

Zechariah 11:17- the Idol Shepherd

Most biblical scholars recognise the book of Zechariah to be about the Lord's remembering of His people, leading up to the Messianic Millennium and their eventual salvation. George L. Robinson sums it up as,

“The most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the Old Testament.”

So, to God's people, it has to be most significant, and just one verse, verse 17, is very revealing, reflecting the results of experiences many of God's people have suffered. *‘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.’*

The first part of chapter 11 is about the way in which the Jews rejected Christ and the resultant destruction which will come upon Judah. (The modern nation called Israel) In verse 14, the final stage of that punishment involves the breaking of the brotherhood between Judah and its fellow Israelite tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, during the time of Jacob's trouble – *‘Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.’*

As we enter into that final period, the verses from 15 to 17 then apply to the descendants of the Israelite tribes Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim, as this web site explains, is Britain and its Commonwealth sister nations, and Manasseh is the USA.

While it refers here to a shepherd in the singular, causing some to assign these verses to the coming anti-Christ, the great similarity to Ezekiel chapter 34 and the concluding verse 17, indicate that as Levi was one, but provided a succession of priests, a succession of shepherds is here indicated by the failure of the shepherds to carry out their obviously pastoral and religious duties, nowhere expected of the anti-Christ.

In this last verse it is interesting to see that the translators of the King James Version are almost alone in their accuracy and perspicacity in using the term ‘idol shepherd’ - *‘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.’*

Almost all modern versions remove the word ‘idol’ which is there in the Hebrew text, and replace it with ‘worthless, foolish, or useless’, all of which are partly true but not as accurate and meaningful as the original Hebrew word. This verse then, indicates that, as the end time nears, God's Church in Ephraim and Manasseh will be afflicted with evil shepherds just as Ezekiel 34 describes, until they are replaced by a true shepherd king, King David, Ezekiel 34:23, *‘And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.’*

But Zechariah 11:17 explains more than that. It explains the reasons WHY these shepherds act like this. They are idols themselves, as the Douey – Rheims version explains, *'O shepherd, and idol, that forsaketh the flock: the sword upon his arm and upon his right eye: his arm shall quite wither away, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.'*

Tragically, God's church has been largely afflicted with a tyrannical system of government which automatically provides these symptoms as God's people are pointed to a man or men at the head of the Church rather than Christ. Colossians 1:18, *'And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.'*

This verse warns all participants in such dominion of their coming punishment. The 'arm', which God's ministers **should have used to protect God's flock** from false teaching and idolatry, will be punished by the sword. Their falsely claimed power and authority will be *'clean dried up'* (KJV), because the power which they *did* have, the power to protect, **they failed to use.**

The idolatry will also result in their right eye being utterly darkened. The word 'right' in Holy Scripture is often the symbol of what is good, the left of what is evil. The more that idolatry **is imposed or even tolerated** among God's people, the more the 'right eye', which should provide counsel and understanding to guard against evil by the expounding of the scriptures, *the true responsibility of God's servants*, will be utterly darkened. Spiritual blindness – the inability to understand or recognise the true message of the scriptures, and especially prophecy relating to the coming End-Time, is the additional God-determined result upon those who ignore this significant verse.

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