

Small Group Guide
Our Good Shepherd
Cleary Baptist Church May 8, 2011 Ezekiel 34

Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel was written during the time of Judah's exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and most of Jerusalem's prominent people, including Ezekiel's family, were taken into exile (see Jeremiah 29:2) and placed in a refugee settlement. Apparently many believed this exile was only a temporary blip on the screen of their glorious history as God's people (see Jeremiah 28). However, Jeremiah had already informed the people (Jeremiah 29:1-23) that they were going to be in exile for quite sometime. Five years later Yahweh called Ezekiel to be a prophet who would announce God's judgment against Jerusalem, addressing his words primarily to the exiles in Babylon (Ezekiel 3:1, 11). The book contains a variety of prophetic visions and oracles, which Ezekiel presented over a twenty-two year period (593-571 B.C.). The structure of the book has three clear parts:

- Ezekiel 1-24 contains oracles from the five-year period preceding the siege of Jerusalem (588 B.C.). Yahweh's holy wrath against His people's idolatries would cause Jerusalem to be destroyed, including her temple, despite the people's disbelief and protest.
- Ezekiel 25-32 contains a series of oracles against surrounding nations. Yahweh is the sovereign God over all the nations, so they, too, will experience judgment because of their idolatries and sins.
- Ezekiel 33-48 features oracles, which cover a sixteen-year period after the fall of Jerusalem. Here we see that Yahweh is a God of great mercy and compassion, who intends to restore His people for the sake of His name and glory among the nations.

The focus of this study guide will be on Ezekiel 34. God has allowed Babylon to destroy Judah and scatter the people in exile because the shepherd kings of Judah ignored the people, destroyed them, and did not protect them from predators (34:1-10; see Jeremiah 23:1-8). To encourage his listeners, Ezekiel assured them that the scattered people were God's people, sheep in His flock. Jerusalem's destruction allowed Him to remove these evil leaders. One day God will care for the sheep, bring them back from foreign nations into the pleasant and peaceful land, feed them, and nurse the sick (34:11-16). God will judge between the good and the evil who treat others unjustly (34:17-22). Then God will set one king over them, the messianic seed of David who will serve God. His eternal covenant of peace will bring fruitfulness to the land, security, and a heartfelt acknowledgement of God's relationship to them (34:23-31; compare Lev. 26:4-13; Hos. 2:17-23; Jer. 30-31). With this vision of the future Ezekiel was trying to convince the exiles to believe in what God would do, in spite of their discouraging situation in exile.

Study the Text...

Prophecy against the Shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-10)

God charges Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. The rulers of the people were often called shepherds (cf. Ps. 78:71-72; Isa. 44:28; 63:11; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:34-38). They were to be strong, caring leaders who guarded their nation like a flock. The image of the people of God as a flock of sheep occurs several times throughout the Bible. In this oracle, the current shepherds - i.e. the rulers of Israel - are rebuked for their self-interest and lack of care for the people. In this section Ezekiel first explained the sins of the shepherds (Ezek. 34:1-6), then pronounced judgment on them (Ezek. 34:7-10).

Read Ezekiel 34:1-10.

Group Discussion...

- Who are the shepherds of Israel? (Also note Psalm 78:7-72; Isaiah 44:28; 63:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:34-38)
- What were the specific sins God held against the shepherds of Israel? (Also note Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 22:25; Micah 3:1-3)
- What were the consequences of the shepherds sin and failure to shepherd the people of Israel (34:5-10)?
- Verse 5 says that the people “were scattered” and “became food for all the wild beasts.” What does this mean? (Also note Leviticus 26:33; Deuteronomy 28:64)
- Why does God say the people were scattered?
- It’s easy to look down on the people of Israel as if we ourselves are above such sins. In what ways does your own life reflect the sins of the people as described in 34:1-4?
- What do these verses teach us about the responsibility held by those who lead others spiritually?
- What aspects of God’s character shine through in these verses?

Study the Text

God, the Shepherd, gathers His flock (Ezekiel 34:11-31)

What the people’s shepherds failed to accomplish because of their selfish greed (34:1-10), God would bring to pass. He would be the people’s shepherd by personally intervening and caring for His flock (34:11-16), judging between His sheep (34:17-24), and establishing a covenant of peace (34:25-31). This covenant of peace is directly tied to the appointment of His servant David as the new shepherd over the people. As in other oracles, the name is symbolic. The reference to David does not mean that the ancient king David will be literally resurrected and set up as ruler. Its primary force is that the coming ruler will have the exemplary attributes of David—someone in whom the Lord delighted and who triumphed over the foes of Israel. David is also referred to in 37:24–26, where his rule is described as lasting forever. The same passage also refers to the everlasting covenant of peace, which the Lord will make with his people, a theme almost identical to that in 34:25–30. Both passages are clearly looking forward not just to Israel’s immediate

future but also to her long-term future. God would make peace with the people, and he would appoint a shepherd prince to rule them. The oracle brings a promise of hope. Even if God's people were scattered and oppressed they would one day receive justice. Readers of the NT will see that day as the time of the return of Jesus Christ, a promise sealed by his first coming, death and resurrection.

