



Ezekiel 34:1-25

Shepherds: True and False

The LORD God, Yahweh, pictures Himself as the Shepherd of His people in the Old Testament. These great Messianic analogies look forward to the faithful and true Shepherd of Israel who will be like His father David. However, the Good Shepherd gave His life for the sheep.

FALSE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL (34:1-10)

This is yet another passage in the Hebrew prophets that speak of the evil shepherds of Israel and Judah. "Shepherds" often referred to kings, priests and prophets who had oversight of the affairs of the Jewish nation. They were men of authority (Isaiah 44:28; Jeremiah 2:8; 10:21; 23:1-6; 25:34-38; Micah 5:4-5; Zechariah 11:4-17). Our word "pastor" is the Latin for shepherd."

With few exceptions the shepherds in Ezekiel's day were evil. Ezekiel writes:

Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, 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?" (Ezekiel 34:1-2).

It was a familiar refrain during the last days of the southern kingdom of Judah. The evil shepherds Ezekiel is referring to were Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Their self interests, controlled them. Ezekiel's description of their selfishness is vivid in verses 1-10. After Josiah all of the kings were corrupt in Judah and they scattered the people.

It is against this backdrop of evil shepherds that Ezekiel presents the hope of the coming ideal Shepherd King who will lead His people under a new covenant. The LORD God will lead the people back to the land, and they will be converted and ruled by the Messiah (34:11-16, 23-24; 37:24-28).

YAHWEH SEARCHES FOR HIS SHEEP (34:11-19)

A familiar role of Yahweh in the Old Testament is that of a shepherd over His flock in contrast to the evil shepherds of Israel. It is first found in Genesis 49:24, where He describes Himself as "the Mighty One of Jacob, . . . the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel." Ezekiel says only Yahweh and His Messiah would be the "Shepherd" of His people (v. 23).

The LORD God is pictured as a Shepherd searching for His sheep.

This imagery is familiar in the Old Testament. King David with poetic beauty said, "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). "Oh give ear, Shepherd of Israel, Thou who dost lead Joseph like a flock; Thou who art enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth!" (80:1). The prophet Isaiah in his great passage on comfort sees the LORD God "Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes" (Isaiah 40:11). Jeremiah cried, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock" (31:10).

Fifteen times in Ezekiel chapter 34 the LORD says, "My flock," or "My sheep." They are His possession as a shepherd. "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out" (v. 11). This passage is a vivid description of the Lord God pastoring His flock. He watches for His own and seeks them out (v. 11). He cares for His scattered flock and will deliver them from all the places they have wandered (v. 12). "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" (v. 13). "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest" (v. 15). Throughout this passage we see a searching shepherd, seeking His lost sheep, binding up the broken, strengthening the sick and feeding them in a rich pasture.

In the above verses it is noted that the Shepherd King has a special relationship with Yahweh. In verses 11-16 the shepherd is Yahweh, however in vv. 23-24 the shepherd is "my servant David." The pronouns "I" and "my" are used forty-five times demonstrating "this shepherd would be God in a personal form." The Good Shepherd would later say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30; cf. 17:21ff).

The true Shepherd King feeds His sheep (34:13, 26-27, 29). Jesus is the Bread and the Water of Life (John 6:31-35; 4:10-14; 7:37-39).

David wrote, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Here the LORD says, "I will cause them to lie down." He gives perfect security (34:11-16). Jesus gives perfect peace in His pastures fair and meadow (John 14:27; 16:33; 20:19; 14:1; Colossians 3:15; Philippians 4:7). There will be a day when He will reestablish His people peacefully in their land (vv. 14-15; Revelation 20:4-6). This Shepherd King will rule with righteousness (v. 16), and He will be a righteous judge (2 Corinthians 5:10ff; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Revelation 20:11-15)

H. A. Ironside well said, "He will seek after those that are lost, and will bring back those that have been driven away; he will bind up those that have been maimed, and will strengthen those that were sick; but the self-sufficient and the strong will be disappointed in that day when He shepherds His sheep in righteousness."

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD (34:20-25; JOHN 10:11).

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. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken (vv. 23-24).

In contrast with the many evil shepherds and the division of the kingdom into the northern and southern kingdoms each having their own kings, the LORD "will set over them one shepherd, My servant David" (v. 23). This shepherd will judge between the sheep and feed them and be a shepherd.

The identity of the true shepherd

Who is this shepherd? "My servant, David . . . And I, the LORD will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD, have spoken" (vv. 23-24). This coming Shepherd will be known as "my servant David" (37:22-26; 2 Samuel 7:16; Jeremiah 30:9; Isaiah 55:3; 40:10-11; Hosea 3:5). He will establish an everlasting throne of David as Yahweh had promised. This grand promise of the establishment of an everlasting throne of David finds its fulfillment only in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

No doubt, Jesus had this passage and other Old Testament shepherd imagery in mind when He said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep; And I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14-16; cf. Luke 1:69; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:25-30).

