

CHAPTER 34

The iniquities and calamities of God's Israel had been largely and pathetically lamented before, in this book. Now in this chapter the shepherds of Israel, their rulers both in church and state, are called to an account, as having been very much accessory to the sin and ruin of Israel, by their neglecting to do the duty of their place. Here is,

- I.** A high charge exhibited against them for their negligence, their unskillfulness, and unfaithfulness in the management of public affairs (v. 1-6 and v. 8).
- II.** Their discharge from their trust, for their insufficiency and treachery (v. 7-10).
- III.** A gracious promise that God would take care of his flock, though they did not, and that it should not always suffer as it had done by their mal-administrations (v. 11-16).
- IV.** Another charge exhibited against those of the flock that were fat and strong, for the injuries they did to those that were weak and feeble (v. 17-22).
- V.** Another promise that God would in the fulness of time send the Messiah, to be the great and good Shepherd of the sheep, who should redress all grievances and set every thing to rights with the flock (v. 23-31).

~~34~~ EZEKIEL 34:1-6

THE SHEPHERDS REPROVED

The prophecy of this chapter is not dated, nor any of those that follow it, till Ezekiel 40. It is most probable that it was delivered after the completing of Jerusalem's destruction, when it would be very seasonable to enquire into the causes of it.

- I.** The prophet is ordered to *prophesy against the shepherds of Israel* — the princes and magistrates, the priests and Levites, the great Sanhedrim or council of state, or whoever they were that had the direction of public

affairs in a higher or lower sphere, the kings especially, for there were two of them now captives in Babylon, who, as well as the people, must have their transgressions shown them, that they might repent, as Manasseh in his captivity. God has something to *say to the shepherds*, for they are but under-shepherds, accountable to him who is the great *Shepherd of Israel*, ~~200~~ Psalm 80:1. And that which he says is, *Woe to the shepherds of Israel!* Though they are shepherds, and shepherds of Israel, yet he must not spare them, must not flatter them. Note, If men's dignity and power do not, as they ought, keep them from sin, they will not serve to exempt them from reproof, to excuse their repentance, or to secure them from the judgments of God if they do not repent. We had a *woe to the pastors*, ~~201~~ Jeremiah 23:1. God will in a particular manner reckon with them if they be false to their trust.

II. He is here directed what to charge the shepherds with, in God's name, as the ground of God's controversy with them; for it is not a causeless quarrel. Two things they are charged with: —

1. That all their care was to advance and enrich themselves and to make themselves great. Their business was to take care of those that were committed to their charge: *Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?* No doubt they should; they betray their trust if they do not. Not that they are to put the meat into their mouths, but to provide it for them and bring them to it. But *these* shepherds made this the least of their care; they *fed themselves*, contrived every thing to gratify and indulge their own appetite, and to make themselves rich and great, fat and easy. They made sure of the profits of their places; they did *eat the fat*, the *cream* (so some), for he *that feeds a flock eats of the milk of it* (~~202~~ 1 Corinthians 9:7), and they made sure of the best of the milk. They made sure of the fleece, and *clothed themselves with the wool*, getting into their hands as much as they could of the estates of their subjects, yea, and *killed those that were well fed*, that what they had might be fed upon, as Naboth was put to death for his vineyard. Note, There is a woe to those who are in public trusts, but consult only their own private interest, and are more inquisitive about the benefice than about the office, what money is to be got than what good to be done. It is an old complaint, *All seek their own*, and too many *more than their own*.

2. That they took no care for the benefit and welfare of those that were committed to their charge: *You feed not the flock*. They neither knew how

to do it, so ignorant were they, nor would they take any pains to do it, so lazy and slothful were they; nay, they never desired nor designed it, so treacherous and unfaithful were they.

