

EZEKIEL

Chapter 34

Prophecy Against the Shepherds of Israel

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? 3 You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. 4 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, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; 6 they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. 7 “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, 9 therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

Chapter 34 is probably one of the more familiar chapters of the book because of its shepherd theme, especially its Good Shepherd development in 34:11–31. Hence, it is naturally paralleled with Psalm 23 and with Jn 10:7–18, where our Lord Jesus identifies himself as ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, “the Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11, 14), using language that seems to be drawn from Ezekiel 34. (CC)

34:1–10 Having reviewed the principles governing the proclamation of restoration (ch 33), Ezekiel proceeds at once to speak promises of redemption into a situation marked by defeat and enshrouded in dark pessimism. Previously, a few rays of hope flashed through the lowering gloom of dire judgment (cf 11:16–20; 16:60; 20:40–44; 28:25–26; 29:21). These brief glimpses into a bright future gave Ezekiel and his hearers assurance that God’s plan of salvation did not lie buried in the exile. Now, the sun of redemptive grace is allowed to break out from the clouds as God promises to care for the people in an even more direct and personal way. (TLSB)

34:2 *shepherds of Israel.* Those responsible for providing leadership, especially the kings and their officials (see 2Sa 7:7; Jer 25:18–19), but also the prophets and priests (see Isa 56:11; Jer 23:9–11). Ezekiel had earlier singled out the princes, priests and prophets for special rebuke (ch. 22). To call a king a shepherd was common throughout the ancient Near East. For David’s rise from shepherd to shepherd-king see Ps 78:70–71. For condemnation of the shepherds cf. Jer 23:1–4. (CSB)

They had not shouldered their responsibilities properly, but had ruled just as brutally as the Egyptian taskmasters had done before the exodus under Moses. (PBC)

Political and religious leaders have exploited and fleeced the sheep (i.e., the people) instead of caring for them (cf 22:25–30; Jer 10:21; 23:1–4). *feeding yourselves!* Hoarding wealth. (TLSB)

34:3 *eat ... clothe ... slaughter.* Legitimate rewards for shepherds. Their crime was that they did not care for the flock. (CSB)

34:4 *sick you have not healed.* Cf. Jer 50:6; Mt 18:12–14; Lk 15:4; 19:10. (CSB)

Ezekiel lists the common practices of a diligent shepherd, who would know his flock intimately. Cypr: “What else ought we to do, dearest brother, than to exhibit full diligence in gathering together and restoring the sheep of Christ, and to apply the medicine of paternal affection to cure the wounds of the lapsed?” (ANF 5:369). (TLSB)

34:5 *scattered.* Often used by Ezekiel to describe Israel’s exile and dispersion (11:16–17; 12:15; 20:23, 34, 41; 22:15; 28:25). (CSB)

no shepherd. A picture used often in the Bible (e.g., Mk 6:34). (CSB)

Jesus would also lament over the people of His day. (TLSB)

Because there had been no spiritual leadership and no godly political leadership, the nation was harassed, robbed and finally scattered. (PBC)

Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”

34:6 *my sheep* – Although they had been abandoned by their shepherds and scattered by their enemies. He still calls them “my sheep.” His covenant. His solemn contract with them, was still intact, because God cannot go back on His Word. (PBC)

wandered over all the mountains – This was a stinging remark, since the high hills were the location on which heathen shrines were erected and gods were worshiped. (PBC)

As a result of the false shepherds’ rapacious rule, the flock was exiled into foreign lands. (TLSB)

34:8 *wild beasts.* Hostile foreign nations; but see v. 28, where they are contrasted. (CSB)

My shepherds. God had a right to expect them to rule as His representatives. (TLSB)

34:10 *I am against the shepherds.* A short and effective phrase of judgment used often by Ezekiel. (CSB)

Hebrews 10:31, “It is dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

I will require My sheep at their hand. Because God chose the offspring of Abraham to serve His plan of salvation, they are called “the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand” (Ps 95:7; cf 74:1; 79:13; 100:3). (TLSB)

rescue. Sheep who hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him are safe, for no one is able to snatch them out of His hand (Jn 10:27–29). (TLSB)

they may not be food for them – Leaders who take advantage of the people they are called to serve can hardly expect the Lord’s blessing on their efforts. Even when we fail in our role as shepherds, God doesn’t change. Nor does His covenant of forgiveness through the Messiah change. He still wants to call us His sheep and shepherds, no matter how much we do to deserve His anger. (PBC)

