

Zechariah 13:7-9

7 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate," says the LORD of hosts. Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. 8 In the whole land, says the LORD, two-thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one-third shall be left alive. 9 And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are my people"; and they will say, "The LORD is our God" (NRSV).

We are all familiar with the New Testament passion story. We know well the story about the arrest, trail, and death of Jesus. The disciples scattered and Jesus knew it was going to happen because Jesus knew this Scripture. There is a theme in the Bible that gets emphasized probably more than anything else and that is the covenant relationship between God and the people. In Exodus the Bible shows us that God's intervention is designed to get the people to know that they are God's chosen people and as such they are to worship God and only God. The covenant relationship is entered into with Abraham and continues through the generations with the nation of Israel. In freeing people up from slavery God has a specific purpose. God gives Pharaoh a hardened heart so that they will know the God of Israel is the one true God.

The Scripture today comes from Zechariah and it deals with the covenant. Zechariah was born in Babylon during the Exile and the Exile relates to the covenant. It happens because people refused to get back into covenant. The second half of the book Zechariah deals with oracles of judgment and salvation regarding a future time when Israel will be redeemed by God.

Zechariah is interpreted as applying to Jesus. This is because the New Testament writers used Zechariah to show that Jesus is the promised Messiah. In the gospels we see after the Last Supper they sang a hymn. Then they went to the Mount of Olives where Jesus said to his disciples "you will all become deserters." That's right each and every one of them will abandon the shepherd. And Jesus tells them why "it was written in prophecy." Now I take a moment to point out a very important fact. There is no way all the various segments of prophecy could possibly match someone unless that someone is the real deal. Jesus tells his disciples that they will desert him because of the prophecy of Zechariah. **Mark 14:27** You will become deserters, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. **Matthew 26:31** You will become deserters because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered (NRSV). What we have in the New Testament Scripture is the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep; the shepherd sacrifices himself for the sake of those under his care. The scattering of the sheep is a result of striking the shepherd.

In Zechariah the word *awake* is a call to battle. The *sword* is called to perform an execution. God, through the prophet, identifies the victim as "my shepherd." The specific purpose of the Exile is due to covenant violations. The Exile acts as a refining agent to get the people back into covenant with God. Whereas, striking the shepherd is done in order to scatter the sheep. This is what happened during the Exile. People died from famine and war, and were scattered in different directions. Zechariah, a prophet during the Exile, teaches that the Exile is a refining fire to bring the people back into covenant relationship with God.

Jesus knows his status. He knows there is no one else. Jesus also knows that he is the shepherd and the shepherd will fall and as a result the disciples will scatter.

There is a common problem that repeats over and over again in the Bible. Human nature is in constant conflict with the will of God. It always has been the problem and always will be. It is true in Old Testament times, New Testament times, and contemporary society. What we have going on in our contemporary society is massive protests against injustice. Here in our own community there have been protests and even a small riot in Lynchburg. My perspective is it is the same repeat problem - scattered people out of covenant with God. If people followed Jesus and his teachings, if people were in covenant with God, there would be no protests. Crimes against humanity would not happen. So, there would be no need for protests. I see religious leaders being a champion and advocate for human rights. They are addressing the issue that is on the surface without digging deep and getting to the rooted fundamental problem. They do not address how it is the result of a much bigger problem. What we need is what society has always needed. What society has done is failed to be obedient to the will of God. What we have in society today is people that continue to scatter. We have scattered into different denominations and that is all due to human will. We have scattered instead of uniting together with Christ as the head of a church that is committed to being in covenant with God. The real problem is between humanity and God - I will your God and you will be my people. God is willing and able but the people stray from God and scatter into their own directions. If humanity is right with God there would be no protests. This is because there would be no need to protest because there would be no victims or victimization. The world we live in is a world where the sheep have scattered and continue getting further away from God.