(1.) They did not do their duty to those of the flock that were distempered, did not strengthen them, nor heal them, nor bind them up, v. 4. When any of the flock were sick or hurt, worried or wounded, it was all one to them whether they lived or died; they never looked after them. The princes and judges took no care to right those that suffered wrong or to shelter injured innocency. They took no care of the poor to see them provided for; they might starve, for them. The priests took no care to instruct the ignorant, to rectify the mistakes of those that were in error, to warn the unruly, or to comfort the feeble-minded. The ministers of state took no care to check the growing distempers of the kingdom, which threatened the vitals of it. Things were amiss, and out of course, every where, and nothing was done to rectify them.

(2.) They did not do their duty to those of the flock that were dispersed, that were driven away by the enemies that invaded the country, and were forced to seek for shelter where they could find a place, or that *wandered* of choice upon *the mountains and hills* (v. 6), where they were exposed to the beasts of prey and became *meat to them*, v. 5. Every one is ready to seize a waif and stray. Some went abroad and begged, some went abroad and traded, and thus the country became thin of inhabitants, and was weakened and impoverished, and wanted hands both in the fields of corn and in the fields of battle, both in harvest and in war: *My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth*, v. 6. And they were never enquired after, were never encouraged to return to their own country: *None did search or seek after them. Nay, with force and cruelty they ruled them*, which drove more away, and discouraged those that were driven away from all thoughts of returning. *Their case is bad who have reason to expect better treatment among strangers than in their own country. It may be meant of those of the flock that went astray from God and their duty; and the priests, that should have taught the good knowledge of the Lord, used no means to convince and reclaim them, so that they became an easy prey to seducers. Thus were they scattered because there was no shepherd*, v. 5. There were those that called themselves shepherds, but really they were not. Note, Those that do not do the work of shepherds are unworthy of the name. And if those that undertake to be shepherds are *foolish shepherds* (³¹¹⁵Zechariah 11:15), if they are proud and above their business, idle and

do not love their business, or faithless and unconcerned about it, the case of the flock is as bad as if it were without a shepherd. Better no shepherd than such shepherds. Christ complains that his flock were *as sheep having no shepherd*, when yet the scribes and Pharisees *sat in Moses' seat*, ~~4085~~ Matthew 9:36. It is ill with the patient when his physician is his worst disease, ill with the flock when the shepherds drive them away and disperse them, *by ruling them with force*.

~~3418~~ EZEKIEL 34:7-16

THE SHEPHERDS REPROVED

Upon reading the foregoing articles of impeachment drawn up, in God's name, against the shepherds of Israel, we cannot but look upon the shepherds with a just indignation, and upon the flock with a tender compassion. God, by the prophet, here expresses both in a high degree; and the shepherds are called upon (v. 7, 9) to *hear the word of the Lord*, to hear this word. Let them hear how little he regards them, who made much of themselves, and how much he regards the flock, which they made nothing of; both will be humbling to them. Those that will not *hear the word of the Lord* giving them their direction shall be made to hear the word of the Lord reading them their doom. Now see here,

I. How much displeased God is at the shepherds. Their crimes are repeated, v. 8. God's flock became a prey to the deceivers first that drew them to idolatry, and then to the destroyers that carried them into captivity; and these shepherds took no care to prevent either the one or the other, but were as if there had been *no shepherds*; and therefore God says (v. 10), and confirms it with an oath (v. 8), *I am against the shepherds*. They had a commission from God to feed the flock, and made use of this name in what they did, expecting he would stand by them. "No," says God, "so far from that, *I am against them*." Note, It is not our having the name and authority of shepherds that will engage God for us, if we do not the work enjoined us, and be not faithful to the trust reposed in us. God is *against them*, and they shall know it; for,

1. They shall be made to account for the manner in which they have discharged their trust: "*I will require my flock at their hands*, and charge it upon them that so many of them are missing." Note, Those will have a

great deal to answer for in the judgment-day who take upon them the care of souls and yet take no care of them. Ministers must *watch* and work as those that *must give account*, ^{<3837>}Hebrews 13:17.

