

Zechariah 11:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

Analysis

Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! (הוֹי רֹעֵי הָאֵלִיל עֲזָבֵי הַצֹּאן)—hoy introduces covenant curse against the ro'i ha-elil (worthless/idol shepherd), one who azav (abandons, forsakes) sheep entrusted to him. This follows Zechariah's enacted prophecy where he symbolically became shepherd of a doomed flock (11:4-14), representing both failed Israelite leadership and, prophetically, the Messiah's rejection. **The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye**—specific judgment: the arm (strength for defense) and right eye (vision for guidance) will be destroyed, rendering the shepherd completely useless.

His arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened (זָרוּעוֹ יָבוֹשׁ תִּיבֹשׁ וְעֵין יָמִינוֹ כָּהָה תִּכְהָה)—yavosh (wither, dry up) is atrophy from disuse or divine curse. Complete incapacitation: can't protect, can't guide. Many identify this 'worthless shepherd' as Antichrist, the final false shepherd whom Israel will initially accept (John 5:43: **"If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive"**) before recognizing the true Shepherd, Jesus.

Historical Context

Zechariah's enacted prophecy (11:4-17) depicted Israel's rejection of God's shepherding, selling their true shepherd for thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13)—the exact price Judas received for betraying Jesus (Matthew 26:15). This passage

condemns both historical false shepherds (corrupt priests, kings, prophets) and the ultimate false shepherd who will deceive Israel before Christ's return.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What characterizes an 'idol shepherd'—how do false spiritual leaders today abandon their flocks?
2. How does losing 'arm and eye' (strength and vision) picture the ultimate futility of false leadership?
3. What warning does this give about following charismatic leaders who draw people to themselves rather than to God?

Interlinear Text

הוֹי	רֹעֵי	הָאִדֹּלִים	עֲזָבֵי	הַצֹּאֵן	חֶרֶב	עַל	זְרְעוֹ
Woe	shepherd	to the idol	that leaveth	the flock	the sword	H5921	his arm
H1945	H7473	H457	H5800	H6629	H2719		H2220

וְעַיִן	וְיָמִינוֹ	זְרְעוֹ	תִּיבֵּי	תִּיבֵּי	וְעַיִן	וְיָמִינוֹ	
H5921	eye	and his right	his arm	dried up	dried up	eye	and his right
	H5869	H3225	H2220	H3001	H3001	H5869	H3225

תִּכְהָהּ:	תִּכְהָהּ:
darkened	darkened
H3543	H3543

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 23:1 (Parallel theme): Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.

Ezekiel 13:3 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!

1 Corinthians 8:4 (Parallel theme): As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

Ezekiel 34:2 (Parallel theme): Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Matthew 23:16 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!

Jeremiah 23:32 (Parallel theme): Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.