

# Ezekiel 34 • The Shepherds & the Sheep

## Introduction

One of the truly remarkable things about the way God works is that He doesn't issue requirements without providing an example of how to live according to them. To be sure, there are many biblical role models provided throughout the whole of Scripture who have provided the example of what it means to live according to God's Word and ways, but God didn't stop there; He sent His very own Son in exactly that capacity. One of the repeated examples throughout both Testaments is that of the shepherd. It's a teaching not just of the Good Shepherd to come, but of every generation's struggle with what to do in the presence of false shepherds.

<sup>1</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? <sup>3</sup>You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. <sup>4</sup>Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. <sup>5</sup>They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. <sup>6</sup>My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.””

### [Read v.1-6]

**Observation:** Just as each word needs to be studied in the context of its verse, and each verse with the other verses in its paragraphs, and the paragraphs with the paragraphs around it, we need to also consider entire chapters in the context of the chapter before and after. In this case, it may be important to note how in chapter 33 God first lays down the requirement for repentance **BEFORE** He goes on to explain in this chapter how He'll deal with false shepherds and false sheep.

**Q: What kind of leader – in other words, which specific office – would Old Testament readers of Ezekiel's time most likely associate with being a shepherd and why?**

A: Most likely it would be the national rulers because of the example established through David, a shepherd anointed to be king by whose standard God compared every successive king. When David is finally accepted as king, it's the role of shepherd which is emphasized in his calling.

“Previously, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and in. And the LORD said to you, ‘**You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will be a ruler over Israel.**’”  
2 Samuel 5:2

**Point:** The choice of a shepherd projected leaders as guarding and providing for God's people entrusted to their care, just as Jesus' selection of fishermen reminded them of their spiritual office to catch men for the kingdom. Most importantly, David was a type – a prefiguring – of the Messiah to come as the ultimate Shepherd.

**Q: Are there any other kinds of leader to which this may be referring?**

A: Time and again in both Testaments spiritual leaders are analogized to shepherds.

**Q: What are the actions taken which precisely define someone as a bad shepherd according to v.1-3?**

1. “...feeding themselves” (v.2)
2. “...clothe yourselves...” (v.3)
3. Not “feeding the flock...” (v.3)

In other words, they are greedy and self-centered, thinking only of themselves.

**Q: According to v.4, who specifically have the false shepherds let down?**

1. “Those who are sickly...”
2. “...the broken...”
3. “...the scattered...”

4. "...the lost..."

God proves their failure to love, follow, and worship **Him** by their failure to love and take care of **others**. Their treatment of others is God's measurement of what kind of shepherd they are.

**Q: According to v.4, what actions did the false shepherds undertake against the flock?**

1. "...you have not strengthened..."
2. "...you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock."
3. "...you have not healed..."
4. "...you have not bound up..."
5. "...you have not brought back..."
6. "...nor have you sought the lost..."
7. "...with force and with severity you have dominated them."

**Q: What was the overall affect on the flock according to v.5-6?**

1. "They were scattered..."
2. "...they became food for every beast..."
3. "...wandered..."

**Point:** False shepherds induce spiritual division and isolation.

**Q: How is the overall situation summarized by God in v.6?**

A: "...there was no one to search or seek for them."

**Point:** Being a shepherd of God is all about the care and feeding of His sheep and pursuing them when they stray. It's much more than merely leading them, and requires constant living out among the sheep to do a good job – not requiring the sheep to come to them (as many ministries are modeled these days).

"What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?"

Matthew 18:12

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup>"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; <sup>9</sup>therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>10</sup>"Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them."'"

**[Read v.7-10]**

**Q: How does God say He will respond to the false shepherds?**

1. "...I will demand My sheep from them..." (v.10)
2. "...and make them cease from feeding sheep." (v.10)
3. They "will not feed themselves anymore..." (v.10)
4. "...I will deliver My flock from their mouth..." (v.10)

**Q: What are the words used over and over again which contrast the actions of the false shepherds to those of God when it comes to the flock?**

A: "Feed" and all its variations. In failing to feed the flock, the false shepherds have made the flock a target for other beasts and themselves become food, a teaching about vulnerability to the forces of spiritual warfare. It's also a metaphor for enriching one's self at the expense of all the others. God's feeding will not only restore their personal health, but enable them to withstand additional spiritual attacks from the outside.

**Point:** The effects of false shepherds have far-reaching repercussions in that their weakening the flock from the inside induces weakness to attacks from the outside.

<sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. <sup>12</sup>As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. <sup>13</sup>I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. <sup>14</sup>I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup>I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup>I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.

