

Zechariah 11:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.

Analysis

This prophetic oracle introduces a worthless shepherd as divine judgment on Israel. The phrase **"lo, I will raise up"** (hineh anokhi meqim) indicates God's sovereign action in bringing judgment through a wicked leader. The term **"shepherd"** (ro'eh) is loaded with meaning in Scripture, representing both political and spiritual leadership.

The shepherd's failures are systematically listed: he will **"not visit those that be cut off"** (et-hannikchad lo yiphqod)—failing to care for the perishing; **"neither shall seek the young one"** (hanna'ar lo-yevaquesh)—ignoring the wandering; **"nor heal that that is broken"** (vehanishshberet lo yerappe)—refusing to mend the injured; **"nor feed that that standeth still"** (hannitzzavah lo yekalkel)—neglecting even those standing ready to be fed.

Instead, this false shepherd will **"eat the flesh of the fat"** (besar haberiah yokhal)—consume the choice sheep—and **"tear their claws in pieces"** (parsehen yephareq), a graphic image of violent exploitation. This shepherd represents anti-pastoral leadership that consumes rather than nurtures.

Historical Context

Zechariah prophesied around 520-518 BC during the post-exilic period as the second temple was being rebuilt. This oracle in chapter 11 is highly symbolic, with interpretive challenges regarding its fulfillment. Many scholars see multiple layers of fulfillment—immediate application to corrupt leaders in Zechariah's time, and eschatological application to the Antichrist figure.

The immediate context involved the rejection of God's shepherding through the prophets and the consequences of that rejection. Historically, Israel experienced numerous wicked leaders who exploited rather than protected the people—from corrupt priests to self-serving kings. The imagery would resonate with an agricultural society where bad shepherds were known to slaughter sheep for meat and profit rather than caring for the flock. Jesus later applied shepherd imagery to Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10), in contrast to the thieves and hirelings who came before. The 'worthless shepherd' prophecy ultimately points to leaders who value their own gain over the welfare of God's people.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this 'worthless shepherd' contrast with God's character as the true Shepherd?
2. What does it mean that God Himself raises up this wicked shepherd as judgment?
3. In what ways have religious or political leaders acted as worthless shepherds throughout history?
4. How does Jesus fulfill the role of the true shepherd in contrast to this prophecy?

5. What warning does this passage offer to those in positions of spiritual or civic leadership?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	הִנֵּה	אֲנֹכִי	יִמְקֶן	רֹעֶה	בָּא רֹעֶה
H3588	H2009	H595			
			For lo I will raise up	a shepherd	in the land
			H6965	H7462	H776
וְהִנֵּקְדוּ	לֹא	יִפְקֹד	הַנָּעַר	לֹא	
those that be cut off	H3808	which shall not visit	the young one	H3808	
H3582		H6485	H5289		
וְיִבְקֹשׁ	וְהַנִּשְׁבָּר	לֹא	יִרְפֶּה	הַנִּצָּבָה	לֹא
neither shall seek	that that is broken	H3808	nor heal	that that standeth	H3808
H1245	H7665		H7495	H5324	
וְיִכְלֹךְ	וּבֶשֶׁר	הַבְּרִיאָה	יֹאכֵל	וּפְרִסְיָהּ	יִפְרֹק:
nor feed	the flesh	of the fat	still but he shall eat	their claws	and tear
H3557	H1320	H1277	H398	H6541	H6561

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 23:2 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.