comfort that is both unreal and vain (Phillips, p. 224).

3. Condemnation of Shepherds (10:2b-3a)

a) *Lost Sheep (10:2b)*

Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for lack of a shepherd.

What is the root cause of this return to idolatrous and false religion? Zechariah pins the blame on the lack of godly shepherds watching over the people of God, who are pictured as wandering

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and lost sheep, shuffling to and fro aimlessly, without direction, without a destination, without leadership. They are like “children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph. 4:14). Their “affliction” or lack of prosperity and success is directly tied to their weak and woeful spiritual condition.

Again, it is not clear from context if the lack of godly, shepherding leadership leading to this religious wandering is a reflection back on historical Israel, which led to the exile, or is a contemporaneous picture of their current spiritual condition. Certainly, it is a recurring motif throughout the Old Testament, and even into the New Testament. This description exactly mirrors the situation encountered by our Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36; cp. Mark 6:34).

While the comparison of God’s people to a flock of leaderless sheep is not a complimentary one, it is realistic. Each of us, even if redeemed, has a strong strain of remaining sin within us, that causes us to wander away from our first love. As the hymn *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* says, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the one I love.” If we always remained true and faithful, there would be no need for Zechariah, or any other prophet, to remind us to ask God for our daily needs and rely upon Him instead of the created things (idols) of this world. Instead, as we read the Old and New Testaments, we are continually bombarded with these and other similar exhortations. Why? Because we are sheep, and we are easily distracted. We need good shepherds to encourage us, to exhort us, to reprove us, and to teach us, in order to keep our feet firmly on the “paths of righteousness.”

b) *Lousy Shepherds (10:3a)*

³“My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders;

The problem is not the total absence of leaders, but rather a lack of godly shepherds. There was no shortage of people who ruled and lorded over the Jews during the many centuries of their national existence, from judges and prophets and priests to domestic kings and foreign overlords. The issue is not a vacuum of leadership, but a dearth of God-centered, God-serving shepherd-servants. Boice elaborates:

Some interpreters believe they are the pagan kings of Greece and other nations who ruled over Palestine. (This would fit in with the immediate context of the allusions to the wars of the Maccabees.). Others believe them to be Israel’s own bad kings and false prophets, along the lines of important references in Jeremiah (ch. 23) and Ezekiel (ch. 34). Probably all false prophets, kings, or other leaders, both Jew and Gentile are meant (Boice, p. 197).

Zechariah does not enumerate the sins of the lousy shepherds here; he merely condemns them. His predecessor, the prophet Ezekiel, had previously issued a full and utter condemnation of the false shepherds and their disastrous practices which had scattered the sheep. The entire 34th chapter of the prophet Ezekiel is dedicated to denouncing the false shepherds of Israel. Zechariah merely touches upon the issue, perhaps expecting his audience to be familiar with the full background:

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah,

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shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ⁶ they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them (Ezekiel 34:1-6).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that judgment is announced against these false shepherds (cp. Ez. 34:10), who allowed the covenant people to wander and follow after worthless idols and vain prophets instead of remaining faithful to the LORD. Interestingly, the word translated as “leaders” in 10:3a is literally “he-goats” (cp. Ez. 34:17). From the parallelism of the text, it seems clear that these “he-goats” are synonymous with the false “shepherds” who had led Israel so poorly.

The manifold warnings in both Testaments regarding judgment upon leaders for failure to uphold their responsibilities faithfully should give all Christians pause. It is no small thing to pick up the mantle of leadership or to take up an office, responsibility, or position of authority in the church. God requires great faithfulness in the exercise of those duties. James writes, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). The warning is there because failure leads to greater sorrow. The individual who falls is responsible only for himself; the shepherd who guides the flock astray has the entire congregation on his conscience. “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required” (Lk. 12:48).

B. The Good Shepherd (Zechariah 10:3b-5)

1. Majestic Steed (10:3b)

for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his majestic steed in battle.

God goes on to declare that He Himself will shepherd the flock of His people. Literally, it says that He “will visit the flock.” Often, this announcement of God’s visitation results in punishment (e.g. Ex. 32:34), as with the false shepherds of the first half of verse 3. However, here, God will visit His people with an intent to bless and care for them, even as He had in times past visited His people (e.g., Gen. 50:24; Ex. 4:31; cp. Ex. 13:19). “And when He visits His flock for good, and assumes His shepherd-care of them, they will be no more like distressed and scattered sheep, a prey to any wild beast, but they shall be strong in Jehovah and in the power of His might” (Baron, p. 345). Phillips goes on to describe God’s motive in shepherding His people:

It is “His flock, the house of Judah,” that God will shepherd. Israel then, like the church now, is God’s flock and He is responsible for her. Therefore, we may always look to God for help, because His own name is bound up with His people, who by His election are called His own. It is God’s ownership of the church that gives us confidence of His care (Phillips, p. 226).

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Once the false shepherds are replaced by the Good Shepherd, there is a change in metaphors: God's people are no longer a flock of sheep, but rather majestic war-horses. The phrase may be rendered "as His goodly horse" or "as the horse of His splendor (or majesty)." "It conveys not only the idea of a changed condition, from oppressed flock to a richly ornamental royal stallion, but of being such to the renown of the LORD and fit to serve His purposes" (Mackay, p. 199).