**[Read v.11-16]**

**Q: What are the actions undertaken which are in direct contrast to those of false shepherds?**

1. “...I Myself will search for My sheep...” (v.11)
2. “...I will care for My sheep...” (v.12)
3. “...I will bring them out...” (v.13)
4. “...I will feed them...” (v.13)
5. “...I will feed them...” (v.14)
6. “...I will feed My flock...” (v.15)
7. “...I will lead them to rest...” (v.15)
8. “I will seek the lost...” (v.16)
9. I will “...bring back the scattered...” (v.16)
10. I will “...bind up the broken...” (v.16)
11. I will “...strengthen the sick...” (v.16)

In other words, He will by example do the very things which His shepherds are supposed to do.

**Application:** Discuss the importance of God repeating one of the actions 3 times.

**Q: What actions will God take directly against the false shepherds?**

A: “...but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.” (v.21)

**Point:** Consider all the ways in which Christ carried out these actions in the course of His earthly ministry. Instead of going to the temple and involving Himself in the rituals and observances of the priesthood in the course of their service to God, He went out directly to the people feeding and healing them as an example of what service to God was supposed to actually mean. How should this be a model for your own ministry?

**Application:** Contrast this to the first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:2) How does this speak to the hope for those who are spiritually struggling?

<sup>17</sup>“As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats. <sup>18</sup>Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet? <sup>19</sup>As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!’”  
<sup>20</sup>Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them, “Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup>Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad, <sup>22</sup>therefore, I will deliver My

**[Read v.17-22]**

**Q: To whom is God now speaking?**

A: He has shifted attention from the shepherds to the individual members of the flock.

**Q: How would you summarize the message to the individual members of the flock?**

A: They are not “off the hook”, so to speak, just because their shepherds were bad. Just as God holds the shepherds accountable for how they treat others, so God likewise holds each member of the flock accountable for their treatment of others.

**Point:** There is never a situation where we are not accountable for the quality of our love to, and service for, others.

**Application:** How might this apply to the situation in which you currently find yourself? Have you ever thought what leadership does has no consequences for you personally? How is that not entirely correct?

flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another.

<sup>23</sup>“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup>And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken.

**[Read v.23-24]**

**Q: What did God teach through Jeremiah as to what appears to be a prerequisite for the Messiah’s coming?**

A: The removal of false shepherds.

*“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD.*

*Jeremiah 23:1*

**Q: What did God teach through Zechariah as to what appears to be a prerequisite for the Messiah’s coming?**

A: The removal of false shepherds.

*“Woe to the worthless shepherd  
Who leaves the flock!  
A sword will be on his arm  
And on his right eye!  
His arm will be totally withered  
And his right eye will be blind.”*

*Zechariah 11:17*

**Q: How did we see this fulfilled in the course of Christ’s First Coming?**

A: Just as Ezekiel 33 puts this chapter in context by first requiring repentance before God’s Shepherd can be established, so John the Baptist’s ministry preached repentance as the preparation for the arrival of the Good Shepherd.

*When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.*

*Luke 7:29-30*

**Observation:** One of the keys to understanding the right context and meaning of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:20, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” It’s the New Testament enhancement of the foundation laid down here in the Old Testament.

**Point:** Jesus and the New Testament writers spend more time warning against false shepherds, false prophets, and a spiritual deception than any other thing when it comes to the End Times. Do you see the connection between unaddressed sin and the apostasy taking place?

<sup>25</sup>“I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. <sup>26</sup>I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. <sup>27</sup>Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. <sup>28</sup>They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. <sup>29</sup>I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore. <sup>30</sup>Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord GOD. <sup>31</sup>As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord GOD.

### [Read v.25-31]

**Q: What is the repeated phrase which serves as a stark contrast to life under the false shepherds versus life under the Good Shepherd?**

1. “...so that they may live securely...” (v.25)
2. “...they will be secure...” (v.27)
3. “...they will live securely...” (v.28)

**Q: How does God bring this about?**

1. “I will make a covenant with them...” (v.25)
2. “...I will cause...showers of blessing.” (v.26)
3. “...I...delivered them...” (v.27)

**Q: And what is the result?**

1. “They will no longer be a prey to the nations...” (v.28)
2. “...no one will make them afraid.” (v.28)
3. “...they will not again be victims of famine...” (v.29)
4. “...they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.” (v.29)

**Q: To a certain degree, these things have a partial fulfillment for those who have already embraced Christ as their Savior, but have they all literally and completely come true?**

A: No. It most certainly speaks of a specific work within Israel yet to come, and a more general fulfillment to come on behalf of all Believers as typified in the millennial reign.

**Q: What is the “sign”, so to speak, by which we’ll know these things have been literally and completely fulfilled?**

A: “Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people...” (v.30) Spiritual revival not among a few, but of the whole flock.

### Overall Application

Discuss the application of this lesson to the following:

*Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*

1 Peter 5:1-3

*But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Matthew 20:25-28