Read Ezekiel 34:11-31

Group Discussion. . .

- How does God respond to the shepherd's failure of leading the people of Israel? What are His logical steps of action as outlined in the text? (also note Ezekiel 11:17, 20:41; Jeremiah 23:3; Psalm 23; Micah 2:12, 4:6-8)
- How does Yahweh's shepherding style differ from that of the people's shepherds?
- What is God's first course of action after gathering His scattered sheep (34:13-14)? Why is this important, particularly when the historical setting of the book is taken into account?
- How does God say He will exercise justice?
- How will God differentiate between the sheep? (34:17, 20, 22; also Ezekiel 20:38)
- What will God do after judging the individual sheep? (34:23-24)
- Who is the new shepherd that God will appoint over His people? (also note Ezekiel 37:24-26; Jeremiah 23:5-6)
- How is this new shepherd described? What is the title given to this new shepherd? (34:24)
- What is the significance of this title given to David? Do you believe this new shepherd is a reference to Christ? Why or why not?
- What will come as a result of the new shepherd being appointed? (34:25-31)
- How is this new covenant of peace described? What are the results of this new covenant of peace that God establishes with His people?
- What is the covenant of peace a specific reference to? Where else in Scripture have we seen this covenant mentioned? (note Jeremiah 31:31-34)
- The imagery of the Lord as our shepherd is found throughout Scripture. What are the implications of the Lord being the shepherd of your life? How have you seen the Lord as the shepherd of your life?
- Elsewhere in Scripture God differentiates between the sheep and the goats (see Matthew 25:31-46). His sheep are primarily characterized by what qualities?
- What New Testament passages does this text (Ezekiel 34:11-24) bring to mind? (Luke 15:4-7, 19:10)
- Spend some time sharing how God the shepherd gathered you to Himself when you had been scattered from Him because of your sin. In other words, if you have yet to do so have everyone in your group briefly share their conversion testimony.

Study the Text...

Jesus, Our great shepherd (John 10:1-18)

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God rebuked the evil shepherds (or leaders) of the nation Israel. He spoke of a coming day when they will be judged, and when God Himself will gather His scattered flock by means of a new shepherd, namely the Messiah (“My servant David”, Ezekiel 34:24). In John 10, Jesus boldly claims to be this promised “Good Shepherd,” and in contrast to His shepherding, He exposes and indicts the Jewish religious leaders (especially the Pharisees) as wicked shepherds, who care not for the hurting and troubled sheep and who use and abuse the sheep of God’s flock for their own personal gain.

It is not difficult to see that Jesus looks upon the Pharisees before Him as the kind of shepherds Ezekiel’s condemned. Like Ezekiel 34, Jesus contrasts the bad shepherding of the Pharisees (as seen in their attitude towards the blind man in John 9) with the manner of His shepherding. Three common shepherding images are given to differentiate Jesus, the good shepherd, from the Jewish religious leaders.

Group Discussion...

- The Shepherd and the Stranger (John 10:1-6)
- The Shepherd and Thieves and Robbers (John 10:7-10)
- The Shepherd and the Hired Hand (John 10:11-18). Jesus uses these contrasts to reveal in great detail what it means for Him to be our Good Shepherd.
- What are the major differences between how the sheep relate to the shepherd as opposed to the stranger? (John 10:1-6)
- Who is the shepherd and stranger referring to within the context of the passage? (also note John 9)
- What does it mean that the sheep “know his voice”? (John 10:4)
- What is the overall point or meaning of the parable of the shepherd and stranger? (John 10:1-6) What does it teach us about Jesus, our good shepherd?
- What are the major differences between how the shepherd relates to the sheep as compared to the thieves and robbers? (John 10:7-10)
- Who are the thieves and robbers a reference to within the context of the passage? (also note John 9)
- What does it mean that Jesus came that we might “have life and have it abundantly”? (John 10:10)
- What does the parable of the shepherd and thieves and robbers teach us about Jesus’ character? (John 10:7-10)
- What are the major differences between how the shepherd and hired hand relate to the sheep? (John 10:11-18)
- How is Jesus’ care for His sheep demonstrated within the passage?
- What do verses 14 and 15 teach us about Jesus’ relationship to His sheep?
- What does the parable of the shepherd and thieves and robbers teach us about Jesus’ relationship toward us? (John 10:7-10)

- In what other ways, other than Jesus, do you seek to find an “abundant life”? (John 10:10)
- How well does God the Father know Jesus and Jesus know God the Father? (John 10:15) Jesus says this is a picture of how well Jesus knows us and we are to know Him. (John 10:14) How well do you really know Jesus? How can you continue to grow in your intimacy and knowledge of Christ?
- As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the ultimate standard for how we shepherd others (note Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:1-4). How does this passage challenge you as you seek to shepherd those God has entrusted to your care?
- In what ways does the shepherd imagery found in John 10 give you a new appreciation or even understanding of the cross?