

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 15: Shepherds of Israel and the One Shepherd

Ezekiel 34:1-31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Expose the sin of self-serving leadership that feeds itself and neglects the weak, and call any who lead God's people to faithful, sacrificial care.

Show that the LORD Himself comes to seek, gather, feed, bind up, and strengthen His scattered flock, magnifying His shepherding grace.

Establish from Scripture that the one shepherd, my servant David, is Jesus Christ reigning now over His one flock the church, not a future earthly Davidic king, and that the covenant of peace is the new covenant in Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

What woe does the LORD pronounce on the shepherds of Israel in 34:1-6, and how does the charge that they fed themselves and not the sheep expose the heart of false leadership?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The word of the LORD comes to Ezekiel with a charge to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, the kings, princes, and leaders responsible for the people.

Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves (34:2). The opening word is a cry of woe, a lament and an accusation pressed together.

Should not shepherds feed the sheep? The very name shepherd defines the duty. A shepherd exists for the flock, not the flock for the shepherd.

The image of shepherd and flock runs through Scripture, picturing the tender, watchful care that God requires of those set over His people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual leadership is a stewardship, not a privilege to be exploited. The shepherd answers to God for the flock entrusted to him.
- The sin named first is feeding self rather than the sheep, the very inversion of what a shepherd is for.
- This woe is real and severe, yet it is spoken to call faithless leaders to account and to set before us the true Shepherd who never fails.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the name shepherd itself reveal about the leader's duty?
- Why does the LORD address the leaders of Israel as shepherds?
- How does feeding oneself rather than the flock pervert the office of leadership?

Question 2

Student Question:

In what ways are you tempted to take from God's people what you ought to be giving to them, seeking your own comfort rather than their good?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep (34:3). The shepherds take every benefit and give nothing back.

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought (34:4).

With force and harshness you have ruled them. The shepherds led not by tender care but by domination and cruelty.

So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts (34:5). The flock wandered over all the earth with none to seek them (34:6).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The LORD measures shepherds by their care for the weakest, the sick, injured, strayed, and lost, not by their own gain.
- Ruling with force and harshness is condemned. God's people are to be led, fed, and tended, never driven and crushed.
- The failure of leaders has real consequences. The flock was scattered and devoured, showing that neglect by those in charge brings true harm to God's people.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the LORD list the weak, sick, injured, strayed, and lost so specifically?
- What is wrong with leading God's people by force and harshness?
- How does the scattering of the flock show the cost of faithless leadership?

Question 3

Student Question:

The shepherds did not strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed, or seek the lost (34:4). Why does the LORD measure shepherds by their care for the weakest sheep, and what does this teach about true spiritual leadership?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD (34:7). Because the flock has become prey and food for every beast, the LORD now turns against the shepherds themselves.

Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand (34:10). God holds the leaders accountable for what became of the flock.

I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. The LORD removes the flock from the shepherds who devoured it.

The shepherds will be put out of office, no longer feeding themselves at the expense of the sheep, for the LORD claims the flock as His own, my sheep.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God requires the flock at the hand of its shepherds. Leaders give an account to Him for those they were charged to keep.
- The repeated my sheep shows that the flock belongs to the LORD, not to the hirelings who exploited it.
- The certainty of God's word stands behind this judgment. What He declares against the false shepherds will surely come to pass.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God will require His sheep at the hand of the shepherds?
- How does the phrase my sheep change how we view the flock?
- Why must faithless shepherds be removed before the flock can be healed?

Question 4

Student Question:

Who are the weak, the sick, the injured, the strayed, and the lost around you, and how have you either neglected or cared for them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out (34:11). The emphatic I myself sets the LORD's own action against the failure of the shepherds.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out my sheep (34:12).

I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. The day of judgment becomes a day of rescue for the flock.

Where the hireling shepherds would not seek the lost, the LORD declares that He Himself will go out and find them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The LORD does not abandon His flock to faithless leaders but comes Himself to seek the scattered and lost.
- This seeking love anticipates the good shepherd of John 10 and the shepherd of Luke 15 who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one.
- The emphasis falls on God's own initiative. He stoops to search, gather, and rescue what others let perish, which is grace, not merit on the part of the sheep.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the LORD stress that He Himself will seek the sheep?
- How does this seeking compare to the shepherd in Luke 15?
- What comfort is there in a God who searches for the scattered and lost?

Question 5

Student Question:

Because the shepherds failed, the sheep were scattered and became food for every beast (34:5–6). How does the failure of leaders bring real harm to God's people, and how does this warn those who would lead today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

I will bring them out from the peoples, gather them, and bring them into their own land, feeding them on the mountains and by the brooks (34:13).

I will feed them with good pasture, and they shall lie down in good grazing land (34:14). The LORD gives rest and abundance to His flock.

I will seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak (34:16). Point by point He undoes the neglect of the false shepherds.

But the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. The same shepherding love judges the bullying sheep who pushed the weak aside.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Each duty the false shepherds neglected, the LORD now fulfills Himself, seeking, gathering, binding up, and strengthening.