34:1–10 It would do little good for God to replace Israel’s bad shepherds with other earthly rulers. Human society cannot lift itself out of the quicksand of pervasive corruption. God Himself must come to the rescue, which He has done in the person of His Son (Jn 10) and in the power of His Holy Spirit. Christian, serve with confidence, knowing that your Good Shepherd is ever vigilant to deliver you from evil. • Bind my wounds, Good Shepherd, and restore me to Your sheepfold, that I may be strengthened by Your caring hand. Amen. (TLSB)

The Lord GOD Will Seek Them Out

11 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. 15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. 17 “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats. 18 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; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? 19 And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? 20 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, 22 I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

34:11 *Lord God* – The double name for God here is literally, “Adonai Yahweh” or “my Lord Yahweh, and occurs some 293 times in the OT, mostly in the prophets, and in fact 217 are in Ezekiel. Adonai is always in the plural when used of God (just like the general title Elohim, “God”) and thus witnesses to the triune nature of the Deity. There is sense of “having supreme rank, power, authority; being above all others in character, importance, excellence.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

I myself will search for my sheep. Having dealt with the faithless shepherds (vv. 1–10), the Lord committed himself to shepherd his flock (see Jer 23:3–4). (CSB)

In these verses, the tender, loving care for His miserable fallen creatures demonstrates that the God of the OT is not a wrathful ogre delighting in crushing helpless victims. He is the Father who sent His Son to seek and to save the lost. (TLSB)

In a world where it is increasingly difficult to find Christian leaders in any area of life, it is comforting to know the Lord has promised to get personally involved in caring for the needs of His people when those who should be providing leadership aren't doing their jobs. (PBC) – LUKE 15

Human faithfulness has frustrated His intentions; if it is going to get done. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are sheep of the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23:1). “For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care” (Ps. 95:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:12 *as a shepherd* – This refers again to this careful seeking (baqarah, verbal noun) of a shepherd who finds himself “in the midst of” a “scattered flock.” Yahweh has a people. When He comes to be with them, He discovers they are scattered. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

I will rescue them – *wehitstalti* implies that they have fallen into danger or under oppression. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

from all the places. Babylon was not the only place where the Israelites had gone (see Jer 43:1–7). (CSB)

day of clouds and darkness. The day of the Lord that had come upon Israel when Jerusalem fell in August of 586 B.C. (CSB)

34:13 *I will bring them out.* The promises of restoration—begun in 11:17 and repeated in 20:34, 41–42; 28:25—find special emphasis in this part (chs. 33–39) of Ezekiel (see 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:27). (CSB)

God promises that He will “bring them out from the nations.” The people of God had been deported to Babylon, where they would live in captivity for 70 years. God’s promise to restore them gives hope. ((Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

mountains of Israel.† Compare the tone of 6:3–7 with judgment now past (see v. 12). (CSB)

THEIR OWN LAND – Israel, land flowing with milk and honey, was given to them solely by God’s grace and according to His promises. Our “own land” is heaven, which God will give to us by His grace. We too are foreigners and exiles on earth, for our citizenship is in heaven (Heb 11:14-16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

bring them into their own land – The tribes of Israel were each given a portion of the Promised Land, though the priestly clan of the Levites was given God Himself, not land, as their inheritance (Dt 10:9; see note, Ps 119:57). Inheritance is an important expression of God’s graciousness in the OT. He gives lovingly and freely to His people as a father lovingly provides

for his children. God's chosen people are His portion and treasured possession (Dt 32:9). (TLSB p. 7)

34:14 *I will feed them.* See Isa 40:11; Jn 10:11. (CSB)

Isaiah 40:11, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; [baby sleeps to beat of heart of dad or mom] he gently leads those that have young."

good pasture...mountain heights...grazing land – God gives far more than the minimal essentials. The best is yet to come for us sojourners. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:15 *I myself will be the shepherd* – Sheep are not "in good hands" with a hired shepherd (Jn 10:11-13). Our Sovereign King is also our Good Shepherd. He feeds us from His hand just as a shepherd feeds his sheep. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

make them lie down – A shepherd leads the flock to the best areas for grazing and rest. (TLSB)

