



## Having God as your shepherd

Zechariah, chapters 10 and 11

### Why study this text?

We are all looking for good shepherds, leaders who can lead us to the best in all areas of our lives. Whether they are mechanics, doctors, teachers, craftsmen, politicians, or bosses. We are ready to listen to them and obey them, convinced that they are the best for us.

However, if we can trust a whole host of people, it's a lot harder when it comes to trusting God, especially when it comes to managing our projects, our choices, what we think is right for us.

Why should I let God tell me what to do?

God's people asked themselves this question 2500 years before we did. After going through war, rebellion, the destruction of their temple, their capital and their country, and being deported to Babylon, the people of Israel had serious reason to believe that not only did God not bring them happiness, but that he was the cause of their misfortune.

However, in ch.10 v.2, God reminds them of the precise reason for their misfortune: "They are wandering like a flock, they are miserable because there is no shepherd". The people entrust their cars to mechanics, their health to doctors, their education to teachers, their city to craftsmen and politicians, they entrust their temple to priests, but they do not entrust their lives, their choices to God, and that is precisely the problem.

It's because they don't let God show them what they need to do to move towards what they so long for: their happiness, that in the end they experience unhappiness. But things change for the people. The Babylonian captivity came to an end, people gathered from all over the country, the temple was rebuilt, worship of God was re-established, the city wall was completed. The people experience a new beginning.

### Author's aim:

God uses Zechariah so that we can say to ourselves: isn't it time to let God lead our lives?

To encourage us to make this decision, God shows us the contrast between ch.10: the joy of living under his divine direction, and ch.11: the disaster of opposing God.

### Author's main idea:

The best thing for us is to have God as our shepherd.

## Text structure:

### I. The happiness of his leadership (10.1-11.3)

#### a. God takes hold of his people who are lost (v.1-5)

- i. v.1-2 – God has compassion on his people who are lost in seeking happiness elsewhere than in him.
- ii. v.3-5: 11.1-3 – Out of compassion, God “*intervenes against the goats, the evil shepherds*” who deceive his people by putting people in charge who are with the Lord.

#### b. To direct them towards what is best (v.6-11.3)

- i. v.6-12 – Out of compassion, God “*strengthens his people [...] and lead them back v.6*” towards what they deeply desire; their happiness, which in the end can only be found with God.

*Transition: If God is directing us towards what is best, he cannot direct a people who do nothing but oppose him. This is why, to convince us that we can live happily with God as our shepherd, God, in this section, shows us:*

### II. The Disaster caused by our foolish opposition (11.4-17)

#### a. The folly of a people weary of the good shepherd v.4-14

- i. Not only have the people grown weary of his care v.8
- ii. But they are capable of the worst, even to the point of devouring each other v.9
- iii. Despite this, the people despise God by asking him to leave v.12

#### b. The disastrous consequences of this choice v.15-17

- i. v.9 Left to their own devices
- ii. v.15-16 Left with leaders like themselves

## Applications:

What difference does it make that God leads our lives? That he is a good shepherd?

## Motivation:

What can motivate us to want God in our lives? I sometimes hear the idea that God is pleased with our obedience. But God is not the one whom I make happy by my obedience. Quite the opposite, God is the one who makes me happy, because he gets me out of my unhappiness! He is the good shepherd who wants to save his sheep from their misery.

This misery that, in our desperate desire to quench our thirst for pleasure and meaning, makes us capable of the worst, blinded by the desire for success. Incapable of compassion. Slaves to passions we know to be evil, shameful, harmful to ourselves and those around us, and so on. That's who we are, sheep lost in their misery. But God is a good shepherd. God is the one who can, if we are willing, save us from our misery and guide us towards a new life. This should motivate us to love God, to hear his voice and to seek to do not what I want, but what he wants.

## **Destination:**

What is this new life to which he is destining us? Two things.

Firstly, we need to realize that what God wants is to prevent us from falling into the trap of "illusory consolation".

