

**Ezekiel 34** (NIV)

**34:1** The word of the LORD came to me:

**34:2** "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

**34:3** You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

**34:4** You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

**34:5** So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.

**34: 6** My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

The shepherds in this passage are not prophets or priests, but *the rulers* over the people. The term "shepherd" is used in this way quite often in both the Old and New Testament.

1. In Genesis 49:24 God is called the Mighty One of Jacob, *the Shepherd*, the Rock of Israel. That is, God was the ruler over the nation.

2. Numbers 27:15-18: Moses said to the LORD, "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, *one who will lead them* out and bring them in, *so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.*" So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him.

Joshua was to *lead* the people as a shepherd.

3. Isaiah 44:28: who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid.'"

Because Cyrus, a pagan king, is given ruling authority over Israel he is called God's shepherd.

4. Psalm 78:70-72: "He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands."

In Psalm 78, David, the most illustrious king, was called a shepherd of the people.

The kings of Israel were to be unique among all the kings in the Middle East for they were to place the people, not themselves, as their highest priority. The authority of the king was given to him by God so

that he could rule God's people as God would rule them. They were to shepherd and care for the people, but the shepherds in Ezekiel's day were those who sought to use their position for their own selfish ends, not the good of the people ruled.

It is difficult to determine whether Ezekiel 34:1-6 is reconstructing the period before the fall of Jerusalem, or is speaking to the leaders in the exilic community who are practicing the same evils as their predecessors. He is either rebuking those who are responsible for scattering the sheep of Israel, or those who have neglected to seek the sheep who had been scattered.

Most scholars see a connection between this passage in Ezekiel and Jeremiah 23:1-8. The content of both of these passages is essentially the same, and two general points can be drawn from them.

**1)** First, much of the blame for the collapse of the Davidic dynasty and the OT kingdom that was governed under the authority of a king is attributed to the unfaithfulness of the rulers (see note 1 below).

In **verse 3** they are accused of three crimes: (1) they ate the curds, (2) clothed themselves with the wool, and (3) slaughtered the choice animals. Normally, the first two acts are not evil, but the point of this passage is that they got all they could out of the people in order to take care of themselves, and had done nothing to care for the sheep.

**Verse 4** adds crimes of neglect: the shepherds had not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, or bound up the injured. They had not brought the strays back or searched for the lost. Instead, they had ruled them harshly and brutally.

**Verse 5** describes the disastrous effects of their irresponsible neglect; the sheep fell prey to predators, and were scattered among the nations (a picturesque way of describing the exile).

To have leaders like this was worse than not having a leader at all.

**Verse 6** shows why Yahweh is so concerned – the sheep they had abused were in reality GOD'S sheep ("My Sheep"). Though Jerusalem had fallen and the shepherds removed, He had not forgotten His flock.

**2)** Secondly, both Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23 teach that the future is going to be different because God is going to raise up a godly King to rule His people. Jeremiah says, "to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land" (Jer. 23:5). Ezekiel says, "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23). In other words, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel promise that God will restore the nation and place over them one, who like David, will rule the people as a true shepherd would.

**34:7 "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:**

**34:8 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,**

**34:9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD:**

**34:10 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.**

The shepherds of Israel abused their authority; their primary concern was for themselves, not the flock who were under their care. Thus, they had to be judged. They would be held accountable for their neglect and abuse of the flock (34:10).

God rescues His sheep by removing the shepherds. This is a preemptive act before the Good Shepherd can be established in the land. Jeremiah 23:1 and Zechariah 11:17 also make the removal of the false shepherds the first necessity before Messiah can act on behalf of His people Israel.

The following verses are easily organized in the following outline:

**34:11-22 *The Nature of the Deliverance***

*11-16 Deliverance from External Threats*

*17-22 Deliverance from Internal Threats*

**34:23-31 *The Goal of Deliverance – Yahweh’s Covenant Peace***

*23-24 The Human Agent of Peace*

*25-30 The Nature of Peace*

*31 The Significance of Peace*

**34:11 "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.**

**34:12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.**

**34:13 I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.**

**34:14 I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.**

**34:15 I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.**

**34:16 I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.**

There is a logical sequence of events as Yahweh acts on behalf of His sheep. The key emphasis is that God Himself will act in response to what these evil shepherds had done to His people.

When God comes, He comes to restore His flock. The initiative that God takes is personal; it is something that He will get involved in doing. This is why there is such reason for rejoicing even though the people were in exile.

