

## Review

We have come to the third and final section of the book of Ezekiel. However, before we hear all the wonderful promises of God's blessings upon Israel's future, He has some "housecleaning" to do for a couple of chapters.

In chapter 33, the Lord told Ezekiel that he was about to be given the job of watchman by the Israelites. Now that they believe he is a prophet, they are going to look to him for the Word of God. The Lord reiterated to Ezekiel what a grave responsibility that was.

Now, in chapter 34, He is going to tell Ezekiel to get in the face of some certain folks...

### **34:1-4 Shepherds And Sheep**

Throughout the Scriptures, God compares His people to sheep.

**Psa. 78:52 ...He led forth His own people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock**

**Psa. 95:7 ...He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.**

**Is. 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...**

Logically then, those who oversee His sheep are called shepherds. God's shepherds have a big responsibility, because they are to be His representatives, doing things like He would. After all, God is

**1Pet. 2:25 ...the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

He is also called...

**John 10:14 ...the good shepherd...**

**Heb. 13:20 ...the great Shepherd of the sheep...**

**1Pet. 5:4 ..the Chief Shepherd...**

God is the true Shepherd of His people, and those who are assigned by Him to shepherd the sheep must do the job the way He does it. Unfortunately, this is not what was happening.

### **Shepherds Who Feed Themselves**

In Ezekiel's day, God was rebuking the shepherds for their failure to shepherd like He shepherds. These leaders and rulers were caring for

themselves, not God's sheep. In figurative language, the Lord describes what they were doing: feeding themselves by eating the fat, clothing themselves with the wool, and slaughtering the fat sheep. What do these things mean?

They refer to the fact that these rulers were in that position only for what they could get out of it. They failed to serve the people, and were only serving themselves. Every benefit they derived was at the sheep's expense - many times, at the expense of the people's lives.

We see this philosophy continue in our own age. Picture some of the regimes we have seen and continue to see in the world today - corrupt leaders who live in opulence while stealing from their own people and watching them starve. Some recent examples include Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq; General Joseph Mobutu of Zaire; Idi Amin of Uganda; Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; and Nicolai Ceaucescu of Romania. Unfortunately, the list goes on and on and on - both past and present.

### **Shepherds Should Feed The Flock**

However, shepherds are not just the governmental leaders of a nation. They also include the religious leaders of a nation. The Lord often refers to pastors, elders, and priests as shepherds of His flock. And He is just as concerned about their shepherding methods and faithfulness of the priests and pastors as He is about the presidents and politicians.

When Jesus restored Peter to the ministry after having been denied by him three times, He asked Peter three times whether or not he loved Him (John 21:15-17). Jesus' response to these three inquiries was:

**John 21:15** ...**"Tend My lambs."**

**John 21:16** ...**"Shepherd My sheep."**

**John 21:17** ...**"Tend My sheep."**

The words for lambs and sheep Jesus uses are diminutive, in other words, "Feed My little sheepies. Tend My little lambies." God views His people as His little sheepies, His little lambies. In the same way that we diligently care for a little puppy or kitten, God expects that His shepherds will care for His sheep.

Unfortunately, one of the major sins that these shepherds were committing is that they were not feeding the flock. That is, after all, the

primary job of a shepherd, isn't it? And how long will a little sheepie survive without food? It is the responsibility of the shepherds to feed the flock

With what food must a shepherd feed the flock? Jesus said,

**Matt. 4:4 ..."MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD."**

The bread we eat is to be the Word of God. Job said,

**Job 23:12 "...I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.**

And Paul told Timothy to be...

**1Tim. 4:6 ...constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine...**

Peter instructed us...

**1Pet. 2:2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word...**

The milk and meat of the Word (Heb. 5:12-14) is what will sustain us and feed us. When Jeremiah tasted the Word of God, he wrote,

**Jer. 15:16 Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;**

Unfortunately, today there is a famine.

**Amos 8:11 "...Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the LORD."**

Shepherds weren't feeding the Word to the people of God then, and many are not fulfilling that obligation now. The shepherds were starving the sheep, and as a result, God told Ezekiel to prophesy against them.

