

The Good Shepherd

There's nothing like show-and-tell in kindergarten! Remember when you would carefully choose your favorite talking robot, your cooing baby doll, or a unique souvenir from your recent family vacation, strategically conceal it in a backpack or other bag, and bring it to class? The anticipation would be palpable leading up to revealing your treasure to the rest of your little peers. Suddenly, the classroom would be filled with an audible buzz - gasps, giggles, and exclamations - as the item came into view and you began to share its significance.

In the Old Testament, **God occasionally used the prophets as object lessons to “show and tell” the nation of Israel His plans, pleasures, and disappointments.** Jeremiah (Jer 13:1-11), Hosea (Hos 1:2-9), and Isaiah (Is 20:1-4) are just a few examples of God's unique, even strange, way of inciting His people to follow and obey. Unfortunately, the “sign acts” often received less than stellar reviews or positive responses. Similar to other prophets, Zechariah acts out the part of a shepherd - props and all - to warn Israel of the threat of bad leadership and in anticipation of good leadership. By donning two staves, one called Favor (or Grace) and one called Union, the prophet anticipates the coming Messiah, Jesus, tending to His exploited sheep (11:7), dismissing their failed shepherds (kings, priest, prophets; v. 8a), and ultimately being despised and rejected by the flock He came to lead (vv. 8b-10).

Sadly, all of God's glorious promises to the nation of Israel were put on hold, because God's people - the very people that God chose as His own - rejected the Messiah who came from their very midst! Jesus, the Messiah and Good Shepherd “came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). The consequences of their rejection are frightening! In the familiar words of Paul we are told that “... the gospel, ... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**” (Rom 1:16). Just a few verses later, Paul writes, “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, **the Jew first and also the Greek,** but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, **the Jew first and also the Greek**” (Rom 2:9-10). In this context, the word “first” (proton) is not an indication of historical order or sequence, but rather of special relevance. In summary, as the word of the promised Messiah has gone “first” to the Jew, so does punishment for failure to respond to that word go “first” to the Jew.

Zechariah's breaking of his staves of Favor and Union are a painful picture of God's rejection, but temporary! God's temporary refusal to strive with Israel has opened

the door for “other sheep” to be invited into the Good Shepherd’s fold. Also, **God will not neglect or reject Israel forever**. The Lord promises that He will “strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the LORD their God and I will answer them” (Zech 10:6).

What a raw, yet wonderful picture of the Good Shepherd we find in Zechariah. It would be foolish not to listen to His voice and shameful to neglect showing Him off with our life.

John 10:10-11, 14-17 (NIV) - *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And 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. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.”*