2. They shall be deprived *officio et beneficio* — *both of the work and of the wages. They shall cease from feeding the flock*, that is, from pretending to feed it. Note, It is just with God to take out of men's hands that power which they have abused and that trust which they have betrayed. But, if this were all their punishment, they could bear it well enough; therefore it is added, "*Neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more, for I will deliver my flock from their mouth*, which, instead of protecting, they had made a prey of." Note, Those that are enriching themselves with the spoils of the public cannot expect that they shall always be suffered to do so. Nor will God always permit his people to be trampled upon by those that should support them, but will find a time to deliver them from the shepherds their false friends, as well as from the lions their open enemies.

II. How much concerned God is for the flock; he speaks as if he were the more concerned for them because he saw them thus neglected, for *with him the fatherless finds mercy*. Precious promises are made here upon the occasion, which were to have their accomplishment in the return of the Jews out of their captivity and their re-establishment in their own land. Let the shepherds *hear this word of the Lord*, and know that they have no part nor lot in the matter. But let the poor sheep hear it and take the comfort of it. Note, Though magistrates and ministers fail in doing their part, for the good of the church, yet God will not fail in doing his; he will take the flock into his own hand rather than the church shall come short of any kindness he has designed for it. The under-shepherds may prove careless, but the chief Shepherd *neither slumbers nor sleeps*. They may be false, but God *abides faithful*.

1. God will gather his sheep together that were scattered, and bring those back to the fold that had wandered from it: "*I, even I, who alone can do it, will do it, and will have all the glory of it. I will both search my sheep and find them out* (v. 11) as a *shepherd* does (v. 12), and bring them back as he does the stray-sheep, upon his shoulders, *from all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day*." There are cloudy and dark days, windy and stormy ones, which scatter God's sheep, which send them hither and thither, to divers and distant places, in quest of secrecy and safety. But,

(1.) Wherever they are the eye of God will *find them out*; for his eyes run to and fro through the earth, in favour of them. *I will seek out my sheep*; and not one that belongs to the fold, though driven ever so far off, shall be lost. *The Lord knows those that are his; he knows their work and where they dwell* (⁴⁶²³Revelation 2:13), and where they are hidden.

(2.) When his time shall come his arms will *fetch them home* (v. 13): *I will bring them out from the people*. God will both incline their hearts to come by his grace and will by his providence open a door for them and remove every difficulty that lies in the way. They shall not return one by one, clandestinely stealing away, but they shall return in a body: *“I will gather them from the countries* into which they are dispersed, not only the most considerable families of them, but every particular person. *I will seek that which was lost and bring again that which was driven away,”* v. 16. This was done when so many thousand Jews returned triumphantly out of Babylon, under the conduct of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and others. When those that have gone astray from God into the paths of sin are brought back by repentance, when those that erred come to the acknowledgment of the truth, when God's outcasts are gathered and restored, and religious assemblies, that were dispersed, rally again, upon the ceasing of persecution, and when the churches have rest and liberty, then this promise has a further accomplishment.

2. God will feed his people as the *sheep of his pasture*, that had been famished. God will bring the returning captives safely to their own land (v. 13), *will feed them upon the mountains of Israel*, and that is a *good pasture*, and a *fat pasture* (v. 14); there shall their *feeding* be, and there shall be *their fold*; and it is a *good fold*. There God will not only *feed them*, but *cause them to lie down* (v. 15), which denotes a comfortable rest after they had tired themselves with their wanderings, and a constant continuing residence; they shall not be driven out again from these green pastures, as they have been, nor shall they be disturbed, but shall lie down in a sweet repose and there shall be *none to make them afraid*. (⁴⁶²⁴Psalm 23:2, *He makes me to lie down in green pastures*. Compare this with the like promise (⁴⁶²⁵Jeremiah 23:3, 4), when God restored them not only to the milk and honey of their own land, to the enjoyment of its fruits, but to the privileges of his sanctuary on Mount Zion, the chief of the mountains of Israel. When they had an altar and a temple again, and the benefit of a settled priesthood, then they were fed in a good pasture.

