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## *Dedication*

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To those who faithfully serve His sheep and  
to those faithful shepherds  
who look like the Shepherd and  
smell like the sheep



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## *Acknowledgments*

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I am profoundly grateful to my parents, who consistently modeled for me the ministry of a shepherd and the incalculable worth of a faithful shepherd's wife. My father was my first shepherd and has been my lifelong mentor. The words I have written are mine, but the thoughts were first his.

I am grateful to my wife, Jaye, who dared to take this journey with me and has encouraged me at every step. She is a blessing of the Lord to me. She makes me want to be when I preach what she is when she sings. The Lord has blessed us with Josh, Tim, Jon, and Dave; and now KariAnn, Alissa, Kelsey, and Genesis.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. and Mrs. Patterson, who have unfailingly modeled the combination of courageous leadership and compassionate care. I'm grateful to Dr. Patterson for the initial support and clarity he gave for this book as well as his vision for this series, and to Mrs. Patterson for the persistent momentum and enthusiasm she has provided, without which this project may never have begun. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this series as well as serve with you at Southwestern. I also want to thank Jason Duesing, the coeditor of this series, for his insightful advice and support.

I am thankful for the eight men who have contributed chapters to this book: Paige Patterson, David Allen, Dale Johnson, Malcolm Yarnell, Tommy Kiker, Matt Queen, Fred Luter, and Stephen Rummage. I'm grateful for your insights, your encouragement, and for modeling what you preach.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to B&H for the invaluable assistance with this book and for the investment in this series; and especially to Renée Chavez, Audrey Greeson, and Jennifer Day.

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## Abbreviations

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AB	Anchor Bible Series
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
BAGD	<i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed., ed. Walter Bauer, trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Daner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)
BDB	<i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> , by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1906; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996)
BDBG	<i>The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BibSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BST	The Bible Speaks Today Series

<i>JCR</i>	<i>Journal of Communication and Religion</i>
<i>JRL</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Leadership</i>
NAC	The New American Commentary
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NPNF</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>A Selected Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. 2</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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## SERIES PREFACE

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### *A Treasury of Baptist Theology*

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**B**aptists have always been grateful for the contributions of great Christians from every era. Where would we be without Athanasius's *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, Augustine's *Confessions*, or the multiplied books of the Reformers who laid the foundations for the Reformation? And as much as we look forward to the return of Christ and a true ecumenism, adjudicated by none other than the Lord from heaven, we must until then be faithful in the expression of the truth as we know it.

The *Treasury of Baptist Theology* represents an effort to do exactly that. This series of more than 30 volumes written by notable Baptist theologians from a number of different institutions and churches reflects the understanding of holy Scripture as Baptists have grasped it. There is diversity among authors, including Asian, German, and French theologians, as well as several Baptist women. Each author is writing from a distinctively Baptist perspective.

As you begin to read these volumes, our prayer to God is that He will use them to encourage faithfulness from all in delivering the New Testament witness to our own era. The concept of a believer's church—that is, a church made up of only twice-born men and women who have witnessed their faith through the covenant of believer's baptism and who have

committed themselves wholly to the fulfillment of the Great Commission as given by our Lord in Matthew 28:18–20—will hopefully incline the hearts of all to the Savior and to His program of witness to the nations. Along the way, the plea for religious liberty will also be made apparent, together with the teachings on those doctrines where there is agreement across denominational lines, such as Christology, the Trinity, and other significant foundational doctrines. Volumes on evangelism, apologetics, and God’s purposes for the home will also be among those coming from this series.

So begin your journey with us, and hear the significant witness of today’s Baptist theologians. And may God help us to embrace these doctrines with the same thoroughness and commitment as those in the generations who have gone before.

Paige Patterson, President  
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Fort Worth, Texas

## CHAPTER 1

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### *Introduction: The Ministry of a Shepherd*

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**Deron J. Biles**

God, in His grace, called me to be a pastor. It is a calling from which I have never recovered. I remember when God first called me as a 12-year-old boy. I recall walking down the aisle and taking the hand of my pastor, who was also my father, and sharing with him that God had called me to full-time ministry.