How does God accomplish this in history? How does He visit the flock and care for them? Primarily, it is through the removal of bad shepherds and the installation of good ones. A chief example is the Reformation, when the Lord raised up Martin Luther and the Reformers to rejuvenate the church and return it to true doctrine after the decay and corruption of the institution via poor leadership through the Middle Ages.

God's people often get the leaders we deserve. Therefore, we must always be praying for our leaders and for the church, that it remains pure and holds fast to the doctrines of true religion. Our shepherds must always "guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14), that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ that leads to salvation.

2. Messianic Metaphors (10:4)

⁴From him shall come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler—all of them together.

The ultimate expression of the LORD shepherding His people is not simply through a succession of godly leaders, but through the presence of God Himself in the midst of His people. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is our Good Shepherd:

¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

Zechariah introduces us to the Good Shepherd, our Messiah, here in verse 4 with a series of four metaphors. We've already seen in Zechariah's prophecy that the Messiah is our coming Savior-King in whom we rejoice (Zech. 9:9-10). Now He is presented at the Shepherd-King who cares for the flock of God's people. Each of the four images is introduced with the same phrase, *from him*. The NIV translates the first as "from Judah," since the antecedent for verse 4 is found in "the house of Judah" in verse 3. The attribution of the Messiah coming from the tribe of Judah certainly accords with prior prophetic revelation:

The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he to whom it belongs shall come
and the obedience of the nations shall be his (Genesis 49:10).

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times (Micah 5:2).

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a) Cornerstone

The first messianic metaphor is *the cornerstone*, or more simply, “the corner.” The cornerstone is the most important part of the foundation of a building. Not only does it anchor the foundation and thereby establish its location, it sets the orientation for the entire structure. It is the spot where two key walls meet up and are anchored. The strength, safety, and stability of the edifice depends upon the cornerstone.

Zechariah’s use of “cornerstone” to describe the person and work of Messiah goes back to two earlier passages in Isaiah and the Psalms:

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste’” (Isaiah 28:16).

²²The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;

²³This is the LORD’s doing,
it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:22-23).

Both of these earlier descriptions of the cornerstone have long been held by both Jews and Christians alike to be messianic prophecies. Indeed, our Savior Himself, as well as the apostle Peter in his address to the Sanhedrin, applied Psalm 118:22 to Jesus (Mt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 4:11). In his first epistle, Peter used both prophecies to describe Christ:

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:4-7).

And the apostle Paul called Christ Jesus the “cornerstone” of the church, the holy temple that God is building up for His glory:

¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Phillips describes the significance of Jesus as our cornerstone:

A cornerstone not only anchors the foundation, but also sets the pattern for the whole structure. In this way, Christ’s person and work establish the dimensions for the church;

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the principles of His life and ministry and saving achievement are the principles for its growth and stability and success. As the church rests and relies upon Him, it is sure to be safe, and as it follows His and the apostles' teachings, it is sure to build rightly. In chapter 3 Zechariah wrote of a stone that would be laid, of which God said, "I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day" (3:9). Surely this was the crucified Christ, whose saving work is the cornerstone on which the house of the redeemed is erected (Phillips, p. 227).

b) *Tent Peg*

The second word picture that Zechariah uses to describe our Shepherd-Messiah is *the tent peg*. The obvious image here is of a stake that is driven into the ground to hold the guy wire or rope of a tent taut and thus keep the structure firm and upright. Bronze tent pegs were used to secure the tabernacle in the wilderness (cp. Ex. 27:19; 38:20). The tent peg was also the weapon that Jael used to kill Sisera, the Canaanite general who oppressed the Israelites in the days of Deborah and Barak, by driving the spike through his head (Jdg. 4:21-22). This reminds us that Messiah will be a head crusher (cp. Jdg. 5:26), for He was prophesied to "bruise" the head of the Serpent in the first messianic prophecy (Gen. 3:15).

However, the Hebrew word in Zechariah 10:4 can also be used to describe a peg which is driven into a wall or post and is used to hang items of value, such as clothing, weapons, or precious vessels (cp. Ez. 15:3). Isaiah uses the word in this sense when he describes the replacement of the wicked steward Shebna, with the man of His own choice, Eliakim, a descendent of David:

²⁰In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²²And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. ²³And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. ²⁴And they will hang on him the whole honor of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons (Isaiah 22:20-24).

Jesus Christ is the greater Eliakim, the eternal holder of the key of the house of David (cp. Rev. 3:7), the ultimate "peg in a sure place." Baron makes two useful applications of this metaphor of Jesus as our tent peg (Baron, p. 352-353). In the first place, Jesus is the one who bears our burdens. He is not only the cornerstone, the foundation of our faith, who unites Jews and Gentiles together in one spiritual house, but He is also the "peg in a sure place" upon whom we can hang all our burdens. Do you have cares and concerns? Are you weak and weary? Come to Jesus and give your burdens to Him, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:30).