34:16 *I will seek the lost* – That no one was "searching for, seeking" (6, 34:4, שׁוֹרֵץ) the sheep is remedied by the promise that Yahweh himself will do so (שׁוֹרֵץ, "seek," in 34:16), as fulfilled in the NT, when "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:10, with ζητέω, which the LXX uses in Ezek 34:4, 16; ἐκζητέω in 34:6). Likewise, Christ himself is the man who "seeks" the one lost sheep in Mt 18:12. (CC)

the fat and the strong. This verse is a good example of the biblical theme of the Great Reversal, like Lk 1:53: "He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:17-22 Not only did the shepherds abuse the flock, but members of the flock abused one another. There were stronger and fatter ones who oppressed and injured the weak and lean ones. God threatens to execute justice on those who prey on the weak. (TLSB)

34:17ii *judge* – A regular duty of animal husbandry, which assures the flock's future and growth, is to compare and distinguish the animals to discern which will be retained in the flock. (TLSB)

rams and goats. People of power and influence who were oppressing poorer Israelites. This prophetic word shows the same concern for social justice found elsewhere in the prophets (see Isa 3:13–15; 5:8; Am 5:12; 6:1–7; Mic 2:1–5). Cf. the treatment of slaves Jeremiah observed (Jer 34:8–11). (CSB)

34:18-19 Certain animals dominate the pasture and the water hole, plying their advantage against the health of the whole flock. Gregory the Great: "The shepherds drink most pure water, when with a right understanding they imbibe the streams of truth. But to foul the same water with their feet is to corrupt the studies of holy meditation by evil living. And verily the sheep drink the water fouled by their feet, when any of those subject to them follow not the words which they hear, but only imitate the bad examples which they see. Thirsting for the things said, but perverted by the works observed, they take in mud with their draughts, as from polluted fountains" (NPNF 2 12:2b). (TLSB)

34:18 *that you must muddy the rest* - If we fail to be good shepherds in our families, in our country, in our congregations, we can expect our constituency, our family members and the rest of the congregation to start trampling the pasture, muddying the water so that it is not usable for others. (PBC) – JEWISH LEADERS WOULD NOT BELIEVE AND ALSO KEPT OTHERS AWAY

Matthew 23:13-15 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.” PART OF SEVEN WOES NEAR END OF JESUS’ MINISTRY

34:20 *I, myself will judge* – Cf Mt 25:31–46. (TLSB)

34:21 *push...thrust* – When leaders abuse their high calling, the people begin to abuse one another. Then the weak are taken advantage of. (PBC)

History judges churches, nations and societies on how they treat the weakest among them.

Horns – An image of power. Animals with horns are bold; in Israelite thought, a horned animal with its head held high symbolized strength and triumph. (TLSB p. 842)

24:23-24 So much is packed in these two verses that one could almost construct an OT Christology from them. (CC)

If God is to break the power and reign of sin, He must send into this world His own vice-regent, His servant David. This future human-divine Shepherd and Prince will not destroy the sheep but feed them with bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40). The brilliance of divine revelation shines into coming centuries. Ezekiel sees this transformation from doom to delight in the perspective of prophetic vision. Past, present, and future merge into a single dimension of timeless fact. The old covenant blends into the new covenant. (TLSB)

34:23 *my servant David*. † A ruler like David and from his line (see Ps 89:4, 20, 29; Jer 23:5–6). Under great David’s greater Son there would be one flock, one Shepherd who will feed them with the bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40; 10:16). (CSB)

The 12 tribes of Jacob were divided into two kingdoms after Solomon’s death. Under great David’s greater Son, there will be one flock, one shepherd. (TLSB)

34:24 *my servant* – This is the same term used in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant (Is. 42:1; 53:1 etc.). He will bestow upon His blood-bought people all the promised covenant blessings in richest measure. These blessings – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – are already ours by faith. We will experience their fullness in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

shall be prince – This literally means “one lifted up,” a leader or ruler. In the same eschatological vision of Ezekiel 40-48, this same Hebrew term will be used of the Prince over the people in the eternal kingdom (Ez 45:7, 17, 22; 46:2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 16-18; 48:21-22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

No one will occupy the throne after Him, for He will be the Prince forever (37:25). Cf 2Sm 7:11–16; Is 9:5–6; 11:1–2; Jer 30:9. For Jesus’ human ancestry from David’s royal house. (TLSB)

34:11–24 In place of unfaithful shepherds, God will provide one Shepherd, Jesus Christ (“My servant David”; v 24). Notice how Matthew captures King David’s ancestry and how it culminates in Jesus Christ as Savior (Mt 1:6b–16). Jesus is the Good Shepherd who faithfully provides God’s Word to all generations. He brings restoration to a world weary with sin. • Precious Savior, thank You for taking my sins on Yourself and restoring my relationship with the Father. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD's Covenant of Peace

25 “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 and sleep in the woods. 26 And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. 27 And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. 28 They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. 29 And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. 30 And they shall know that I am the LORD their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord GOD. 31 And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD.”

