

## Message #38

## Ezekiel 34:1-31

The animal that is most frequently mentioned in the Bible is the sheep. By my calculation the words “sheep” or “lamb” are used over 200 times in the Bible. Now some of the most important men of God in the O.T. were literal shepherds. Abraham was a shepherd (Gen. 12:16). Isaac was a shepherd (Gen. 26:14). Moses was a shepherd (Ex. 3:1). David was a shepherd (II Sam. 7:8). Amos was a shepherd (Amos 1:1). David pictured God Himself as a “shepherd” when he wrote “The LORD is my shepherd.” Even Jesus Christ identified Himself as being a “good shepherd” (John 10:14). So the sheep and shepherd imagery is very important to the Bible.

Now shepherds had the primary responsibility to take care of the sheep. Sheep are helpless if left to themselves and a shepherd was responsible to take care of the sheep. He needed to be on the lookout for predators who could harm the flock and He needed to make sure that the sheep were well fed, which meant he had to lead them to appropriate safe and good places.

**Now in the Bible, political and religious leaders are often referred to as being shepherds.** Previously, in the book of Ezekiel, he had singled out the prophets, the princes and the priests (Ezek. 22:26, 27, 28). These rulers of the people were heading to judgment and they were leading the people to judgment.

Now God lumps all these leaders together and uses the shepherd imagery. **He says all of the leaders are false shepherds who have not cared for God’s flock so God, Himself, will deliver his flock from these corrupt leaders.**

**GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LED ASTRAY BY PATHETIC FALSE SHEPHERDS SO GOD HIMSELF WILL INTERVENE AND PUT HIS OWN SHEPHERD/KING IN CHARGE AND WILL BLESS HIS PEOPLE.**

The religious and political leadership of Israel had become so corrupt that they were hurting the flock. They were not helping the flock of God. They were not ministering to the flock of God; they were not caring for the flock of God.

So in **verse 1**, the Word of the LORD came to Ezekiel and said you pronounce a “woe” judgment on those shepherds (v. 2). **God stresses in this chapter that He wants all to know this is directly from Him:**

- 1) “Thus says the LORD GOD (Adonai Jehovah)” - v. 2, 10, 11, 17, 20
- 2) “the LORD GOD declares (Adonai Jehovah)” - v. 8, 15, 30, 31
- 3) “hear the word of the LORD (Jehovah)” - v. 7, 9
- 4) “they will know I AM the LORD (Jehovah) - v. 27, 30
- 5) “I the LORD (Jehovah) will be their God (Elohim)” v. 24
- 6) “I the LORD (Jehovah) have spoken” v. 24

These 15 statements in 31 verses make it clear that the data here is coming directly from the LORD God and people better take it seriously and apply it immediately.

Now from a historical perspective, this is the first prophecy given after the fall of Jerusalem. The situation was depressing for Israel. Those left in the land are living in “waste places” and those who are exiled are living out of the land in Babylon.

So God says I want you to know that I will hold those shepherds accountable who got you into this mess. I also want you to know that I will one day send My Shepherd who will lead you into all of My blessings.

Now the passage breaks down into five main parts:

**PART #1** – God has a case against the shepherds. **34:1-6**

Israel did not end up in the national mess she is in, even to this day. She ended in this mess by “gross malpractice” of the leadership. Her religious and political leaders never pointed her in the true and right ways of God and they are still not doing that now.

So God lays out His case against the leaders that he refers to as shepherds. He spells out what they did and what they did not do. Every Jewish Rabbi and every Jewish political leader should take a serious look at this text. But also every minister and every church leader should also take a serious look at this text. There are nine pathetic actions that God specifically brings out:

**Pathetic Action #1** - The shepherds fed themselves. **34:2a**

There was a self-centered focus of the leadership of Israel. They loved the power and they loved the wealth they got from the power. These leaders put their own wealth and interest above the concern for the flock.

**Pathetic Action #2** - The shepherds did not feed the flock. **34:2b**

These leaders were feeding themselves, but not the flock. One old Bible teacher said, “Instead of feeding the flock, they fed on the flock.” It is the job of a leader to feed the flock. That is his primary job and they were not doing that.

**Pathetic Action #3** - The shepherds had the best of everything while the flock was starving.  
**34:3**

They ate the best food and they wore the best clothes, but the flock was not fed anything.

Years ago we toured a Jewish synagogue and I asked the guide if the rabbis ever took them through a book of the Bible like Isaiah. He laughed and said never. He said that would be too much work. So the Rabbis do their readings and conduct their rituals and the congregation starves for truth.

But doesn't this also remind us of what is happening with many TV evangelists? They are not feeding God's people truth and they live life at the highest level. They have their mansions and their jets and their silk suits, while the people are starving for truth.

**Pathetic Action #4** - The shepherds did not strengthen the sick. **34:4a**

They did not try to encourage the people to trust in the Lord. They did not pray for the people. They did not make hospital calls. They didn't care.

**Pathetic Action #5** - The shepherds did not heal the diseased. **34:4b**

Now obviously this is a metaphor of one diseased by sin who needs healing in their relationship with God. These shepherds did not try to heal anyone. They would not even tell them they needed spiritual healing. They told them they were okay the way they were.

**Pathetic Action #6** - The shepherds did not bind up the broken. **34:4c**

They did not try to present grace to those broken and bruised by sin. They did not challenge people to turn to the Lord.

**Pathetic Action #7** - The shepherds did not bring back the scattered. **34:4d**

There was never an attempt to corral those that strayed. There was never an attempt to challenge them to come back to the Lord and His Word.

**Pathetic Action #8** - The shepherds did not seek the lost. **34:4e**

There was no concern for the lost; there was only concern for themselves.