In the second place, Baron points out that the chief purpose of the "peg in a sure place" is to hang upon it the glory of the house. The most valuable and honorable possessions of an ancient household were put on display by hanging on pegs throughout the tent or house. In the same way, the church is to give Jesus Christ all blessing and glory and honor (cp. Rev. 5:12-13), all worship and allegiance, all their works and indeed all of themselves "as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1). Phillips summarizes these applications well: "Here is one on whom we may rest all our burdens—the guilt of our sin, our cares, and needs—and on whom we may securely place all our hopes of glory" (Phillips, p. 228).

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c) *Battle Bow*

The third image of Messiah is that of *the battle bow*, which speaks to our Lord's ability to defend His people and defeat His enemies. "From him the battle bow" is an obvious reference to the military prowess of the leaders the LORD will raise up from Judah. This too finds its final reference in Christ the mighty warrior, the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5)" (Mackay, p. 200).

This reminds us of the prophet's previous messianic prophecy, where he indicated that in His coming "the battle bow shall be cut off" (Zech. 9:10). This announcement was intended to force the people of God to rely on the LORD rather than in their own strength. A few verses later, God declared that "I have bent Judah as my bow" (Zech. 9:13), promising the Jews victory over their oppressors. "This is what happened in the time of the Maccabees, who violently expelled foreign rulers in the second century before Christ. In the Gospels we see the exceeding violence with which Jesus attacked the devil and his spiritual minions. Indeed, under His leadership the sheep are made to be 'like His majestic steed in battle' (10:3)" (Phillips, p. 228). Likely, the complete extent of the fulfillment of this picture of Messiah as Divine Warrior awaits His second coming, when at last all His enemies will be defeated forever (cp. Is. 63:1-4; Rev. 19:16).

d) *Every Ruler*

The fourth and final depiction of the Messiah in Zechariah verse 4 is in these words: *from him every ruler—all of them together*. The term translated "ruler" is difficult. In Zechariah 9:8, the same Hebrew word is translated as "oppressor" in reference to Alexander the Great. Usually, the word means a despot, someone whose rule is harsh, oppressive, overbearing, or violent through the use of force. Obviously, such a negative connotation would not be consistent with the portrait that Zechariah paints of Messiah. Hence, most English versions use the more neutral word "ruler," as does the ESV. Baron translates it as "absolute Ruler or 'Extractor'—the most absolute and autocratic King the world has yet seen" (Baron, p. 356).

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16), the prototype for and the ultimate consummation of every ruling authority. The idea of Him as an absolute monarch over the nations is previously described in the second Psalm, where the nations rage at the rule of the LORD God and His Messiah. To the rebellious nations, His rule is as with a "rod of iron"; but His people will enjoy safety, peace, and security because "blessed are all those who take refuge in Him":

- ⁷I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
¹⁰Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
¹¹Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
¹²Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,

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for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:7-12).

3. Mighty Men (10:5)

⁵They shall be like mighty men in battle, trampling the foe in the mud of the streets; they shall fight because the LORD is with them, and they shall put to shame the riders on horses.

Under the leadership of Messiah, the entire “house of Judah” will be transformed from wandering sheep into *mighty men* of war. They previously had been pictured as the Messiah’s majestic warhorse in 10:3. Now, they are picture as infantry soldiers who trample their foes in the streets (cp. 9:15, where the enemy are trampled like sling stones) and overcome the superior strength of the enemy’s cavalry, whose distinct advantage of being horsed is more than negated by the presence of the Warrior-King. The Messiah is pictured elsewhere in Scripture as a warrior who comes to trample His enemies in the winepress of His wrath:

²Why is your apparel red,
and your garments like his who treads in the winepress?

³“I have trodden the winepress alone,
and from the peoples no one was with me;
I trod them in my anger
and trampled them in my wrath;
their lifeblood spattered on my garments,
and stained all my apparel.

⁴For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
and my year of redemption had come (Isaiah 63:2-4; cp. Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15).

Conclusion and Application

While good leadership is a blessing from the Lord, all too often the people of God, Old Testament Israel and the New Testament church, have experienced the neglect and oppression of ungodly leaders. As the prophet Zechariah has shown us, wandering sheep inevitably err, falling away from trust in the one true God and instead choosing to follow made-up idols or lying prophets. However, our LORD has not left us without hope; indeed, He has provided the Hope of the World to be our Good Shepherd. In His first advent, our Messiah, Jesus Christ told us:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

The Messiah is the Good Shepherd of His people; He provides for their needs and keeps them safe from false religion and poor leaders. As our cornerstone, the Messiah is our sure foundation, a stable base on which to build up the faithful church in truth and righteousness. As our tent peg, we can lay all our burdens on Him and hang on Him our hope of glory. As our battle bow, we have confidence that He can defeat our enemies, allowing us rest secure in His eternal victory. And as our ruler, we have a King who rules over us and keeps us in perfect righteousness, joy, and peace forever. Through the use of these messianic images, Zechariah gives us all the encouragement we need to turn to our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, for all our needs, cares, and wants in this life and the next.

For next time: Read Zechariah 10:6-12.