EZEKIEL 34

The Shepherds and the Good Shepherd

> *"I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment."*
> EZEKIEL 34:16

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Ezekiel is an exile in Babylon, and the chapter before ended with the news he had waited years to hear: “The city has been taken” (33:21).

2. In the ancient Near East “shepherd” was a common title for a ruler, and Ezekiel’s word reaches the kings, princes, priests and prophets who led Judah into ruin.



Woe to the Shepherds

Leaders who fed themselves and not the flock

EZEKIEL 34:2

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that 'shepherd' covers civil leaders like Joshua and David as well as spiritual leaders, and Ezekiel's word includes both. Block, in Guzik: 'the shepherd holds office for the sake of the ruled.'

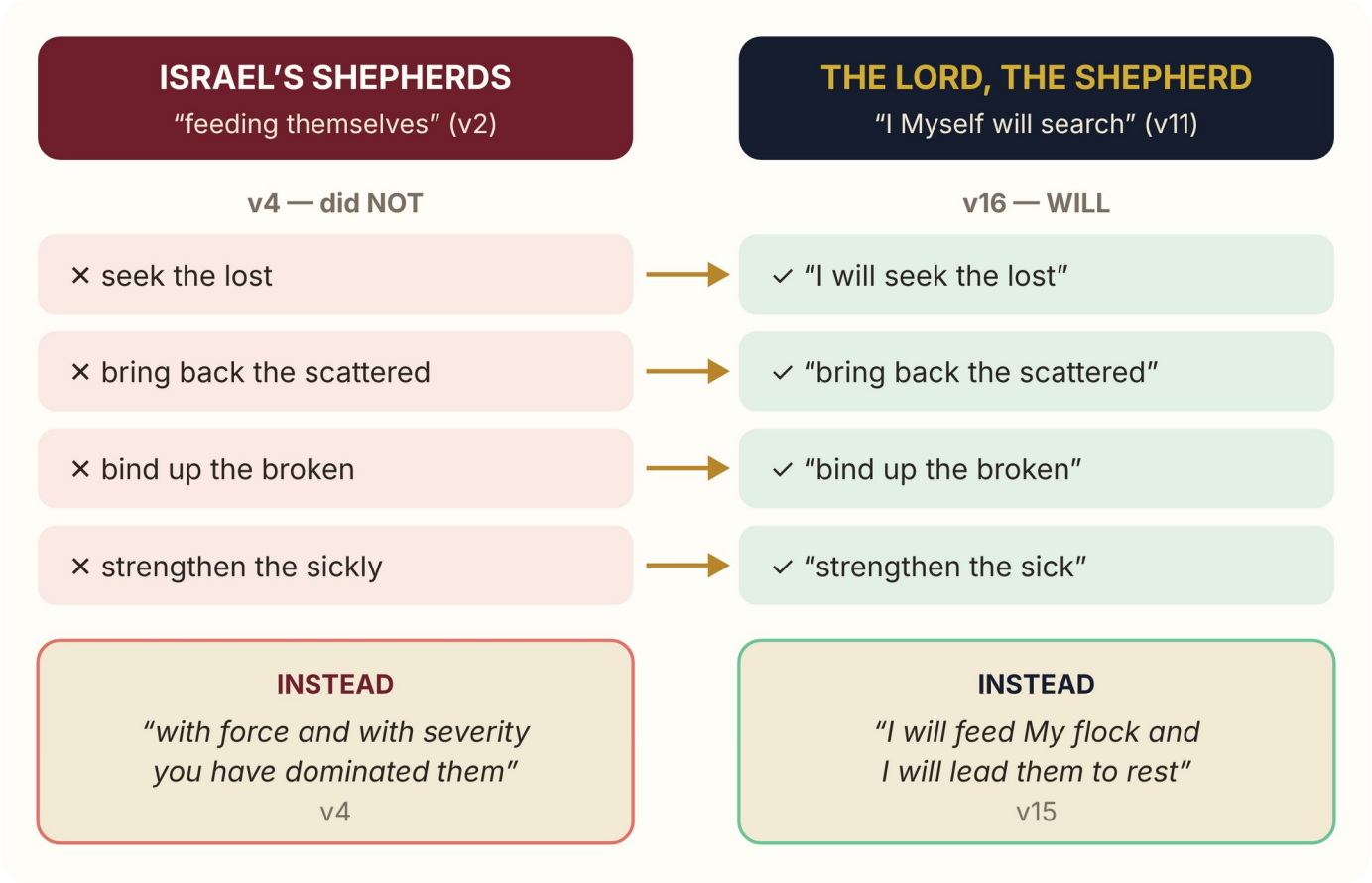
WHAT IT MEANS

Verse 4 is a shepherd's job description written in reverse: strengthen the sickly, heal the diseased, bind up the broken, bring back the scattered, seek the lost.