Not until a few years later as a 19-year-old pastor of a small church in central Texas did I begin to realize that, despite having been reared in the home of a pastor, I did not really know what a pastor was supposed to do. Three decades later, I am still learning. During that time, I have had the privilege of serving as a pastor, working with pastors at a state convention, and now training pastors at a seminary.

Being a pastor is an audacious calling. It is at once a remarkable privilege and an unaccomplishable task. Imagine the grace of God to call men to be His servants. What a wonderful privilege we have been given! Yet, the task is so great, who can be worthy? Just as the Lamb alone is worthy to loose the seals of the scroll (Rev 5:1–5), ultimately He alone is qualified to shepherd His people. Nevertheless, the ministries of the men God calls to be His shepherds must be consumed by His purpose for their lives. God's Word supplies clarity for this high calling.

## The Shepherd God

In general, the Bible talks more about who a shepherd is than what a shepherd does. Yet, both are vital in ministry. They are combined in Asaph's tribute to David, "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, / And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands" (Ps 78:72).<sup>1</sup> This verse expresses the faithful integration of being and doing that completes the ideal shepherd.

Passages that are typically used to describe the role of the pastor (i.e., 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) address more of the character attributes required of pastors than they do actual functions. However, a few passages in Scripture speak to the tasks of pastoral ministry; among these are Jer 23:1–4; Ezek 34:1–10; Acts 20:17–36; Eph 4:11–12; and 1 Pet 5:1–4.

In Scripture the clearest picture of the functions of a shepherd is found in Ezekiel 34. In this chapter God outlines the responsibilities of shepherds, the accountability of the shepherds, the consequences of a lack of shepherds, and the anticipation of the good Shepherd. The responsibilities of a shepherd become clear as we examine those areas for which God holds His shepherd servants accountable. Thus, we understand what shepherds should do by paying attention to what God indicts them for not doing.

The potency of Ezekiel 34 is the clarity of God's instructions (i.e., what God expects of His servants)—not someone's idea of what God wants. God says what He demands—the "oughtness" of tending sheep. So, we should huddle in close and sit up straight at the anticipation of His instruction and, in sincere faith, say, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

## What Shepherds Do

Being a pastor is hard work. The responsibilities seem endless. Some time ago, I put together a list of all the things that a pastor is expected to do. The list is still growing, but here is what I have so far. A pastor is expected to

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<sup>1</sup> Other references to David as shepherd in Scripture are 1 Sam 16:11, 19; 17:15, 20, 34–36; 2 Sam 5:2; 1 Chr 17:6; 24:17; 21:17.

preach,	dedicate babies,	lead the community in
teach,	baptize,	social reform,
pray,	serve the Lord's	visit the sick and
equip,	Supper,	the bereaved and
cast vision,	moderate business	the lost and the
counsel,	meetings,	prospects and the
lead the staff,	attend denominational	problematic,
lead his family,	functions,	provide leadership,
study,	advise committees,	and
conduct weddings and	manage the public	give direction.
funerals,	relations of the	
	church,	

But that is not all. In addition to what pastors are expected to do, there is also an unwritten list of expectations regarding what they should know. They are expected to be knowledgeable (maybe even an expert) in

theology,	conflict resolution,	gerontology,
hermeneutics,	worship,	child-rearing,
rhetoric,	counseling,	apologetics,
logic,	medicine,	evangelism,
music,	legal matters,	etiquette,
architecture,	ethics,	prayer,
administration,	politics,	the Bible,
leadership,	secular culture,	current events,
management,	engineering,	history,
finance,	acoustics,	religions, and
education,	aesthetics,	denominations.

To be fair, some of the expectations under which pastors operate are self-imposed; others are prescribed by the congregation. These tasks may be necessary or even good. But, they must not be the highest priorities. The church may employ you, but God is the One who called you. So, you must focus first on His instructions and filter all other expectations through the template of His Word.

Ezekiel 34 is God's message to pastors: "This is what I expect from you." He delivers these expectations in the context of His performance review of some shepherds who scored very low on their evaluations.

The indictment of the shepherds in Ezekiel 34 recalls God's search for a faithful leader in Ezek 22:30, "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."<sup>2</sup> It also highlights the fact that God will not leave His sheep unattended simply because His shepherds have not proven worthy of their calling.