3. He will succour those that are hurt, will *bind up that which was broken and strengthen that which was sick*, will comfort those that *mourn in Zion* and with Zion. If ministers, who should speak peace to those who are of a sorrowful spirit, neglect their duty, yet the Holy Ghost the Comforter will be faithful to his office. But, as it follows, the *fat and the strong shall be destroyed*. He that has rest for disquieted saints has terror to speak to presumptuous sinners. As *every valley shall be filled, so every mountain and hill shall be brought low*, ~~4085~~ Luke 3:5.

~~4047~~ EZEKIEL 34:17-31

GOD'S CARE OF HIS FLOCK

The prophet has no more to say to the shepherds, but he has now a message to deliver to the flock. God had ordered him to speak tenderly to them, and to assure them of the mercy he had in store for them. But here he is ordered to make a difference between some and others of them, to separate between the precious and the vile and then to give them a promise of the Messiah, by whom this distinction should be effectually made, partly at his first coming (for *for judgment he came into this world*, ~~4085~~ John 9:39, to *fill the hungry with good things and to send the rich empty away*, ~~4053~~ Luke 1:53), but completely at his second coming, when he shall, as it is here said, *judge between cattle and cattle, as a shepherd divides between the sheep and the goats, and shall set the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left* (~~4053~~ Matthew 25:32, 33), which seems to have reference to this. We have here,

I. Conviction spoken to those of the flock that were fat and strong, the *rams and the he-goats* (v. 17), those that, though they had not power, as shepherds and rulers, to oppress with, yet, being rich and wealthy, made use of the opportunity which this gave them to bear hard upon their poor neighbours. Those that have much would have more, and, if they set to it, will have more, so many ways have they of encroaching upon their poor neighbours, and forcing from them the one ewe-lamb, ~~4024~~ 2 Samuel 12:4. Do not the rich oppress the poor merely with the help of their riches, and *draw them before the judgment-seats*? ~~5006~~ James 2:6. Poor servants and tenants are hardly used by their rich lords and masters. The *rams* and the *he-goats* not only kept all the good pasture to themselves, ate the fat and

drank the sweet, but they would not let the poor of the flock have any comfortable enjoyment of the little that was left them; they *trod down the residue of the pastures and fouled the residue of the waters*, so that the flock was obliged to eat that which they had trodden into the dirt, and drink that which they had muddied, v. 18, 19. This intimates that the great men not only by extortion and oppression made and kept their neighbours poor, and scarcely left them enough to subsist on, but were so vexatious to them that what little coarse fare they had was embittered to them. And this *seemed a small thing* to them; they thought there was no harm in it, as if it were the privilege of their quality to be injurious to all their neighbours. Note, Many that live in pomp and at ease themselves care not what straits those about them are reduced to, so they may but have every thing to their mind. Those that *are at ease*, and *the proud*, grudge that any body should live by them with any comfort. But this is not all; they not only robbed the poor, to make them poorer, but were troublesome to the sick and weak of the flock (v. 21): They *thrust with side and shoulder* those that were feeble (for the weakest goes to the wall) and *pushed the diseased with their horns*, because they knew they could be too hard for them, when they durst not meddle with their match. It has been observed concerning sheep that if one of the flock be sick and faint the rest will secure it as well as they can, and shelter it from the scorching heat of the sun; but these, on the contrary, were most injurious to the diseased. Those that they could not serve themselves of they did what they could to rid the country of, and so *scattered them abroad*, as if the poor, whom, Christ says, we must have always with us, were public nuisances, not to be relieved, but sent far away from us. Note, It is a barbarous thing to *add affliction to the afflicted*. Perhaps these *rams* and *he-goats* are designed to represent the scribes and Pharisees, for they are such troublers of the church as Christ himself must come to deliver it from. from, v. 23. They devoured widows' houses, took away the key of knowledge, corrupted the pure water of divine truths, and oppressed the consciences of men with the traditions of the elders, besides that they were continually vexatious and injurious to *the poor of the flock that waited on the Lord*, ^{<III>}Zechariah 11:11. Note, It is no new thing for the flock of God to receive a great deal of damage and mischief from those that are themselves of the flock, and in eminent stations in it, ^{<III>}Acts 20:30.

