

Israel's False Shepherds and True Shepherd

Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel 34:1-10 – *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ²“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? ³ You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. ⁶ My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.” ⁷ ‘Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: ⁸ “As I live,” says the Lord God, “surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock”— ⁹ therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord!¹⁰ Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”*

Background Notes

In Ezekiel 33, the news of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian army finally reached Ezekiel and the captives in Babylon when an escaped refugee arrived with the terrible news. All the prediction by Ezekiel and Jeremiah of God's judgment because of Judah's sins had come true. But God had not forsaken His people. Judgment and discipline - yes; forsaken and forgotten - no.

In fact, from this point on in the book of Ezekiel, we will see God's grace in His promises to restore His people - to their Land, and to their special relationship with the Lord as God's nation and people. In our last talk we mentioned that in chapters 33-39 the Lord spoke words of encouragement and hope in view of the coming restoration. And chapters 40-48 gave details of the Lord's literal future kingdom when He returns to this earth, with details of the literal Temple that will be built in Jerusalem for His millennial kingdom.

There are six messages in chapters 33-39, all beginning with the phrase, *“the word of the Lord came to me saying...”* The first message began in 33:23. The second message is in chapter 34, indicated by the key phrase in verse 1: *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying...”* In the first part of the message (v1-10), the false shepherds were denounced and

judged. Then the good news came in the second part of the message (v11-31) - a true Shepherd would be coming and He would replace the false shepherds. The true Shepherd would love the sheep, serve the sheep, and care for the sheep. The true Shepherd, of course, is our Lord Himself.

Doctrinal Points

1. The false shepherds were unfaithful and uncaring of Israel.

In verses 1-10 the shepherds of the people were denounced and judged for their failure. These shepherds were the kings and elders and spiritual leaders of the nation. They failed because they had not cared for the needs of the people. They were not feeding them (v2); they were not caring for the sick and the helpless (v4); they were not bringing back those who wandered (verses 4&6); they were not doing anything to keep the sheep from being scattered and attacked (v5). Instead, those false shepherds were caring only for themselves (v2). They were taking advantage of the people, who were weak and vulnerable (v3).

Verses 7-10 predicted that the false shepherds would be judged for those sins. Those shepherds had been given the responsibility to serve the people in both the spiritual and material areas. The civic leaders had the responsibility of caring for the poor and needy, and the spiritual leaders were responsible to feed the people the Word of God. They should have exhorted the wayward and encouraged the faithful.

The leaders in government had failed – they were self-serving on every level. Even the spiritual leaders were serving themselves, and not the people. There were many false prophets and self-serving preachers in Israel. The true and good prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah were few and far between. The false shepherds were unfaithful and uncaring.

2. The true Shepherd will restore and care for Israel.

Ezekiel 34:11-31 - *“For thus says the Lord God: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. ¹⁶ “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”*

¹⁷ ‘And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue

of your pasture—and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? ¹⁹ And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.”

²⁰ Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: “Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, ²² therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³ I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken. ²⁵ “I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. ²⁶ I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷ Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid. ²⁹ I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. ³⁰ Thus they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,” says the Lord God.’

The true Shepherd mentioned here is the Lord Himself, Israel’s Messiah, who would faithfully serve His flock - not fleece the flock! Did you notice all the **“I will”** in these verses? The Lord **will** search for His scattered sheep. He **will** bring them back to the land of Israel. He **will** feed them (v14). He **will** give them rest (v15). He **will** heal and strengthen the injured and sick sheep (v16). He **will** discipline the flock, and He **will** judge and remove anyone who is not really part of His flock (v16-22). That great blessing was pronounced on the sheep and on their land **by the true Shepherd** and **because of the true Shepherd**.

There are some areas of interpretation in this chapter that need further discussion. First of all, who are the “good sheep”? What and where is the “Land” to which they will be restored? To interpret correctly, we must look at the *overall context of the chapter*. In the context, the sheep are clearly the Jewish people. The land of return is the Land of Israel.

Was this prophecy of great blessing fulfilled when the Jewish people returned from their captivity in Babylon? Certainly not! The Jewish people did not experience the rest and security and blessing of verses 25-27 at that time. They were not free from the threats of foreign nations when they returned from the Babylonian captivity (v25-29). For details of this turbulent time period, read the prophecies of the troubled history of Israel during the inter-testamental period in Daniel 11.

Is this prophecy of great blessing for the sheep and the Land being fulfilled today in the Church? Is the “flock of sheep” to be interpreted as the Church, and the “land of blessing” to be interpreted as the “Land of Heaven,” where the Lord is leading us to eternal rest and security?

No. We believe that these literal promises are **not** to be spiritualized, and they are **not** to be interpreted as the Church today and Heaven in the future. This prophecy of great blessing for Israel will be fulfilled to *literal* Israel in the future, when many of the *literal* Jewish people will turn to the Lord and be saved. And they will be restored to the *literal* land of Israel. ***If the scattering of the Jewish people was literal, so their re-gathering will also be literal.***

The “covenant of peace” in verse 25 is the **New Covenant** that the Lord will make with Israel, as predicted in Jeremiah 31:31 - “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” The “house of Israel” is not the Church. Although the blessings of the New Covenant are *extended* to the Church, the covenant will be made with restored Israel.

What about the “David” in verses 23-24? “My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.” Who is this “David”? Is this the literal resurrected David reigning over Israel during the millennial kingdom of Christ on this earth? Some commentators think so, and we’ll discuss this further in chapters 45-46. Most likely this mention of “David” is a reference to our Lord Himself, the true Shepherd. He is the *greater Son of David* and in the dynasty of David. King David was a “type” or picture of Jesus Christ, because the Davidic throne will be re-established and the Lord will literally reign from Jerusalem. The true Shepherd will restore and care for Israel.

Practical Application

Sing for showers of blessing!

Verse 26: “I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing.” The well-known song “Showers of Blessing” gets its title from this verse. In the context of Ezekiel 34, the “showers of blessing” were literal rain showers that would fall on the literal land of Israel. So when we sing “Showers of Blessing, “ and we request of the Lord, “O that today they might fall,” we’re literally calling for blessing on Israel and the return of the Lord! And that’s good!

However, when we sing this song we’re usually thinking of *spiritual* blessings that we desire in our lives – so is singing that song “*bad* hermeneutics”? No, it’s not, as long as we understand that there is *one interpretation* (the literal rain on literal Israel), but there can be *many applications*. So we’re not “hermeneutically incorrect” if we *apply* that verse by asking for spiritual showers of blessings the Lord can bring into our lives. And that’s good too! So - sing for showers of blessing!