

# **Ezekiel 34: the Shepherd Prince**

## **Leader Guide- 12/20/09**



**Small Group Study** – Each week our small groups team works alongside Pastor J.D. to create a small group study which corresponds to his sermon that week. The study examines a related passage of scripture to the text he preaches through with the goal of challenging small groups to grow both in their confidence in studying the bible and in their application of the truths brought out in the sermon.

**Introduction:** During the last few weeks of sermons and small groups, Summit has been studying the prophecies that foretell Jesus Christ. As the sermons have mentioned, about 25% of the Old Testament are prophetic texts. Like Isaiah 9, many of these prophetic texts have meaning and instruction for the original hearers, providing insight into God's activity in the world, while also foretelling the future. Seeing the big picture of God's activity, present and future, is meant to help God's people be "firm in their faith (Is. 7:9)."

The principle guiding the "foretold" series is expressed in Luke 24:44: "these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." When the Apostles preached about Jesus, as seen in Acts and the ministry of Paul in the synagogues throughout the lands of Exiled Jews, they almost always did so with references to the OT. Every page of the New Testament has either a quotation or a direct reference to the Old Testament. This connection is crucial to understanding the Apostles' message about Jesus. Knowing the Old Testament will provide you with a textured picture of Jesus and the lofty expectations that He fulfilled as the Christ/Messiah. Seeing this prophecy fulfilled gives us assurance that God is in control of history and will eventually fulfill every promise.

**Context:** Ezekiel 34 talks about the coming Messiah as a New David, which is a theme of Isaiah, Jeremiah, other prophets, and the Gospels. Verse 23 says "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd." These words were written about 400 years after David's glorious reign on Israel's throne. David had been a shepherd before he was king, and his leadership style reflected this. As a king he was attentive to the will of God and the needs of the people.

In the centuries leading up to Ezekiel's day, unfortunately, such attentive rulers were few and far between as the kingdom fell into moral, spiritual, and physical decline. As a result, God took His protective hand away from Jerusalem and sent the people away into Exile. The Temple was defiled and the people of Israel were scattered throughout the nations. False prophets assured a quick return (Jer. 29), but Ezekiel and Jeremiah preached that the rest of Israel would fall and stay in Exile for a long time. Ezekiel's prophecy proved true (hence, His words are prophetic Scripture according to the standards in Deuteronomy 18). Ezekiel 33-48, however, reminds the people of the mercies of God which will eventually result in a glorious salvation.

**Theme:** The merciful act described in Ezekiel 34 is that God will send a leader who cares for the people like a shepherd attending his sheep. God Himself will be their shepherd, but He will also send a human shepherd like David. This David-like Prince will rule the land in peace and with righteousness. He will gather the lost and be attentive in caring for the people. God's return will mean mercy for the people, but judgment for those rulers who have been a burden to the people. The bad shepherds will be removed from their place of authority.

The Gospels record that God sends Jesus to be the Good Shepherd (John 10). Throughout Luke, we see Jesus oppose the Pharisees and teachers who have laid a heavy burden on an already burdened people. Jesus says that His own ministry is to "seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)" and teaches parables describing his ministry this way (Luke 15). He also eats with sinners and preaches to exiles. Just like the Shepherd mentioned in Ezekiel 34, Jesus has lifted up the humble, gathered the lost, bound up the hurt, opposed the bad shepherds, and preached good news to the poor. These are the recurring themes of Luke's Gospel, which confirm Jesus' identity as the Ezekiel 34 Good Shepherd.

**Prayer:**

- Pray that our souls, and the souls of our friends and neighbors would find rest in Jesus
- Pray Summit church would be receptive to Christ's leadership and attentive to needs in the community
- Pray for more Christ-like leaders in churches and communities all around the world

Aim: Entrust your life to Jesus' leadership, like a sheep to its shepherd.

Study Questions:

What have you been learning about the Old Testament in these last few weeks?

[34:1-10]

In your own words, what are the bad leaders doing to the people of Israel?

Verse 34:2, they take care of themselves. Verse 4, they neglected the people.

What are some of the results of their bad leadership?

The sheep wandered away from their home. This first is a metaphor of the Spiritual "backsliding" that happened among the people of Israel in the centuries after David. With no one to guide the sheep, they left. The second metaphor pictures the Exile. With no one to protect the sheep, they were carried off into other nations.

[34:11-16]

How will God oppose the bad shepherds?

God's activity will mean mercy for the people, but judgment for the leaders. Their authority will be taken away from them and they will face the wrath of God. This, too, is a mercy for the people, who suffered under their leadership for centuries.

Read Luke 4:16-21 and answer: how does Jesus' ministry fulfill Ezekiel 34?

This is Jesus' announcement about His ministry at the beginning. Verses 18-19 are a quote from Isaiah 61, but could have easily come from Ezekiel 34. Next time you read Luke, notice the perpetual fulfillment of Ez. 34.

[34:17-31]

What verses in this passage show that God is an attentive Shepherd?

Don't miss verse 16 in this answer. He will bind up the weak and search for the lost. God will also feed the sheep and bring them rest. He will return them from Exile and break the bars of their oppression.

What will the new David's ministry be like?

Verse 23-24, the new David will tend to the people and presumably lead the way God would if He was a human leader in their midst.

How would this prophecy be meaningful for those who originally heard it?

Though this prophecy would not be fulfilled for 600 years, and even then only partially, this chapter would have provided a reminder for what godly leadership looks like. Hopefully, this would have inspired leaders among the Israelites that would be compassionate with their flock, especially as they are living in Exile. The prophecy gave them hope that God would eventually act on their behalf to remove their circumstances. When they did see Jesus come and respond to them as the Shepherd foretold in Ezekiel, those who saw it would have had their faith in God's control of history confirmed deeply in their hearts. Thus, we can be sure that the ultimate fulfillment of living physically in God's presence and rid of our exilic circumstances will come true!

Read John 10:1-18; how else does Jesus' ministry fulfill Ezekiel 34?

He provides guidance to those who obey His voice, He provides protection as the gate (a shepherd in those days would sleep in the opening of the sheep pen to make sure no animal got in or out of that pen), He has an intimate knowledge of their lives, and (despite that intimate knowledge of us) he lays down his life for His sheep.

Why are the people compared to sheep?

JD has preached on this metaphor often in recent years. This is your chance to discuss it.

Why do people need a shepherd?

Opinion question. It will not be hard to find contemporary examples of being spiritually lost.

How can Summit provide good spiritual leadership to this community?