**Pathetic Action #9** - The shepherds did severely dominate the people. **34:4f**

These leaders ruled with force, brutality and cruelty. They were dominant bullies. Instead of helping the flock, they hurt it. They were only in leadership for themselves. They were not kind. They were not compassionate. They loved the power but they didn't really care about the people.

As a result of these pathetic shepherds here is what happened to God's flock. There were four responses:

**(Flock Response #1)** - God's flock scattered. **34:5a**

Because they were not being fed, they scattered. They went looking for help from others.

**(Flock Response #2)** - God's flock became food for every predator. **34:5b**

Israel became food for every predator nation and religion. She was lured in because her leaders did not lead her to truth.

**(Flock Response #3)** - God's flock wanders through mountains on every high hill. **34:6a**

There are dangerous things in the mountains that can hurt innocent sheep. High mountains were the main places of false religion. When you don't feed the flock, it can wander off into one religion and denomination to another. The sheep don't know who to believe or what to believe.

**(Flock Response #4)** - God's flock was scattered all over the world. **36:6b**

This nation should have been enjoying the blessings of God in her promised land, but instead, she is scattered all over the world.

Now the primary responsibility of a shepherd is to watch over the flock so that what was just mentioned doesn't happen. It is the responsibility of the leaders to do what they can to help build the flock, not scatter it.

**PART #2** – God will bring judgment against the shepherds. **34:7-10**

God held the leaders responsible for the deplorable condition of His flock. They were the ones who brought Israel to ruin. This poor nation is still wandering around looking for answers and looking for hope. God says in **verse 7** that these leaders were responsible for His flock becoming prey for everyone else. While this was happening, the shepherds were just enjoying life and feeding themselves. They did not care if the flock knew truth or was taught truth. They had a good thing going.

So God aims His judgment words straight at the leaders (**v. 9**). He gives them warning messages:

**Warning Message #1** - God is against the leaders. **34:10a**

**Warning Message #2** - God will hold them accountable for what they did to His sheep. **34:10b**

**Warning Message #3** - God will remove them from being shepherds. **34:10c**

God would literally remove them from their positions of power and authority.

**Warning Message #4** - God will put a stop to the shepherds feeding themselves. **34:10d**

God would put a stop to those misusing their position.

**Warning Message #5** - God will deliver His people. **34:10e**

God would come to the rescue of His people.

**PART #3** – God Himself will become the shepherd of His people. **34:11-16**

God Himself will replace the corrupt leaders by being their shepherd Himself. Here are some wonderful messages that God gives to His sheep:

**Message #1** - God Himself will search for His own sheep. **34:11**

**Message #2** - God Himself will care for and deliver His own sheep. **34:12**

**Message #3** - God Himself will bring His own sheep to their land and bless them. **34:13**

**Message #4** - God Himself will richly feed His own sheep. **34:14-15a**

**Message #5** - God Himself will lead His own sheep to a place of rest. **34:15b**

**Message #6** - God Himself will heal His hurting sheep. **34:16a**

**Message #7** - God Himself will destroy the strong that hurt the sheep. **34:16b**

**PART #4** – God will judge His own flock. **34:17-22**

There are six judgment realities brought out in this text:

**Judgment Reality #1** - God will judge between every sheep, ram and goat. **34:17**

**Judgment Reality #2** - God will judge those who lead to good pasture and good water. **34:18a**

**Judgment Reality #3** - God will judge those who trampled good pasture and muddied water.  
**34:18b**

This is what false leaders do; they muddy the water of clear truth. They trample down the good food that feeds the flock.

**Judgment Reality #4** - God will judge according to what the sheep ate. **34:19**

The sheep were starving. They did not eat or drink well. They ate trampled grass and drank foul water.

**Judgment Reality #5** - God will judge according to the condition of the sheep. **34:20**

**Judgment Reality #6** - God will judge according to how one treated other sheep. **34:21**

God says I will judge my own flock (**v. 22**). Every sheep will be judged.

**PART #5** – God says what He will do for His people. **34:23-30**

There are eight wonderful promises that God makes to His people:

**Reality #1** - God will make David the shepherd. **34:23; 37:24, 25**

When Zedekiah was captured in 586 B.C., the Davidic dynasty ended (II Kings 25:1-7). It has now been over 2400 years since someone from the Davidic line has ruled over Israel. Yet God predicts this is exactly what will happen. One day, God says, David will reign.

Now David has been dead for about 3000 years so there is a debate over whether or not this refers to David actually being raised up and sitting on the throne again one day or if it is a reference to Jesus Christ who is the king of kings who came from the Davidic line. I tend to think both are true. I think Jesus Christ will literally reign in Jerusalem and David himself will also be there. Many passages mention this point: Jer. 30:9; Hos. 3:5.

God says I will bring my shepherd David back to life and he will reign and be the shepherd of Israel.

**Reality #2** - God will make David the prince. **34:24**

David will hold a key place of royalty in the reign of Jesus Christ.

**Reality #3** - God will make a peace covenant with His flock. **34:25**

During the 1000 year millennial reign of Jesus Christ, the covenant of peace in the land will be fully operative.

**Reality #4** - God will shower His flock with blessings everywhere. **34:26**

**Reality #5** - God will bless the land. **34:27a**

**Reality #6** - God will give His flock security and deliver them from everything. **34:27b-28**

This is a reference to the entire Promise Land dimensions. Israel will live securely in the totality of her land.

**Reality #7** - God will plant His flock in the land and they will never be insulted again. **34:29**

This will be a time when the entire world honors Israel.

**Reality #8** - God will be Israel's God and all Israel will know it. **34:30-31**

There is promised a time coming when all of Israel will recognize the unique relationship she has with the true God of the Bible.