### Imagery of Shepherds and Sheep

Imagery of shepherd and sheep is common in Scripture and rich in significance.<sup>3</sup> The frequency of its use in the Pentateuch, in the history of the monarchy, in the book of Psalms, and in the Prophets demands careful exegetical attention.

The Bible uses shepherds and sheep as metaphors.<sup>4</sup> Metaphors do not define; they compare.<sup>5</sup> They explain what is unknown by comparing it to something that is known. Thus, when Jesus used metaphors to explain what "the kingdom of heaven is like," His intention was not to give us full comprehension of the kingdom. Instead, by comparison, we learn something about one aspect of His kingdom.

We must be careful not to press the image too far. There are obvious limitations to the images of sheep and shepherd. The portrayal of sheep as weak, sickly, and ignorant is not necessarily indicative of all church

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<sup>2</sup> See Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, NAC, vol. 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 298. Cooper shows a relationship between Ezekiel 22 and 34, calling chapter 34 a "sequel" to chapter 22.

<sup>3</sup> See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor," *BBR* 12, no. 1 (2002): 67–96. Köstenberger suggests that the metaphors of sheep and shepherd are like an iceberg with much of their significance lying "under the surface" (75).

<sup>4</sup> Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 31–41. See also Köstenberger, "Jesus the Good Shepherd," 73–74, for a discussion on the distinction between metaphor and allegory.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 1," *BibSac* 163 (Jan–Mar, 2006): 19–21.

members. In addition, that sheep are often bred to be eaten might not sit well in a new members class.

Yet, the comforting assurance of a shepherd who leads his sheep to lush pastures and streams of refreshing water, protects them from impending dangers, cares for their needs, knows them individually, and seeks to find them when they are lost resonates in the church as much as in the pasture. That is the picture in Scripture of a God-honoring shepherd.

### ***Who Were the Shepherds of Israel?***

The term “shepherd” can mean a number of things in Scripture. It is used as both a noun and a verb. In addition to actual keepers of sheep, the term is used for kings and leaders in the Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> This is consistent with how the term was used in ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>7</sup> In Ezekiel 34, given the context and the obvious connection with Jeremiah 23, the term clearly references the kings of Judah and other leaders entrusted with special care of God’s people.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the terms used to describe the intended functions of the shepherds convey the personal care expected of them by God.<sup>9</sup>

In the Old Testament, David is portrayed as the ultimate shepherd, even as Christ is portrayed as the true Shepherd in the New Testament. David served two shepherding functions in the Old Testament. He was an

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<sup>6</sup> Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 298. See also Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC, vol. 9 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 161; Iain Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 394; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 469; and Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, UK; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 274. Cp. 2 Sam 5:2; 1 Kgs 22:17; Isa 44:28; Jer 2:8; 10:21; 23:1–4; 25:34–38; Mic 5:4–5; Zech 10:2–3; 11:3–17.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 275. For a more extensive history of the use of the imagery outside of Scripture, see Jack W. Vancil, “Sheep, Shepherd,” in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1187–89; and Bernard Aubert, *The Shepherd-Flock Motif in the Miletus Discourse (Acts 20:17–38) Against Its Historical Background*, SBL 124 (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 132–44.

<sup>8</sup> F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, vol. 16 (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 210. For more on the relationship between Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23, see Block, 275–76.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan David Huntzinger, “The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature,” PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999, 150–51.

actual shepherd (1 Sam 16:11); and, as king, he was the shepherd-leader of his people (Ps 78:70–72). Thus, as David’s early role as a shepherd of his father’s sheep foreshadowed his later role as shepherd of Israel, so his life became a type of the true Shepherd of God’s people ultimately fulfilled in Christ.<sup>10</sup>

### ***God as Shepherd***

The imagery of a shepherd is not limited to mankind. In Scripture, God is both called<sup>11</sup> and portrayed as a shepherd.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the Bible frequently refers to God’s people as His sheep.<sup>13</sup> So, if God is the true Shepherd, then the role of His under-shepherd must find its meaning in Him. Thus, the essential question of Ezekiel 34 is: What does it mean to be a shepherd?