We are all here in search of something that will make us happy. The problem is that our eyes are turned towards the idols of v.2: "*The teraphim with empty words, the diviners with false prophecies and the dreamers with illusory consolations*". This is why God, the good shepherd, wants to prevent us from falling into the illusion of believing that there is something other than him that can bring us the happiness we so long for. Protecting ourselves from these things comforts us as much as they overwhelm us. God destines us to protect ourselves from illusory consolations but that's not all.

God, the good shepherd ch. 10 v.10 "*will bring his people out of Egypt and gather them from Assyria to the land of Gilead and Lebanon*" What does this mean?

Mt 1 v.2 shows us that Abraham's descendants were Judah and his brothers. This descendant of Judah is Jesus, the one who is going to save his people, not from the pride of Assyria, nor from the scepter of Egypt, but from their sins!

Not only does God preserve us from illusory consolations, but he also destines us to experience this joy, this happiness of being delivered from the grip of our sins. Here are a few verses to meditate on to see who Jesus is for us...

Mt 9.36, "*When Jesus saw the crowds, he was filled with compassion for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd*". Jesus is the good shepherd of whom Zechariah speaks. But what does he do for them? How does he show his compassion?

Mt 14:21 Jesus directs his people towards what is best. He guides his people in the desert by feeding them. Mt 14.25, he guides his people and reassures them through the waters of distress.

Mt 21.4 "*Behold, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey*". But what happens when God sends his good shepherd to save his people from their sins and guide them towards eternal life?

Mt 26:14-15 shows us that the shepherds of the people, the religious leaders, want to get rid of him for 30 pieces of silver and, to add insult to injury, Mt 27:9-10 shows that Jesus is betrayed by one of his own disciples and we see what happens with these famous 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus, the one who has compassion on his miserable people, who saves his people from their sins, the one who leads them to eternal life, the one whose value is priceless, Jesus will be sold for the price of a slave!

This is the man to whom the chapters of Zechariah 10 and 11 point: they point to Jesus, the good shepherd, who brings great joy to his people, who saves them from their sins and leads them to total liberation, to eternal life, but who, despite all this, has to endure the terrible betrayal of a people foolish enough to abandon the one who saves them.

What does God intend for us? God turns our eyes away from illusory consolation and leads us to the one who will give us the happiness we so long for: a new life, free from the domination of sin until the day we reach that "promised land" to which he has destined us: eternal life.

## **Action: What is God asking me to do?**

Let God strengthen us. Zech 10, v.6 "*I will strengthen the community of Judah*" and v.12 "*I will strengthen them*". The Christian life is about God strengthening his people on their way to salvation, to lead them to live more and more of what he has destined them to do. What does this mean? It means that the Christian life is God moving us from illusion to action. From the illusion of believing that we'll be happier with another spouse, with fewer children, or with a more attractive body, to God who strengthens me to such an extent that he makes me fight

those sins that are ruining my marriage, causing me difficulties with my children and making me hate looking at myself in the mirror. So, this week, let's be Christians who abandon illusion for action, convinced that God, the good shepherd, strengthens his people.

Let us turn to the One who strengthens. Let us remember that the great misfortune of the people was that they were directed towards illusory consolations rather than towards God. ch.10 v.2 "*They are miserable because there is no shepherd*". When we see each other, in large gatherings or in our small flats, let us remember that the happiness of the person opposite me does not depend on my ability to understand their problems, to answer all their questions or to show them a good time. No. Their happiness depends on my ability to turn their eyes away from illusory consolations and lead them to contemplate the One who strengthens. To the One who will have sufficient power to change their lives. Let's remember that the best thing for us is to have God as our shepherd. Therefore, what can we do, in each of our meetings, in each of our discussions, is to encourage each other to let ourselves be led by the one who said "*I am the good shepherd, I have come that the sheep may have life, and have it to the full*".

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**Église Évangélique de la Pélisserie**  
Rue de la Pélisserie 20 | 1204 Genève, CH  
+41 22 311 67 00  
courrier@eglisepelisserie.ch  
**eglisepelisserie.ch**