- 1. He will seek for the lost sheep (34:11, 16).**
- 2. He will rescue them (rescue them from the nations) (34:13).**
- 3. He will care for the sheep and lead them to good pasture (brings them back to their own land; 34:13, 14).**
- 4. He will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak (34:16).**

But God will also destroy the sleek and the strong and shepherd them in justice. "Justice" is the making of a right decision. As God governs His flock, He will direct them into the ways of His will (34:16). This is elaborated upon in verses 17-22.

**34:17 "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats.**

**34:18 Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?**

**34:19 Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?**

Even though Yahweh intervenes and rescues the flock, the community problems don't end. The more robust males trample the grass and dirty the water with their feet, depriving the weaker sheep of good grass and clear water to drink. Thus, Yahweh must respond. The flock will be purified not only of its greedy leadership, but also of its wicked members.

**34:20 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.**

**34:21 Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away,**

**34:22 I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.**

God Himself will judge and remove the cause of the relational tensions within the flock. He will rescue the weak and reestablish order in the community (Block, 293). Verses 23-24 tell them how God will do this:

**34:23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.**

**34:24 I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.**

Suddenly the language changes. All along, God has been declaring that He Himself will shepherd his flock; now he says, "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them." The shepherd who will reverse things for the sheep will ultimately be Yahweh Himself (34:11-22), but He is also human (34:24; He "will be prince among them"). It is through the agency of a man that God will accomplish His rescue and care of the sheep.

Note the following characteristics of this king:

- He *will be raised up* by God, not elected by popular opinion or appointed by men ("I [God] will place **over** them one shepherd").
- He is *one* shepherd, not many, for He will shepherd one flock (Heb. 13:20).
- He will provide all that His people need ("He will tend them and be their shepherd").
- He would not only be placed **over** God's people (34:23), He would be **among** His people (34:24). That is, He would identify with His people (Heb. 2:14-18).

The shepherd's identity is in verse 24. The messianic future is explained under the terminology of the best of the past. He is called David. He is the antitypical David, the ideal Davidic king.

Having predicted the fall of the Davidic dynasty in Chapter 17, Ezekiel now tells of the restoration of David's house. In 2 Samuel 7:12-13 God had promised David, "I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." This promise is the basis of Ezekiel's prophetic hope. Jeremiah saw the same hope in God's promise to David as well. In Jeremiah 33:17,25,26 he says, "For thus says the LORD, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel . . . If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.'" In other words, the promise that one of the descendants of David would rule God's people was as sure as the fixed laws of nature established by God.

These verses are clearly a prediction of Christ. Jesus fulfills God's promise to David of an eternal dynasty ("My servant David;" Ro. 1:2; Isa. 9:6-7; Acts 15:16).

The shepherd terminology is often applied to Jesus in the NT.

In Matthew 2:6 it says: "and you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

In John 10 Jesus says of Himself:

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.

13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--  
 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep.  
 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

In John 5 Jesus said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (Jn. 5:19). As the Good Shepherd, Jesus does the shepherd's work just as Yahweh, the Shepherd of Israel, does His.

### **1. He seeks for the lost sheep**

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

### **2. He rescues the sheep**

John 10:9: "if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved"

Colossians 1:13: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son"

### **3. He cares for the sheep and leads them to good pasture**

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

Revelation 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."

### **4. He binds up the injured and strengthens the weak**

Matthew 12:20: "a battered reed he will not break off, and a smoldering wick he will not put out."

Jesus is the Shepherd of Ezekiel 34, and through Him God will establish a covenant of peace.

**34:25 "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety.**

**34:26 I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.**

**34:27 The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them.**

**34:28 They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid.**

**34:29 I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations.**

**34:30 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 Sovereign LORD.**

**34:31 You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD."**

The promised reformation will come about in its fullness by a transforming new covenant (Ezek. 34:25-31). This covenant, called a covenant of peace, will be established by His Shepherd, who elsewhere is called the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). Wholeness will be restored. It is described as the elimination of, or the reversal of every negative thing that was hindering the spreading of the kingdom.

Isaiah 54:7-10:

7 "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back.

8 In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.

9 "To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again.

10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

The people of Ezekiel's day were experiencing the covenant curses of God for breaking their covenant with Him. But God will not ultimately abandon His people. He will make a new covenant, a covenant of peace. Strikingly, this new covenant has no contingencies; the blessings of the covenant are unconditional. Compare the blessings of Lev. 26:4-13 and contrast the contingent nature of the blessings in Lev. 26:2-3; 14ff. But most significantly, these verses have the goal of salvation in mind; all will culminate in the glorious promise that God will be their God. In the messianic age there will be total physical and spiritual renewal.

