

Ezk 34 – Shepherds and the Shepherd

What does God think of national leaders who use their position for selfish gain, or who force their way on the people and cause harm to those they are supposed to care for? What hope does God give to people who suffer under that kind of leader? We find out in Ezk 34, as God delivered a message to selfish shepherds.

Who are these shepherds the prophet talked about? God used that term in reference to kings, judges, elders, and priests. Anyone in a position of leadership was considered a shepherd. In 2 Sam 5:2, King David was reminded, “In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” In this passage it seems to be directed at all the appointed leaders of the nation.

Selfish Shepherds – feeding themselves instead of the sheep. “You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.” These selfish shepherds weren’t interested in caring for the people, but were instead seeking how they could be enriched personally. When they become selfish, the people suffer. We often see this very thing among our political class today.

What were some of the things these shepherds of the people should have been doing? We find them in v. 4 – strengthening the weak, healing the sick, binding up the injured, bringing back those who strayed, seeking the lost. In other words, using their authority, wisdom, and resources to help their citizens have safe and secure livelihoods. Instead of seeking the best for their people, God said “with force and harshness you have ruled them.” President Eisenhower, who was also a 5 star general, said “You don’t lead by hitting people over the head—that’s assault, not leadership.” Too often people in positions of authority think they need to prove their power over others, to force people to follow them because they know what is best. In reality, if you have to force something on people, they don’t see a need for it.

So, what did God say was the result of these selfish shepherds over His people? Verse 5 – “So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My people were scattered; 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.”

Verse 7 God declares His judgment to the shepherds. “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, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 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.” God said to these shepherds, “You’re fired – and you will answer for all my sheep that you have lost.” We can be assured that God will judge those who abuse their power and the people they should care for. Justice will be served, in God’s time and in God’s way.

This is where it really gets good. God then announces that He will be the Shepherd: “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 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. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land.” What a great promise! This is the same God who scattered Israel among the nations because of their sin, and now He says He will be the shepherd who searches them out to gather them back into the land. This is God saying that He will remain faithful to the covenant He made with Abraham. Israel is His chosen people, and though they were unfaithful, He remained faithful. He was promising to restore them to the land, and that was fulfilled in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

God says that He will feed His sheep with good pasture (v. 14), and they will lie down in good grazing land and rich pasture. The injured will be healed, the weak will be strengthened, and the bullies will be destroyed. (v. 20) Then God gave a great promise, “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. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them.” We know this is talking about Jesus, and His great work of salvation, but there is so much to cover, we will look into this promise more next time.

For now, we have the wonderful reminder that God kept His promises to His people Israel. He judged the wicked leaders who caused His people such harm, and He brought His people back into the land after their captivity was finished. We can count on God today to bring justice and judgment on those who cause harm to us, though it may not be on the schedule or in the way we expect. We can count on God to remember His promises and carry them out. We can rely on His care and protection, even when we are enduring mistreatment and hardship. We can be thankful that He has sent His Son Jesus to be our Good Shepherd, to give His life for the sheep, so that we have assurance of salvation.