

## EZEKIEL 34:1-31 | SHEPHERDS AND FLOCK

## EZEKIEL 34:1-22 | FALSE SHEPHERDS AND FALSE FLOCK

- Verses 1-4 - The neglect of the false shepherds
  - The shepherds are the leaders of the nation, both religious and political (a division difficult to make in ancient Israel).
  - God pronounces **woe** (v. 2) upon these shepherds for feeding themselves and neglecting the flock.
  - The shepherds did nothing that a shepherd *should* do, and (as is often the case) used their position to enrich themselves, doing so **with force and with cruelty** (v. 4).
- Verses 5-6 - worthless shepherds
  - Sheep without a shepherd will be **scattered** and become **meat to all the beasts of the field** (v. 5). The shepherds should be the ones who seek for them (see Luke 15:4), but of these “shepherds” **none did search or seek after them** (v. 6).
  - It is of interest that verse 6 says that the sheep were **scattered upon all the face of the earth**, giving indication that God makes reference to the ten northern tribes, and chastises the rulers of Judah for not going to find those sheep to bring them into the fold.
- Verses 7-10 - The Lord’s oath
  - The Lord makes an oath, saying, **As I live...**(v. 8), He will **require my flock at their hand** (v. 10) and will remove them from their position.
- Verses 11-16 - The gathering of the flock
  - The Lord Himself will **both search my sheep, and seek them out** (v. 11). Note the emphasis of the repetition, **I, even I** (v.11), with the word **even** added for the sake of English.
  - The Lord Himself has never searched for His sheep, to date. In Luke 19:10 he stated that **the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.**
    - The **Son of man** title is used in reference to the Kingdom/reign role of Jesus, giving indication that this entire section of scripture will be fulfilled in the last days.
    - Recall that Jesus said that in the last days **he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds...**(Matt. 24:31).
  - To further support the concept that this is a *last days* prophecy, note that verse 12 says that the Lord will seek His sheep **as a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep.**
    - This could *only* refer to the time in which Jesus was or will be on earth.
    - This, then, would make **the cloudy and dark day** (v. 12) to be a reference to the tribulation, a time in which all faithful Jews will be forced to scatter for their own safety.

- Verses 13-15, then are beautiful pictures of the millennium. Because they use sheep as a picture of people, they are clearly not literal, but the picture of abundance is no doubt literal (for what else could it be?).
- In verse 16 God continues the blessing of the return of Israel, but also promises destruction and judgment of **the fat and the strong** (v. 16). Compare Matthew 19:24.
- Two thoughts for consideration:
  - Are there *any* promises in the Bible that promise a last-days return of Israel to the land *prior* to the ingathering at the Second Coming? If not, have prophecy teachers misunderstood the current return to be the final return?
  - Are *all* references to sheep / flock / shepherding related to Israel and thus unrelated to the church, or is it an illustration that is used in a broader scope that *can* include the church? If it is narrow, then this would help students of the word avoid misapplication of shepherd/sheep/flock passages to the church.
- Verses 17-22 - The coming judgment
  - God speaks to **my flock** (v. 17) about His coming judgment.
    - While these are words to the flock, they are not *about* the flock. Rather, they words about judgment **between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats** (v. 17).
    - This would make this *appear* to be a reference either to the leaders of Israel (most likely in context) or a reference to the judgment of the nations (most likely in prophetic understanding).
    - Note that by verse 18 the **you** pronoun is not **my flock** of verse 17, but the **he goats** of the verse 17 judgment.
  - Note that the Hebrew word translated **cattle** is simply *small livestock* and could be translated *between sheep and sheep*, or even *between sheep and goats* as in Matthew 25:32, especially since a ram is a male-sheep and a he-goat is a male goat.
  - Verses 18-21 speak directly to the **he goats** of verse 17.
  - In this coming judgment, God will **save my flock** from the goats. It is virtually impossible to equate this prophesied judgement with anything other than that of Matthew 25. The only real question is whether the animals involved in judgment involve the Jewish nation or the Gentile nations.

#### EZEKIEL 34:23-31 | TRUE SHEPHERDS AND TRUE FLOCK

- Verses 23-24 - The Millennial Shepherd
  - God **will set up one shepherd** (v. 23), clearly a messianic reference. Here the Messiah is referred to as **my servant David** who will **feed them and be their shepherd**. The reference to Messiah as David is also seen in Jeremiah 30:9 and Hosea 3:5. David is a *type* of Messiah, but not the Messiah.
  - In that day, **I the Lord will be their God** (v. 24), a prophecy that will not be fulfilled until the Kingdom.
  - Note that *amillennialists* reject this, relegating it to an inner/spiritual reality alone. *Postmillennialist* believe that this era is built by the Christian church. Only *premillennialists* believe that this is done by the Lord Himself.

- Verses 25-31 - The Millennium Described
  - The **covenant of peace** is also mentioned in Ezekiel 37:26, where it is **an everlasting covenant**.
    - This is surely the **new covenant** mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31.
    - And if this is the new covenant, then a quick read of verses 25-31 would quickly alert the reader that *we are currently under no such covenant*, and the reader would reject all ideas that place the church of today under the new covenant (which belongs exclusively to the nation of Israel future).
  - The **showers of blessing** (v. 26) are symbolic of the ultimate blessing and bounty of the coming kingdom/millennial age. This will be a post-curse age in which **the earth shall yield her increase** (v. 27) and Israel **shall no more be a prey to the heathen** (v. 28).
  - Note that at this time the world **shall know that I am the Lord** (v. 27).
    - This study has speculated that the previous instances in which this phrase (or similar) has been used are all eschatological (to be fulfilled in the last days).
    - The use of the term here all but solidifies that argument. There are 51 times in Ezekiel alone that this phrase is used.
  - The **plant of renown** that God will raise up is the Messiah. Compare Isaiah 4:2, 11:1, and Psalm 1.