### ***Jesus as the Good Shepherd***

The conscious expectation of the Shepherd-Messiah in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Christ.<sup>14</sup> He is also described as “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14); the “one shepherd” (John 10:16), the “great Shepherd” (Heb 13:20), and “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5:4).<sup>15</sup> In the New Testament, Jesus completes the Messianic promise of Ezekiel

<sup>10</sup> See Köstenberger, “Jesus the Good Shepherd,” 77.

<sup>11</sup> Gen 49:24; Pss 23:1; 80:1; Heb 13:20. Cp. Isa 30:23; 40:11; Mic 7:14. See also Quentin P. Kinnison, “Shepherd or One of the Sheep: Revisiting the Biblical Metaphor of the Pastorate,” *JRL* 9, no. 1 (2010): 71. Kinnison helpfully points out that in Scripture, God is only ever identified as Shepherd of a singular flock, not of plural flocks.

<sup>12</sup> Gen 48:15; 49:23–24; 2 Sam 5:2; Pss 23:1–3; 28:9; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; 119:176; Ecc 12:11; Isa 40:11; 53:6; 63:11; Jer 3:15; 23:1–4; 31:10; 50:7; Hos 4:16; Mic 2:12; 5:4; 7:14; Zech 10:2–3; 11:16; Matt 2:6; 18:12–14; 25:32–46; Luke 12:32; 15:3–7; John 10:11, 14; 11:52; 21:15–19; Acts 20:28–29; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:2–4; Rev 7:17.

<sup>13</sup> Pss 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:11; 53:6; Jer 31:10; Zech 9:6; 13:7; Matt 10:6, 16; John 10:3, 9, 11, 14, 27; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 2:25.

<sup>14</sup> Matt 9:6; 15:24; 25:32–33; 26:31–35; John 10:1–18, 25–28; Heb 13:20–21; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4; Rev 7:15–17.

<sup>15</sup> The good Shepherd has compassion for His sheep (Matt 9:36) and knows His sheep by name (John 10:3, 14, 27); the sheep know His voice (John 10:3–5, 14, 16, 27), and He sacrificially lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11, 15, 17–18).

34.<sup>16</sup> Jesus stands in antithetical relationship to the false shepherds (John 10:1, 5, 8, 10, 12–13):

- He knows the sheep, and the sheep know Him (John 10:3, 14, 27).
- He leads the sheep (John 10:4).
- He protects the sheep (John 10:10).
- He is a good shepherd (John 10:11, 14).
- He sacrifices Himself for the sheep (John 10:11, 15).
- He feeds the sheep (Isa 40:11; John 21:15–17).
- He holds the shepherds accountable (1 Pet 5:4).
- He is “the Chief Shepherd” (Heb 13:20).

Ironically, He is both Lamb and Shepherd.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Pastors as Shepherds***

The New Testament applies the image of the shepherd to the role of pastor. In contrast to the faithless shepherds of the Old Testament, shepherds in the New Testament are never pictured as unfaithful.<sup>18</sup> Although the term “shepherd” is applied to pastors only once in the New Testament (Eph 4:11), the functions of a shepherd are frequently apparent in descriptions of their responsibilities. Pastors should care for the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2–4), seek the lost (Matt 18:12–14), protect the flock (Acts 20:29), feed the flock (John 21:15–17),<sup>19</sup> and oversee the flock (1 Pet 5:2). Moreover, the word “shepherd” occurs in verbal form to describe the work of a pastor (Matt 2:6; John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2) even as the word “sheep” is used to describe God’s people (John 10:14–16, 26–27).

One can preach *to* the sheep, but one can only pastor *among* the sheep. Being a pastor requires proximity to the sheep. “Preacher” is a title earned

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on Jesus as the supreme model and fulfillment of Ezekiel 34, see Daguid, *Ezekiel*, 400–1.

<sup>17</sup> Kinnison, “Shepherd or One of the Sheep,” 83. See also Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd* (New York: Thomas & Crowell company, 1912), 31; <https://archive.org/details/ministerasshephe00jeff>.

<sup>18</sup> Joiachim Jeremias, “ποιμήν [ . . . ],” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:490.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

by excellence in education and eloquence, but “Pastor” is a title earned by hands-on ministry. Correspondingly, Jefferson notes that the affection of church members for their pastor is more intimate than their affection for leaders serving in other ministry positions. Eloquent preachers may be admired, but faithful pastors are loved.<sup>20</sup> Serving as pastor involves more intimate connection with the sheep. Nathan’s fictional allegory of a man with one little lamb describes the affection of a true shepherd for the individual members of his flock (2 Sam 12:1–4). Such is the calling of a biblical shepherd.