II. Comfort spoken to those of the flock that are poor and feeble, and that wait for the consolation of Israel (v. 22): “*I will save my flock*, and they

shall no more be spoiled as they have been by the beasts of prey, by their own shepherds or by the rams and he-goats among themselves.” Upon this occasion, as is usual in the prophets, comes in a prediction of the coming of the Messiah, and the setting up of his kingdom, and the exceedingly great and precious benefits which the church should enjoy under the protection and influence of that kingdom. Observe what is here foretold,

1. Concerning the Messiah himself.

(1.) He shall have his commission from God himself: I will *set him up* (v. 23); *I will raise him up*, v. 29. He sanctified and sealed him, appointed and anointed him.

(2.) He shall be the great *Shepherd* of the sheep, who shall do that for his flock which no one else could do. He is the *one Shepherd*, under whom Jews and Gentiles should be *one fold*.

(3.) He is *God's servant*, employed by him and for him, and doing all in obedience to his will, with an eye to his glory — his servant, to re-establish his kingdom among men and advance the interests of that kingdom.

(4.) He is David, one after God's own heart, set as his King upon the holy hill of Zion, made the head of the corner, with whom the covenant of royalty is made, and to whom God would *give the throne of his father David*. He is both the *root and offspring of David*.

(5.) He is the *plant of renown*, because a *righteous branch* (²³⁵Jeremiah 23:5), a branch of the Lord, that is *beautiful and glorious*, ²⁰⁰Isaiah 4:2. He has a name above every name, a throne above every throne, and may therefore well be called a *branch of renown*. Some understand it of the church, the *planting of the Lord*, ²⁰³Isaiah 61:3. *Its name shall be remembered* (¹⁵⁷Psalms 45:17) and Christ's in it.

2. Concerning the great charter by which the kingdom of the Messiah should be incorporated, and upon which it should be founded (v. 25): *I will make with them a covenant of peace*. The covenant of grace is a covenant of peace. In it God is at peace with us, speaks peace to us, and assures us of peace, of all good, all the good we need to make us happy. The tenour of this covenant is: “*I the Lord will be their God*, a God all-sufficient to them (v. 24), will own them and will be owned by them; in order to this *my servant David shall be a prince among them*, to reduce

them to their allegiance, to receive their homage, and to reign over them, in them, and for them.” Note, Those, and those only, that have the Lord Jesus for *their prince* have the Lord Jehovah for *their God*. And then *they, even the house of Israel, shall be my people*. If we take God to be *our God*, he will take us to be *his people*. From this covenant between God and Israel there results communion: “*I the Lord their God am with them, to converse with them; and they shall know it, and have the comfort of it.*”

3. Concerning the privileges of those that are the faithful subjects of this kingdom of the Messiah and interested in the covenant of peace. These are here set forth figuratively, as the blessings of the flock. But we have a key to it, v. 31. Those that belong to this flock, though they are spoken of as *sheep*, are really men, men that have *the Lord for their God*, and are in covenant with him. Now to them it is promised,

