

## Z'kharyah ~ Part 9

In stark contrast to the last two chapters, in which **Messiah** is pictured as a wonderful Shepherd, this passage presents an ugly picture of the rejection of the **Messiah**, the true **Shepherd**. The prophet turns from the glories of the accepted **Messiah** at **His Second Coming** to the national apostasy and rejection of the **Messiah** at **His First Coming**.

### Lament for Shepherds

*11 <sup>1</sup> Open your doors, L'vanon, so that fire can consume your cedars. <sup>2</sup> Wail, cypress, because the cedar has fallen, those splendid trees are ruined. Wail, oaks of Bashan, because the thick forest has been felled. <sup>3</sup> Listen to the wail of the shepherds, because their glory is spoiled. Listen to the roaring of young lions, because the Yarden's thickets are plundered.*

As a fire sweeping down to ravage the whole land of **Isra'el**, **Z'kharyah** described a fire of judgment that would consume the ungodly as a conflagration consumes trees. The devastation is not limited to spiritual judgment only, but includes the death of people as the land of **Isra'el** is judged. The language is the book's most poetic. "*L'vanon*," "*Bashan*," and "*Yarden*" represent the whole land as judgment sweeps from top to bottom, covering the entire nation from the north, inland, and down the **Yarden Valley** to the southern border.

### The Good and Bad Shepherds

*<sup>4</sup> Adonai my God says this: "Shepherd the flock for slaughter. <sup>5</sup> Their buyers kill them and go unpunished; while those who sell them say, 'Barukh Adonai! Now I'm rich!' Even their own shepherds show them no pity. <sup>6</sup> I will no longer show pity to the inhabitants of the land," says Adonai. "No, I will hand every one of them over to the power of a neighbor and to the power of his king; they will crush the land, and I won't rescue them from their power."*

**Adonai** said that **His** people were to be treated like *sheep fattened for the slaughter*, whose shepherds have no pity, but are only interested in money for the meat. Thus, **God** will serve up **His** sheep for slaughter without pity. With **God's** pity and protection withdrawn, they will be given over to their **Roman "neighbors"** and to their "**King**" **Caesar**, who will ultimately lead them to their destruction in 70 CE by the **Roman Army** (cf. **Yochanan** 11:47–50). Over one million **Jews** were slaughtered in that assault, and almost half a million in subsequent **Roman** attacks in **Palestine**.

The following is the record of **Z'kharyah** playing a dramatic role to act out the rejection of the **Messiah** that will lead to the judgment of **Isra'el**, as outlined in vv. 1–3 above.

*<sup>7</sup> So I shepherded the flock for slaughter, truly the most miserable of the sheep; and I took two staffs for myself. I called the one No'am [pleasantness], the other I called Hovalim [bound together], and I shepherded the flock.*

The prophet did feed the truth of **God** to **His** people as a picture of what the **Messiah** would do when He came. Only people experiencing poverty responded when **Yeshua** came to feed the flock. They were the lowly who would not follow the pride of the priest, scribes, and Pharisees, but believed in **Yeshua**. *No'am* ... *No'am*. The prophet's symbolic act called for him to take "**two staffs**." Eastern shepherds often carried two sticks, a rod to ward off wild beasts and a staff to guide and retrieve wayward sheep (see Psalm 23:4). The staff speaks of **Yeshua the Good Shepherd** who expressed the love and grace of **God** by tenderly leading and protecting His people (Mark 6:34). In contrast, the other staff speaks of His unifying ministry, binding together the scattered house of **Isra'el** into one-fold.

*<sup>8</sup> "In a single month, I got rid of three shepherds, because I grew impatient with them; and besides, they detested me.*

Though difficult to identify, one of the oldest interpretations is that this refers to the **priests, elders,** and **scribes of Isra'el. Yeshua** bestowed grace and unity upon the populace, but confronted the hypocrisy of these religious leaders; because they rejected **Him**, all 3 offices were obliterated in a short time. **God** ended the traditional offices of the mediators and, in their place, brought a new priesthood of **Believers**.

*<sup>9</sup> I said, 'I'm not going to shepherd you. Whichever one is going to die, let it die; whichever is going to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and the rest can all devour each other.'"*

In this drama, **Z'kharyah** played the unnatural role of a shepherd who abandons his sheep and stops teaching and protecting them. Those who refused to believe were to be given over to pursue their own desires and left exposed to deadly enemies. In the **Roman** siege of 70 CE, some of the starving inhabitants resorted to cannibalism (see Yiremyahu 19:9).

*<sup>10</sup> I took my staff, No'am, and snapped it in two, "in order to break my covenant, which I made with all the peoples."<sup>11</sup> On that day when it was broken, the most miserable of the sheep who paid attention to me knew that this was indeed a message from Adonai. <sup>12</sup> I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; if not, don't." So, they weighed out my wages, thirty silver [shekels, that is, twelve ounces]. <sup>13</sup> Concerning that "princely sum" at which they valued me, Adonai said, "Throw it into the treasury!" So, I took the thirty silver [shekels] and threw them into the treasury in the house of Adonai. <sup>14</sup> Then I snapped in two my other staff Hovalim [bound together], in order to break up the brotherhood between Y'hudah and Isra'el.*

The believing remnant of **Yeshua's** day knew **God's Word** was being fulfilled. They knew judgment was coming, but avoided the long-term consequences by faith in **Yeshua. Z'kharyah** carried on the drama by symbolically picturing **Yeshua** asking those **He** came to shepherd what they felt **He** was worth to them. In a mocking response, the leaders offered 30 silver pieces, which was the amount of compensation paid for a slave gored by an ox (Exodus 21:32). This is exactly what **Judas Iscariot** was paid to betray the **Great Shepherd** (Matthew 26:14–16). The **Jews** of **Yeshua's** day who offered that amount were saying **He** was worth no more than a common slave.

*<sup>15</sup> Adonai said to me, "This time, take the equipment of a worthless shepherd. <sup>16</sup> For I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who won't bother about the ones who have been destroyed, won't seek out the young, won't heal the broken, and won't feed those standing still; on the contrary, he will eat the meat of the fat ones and break their hoofs in pieces. <sup>17</sup> "Woe to the worthless shepherd who abandons the sheep! May a sword strike his arm and his right eye. May his arm be completely withered and his right eye totally blinded." <sup>1</sup>*

Because **Isra'el** rejected the **Good Shepherd**, they would be given a **False shepherd. Z'kharyah** acts this out by taking *the equipment of a worthless shepherd*. This points to the future **Antichrist**, who will not care for the sheep but will rob and slay them.

In our next post, we will pick up where we left off by exploring **Z'kharyah** in the previous post.

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<sup>1</sup> Z'kharyah 11:1–17.