### A Message of Woe

Ezekiel 34 begins with a charge from the Lord to the prophet to “prophesy against” the shepherds of Israel. In verses 2–3, the text’s perspective changes from third person to second person as the message shifts from God’s instructions for Ezekiel to Ezekiel’s message for the shepherds.

However, the origin of the message is not in question. It is God’s indictment of His shepherds. Five times the expression “Thus says the Lord GOD” (vv. 2, 10–11, 17, 20) is found; four times, the phrase “says the Lord GOD” (vv. 8, 15, 30–31); and twice, the admonition to “hear the word of the LORD” (vv. 7, 9). Ezekiel is simply delivering God’s message, and His shepherds are expected to pay attention.

I find it curious that God does not speak *to* the shepherds. Perhaps these were not shepherds at all. Instead, the picture reveals that they were more akin to Jesus’s description of “the hireling” (John 10:12–13), whose concern for his own safety overshadowed the needs of the sheep. Thus, the contrast between the shepherding work of God in Ezek 34:11–16 and the failure of the anti-shepherds in 34:1–10 parallels that of the good Shepherd, who is the antithesis of “the hireling” (John 10:11).

The shepherds of Israel were not the first group against whom the Lord directed Ezekiel to prophesy. Of the 17 times the Lord instructed His prophets to “prophesy against” someone, 15 of those were entrusted to Ezekiel. Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy against Jerusalem (4:7), the

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<sup>20</sup> Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 109–10.

mountains of Israel (6:2), the wicked counselors in Israel (11:4), the false prophets of Israel (13:2), the false female prophets (13:17), the forest in the south of Israel (20:46), the land of Israel (21:2), the Ammonites (25:2), Sidon (28:21), “Pharaoh king of Egypt” (29:2), the shepherds of Israel (34:2), Mount Seir (35:2), and Gog (38:2; 39:1). Ezekiel functions as the prophet “against.”

The force of this message is that it was not addressed to other nations or even to the sinful people of Israel, but to their intended spiritual leaders. In a declaration of woe first uttered by Jeremiah (Jer 23:1) and later echoed by Zechariah (Zech 11:17), God through Ezekiel pronounced a message of woe against the shepherds.<sup>21</sup>

### **Counterfeit Shepherds**

Football fans will remember the 2012 National Football League Referees Association labor dispute, which resulted in a referee lockout. Throughout the preseason and the first part of the regular season, regular referees were replaced by less skilled substitutes. As the drama of these referees began to unfold, stories emerged about the background of the men assuming those roles. Some came to the NFL from six-man football, some had been fired from previous referee positions for incompetence, and at least one had been fired from his previous referee job with the Lingerie Football League.

The outcome of this experiment led to more than just blown calls and the slowing down of the games. It resulted in a lack of respect for the role of the official, situations where the refs appeared to have been intimidated by coaches and players with strong personalities, outrage in the media, and general disgust and distrust from the fans.

Despite all the apologizing, overanalyzing, and fining of players and coaches, I do not know anyone who believed that these men intended to do a poor job. However, what became clear is that they were immersed in

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<sup>21</sup> On the relationship of Ezekiel 34 to Jeremiah 23, see Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, 276; and Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 161. See also, Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel I: A Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, trans. R. E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 245. Huntzinger regards Ezekiel 34 as a development of Jeremiah 23 (“The End of Exile,” 111, 152–53).

a challenge over their heads. It was as if they were unprepared for the job. Each substitute was wearing someone else's jersey.

With all the questions related to inconsistencies, the missed calls, delays in the game, and the breakdowns in communication, I began to see a parallel to the role of a pastor today. We live in a time when every decision pastors make is analyzed, scrutinized, and criticized. Some churches have even initiated a sort of "review process" for the decisions of the pastor that do much more than simply slow down the pace of the game. Further, I have also witnessed pastors intimidated by strong personalities in the church, and others all too often have been fired from their positions. The result has been that pastors no longer enjoy the level of respect formerly common to that position.

