

Zechariah 11:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty:
and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am
rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.

Analysis

Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not. This verse describes the appalling exploitation of God's flock by their supposed caretakers. "**Whose possessors slay them**" (asher qoneihem yahargum, אֲשֶׁר קִנְיֵיהֶם יַהַרְגֵם) depicts owners who kill their own sheep for profit—viewing them as commodities, not living souls entrusted to their care.

"And hold themselves not guilty" (ve-lo ye'shamu, וְלֹא יִאָּשְׁמוּ) reveals their moral blindness: they feel no guilt for destroying those in their charge. They exploit God's people while claiming righteousness. **"They that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich"** combines religious hypocrisy with greed—thanking God while profiting from God's people's suffering. This describes religious leaders who use their positions for financial gain while displaying outward piety.

"Their own shepherds pity them not" (ve-ro'eihem lo yachmol aleihem, וְרֵעֵיהֶם לֹא יַחְמֹל עֲלֵיהֶם) is the devastating climax: those called to shepherd have no compassion. The word chamal means to spare, show mercy, have compassion. Israel's leaders are completely devoid of pastoral concern. This describes the Pharisees and religious elite of Jesus's day who "devour widows' houses" (Matthew 23:14) and "bind heavy burdens on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4).

Historical Context

This verse paints a damning picture of Israel's leadership from the intertestamental period through Jesus's time. The Hasmonean priest-kings combined religious office with political power, often exploiting the people. The Sadducees collaborated with Rome for profit. The Pharisees imposed crushing legalistic burdens while exempting themselves. Jesus condemned them: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer" (Matthew 23:14).

The phrase "Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich" captures their religious veneer masking greed. They attributed their wealth to God's blessing while extracting it from the poor through temple taxes, sacrificial system manipulation, and legal trickery. Annas and Caiaphas's families controlled the temple market, gouging pilgrims on sacrificial animals. Jesus cleansed the temple precisely because they had made God's house "a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse warn religious leaders against viewing their congregations as means to personal gain rather than souls entrusted to their care?
2. In what ways do modern churches risk repeating this error—exploiting God's people while claiming to serve them?
3. How does Jesus as the Good Shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11) contrast with these shepherds who slay and sell the flock?

Interlinear Text

אֲשֶׁר	קִנְיָהּ	וְלֹא	יִהְיוּ	אֲשֶׁר
H834	H7069	H3808	H2026	H816
Whose possessors		slay		them and hold themselves not guilty
וּמְכָרֶיהָ	יֹאמְרוּ	בָּרוּךְ	יְהוָה	וְאֵשֶׁר
H4376	H559	H1288	H3068	H6238
and they that sell	them say	Blessed	be the LORD	for I am rich
וְעֵינֵיהֶם	וְלֹא	יִחַם	וְלֹא	עֲלֵיהֶם
H7462	H3808	H2550	H5921	
and their own shepherds		pity		

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 50:7 (References Lord): All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice, even the LORD, the hope of their fathers.

Hosea 12:8 (Parallel theme): And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.