

Zechariah 11:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/zech/zech-11/zechariah-111-3/>

Zechariah urges the leaders of Lebanon and Bashan to lament the destruction of their forested land because the LORD will come to them with judgment.

The [previous chapter](#) ended with God's judgment on Assyria and Egypt—two nations that likely represented all the nations who opposed God and His covenant people (Zechariah 10:11–12). The present chapter starts off with a short lyric poem addressed to [Lebanon and Bashan](#), two neighboring regions, also possibly representing the nations that would experience divine judgment. The prophet graphically depicted the coming judgment using the imperative, followed by the naming of the region. He addressed Lebanon and Bashan as though he were speaking with human beings. Thus, he said to *Lebanon*, *Open your doors, O Lebanon* (v. 1).

The word for *door* is “deleth” in Hebrew. A closed door promotes a sense of security (Joshua 2:19) while an open door conveys a welcome, connecting what is inside to what is without.

Sometimes, “deleth” refers to the gates of a city (Deuteronomy 3:5; 1 Samuel 23:7; 2 Chronicles 8:5). Whether it is a door or a gate, it is always an obstacle that someone standing outside must overcome by pounding it or opening it with some effort (Judges 19:22, 3:25). In our passage, Zechariah spoke of the *doors* of *Lebanon* to refer to the passageway that gave access to *Lebanon* (Proverbs 8:34). He calls on *Lebanon* to *Open your doors* in order to picture the judgment that was coming its way, *that a fire may feed on your cedars* (v 1).

The region of *Lebanon* is a mountainous region that borders Israel to the north. In Bible times, it was known for its natural beauty and resources (Hosea 14:5–7; Psalm 92:12). It was the source of fine wood for Israel. The mighty *cedars* of Lebanon represented the pride and strength of that land (Isaiah 2:13). Yet, it was home to the exploitive ways of paganism and idol worship. Because its beauty produced pride, it fell under God's judgment. Thus, the prophet personified *Lebanon* and commanded it to *open its doors that a fire may feed on your cedars* (v 1).

The *cedar* was a tree indigenous to *Lebanon*. As an item of luxury, the *cedar* was a gift from God and a sign of wealth for *Lebanon* (Psalm 104:16). It was stately, with a pleasant aroma, and was high and strong (see for example, Ezekiel 31:3–5, Hosea 14:6, and Amos 2:9). King David used *cedars* to build his palace (2 Kings 5:11). His son, Solomon, used them for the first temple (2 Samuel 5:11).

Later, when the Judeans returned from their captivity in Babylonia, they used *cedars* for the construction of the second temple (Ezra 3:7). In Zechariah, the prophet pronounced that the *fire* of His judgment was about to have free access to the land. The picture of judgement is the burning of Lebanon's luxurious trees. God would break them to show His power to judge (Isaiah 14:8).

The judgement fire is pictured against the entire forest. In a second command, Zechariah said: *Wail, O cypress for the cedar has fallen* (v. 2). To *wail* means to mourn loudly to express grief

and distress (Joel 1:13). It is to cry out in sorrow and despair (Ezekiel 32:18). Zechariah commanded the *cypress* to *wail* as if it were a person. The *cypress* also produced useful wood. King Solomon used it to make floors, doors, and ceilings in the temple that God had instructed him to build (1 Kings 6:15, 34). It was a valuable tree but less than the *cedar*.

The question that comes to the mind of the reader is: Why did the *cypress* tree have need to express sorrow and agony? The prophet did not hesitate to spell out the reason: *for the cedar has fallen*. The point is that if the *cedar* tree, so strong as it was, could fall, the *cypress* would soon meet the same fate. They would mourn *because the glorious trees have been destroyed* (v 2).

The *glorious trees* refer to the *cedars*. The Bible often describes them as “the glory of Lebanon” (Isaiah 35:2, 60:13). Today, the *cedar* is still the national emblem of *Lebanon* and is in the center of the country’s flag. It symbolizes *Lebanon*’s elevation and strength. In judgment, however, “Lebanon is shamed and withers” (Isaiah 33:9).

After calling *Lebanon* to *open* its gates to receive the divine judgment, the prophet Zechariah turned his attention to *Bashan*. He stated, *Wail, O oaks of Bashan*. The region of *Bashan* was a rich and fertile land in what is now called the Golan Heights, east of the Sea of Galilee. It contained abundant *oak* trees, which produced valuable lumber (Isaiah 2:13; Ezekiel 27:6). It also had plenty of livestock (Deuteronomy 32:14; Ezekiel 39:18).

Animals such as *cows* grazed on the lush grass available in *Bashan*. In Zechariah, the prophet called on those *oak* trees to mourn, *for the impenetrable forest has come down* (v 2). The *impenetrable forest* likely refers to the great cedar forests of Lebanon. The point is that if some people could cut down a *forest* that is *impenetrable*, then *the oaks of Bashan* should panic and lament because they would also suffer the same fate.

Zechariah then transitioned from *trees* and *forest* to humans and livestock, thus showing the extent of God’s judgment on the land and its people. He said, *There is a sound of the shepherds’ wail* (v. 3). Shepherds are those responsible for guiding and protecting their livestock. They care for them. They see more and know more than their sheep.

Therefore, they look out for them to prevent them from becoming lost or falling into danger. In our passage, the *shepherds* would be in agony, *for their glory is ruined* (v 3). The *glory* of a shepherd is their flocks or pasture lands. This lament pictures the devastation of the pastures and their flocks.

Besides the grief of the *shepherds*, *there is a sound of the young lions’ roar*. The reason for their cry is because *the pride of the Jordan is ruined* (v 3). The *pride of the Jordan* might refer to the lush habitat around the Jordan River, where the *lions* lived. The devastation of their habitat would drive them away from their homes and cause them to cry in grief.

All this would happen in God’s timing because He would judge those who oppose Him. God’s design for humanity is for them to live in love and service to one another (Leviticus 19:18). Pagan idolatry produces the opposite of living in God’s design. Paganism leads to exploitation, violence, and oppression of children, including child sacrifice. God judged such wickedness, and here pronounces His judgment.

Biblical Text

**1 Open your doors, O Lebanon,
That a fire may feed on your cedars.**

**2 Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen,
Because the glorious *trees* have been destroyed;
Wail, O oaks of Bashan,**

For the impenetrable forest has come down.

**3 There is a sound of the shepherds' wail,
For their glory is ruined;**

**There is a sound of the young lions' roar,
For the pride of the Jordan is ruined.**