To be fair, some of the problems evidenced by the replacement referees have at times been reflected in pastors. Failures in communication, missed "calls," and underqualified leaders have yielded the self-inflicted wounds that sting so many churches today. Then, as the media continues to accentuate these evident failures, church members—like disenchanting fans—eventually lose confidence in the position and sometimes even in the game itself. And, like the NFL stadiums, churches feel the effects in declines in attendance and giving.

But, there is one key difference between a backup referee and a pastor. Unlike the replacement officials, who were on the field against the wishes of the "real" refs, undershepherds serve in the authority, power, and calling of the true Shepherd. Just as "sheep are not independent travelers,"<sup>22</sup> so shepherds are not independent contractors. They report to the Chief Shepherd.

The shepherds under indictment in Ezekiel 34 were more than just mistaken; they were not just shepherds who had fallen out of line. They were counterfeits, anti-shepherds,<sup>23</sup> "predatory misrulers."<sup>24</sup> As such, God castigated them for their callous self-indulgence, exploiting the sheep for their own benefit (v. 2); for their failure to meet the needs of the flock

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<sup>22</sup> Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> Huntzinger, "The End of Exile," 96.

<sup>24</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997): 708.

(v. 3); for their lack of concern for the flock (v. 4); and for their ruling the flock with force and cruelty (v. 4).

These anti-shepherds personally gained—they “feed themselves” (vv. 2, 10)—from ministry but failed in its obligations.<sup>25</sup> They expected the best from the sheep but gave little in return. They ravaged the sheep<sup>26</sup> despite the inherent counter-productivity of doing so.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Consequences of the Shepherds’ Irresponsibility***

The consequences brought on by these counterfeit shepherds were catastrophic.<sup>28</sup> God revealed that His sheep had become weak, sick, and broken (v. 4); they had been driven away (v. 4), lost (v. 4) and scattered from the flock (vv. 4–6);<sup>29</sup> they had wandered in search of care (v. 6); they had become prey among the nations (vv. 8, 28); they had been devoured by wild beasts (vv. 5, 28); and they suffered from fear (v. 28), hunger (v. 29), and shame (v. 29).<sup>30</sup>

The phrase “like sheep having no shepherd” (Matt 9:36)<sup>31</sup> capsulizes the paradigmatic equation describing the aftermath of a shepherd’s absence. These anti-shepherds were occupying a position, but they were not really shepherds. And the sheep paid the price.

Because of their failure to shepherd the sheep, these false shepherds were called to account before the Lord (vv. 5–10).<sup>32</sup> Twice, God called on them to “hear” (vv. 7, 9). He delineated the charges in verses 4 and 5 and

<sup>25</sup> See Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 35–6. Jefferson asserts that a shepherd’s task “is a humble work; such is has been from the beginning and such it must be to the end. A man must come down to do it. A shepherd doesn’t shine. He cannot cut a figure. His work must be done in obscurity.”

<sup>26</sup> Cp. Ezek 34:3.

<sup>27</sup> Clearly if one is not properly caring for the sheep, ultimately one will have less to consume later.

<sup>28</sup> For other indictments against shepherds, see Isa 56:9–12; Jer 10:21; 23:1–4; 50:6–7; Zech 10:2–3; 11:4–17.

<sup>29</sup> For a good discussion of the Hebrew words used to describe the condition of the sheep, see Huntzinger, “The End of Exile,” 97, 100, 113–16.

<sup>30</sup> To that list could also be added the “the lean sheep” (v. 20).

<sup>31</sup> Cp. Num 27:16–7; 1 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 18:16; Ezek 34:5; Nah 3:18; Zech 10:2; 13:7; Mark 6:34; 14:27.

<sup>32</sup> See Jer 23:2 for a play on words in Hebrew. God told the shepherds that because they did not attend to the sheep, God would attend to them.

then reiterated them in verse 8. The force of His arraignment is felt in the words, “I am against the shepherds” (v. 10).

The consequences for these scatterers of God’s flock were both immediate and ultimate. They “must give account.”<sup>33</sup> God said, “I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease feeding the sheep, and the shepherds shall feed themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths that they may no longer be food for them” (v. 10).<sup>34</sup> Therefore, God declared that He was going to take away from the shepherds their flock, their position, and their benefits. Their removal was both judgment for the shepherds and grace for the sheep. Shepherds must remember that ministry is a privilege, not a right. Those who are found to be unworthy forfeit the privilege accessible only by His grace.