- The promise of rest and good pasture pictures the spiritual rest and provision Christ gives His flock, the church, now.
- The LORD shepherds in justice, caring for the weak and dealing with the strong who oppress them, so that His mercy and His justice stand together.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the LORD reverse each of the shepherds' failures?
- What does feeding the flock in good pasture picture for the believer today?
- Why does true shepherding include judging the fat sheep who harm the weak?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you have been hurt or scattered by the failure of those who should have cared for you, how have you been tempted to respond, and what does this chapter call you to instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As for you, my flock, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats (34:17). Within the flock itself there is injustice to be judged.

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? (34:18).

The strong sheep foul the water and trample the grass, so that the weak must eat what they have trampled and drink what they have muddied (34:19).

The LORD sees not only the failure of leaders but the selfishness of the strong among the people who spoil what others need.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's justice reaches within the flock, not only to its shepherds but to the strong who trample and crowd out the weak.
- Taking more than one needs and ruining what is left for others is a sin the LORD marks and will judge.
- This passage warns the believer against a self-serving spirit even within the people of God, where the strong must consider the weak.

Discussion Prompts

- How can strong sheep harm the weak within the flock?
- What does this teach about selfishness among God's own people?
- How should the strong in faith regard the weak according to this passage?

Question 7

Student Question:

The LORD declares, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out (34:11–16). What does it reveal about God that He does not abandon the flock to faithless shepherds but comes Himself to gather, feed, bind up, and strengthen them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep (34:20). Again the emphatic I myself marks the LORD's personal action.

Because you push with side and shoulder and thrust at all the weak with your horns till you have scattered them abroad (34:21).

I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey, and I will judge between sheep and sheep (34:22).

The LORD takes the side of the weak and the pushed-aside, rescuing them from the bullying of the strong.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The LORD defends the weak against the strong who scatter them, showing His care for the lowly and oppressed.
- This judgment within the flock prepares for the coming of the one shepherd who will rule justly over all.
- God's rescue is for those who cannot rescue themselves, the lean and pushed-aside, again magnifying grace toward the helpless.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the LORD repeatedly take the side of the weak sheep?
- What does this reveal about God's heart toward the oppressed?
- How does this judgment set the stage for the one shepherd to come?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where in your life do you most need the LORD to seek you out, bind you up, or strengthen you, and will you let Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd (34:23).

David had long been dead when Ezekiel prophesied. The promise looks beyond David to his greater Son, the Messiah, who comes from David's line.

And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them (34:24). One shepherd is set over one flock.

Jesus declares, I am the good shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep, and there will be one flock, one shepherd (John 10:11, 16). This promise is fulfilled in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- My servant David is not a return of the literal David nor a future earthly Davidic king, but Christ, the Son of David, reigning now over His church.
- The one shepherd over one flock is fulfilled in Jesus who gathers Jew and Gentile into one body, the church, under His present rule.
- This is not a promise of a future earthly political kingdom. Christ reigns now from heaven over His flock, and we must read the promise as the New Testament reads it, in Christ and His church.

Discussion Prompts

- Why can my servant David not mean the literal David or a future earthly king?
- How does John 10:11-16 identify the one shepherd as Jesus Christ?
- What does it mean that Christ rules now over one flock, the church?

Question 9

Student Question:

The LORD promises, I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them, and I will make with them a covenant of peace (34:23-25). Show from John 10:11-16, Hebrews 13:20, and 1 Peter 5:4 that this one shepherd is Jesus Christ, the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Explain why my servant David must be understood as Christ reigning now over His one flock the church, and not as a future earthly Davidic monarch over national Israel. How does the covenant of peace find its fulfillment in the new covenant in Christ, and what does it mean that the one shepherd seeks the lost and binds up the broken today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness (34:25).

I will make them and the places around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season, showers of blessing (34:26).

The land will yield its increase, and they shall be secure, and they shall know that I am the LORD when I break the bars of their yoke (34:27).

This covenant of peace is the new covenant blessing realized in Christ, who is our peace and who gives His flock security and rest under His care.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The covenant of peace is fulfilled in the new covenant in Christ, who reconciles us to God and gives true and lasting peace.
- The pictures of security, fruitfulness, and blessing describe the spiritual abundance Christ gives His church, not a guaranteed earthly prosperity.
- Breaking the bars of their yoke pictures the freedom from sin and condemnation that the good shepherd brings to His flock.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the covenant of peace fulfilled in Christ?
- What spiritual blessings does the good shepherd give His flock today?
- What does it mean for Christ to break the bars of the yoke for His people?

Question 10

Student Question:

After studying this chapter, what does it mean for you to know Jesus as your shepherd, to hear His voice, and to belong to His one flock, and how should that change the way you live and the way you care for others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land (34:29). The flock will lack no good thing under the LORD's care.

And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people (34:30).

And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD (34:31). The chapter ends in tender assurance.

Those who hear the voice of the good shepherd and follow Him belong to His flock, secure in the hand from which no one can pluck them (John 10:27-29).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The chapter ends not in threat but in belonging, you are my sheep, the comfort of those who follow the good shepherd.
- To be Christ's sheep is to hear His voice and follow Him, which calls for ongoing faithfulness, not careless presumption that one can never fall away.
- The believer is called to find in Jesus the shepherd who seeks the lost and binds up the broken today, and to care for others as He has cared for him.

Discussion Prompts

- What comfort is there in the words you are my sheep?
- What does it mean to hear and follow the voice of the good shepherd?
- How should being Christ's sheep shape the way we care for others in the flock?