shepherd / feed (רָעָה)
RA'AH · "TO PASTURE, FEED"

Ra'ah means to pasture, tend or feed; as a noun it means a shepherd. The same word does both jobs in this chapter, which makes God's question bite: "Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"

The Shepherds vs. the Shepherd



Verse 16 answers verse 4 line for line: what Israel's shepherds refused to do, God Himself promises to do.

I Myself Will Search

God comes Himself to seek, gather, heal and lead to rest

EZEKIEL 34:11

For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik sees these promises as partly fulfilled in the return from Babylon, with a larger, final fulfillment still ahead.

WHAT IT MEANS

This is the heart of the chapter. God does not merely appoint better managers; He comes Himself.

search (דָּרַשׁ)
DARASH · "SEEK WITH CARE"

Darash means to seek with care, to inquire, to require. In verse 6 there was "no one to search or seek" for the sheep; in verse 11 God says, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."

Between One Sheep and Another

Bully sheep trample the pasture and muddy the water

EZEKIEL 34:17

"As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik says the sheep bear responsibility too, not only the leaders.

WHAT IT MEANS

Not all the blame belongs to the leaders. Some sheep were bullies. "Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures?"

fat (חֵלֶב)

CHELEB · "THE FAT, THE BEST"

Cheleb is the fat, the best portion. The bad shepherds ate it (v3), and now some of the sheep are doing the same — feeding in the good pasture, drinking the clear water, then trampling and fouling what is left.

One Shepherd, My Servant David

God sets His own Shepherd over the flock

EZEKIEL 34:23

"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik grants that most interpreters take 'David' to mean the Messiah, the Son of David, but he prefers a literal reading: David himself ruling Israel as prince under the Messiah in the Millennial Kingdom.

WHAT IT MEANS

David had been dead about four hundred years. So who is "one shepherd, My servant David" (v23)?

prince (נָשִׂיא)
NASI · "ONE LIFTED UP"

Nasi means one lifted up — a chief or prince. In verse 24 "My servant David will be prince among them."

A Covenant of Peace

Safety, showers of blessing, broken yokes, and a people called His own

EZEKIEL 34:25

"I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik ties this covenant of peace to the new covenant and the coming Kingdom (compare Isaiah 2 and Jeremiah 23).

WHAT IT MEANS

The chapter that began with sheep as "food for every beast of the field" (v5) ends with "they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid" (v28).

peace (שָׁלוֹם)
SHALOM · "COMPLETENESS, WELFARE"

Shalom means completeness, welfare, peace. Block, in Guzik, says it 'signifies much more than the absence of hostility or tension.'

What to carry from this chapter

1

A shepherd feeds.

In Hebrew the same word, ra‘ah, means both shepherd and feed, so a shepherd who feeds himself has stopped being a shepherd.

2

Office for the sake of the ruled.

Block, in Guzik, says the shepherd holds office for the people’s good, not his own.

3

“My flock.”

God keeps calling the people His sheep; leaders never own the people they serve (vv6–10).

4

God comes Himself.

“Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out” (v11) — not a better manager, but the Lord in person.

More to carry

5

Verse 16 answers verse 4.

Seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick: God does every duty the shepherds dropped.

6

Bully sheep are judged too.

Guzik notes the flock bears responsibility; strong sheep who trample and foul the pasture answer to God (vv17–22).

7

Prince, not king.

Guzik observes that “My servant David” is called nasi, prince, and reads him as ruling under the Messiah; most see the Messiah Himself.

8

Shalom is more than quiet.

The covenant of peace means completeness and welfare: safety, rain, fruit, freedom and no more fear (vv25–28).

Talk it through

1. Where has God made you a shepherd — and are you feeding the people there or feeding off them?

2. Which of the five duties in verse 4 do you most need to start doing for someone?

3. What does it mean to you that God says “I Myself will search” rather than sending someone else?

4. In what ways can a strong sheep make life hard for weaker ones in a church or group?

5. What yoke has God broken in your life, or what yoke are you asking Him to break?

CLOSING

The shepherds failed, but the Shepherd did not. He came Himself — searching, gathering, binding up the broken — and in Jesus He still goes after the one. You are the sheep of His pasture; you are a man, and He is your God.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.