34:25 *covenant of peace.* † Cf. 37:26. All of God’s covenants aim at peace (see Ge 26:28–31; Nu 25:12; Isa 54:10; Mal 2:5). This covenant (the “new covenant” spoken of by Jeremiah, 31:31–34) looks to the final peace, initiated by Christ (Php 4:7) and still awaiting final fulfillment. “Peace” (Hebrew *shalom*) is more than absence of hostility; it is fullness of life in communion with God, enjoyed in complete security. (CSB)

God pledges Himself to bring back the harmony and bliss He once provided in an unmarred paradise. His flock will know the peace that “surpasses all understanding” (Php 4:7). Israel’s restoration is the rescue from estrangement from God. He will welcome the redeemed into the eternal Kingdom of His beloved Son, where there are pleasures forevermore (Col 1:13; Ps 16:11). He heals and makes whole again the brokenness of human existence. Man can be at peace with God and with himself. Because its provisions will never be abrogated, Ezekiel calls it an everlasting covenant (cf 16:60; Is 24:5; 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40). (TLSB)

securely. As Israel of old was safe under the mighty hand of the Creator of the universe, so the combined forces of the fiercest foes will not be allowed to harm God’s people of the new covenant. The Kingdom of great David’s greater Son will not be confined to the borders of the Holy Land, promised and given to the 12 tribes of Israel. His blessings will flow in ever-growing streams of living water to all parts of the sin-cursed world. (TLSB)

34:26 *blessing.* Fruitful and nourishing for the flock. (TLSB)

showers in their season. Autumn rains, which signal the beginning of the rainy season, and spring rains, which come at the end (cf. Jer 5:24). (CSB)

Verses 25 and 26 use language easy to understand for ancient people who made their living by farming or raising sheep. For them ideal conditions would include the absence of wild beasts to attack the flocks or shepherds, rain at the proper time so the land would be productive, fields and orchards free from attackers who might destroy and steal, and no domination by foreign powers who would demand the produce of the land. This description reminds us of the one time when such conditions existed – back in Eden. For most of us who aren't farmers or shepherds the ideal existence in communion with and under all the blessings of the Lord might be described in terms different from those above. But Ezekiel's point is obvious. Under the reign of the Messiah, everything will be restored to perfection. (PBC)

showers of blessing. † Blessing, promised to all nations through Abraham (Ge 12:1–3), is beautifully symbolized in the life-giving effects of rain. (CSB)

For the bliss of restored communion with God. (TLSB)

34:27 *bars of their yoke.* The bars were wooden pegs inserted down through holes in the yoke and tied below the animal's neck with cords (Isa 58:6) to form a collar (cf. 30:18; Lev 26:13; Jer 27:2; 28:10–13). The entire picture represents foreign domination. (CSB)

34:29 *renowned plantations.* God assures abundant harvests for them. (TLSB)

34:30 *I, the LORD their God, am with them ... they ... are my people.* † Covenant language (cf. 11:20; Ex 6:7; Hos 1:9). (CSB)

34:31 *human sheep.* God's eternal plan of redemption will get under way again when He gathers the Israelites, scattered like lost sheep on the hills, and brings them back from exile to their homeland. From their midst will arise a Prince of the lineage of David (Lk 2:4). Not an earthly king of limited authority, He will found a spiritual kingdom. His subjects will represent broad racial and national affiliation. Even the poorest and the weakest will have all they need for time and eternity. The injustice and suffering of a sinful, heartless world will be left behind when the King says: "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34 He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:1–18; Heb 13:20–21; 1Pt 2:25; 5:4). (TLSB)

34:25–31 God describes the tranquility of the new creation. A world like this once existed, a long time ago in the Garden of Eden. However, the bars of Adam and Eve's yoke (v 27) enslaved the Israelites, just as they enslaved you and me. Because of sin, we find ourselves bound to an endless cycle of hopelessness. Yet, God frees us from bondage through Jesus Christ, who breaks slavery's yoke and delivers us from the hand of Satan. • Heavenly Father, we are famished for righteousness. Shower Your blessings upon us, and direct us to the verdant pastures of Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)