

Zechariah 11:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.

Analysis

Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. This cryptic verse describes the shepherd's action against corrupt leadership. "**Three shepherds also I cut off in one month**" (va-akhchid et-sheloshet ha-ro'im be-yerach echad, has (אָכַחֵד אֶת־שְׁלֹשֶׁת הָרִיעִים בְּיַרְחֵךְ אֶחָד) has generated extensive interpretation. The "three shepherds" likely represent categories of Israel's leadership: prophets, priests, and kings/rulers—or perhaps Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes in Jesus's day. "Cut off" means destroyed, removed from office, rendered powerless.

"**In one month**" suggests swift, decisive action within a short time period. This could refer to Jesus's final confrontation with the religious leaders during His last Passover week, when He systematically exposed and condemned their hypocrisy (Matthew 21-23). Or it may point to the rapid collapse of Israel's leadership system after AD 70 when the temple, priesthood, and Sanhedrin all ended permanently.

"My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me" (va-tiktzar nafshi bahem ve-gam nafsham ba'alah oti, (וְתִקְצַר נֶפֶשִׁי בָּהֶם וְגַם־נֶפֶשִׁם בָּעֵלה אָתִי) describes mutual rejection. The shepherd's soul grew impatient/weary with their wickedness (qatzar can mean shortened, impatient, disgusted). They in turn abhorred Him (ba'al means to loathe, reject). This mutual antagonism describes Jesus's relationship with Israel's leaders—He condemned them; they crucified Him.

Historical Context

Interpreters have proposed numerous identifications for the "three shepherds," but the broader meaning is clear: Jesus confronted and condemned Israel's corrupt leadership classes. During passion week, He challenged the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and elders, pronouncing seven woes against them (Matthew 23). They responded by plotting His death: "Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people...and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him" (Matthew 26:3-4).

The "one month" may be the approximately 30 days from Jesus's triumphal entry to His ascension, during which He systematically dismantled the religious establishment's authority and after His resurrection sent disciples to preach the gospel, bypassing traditional leadership structures. Alternatively, it could refer to the brief period of the Jewish revolt (AD 66-70) when the entire leadership system collapsed. Whatever the specific referent, the point is clear: the Good Shepherd exposes and judges false shepherds.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How did Jesus "cut off" the corrupt leadership of His day, even though they appeared to triumph by crucifying Him?
2. What does mutual loathing between the shepherd and shepherds reveal about the incompatibility between true and false ministry?
3. How should this warning shape our evaluation of religious leaders today—are they faithful shepherds or among those God will "cut off"?

Interlinear Text

וְתַּקְנַּצְתָּ	רָ	אֶפְתָּחָה	דְּ	בֵּין	רֵחֶם	שְׁלֵמָה	שְׁתִּים	בְּרִעָם	שְׁלֵמָה	אֶת	תְּאַכְּחָה	תְּ
also I cut off	H853	Three		shepherds		month		in one		loathed		
H3582		H7969		H7462		H3391		H259		H7114		

בְּ	בְּ	לְפָנֶיךָ	מְ	בְּ	לְפָנֶיךָ	מְ	בְּ	לְפָנֶיךָ	מְ	בְּ	לְפָנֶיךָ	
and my soul	H0		H1571	and my soul		also abhorred		H0				
H5315				H5315		H973						

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 49:7 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

John 15:18 (Parallel theme): If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

John 7:7 (Parallel theme): The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.

Luke 19:14 (Parallel theme): But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

Hosea 5:7 (Parallel theme): They have dealt treacherously against the LORD: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.