

# Under New Management

## Ezekiel 34

We're in a study of a period of Israel's history called the exile. By now we are aware that the monarchy form of government only worked as long as the leadership was godly leadership. But what God predicted when Israel demanded a king did eventually take place. Power corrupted and stability was lost and the people's covenant relationship with God was abandoned.

According to the covenant they could only have occupation of the land if they obeyed the covenant, so they were conquered and exiled.

Now that we are in the fourth section of the Book of Ezekiel we are looking particularly at God's promise for bringing them back to the land to live in covenant with Him. But the question is what is going to be different about when they get back. The spiritual renewal that God is at work doing only holds out hope for a generation. So what is God going to be up to that is new and different?

You have probably heard the familiar definition of insanity: Doing the same things and expecting different results.

Before Judah was conquered God had promised through Isaiah and Jeremiah that at the end of the 70 years God would bring back the descendants of Abraham to the Promised Land. 70 years was a long enough time to have basically a complete turnover of population.

Similar to the 40 years in the wilderness after they left Egypt, God would start over with a whole new group of people. But guess what? They were still people. They were sinners who could be drawn away into sin and rebellion.

There is nothing that could be done really about that. He was working with and through human beings and that was not something that could change. Turn in your bibles to Ezekiel 34.

In Ezekiel 34 we learn that God has some new things in mind for a new day. And it has to do with leadership.

The title of my message is "**Under New Management**".

Most people know when a business starts up again under a new name if it still has the same management it is going to still have the same limitations, expertise, decision making framework etc. For things to really change for the Israelites, changes were going to be needed as to how they were shepherded. And that is what Ezekiel 34 is all about.

The text we're going to work through today has God making four promises related to the leadership of His people. The leadership term of this text is "shepherds" and God uses the metaphor of a flock.

**Promise #1: God promises to hold shepherds accountable.**

### **Ezek 34:-1-10**

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? 3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. 4 You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. 6 My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. 7 " 'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 8 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: 10 This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the

shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.

The meaning of this passage is simple. Part of the reason for the exile of God's flock was that the leadership of the country lost sight of their primary responsibility - to look after the people. They became self-serving and looked after their own interests, and it resulted in God's people losing their way.

People need leadership. Without vision, the people perish says the proverbs. The key characteristic of the shepherds that God is talking about is selfishness. Selfishness at the top of anything winds up hurting everything and everyone.

So the shepherds have been fired. And when God brings His people back they are going to be **under new management**. And that is going to be a good thing for who?

The average citizen? Yes. The nation as a whole? Yes. God's kingdom purposes? You bet!

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT! But what is that going to look like?

**Promise #2: God promises to look after His people Himself.**

**Ezek 34:11-16** " 'For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: **I myself** will search for my sheep and look after them. 12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, **so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them** from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. 13 **I will bring them out** from the nations and gather them from the countries, and **I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them** on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. 14 **I will tend them** in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 **I myself will tend my sheep** and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. 16 **I will search for the lost** and bring back the strays. **I will bind up the injured** and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. **I will shepherd the flock with justice.**

More or less, this is how things were before Israel demanded a king and rejected God as their king. God allowed them to have what they asked for and they got what He predicted. Leaders that would eventually become corrupt.

It appears to me in this text that He is promising Himself to His people in a way that the exiles had never known before.

What God is offering here is matchless and priceless. This is what He means when He says I want you to be my people and me to be your God.

This is not a God who desires to look down from above but remain distant. This is not a God who wants to have someone bring Him a report now and again about how things are going.

What is emphasized in this is the personal involvement of God looking after those who are His.

But the truth is that we often resist this leadership. We want to provide ourselves. We want to believe we are strong and confident and capable. But we are like sheep. We are weaker than we think. We are more vulnerable than we'd like to believe.

Only a humble people who put their faith in God can have and enjoy what He is promising here. Let me read some of these verses again.

**v. 15—16** 15 **I myself will tend my sheep** and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. 16 **I will search for the lost** and bring back the strays. **I will bind up the injured** and strengthen the weak.

Perhaps this sounds inviting to you. Have you heard or read God talk like this? Maybe you are up for being under new management?

**Promise #3: God would set over His people the ultimate shepherd.**

The passage at this point becomes Messianic, and what God is promising next is not for the day when they return but a day to come down the road.

There never was another king in Israel after they occupied the land again. There was a royal line, but God never allowed there to be a monarchy of the old sort ever again. From the days of the exile forward they were under new management. But there would be a shepherd of a different order and sort who would lead God's people. The next shepherd king was going to be God Himself incarnated into human flesh. Listen carefully.

**Ezekiel 34:23-24** I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. 24 I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

Now when this ultimately took place God's people were truly under new management. The Christmas story is the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy. The son of David was the Son of God. And it was this passage that Jesus had in mind in John 10.

Turn in your bibles to John 10 would you.

**John 10:11-16** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Here Jesus is saying I am the one who Ezekiel and other prophets said would come. I am the new management and I am the kind of shepherd king that won't ever abuse the sheep. The kind of leadership that God's people needed, God's people have had for 2000 years. Jesus and the Holy Spirit switched places more or less, but since God set over His people the Shepherd King, the Son of David, the kingdom has not faltered.

Yes, individuals have. Yes, groups have. But never again has God's people as a whole been in the condition that Israel was during the period of the exile and before.

Jesus said that He not only lays down His life for the sheep. In John 6 He says of all that the Father has given to me, I have not lost one.

My friends, the new management that you need and that I need is none other than Jesus Christ. And you are who Jesus was talking about when He said "I have other sheep not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they hear my voice and they will become one flock."

Are you hearing the voice of the Shepherd today? Are you hearing His voice? If you are, come to Him. Right now come to Him for your rest. Come to Him for your food. Come to Him to see. Come to Him with your brokenness.

There is one more promise made by God in this passage. And this promise has yet to be fulfilled. This promise relates to the eternal covenant.

**Promise #4: God promised His people an eternal covenant of peace.**

**Ezek 34:25-31** " 'I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. 26 I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. 27 The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. 28 They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. 29 I will provide for them a land

renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. 30 Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. 31 You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are my people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.' "

During this covenant there will be no enemies of God. No beasts. There will be eternal provision called showers of blessing.

In the new heaven and new earth there will be no lack of food. No enemies. No battle. No war or sickness, Revelation says.

"Under New Management" will find its ultimate fulfillment in the covenant of peace that we like to refer to as heaven.

So what God was promising to these exiles was a new day. And that new day would unfold over many centuries. And that last one is coming.

And during this covenant there will be no need for a shepherd who binds up the broken and heals the sick. We will be at peace in every way.

We are His people and He will bring us to that covenant. He desires it. And our souls long for it.

And the one who ushers it in will be the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Jesus Christ.

Life is in His name.

Peace with God comes through faith in Him.

And today if you hear His voice do not harden your heart. Humble yourself before Him and be reminded that you can be, or are, His sheep.

Let's pray.