Scripture reveals that there are two categories of accusations against the shepherds. The fourfold repetition of the word “scattered” in verses 4–6 accentuates the outcome for the sheep in both cases.

The first accusation against the shepherds regards what they did not do. Verses 3 and 4 reveal how the shepherds neglected the sheep.<sup>35</sup> Worse, the shepherds’ omission is juxtaposed with what they did for themselves. They ate the best sheep and clothed themselves with wool from the flocks (v. 2).<sup>36</sup> Thus, the sheep were scattered because of the inaction of the shepherds (vv. 4, 6).

The second accusation against the shepherds pertained to what they did. The scattering described in verse 5 was the direct result of their actions. They ruled their sheep with force and cruelty. Here, the savagery of the shepherds caused the scattering of the sheep.

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<sup>33</sup> Heb 13:17; cp. Luke 16:2; Rom 14:12; 1 Pet 3:15; 4:5.

<sup>34</sup> See Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT 2, 216 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 59–60. Chae notes that in 34:10, God places the false shepherds into the category of “wild beasts” and describes the process of delivering the sheep from their mouths.

<sup>35</sup> See Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 152. Laniak explains that negligence was “tantamount to abuse.”

<sup>36</sup> The ironies in the passage are thick: The shepherds fed and clothed themselves, but did not feed and clothe the sheep. Because the shepherds did not feed the sheep, the sheep became food for beasts.

The shepherds' failure to care for their sheep proved that they were not true shepherds at all. What these derelict shepherds *were* doing demonstrated that actually they were false shepherds. Some sheep were scattered because of the absence of a true shepherd (i.e., what the shepherds did not do). Others were scattered because of the presence of a false shepherd (i.e., what the shepherds did do). The accusations accentuate the contrast in verses 11–16, in which God delineated what *He* would do for the sheep in the absence of the shepherds. He would do what they had failed to do, and He would undo what they had done.

### My Sheep

Sometimes ministers are careless in their use of pronouns. The pronoun “my” implies possession. Pastors often say “my church” or “my people” when referring to the the congregation or “flock” they serve. Usually, the implications are harmless, and most people know what they mean. However, one might be wise to remind himself that the sheep do not belong to the earthly shepherd.

God is very particular in His use of pronouns in Ezekiel 34. He makes the distinction clear, referring to His people 15 times as “My flock” (vv. 6, 8, 10, 15, 17, 19, 22, 31) or “My sheep”<sup>37</sup> (vv. 6, 11–12) and once as “My people” (v. 30). He also talks about “My shepherds” (v. 8), “My servant David” (vv. 23–24), “My hills” (v. 26), and “My pasture” (v. 31). You hear echoes of this in the Lord’s challenge to Peter in John 21, where the restored disciple is three times challenged to feed “My lambs” and “My sheep.”<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, then, the shepherds have no claim of possession, and their authority over the sheep is only imputed. As shepherds, we need to remind ourselves regularly that God’s sheep do not belong to us. We simply have the task to care for them until the true Shepherd returns.

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<sup>37</sup> See Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel*, 275. Wright explains that the same Hebrew word (*tso' n*) is translated as “flock” and “sheep” in Ezekiel 34.

<sup>38</sup> See also John 10:14–27 and 21:15–17 for Jesus’s use of “My sheep” and “My lambs.”

### Outline of Ezekiel 34

The framework of Ezekiel 34 is masterful. The chapter contains two almost equal halves, which are each divided into two parts. The organization is obvious. Part 1 stands in parallel with part 3, and part 2 parallels part 4.<sup>39</sup>

