

Zechariah 11:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.

Analysis

Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars. This prophetic lament opens Zechariah's parable of the two shepherds with ominous imagery. "Lebanon" (Levanon, לבנון) represents the pride and glory of Israel—its majestic cedars symbolized strength, beauty, and royal splendor (1 Kings 5:6; Psalm 92:12). The command to "**open thy doors**" (petach dlatekha, פְתַח דְלַתְךָ) indicates inevitable judgment—the forests must open themselves to consuming fire.

"That the fire may devour" (ve-tokhal esh, אֵשׁ וְתַאכֵּל) speaks of complete destruction. Fire in prophetic literature represents divine judgment (Isaiah 66:15-16; Malachi 4:1). The cedars—tall, noble, seemingly indestructible—will be consumed. This imagery prophesies the coming devastation of Jerusalem and the temple (fulfilled in AD 70 when Rome destroyed the city). Josephus records that the temple's cedar-paneled interior burned magnificently, fulfilling this very image.

The verse introduces the shepherd allegory that follows, where Israel's rejection of God's Good Shepherd leads to judgment. The cedars of Lebanon were used in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:9-18), so their burning symbolizes the destruction of that which represented God's presence. The connection to the New Testament is clear: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was rejected, leading to the destruction of the second temple within a generation.

Historical Context

Zechariah prophesied around 520-518 BC during the post-exilic period as the second temple was being rebuilt. Yet this oracle looks forward to a future destruction—the temple rebuilt in Zechariah's day would itself be destroyed. The prophecy had layered fulfillment: the Seleucid desecration under Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BC), and ultimately Rome's destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (AD 70).

Lebanon's cedars were legendary in the ancient Near East—massive trees reaching heights of 120 feet, used for royal palaces and sacred buildings. King Solomon imported Lebanese cedars for the first temple. The image of these mighty trees consumed by fire would shock Zechariah's audience—it represented the unthinkable: God's own dwelling place destroyed. The historical fulfillment came when Jesus predicted: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:2). Roman armies under Titus besieged Jerusalem in AD 70, burned the temple, and scattered the Jewish people.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the destruction of the cedars—symbols of pride and strength—warn against trusting in external religious structures rather than genuine relationship with God?
2. What does this verse teach about the inevitability of divine judgment when God's people reject His shepherding?
3. How should Christians view the destruction of the temple as related to Israel's rejection of Jesus as Messiah?

Interlinear Text

בָּאַכְזִיבָּן אָשׁ וְתַאֲכֶל לְבָנָן פָּתָח

Open

O Lebanon

thy doors

may devour

that the fire

thy cedars

H6605

H3844

H1817

H398

H784

H730

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 22:23 (Parallel theme): O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail!

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