The True Shepherd makes a new covenant with His flock (v. 25; 37:26)

The True and Good Shepherd will make a "covenant of peace" with His people (v. 25). Jeremiah had called this same covenant the "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31). It is an everlasting covenant" (Ezekiel 16:60). How desperately sinful man needs peace with God, which was lost in the fall. God will restore it in the Messianic Age.

However, we don't have to wait until then to experience inner peace. There is no greater promise of assurance in God's word than these words of the Good Shepherd as He comforts the sheep of His pasture in John 10:24-30:

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 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. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father s hand. I and the Father are one."

Just like the prophet Ezekiel said, Jesus judges the sheep and gives assurance and comfort to His flock. He declared God's Word very plainly. Those who reject Him are not of His sheep. "My sheep are in the habit of listening to My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me." Have you come to an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd?

Here are six great truths Jesus gives to every true believer:

Here are six great truths Jesus gives to every true believer:

1. "My sheep hear My voice" (v. 27). They are in the habit of recognizing and paying attention to His voice.
2. "I know them" (v. 27). The Good Shepherd knows His own sheep.
3. "They follow Me" (v. 27). That is the constant habit of the true sheep.
4. "I give eternal life to them" (v. 28). This isn't a passing fad. The Good shepherd loves His sheep and wants them to spent eternity with Him.
5. "The shall never perish" (v. 28). It is double negative in the original language. They shall "not perish, never." They can never perish because "no one shall snatch them out of My hand." You can't jump out either, even if you were stupid enough to do it, because the Father has His hands around the hands of Jesus! "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all . . ." (v. 29).
6. "No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (vv. 29-30). Double security! Jesus holds us in His hands and the Father holds Him in His hands! (cf. Romans 8:38-39).

How great is our Savior! Marvelous is His sovereign saving grace.

THE FUTURE REIGN OF THE SHEPHERD KING (37:24-38)

This new covenant of everlasting peace anticipates events and promises never realized in the first return of Israel from Babylonian captivity. They never knew "peace" as described in these passages. Israel returned to her land and was dominated by Medo Persia, Greece and Rome until A.D. 70 when the Romans burned Jerusalem. Either one must come to the conclusion that this "covenant of peace" was an unrealistic hope that never materialized or that a future event is in mind.

God s "covenant of peace" looks forward to the blessings Israel will experience in the Millennium. This covenant will establish Israel in her land permanently with David's greater Son as her Shepherd King. Later Ezekiel stated that the covenant of peace would also involve the rebuilding of God s temple as a visible reminder of His presence (37:26-28).

In chapter thirty-seven, Ezekiel expands on his message in chapter 34. When the Messiah came the first time not many in Israel recognized Him for who He was, but there is a day coming when He will make them one nation in the land. God will restore Israel because of her unique relationship to Him. Yahweh says, "One king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. . . My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. . . David My servant shall be their prince forever" (37:22-25). Now He tells us that the "covenant of peace" will be "an everlasting covenant with them" (v. 26). It is an everlasting kingdom with an everlasting covenant and an everlasting King. "David My servant shall be their prince forever." Then He goes on to tell us we shall worship the Shepherd King forever. He is also our God. He tells us He "will set My sanctuary in their midst forever" (v. 26). "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever" (vv. 27-28). This is far beyond Zerrubbabel and Herod's temples which was consumed by Roman fire in AD 70. It did not stand forever nor was it ever filled with the *Shekinah* glory.

I don't think you can take seriously these passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel without being reminded of the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 11:25-29.

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery —so that you will not be wise in your own estimation —that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the

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in your own estimation –that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

The promise made in Ezekiel chapters 36-37 will take place in the future when Israel is secure in her own land. This regathering of Israel from all nations looks beyond the first return from the Babylonian captivity to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

Ezekiel looks forward to the future work of God when He will bring about a complete restoration of the nation Israel. The righteous King who is the Messiah in 37:24-28 will carry out the work of the Good Shepherd of 34:23-31. One wonderful day the "Chief Shepherd" will appear (1 Peter 5:4). Even so come, Lord Jesus.

"All God's dealings in regard to Israel's future blessing will be in pure grace; nothing will be on the ground of merit, for they have merited only judgment" (Ironside). This is also true of each of us. We merit only judgment because of our sins. However, God in His rich abundant and merciful grace reaches down to each of us this day and offers abundant life.

Have you put your personal trust in the Good Shepherd? He has come to give you eternal life.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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Series: [Christ in the Old Testament](#)

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