### **Caring Or Severity?**

The shepherds were also treating the sheep with severity instead of caring. Shepherds are supposed to strengthen the weak sheep, heal diseased sheep, bind up the broken sheep, bring back the scattered sheep, and seek the lost sheep.

Jesus, in speaking a parable to the Pharisees and scribes, said,

**Luke 15:4-6 "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine**

**in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"**

Even men with evil hearts will search for their own lost sheep. But not Israel's shepherds. These guys were using force and severity, dominating the sheep. They didn't care how many they lost, how many ran away, how many were wounded, or how many died. They only cared about themselves.

I have heard of far too many modern-day shepherds in churches around our world that live like this. No heart for God, no concern for His people. Just occupying the position of shepherd for what they can get out of it. They scatter the flock, inflict injuries on the sheep, and never have a tinge of the fear of the Lord for what they are doing to His little lambies.

### **34:5-8 My Flock Has Become A Prey**

When sheep are scattered and alone, when they don't have a shepherd watching over them, they become food for beasts. They fall victim to predators. Elsewhere in the world at this time, the Lord said to Jeremiah,

**Jer. 50:6-7 "My people have become lost sheep; Their shepherds have led them astray. They have made them turn aside on the mountains; They have gone along from mountain to hill and have forgotten their resting place. All who came upon them have devoured them..."**

In the church, the shepherds have been commanded to insure that this doesn't happen. They are commissioned to guard God's sheep from predators. Paul warned the Ephesian elders,

**Acts 20:28-31 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves**

**will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert..."**

Some pastors, preachers, and priests don't like this part of the job. It makes them uncomfortable. It makes them unpopular. It can be dangerous. My response? "So what? It's your job, given to you by God!" Jesus said,

**John 10:11-13 "...the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep."**

A hireling is not a shepherd, and shepherd must not behave as a hireling. A hireling is only doing the job for the paycheck. A shepherd will lay down his life to protect the lives of the sheep. These men had not done so.

### **34:9-10a I Am Against The Shepherds**

Because the shepherds had done this, God was against them. He would demand His sheep from them and would fire the hirelings. They will not be allowed to stay in those positions for long.

The Lord told Jeremiah about this time,

**Jer. 23:1-2 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: "You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds," declares the LORD.**

You have heard of jobs in government, unions, and colleges where it practically takes an act of God to fire someone. Well, no matter how secure the shepherds thought their jobs were, there is about to be an act of God...

### **34:10b-15 I Will Care For My Sheep**

The Lord declares that He Himself is going to step in and shepherd His people. He will deliver them. He will seek them out.

God is promising them that they will be gathered from the nations. They will be restored to the land of Israel. There will be a lot more spoken about this before the book is over.

### **34:16-22 I Will Judge Between The Sheep**

This is at first a little difficult to understand, but it is important to realize that the shepherds God uses are also sheep. In God's view, He has fired them - they have the title stripped from them, and have been removed from the position. Thus, they are referred to as sheep. Their behavior is the same - self-centered, selfish, demanding, abusing - but now they are being spoken of as sheep, rather than shepherds.

They are fat sheep - taking all for themselves. They tread down the pastures and muddy the waters - spoiling everything for the others around them. They push with their shoulders and thrust with their horns - abusing the other sheep. For all this, God will judge them.

### **34:23-24 David The Shepherd**

The Lord promises to raise up a shepherd who will tend them. He is called "My servant David." Of course, David had been dead for about 400 years at this point. God is obviously talking about a descendant of David. He clarified this through the writings of Jeremiah:

**Jer. 23:4-6 "I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The LORD our righteousness.'"**

This branch of David will shepherd the flock with God's heart. Mi-

cah said,

**Mic. 5:4 And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth.**

We have the promise in Revelation that...

**Rev. 7:17 ...the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."**

We recognize this Shepherd as the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David. And how perfectly Jesus demonstrated God's heart in shepherding!

**Mark 6:34 When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.**

**Luke 19:10 "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."**

**Matt. 9:36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.**

**John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.**

### **34:25-31 Security For The Sheep**

When Christ returns and establishes His millennial kingdom on this earth, God's sheep will no longer be in danger. They will dwell securely in the midst of the nations.