(1.) That they shall enjoy a holy security under the divine protection. Christ, our good Shepherd, has *caused the evil beasts to cease out of the land* (v. 25), having vanquished all our spiritual enemies, broken their power, and triumphed over them; the roaring lion is not a roaring devouring lion to them; *they shall no more be a prey to the heathen* nor the heathen a terror to them, *neither shall the beasts of the land devour them*. Sin and Satan, death and hell, are conquered. And then *they shall dwell safely*, not only in the folds, but in the fields, *in the wilderness, in the woods*, where the beasts of prey are; they shall not only dwell there, but they shall sleep there, which denotes not only that the beasts being *made to cease* there shall be no danger, but, their consciences being purified and pacified, they shall be in no apprehension of danger; not only safe from evil, but quiet from the fear of evil. Note, Those may lay down and sleep securely, sleep at ease, that have Christ for their prince; for he will be their protector, and make them to dwell in safety. None shall hurt them, nay, *none shall make them afraid*. If God be for us, who can be against us? *Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed*. Through Christ, God delivers his people not only from the things they have reason to fear, but from their fear even of death itself, from all that fear that has torment. This safety from evil is promised (v. 27): *They shall be safe in their land*, in no danger of being invaded and enslaved, though their great plenty be a temptation to their neighbours to *desire their land*; and that which shall make them think themselves safe is their confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of God: *They shall know that I am the Lord*. All our disquieting fears arise from our ignorance of God and

mistakes concerning him. Their experience of his particular care concerning them encourages their confidence in him: “*I have broken the bands of their yoke, with which they have been brought and held down under oppression, and have delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them, whence they shall argue, He that has delivered does and will, therefore will we dwell safely.*” This is explained, and applied to our gospel-state, ⁴¹⁷Luke 1:74. *That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, as those may do that serve him in faith.*

(2.) That they shall enjoy a spiritual plenty of all good things, the best things, for their comfort and happiness: *They shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, v. 29.* Famine and scarcity, when Israel was punished with that judgment, turned as much to their reproach among the heathen as any other, because the fruitfulness of Canaan was so much talked of. But now *they shall not bear that shame of the heathen any more* For the *showers shall come down in their season, even showers of blessing, v. 26.* Christ is a Shepherd that will feed his people; and they shall *go in and out, and find pasture.*

[1.] They shall not be consumed with hunger; for they shall not be put off with the world for a portion, which is not bread, which satisfies not, and which leaves those that are put off with it to be *consumed with hunger.* The ordinances of the ceremonial law are called *beggarly elements*, for there was little in them, compared with the Christian institutes, *wherewith the mower fills his hand and he that binds sheaves his bosom.* Those that *hunger and thirst after righteousness* shall not be consumed with that hunger, for *they shall be filled.* And he that drinks of the water that Christ gives him, the still waters by which he leads his sheep, shall *never thirst.*

[2.] *Showers of blessings* shall come upon them, v. 26, 27. The heavens shall yield their dews; the *trees of the field* also shall *yield their fruit.* The seat of this plenty is *God's hill*, his holy hill of Zion, for on that mountain, in the gospel church, it is, that God has *made to all nations a feast;* to that those must join themselves who would partake of gospel benefits. The cause of this plenty is the *showers that come down in their season,* that descend upon the mountains of Zion, the graces of Christ, his doctrine that drops as the dew, the graces of Christ, and the fruits and comforts of his Spirit, by which we are made fruitful in the fruits of righteousness. The instances of this plenty are the blessings of heaven poured down upon us

and the productions of grace brought forth by us, our comfort in God's favour and God's glory in our fruit-bearing. The extent of this plenty is very large, to all the *places round about my hill*; for *out of Zion shall go forth the law*, shall go forth light to a dark world, and the river that shall water a dry and desert world; all that are in the neighbourhood of Zion shall fare the better for it; and the nearer the church the nearer its God. And, *lastly*, The *effect of this plenty* is, *I will make them a blessing*, eminently and exemplarily blessed, patterns of happiness, ~~2352~~ Isaiah 19:24. Or, They shall be blessings to all about them, diffusively useful. Note, Those that are the *blessed of the Lord* must study to make themselves blessings to the world. He that is good, let him do *good*; he that has received the gift, the grace, let him minister the same.

Now this promise of the Messiah and his kingdom spoke much comfort to those to whom it was then made, for they might be sure that God would not utterly *destroy* their nation, how low soever it might be brought, as long as that *blessing* was *in the womb of it*, ~~2353~~ Isaiah 65:8. But it speaks much more comfort to us, to whom it is fulfilled, who are the sheep of this good Shepherd, are fed in his pastures, and *blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things* by him.