This covenant will bring peace to every aspect of life; there will be safety from wild beasts (see Isa. 11:6-9; Hos. 2:18-23; contrast Ezek. 5:17; 14:15, 21; 33:27), the weather will act favorably toward the production of fruit and grain, for God will send showers that invigorate the vegetation to the degree that the land will be "renowned for its crops" (34:29). There will be peace among the nations and Israel "will no longer . . . bear the scorn of the nations." As verse 27 states, God will "break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them;" He promises a new exodus from Israel's foreign oppressors. Neither human foe nor natural forces will disturb their peace. The world will return to its Edenic state in Genesis 1-2.

What a glorious word this must have been to the people living in the circumstances of Ezekiel's day.

The full experience of this covenant will be felt when God makes new heavens and a new earth.

In the benediction of Aaron, in Numbers 6, he said,

- 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you;
- 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;
- 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.'

How does this come about? How can we know the peace of God? How can we experience the blessing of God? How can we know the light of God's countenance shining upon us? All these things come as the result of God sending His Shepherd.

Hebrews 13:20-21

- 20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,
- 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This shepherd God slayed for our sins so that we can experience the blessings of God (Zech. 13:7; Matt. 26:31). He was cursed by God. God hid His face from Him. The blessing of God fled from Him. As Isaiah says, He was "smitten of God, and afflicted. . . He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities." Through this Shepherd God paved the road to bless us, make His face shine on us, and give us peace. It is because of Christ we can say, "The LORD is **my** shepherd, I shall not want. He makes **me** lie down in green pastures; He leads **me** beside quiet waters. He restores **my** soul" (Ps. 23:1-3).

NOTE 1:

To understand how critical the collapse of the Davidic line is, one must first appreciate the concept in the OT.

The broad theme "king, kingdom" (human and divine) appears throughout the Bible. With the exceptions of Leviticus, Ruth, and Joel, the OT explicitly includes various mentions in 36 of its 39 books. Except for Philippians, Titus, Philemon, 1, 2, and 3 John, the NT directly mentions the subject in 21 of its 27 books. All in all, 57 of the 66 biblical books (86 percent) include the kingdom theme.

The OT words for "king," "kingdom," "reign," and "throne" appear over 3,000 times and 160 times in the NT. The first OT mention appears in Gen 10:10 and the last in Mal 1:14. The initial appearance in the NT comes at Matt 2:2 and the last in Rev 22:1, 3, 5 (Mayhue, The Kingdom Of God: An Introduction, MSJ 23/2 [Fall 2012] 168).

Genesis 1:26 and 28 tell us that man was designed to "*rule over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the

earth." Man was to be the mediatorial ruler for God over the earth, but due to the fall his fitness to rule was forfeited.

Later, Genesis 49:10 predicted that a kingly line would rise from the tribe of Judah ("the scepter shall not depart from Judah") and that the succession of kings would continue "*Until Shiloh comes and to Him shall be the obedience of the nations.*" This has been traditionally understood to be a promise that the line of David would not end; Messiah (Shiloh) comes and extends His rule over all nations.

Numbers 24:17 reiterates that "A star shall come forth from Jacob, A scepter shall rise from Israel" and He shall crush Israel's enemies.

Later, the perpetuity of the kingly line was promised to David's descendants. In 2 Samuel 7:12-13 God promised David, "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

However, as Ezekiel 19 demonstrated, the nation of Israel was in crises. The Davidic line was about to end (see notes). Jehoiachin, the true heir of the throne, was in exile in Babylon and the prophet Jeremiah had predicted that he would be childless: "Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah" (Jer. 22:30). The context makes it clear that "childless" didn't necessarily mean that Jehoiachin would have no children, but that none of his descendants would sit on the throne of David.

The appearance was that the promises of God would fail. Shiloh had not come to rule the nations. The opposite had happened; Israel was in exile being subjugated to foreign powers.

However, Ezekiel does not leave the people without hope. In Ezekiel 21:26-27 a reference was made to the promised king of Genesis 49:10; Ezekiel says to Zedekiah (the ruler over Judah) "thus says the Lord GOD, ' . . . take off the crown . . . This also will be no more *until He comes* (Gen. 49:10) whose right it is, and I will give it to Him." In other words, the crown would be removed from Zedekiah "until He comes whose right it is" to wear it. At that time the kingly crown will be given to Him.

Close to 500 years after Ezekiel 34 was written, word came to King Herod in Jerusalem that a king had been born. The religious leaders recall the promise of God, "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6; Micah. 5:2), and Jesus appears to shepherd the people of God. . . exactly as God had promised.