- I. The False Shepherds (vv. 1–10)
  - A. Indictment of the Shepherds (vv. 1–2)
  - B. Responsibility of the Shepherds (vv. 3–4)
  - C. Consequences of Their Irresponsibility (vv. 5–6)
  - D. Accountability of the Shepherds (vv. 7–10)
- II. The True Shepherd (vv. 11–16)
- III. Accountability of the Sheep (vv. 17–22)
  - A. Indictment of the Sheep (v. 17)
  - B. Responsibility of the Sheep (vv. 18–19)
  - C. Consequences of Their Irresponsibility (v. 20)
  - D. Accountability of the Sheep (v. 21)
- IV. Divine Provision for the Sheep (vv. 23–31)
  - A. The One Shepherd (vv. 23–24)
  - B. A Covenant of Peace (vv. 25–29)
  - C. Divine Affirmation (vv. 30–31)

### The Functions of a Shepherd

The primary intention of this book is to examine the areas for which God holds His shepherds accountable and to understand the expectations He has for His leaders today. As we examine God’s contentions against the false shepherds of Israel, His expectations become clear. We are accountable before God in these same areas. Fundamentally, shepherds are responsible for caring for the needs of the sheep.<sup>40</sup> How ministers carry

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<sup>39</sup> Parts 1 and 3 are exact parallels. Parts 2 and 4 are parallel with the description of what the true Shepherd will do. However, Part 4 concludes with the covenant promise and the divine affirmation to the sheep.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas A. Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 2.” *BibSac* 163 (Apr–June 2006): 173.

out these functions may vary with each context, but the functions remain the same.

### ***Shepherds Must Feed the Flock (vv. 2–3, 8, 10, 19)***

The phrase “First things first” expresses the idea that whatever is most essential should be addressed before anything else. As the Lord unveiled His most extended message on the responsibilities of a shepherd, His attention focused first on the nourishment of His sheep. Shepherds feed their sheep. This responsibility is outlined five times in Ezekiel 34 (vv. 2–3, 8, 10, 19). Another four times, the Lord promised His personal involvement in the feeding process (vv. 13–15, 23).

That someone would make his living by being a shepherd but fail to feed the sheep seems unconscionable. Yet that is exactly the accusation the Lord made regarding the overweight and stingy shepherds of Judah (34:2).

To become so enamored with the meat of God’s Word that we find ourselves skimpy with the sheep is an enticing temptation. Maybe it is the unearthing of a *hapax legomenon* or the rich nuances of a lemma that sequesters us in our study. Perhaps it is the diversion of the newest study resource that arrests our attention and subjugates our time. These are good things, to be sure; but when they become the focus and not the lens, they become excuses for avoiding the sheep rather than resources to nourish them.

Consider the pre-flight instructions given to parents regarding oxygen masks for their children. They are told that in the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling. Then, almost counterintuitively, parents are instructed to put on their own masks first, and *then* take care of their children. Just as oxygen-deprived parents cannot effectively administer oxygen to their children, so underfed shepherds cannot feed sheep. But, shepherds must never allow the sheep to starve while they alone enjoy the green of the pasture. They must remember that spiritual food is not only for the shepherd.

The subtle and significant danger is this: because we deal with excellent words, thoughts, and ideas, we easily gorge ourselves with the meaty truths of God’s Word (like Eli at the dinner table) and leave the sheep to scavenge only on our leftovers. The obviousness of the obvious strikes us:

The Lord expects the shepherds to feed the sheep. David Allen will talk more about this in chapter 2.

### ***Shepherds Must Strengthen the Weak (v. 4)***

Scripture reveals the heart of the heavenly Father for the vulnerable. He commands special care for those who are poor, sick, widowed, or distressed. Indeed, James suggested that the definition of pure and undefiled religion begins with visiting orphans and widows in their distress (Jas 1:27). God's concern for the weak is also seen in Scripture. Failing to strengthen the weak is the second dereliction of the shepherds in Ezekiel 34.

Immediately after the discussion of feeding the sheep, the Lord's attention turned to strengthening the weak. Sadly, shepherds too often spend an inordinate amount of time caressing the strong sheep rather than strengthening the weak ones. But the Bible reminds us that sheep are prone to weaknesses.

Consider an example from sports. Teams named for animals are typically named for strong ones. For example, we have tigers, bears, rams, chargers, colts, and panthers. You do not see sheep in that list. Sheep are not intimidating. They tend to be defenseless, slow, unintelligent, and subject to disease.

Because of the weakness of the sheep, the Lord castigates the shepherds for not strengthening them (34:4). Shepherds are responsible for being ever alert to the signs indicating that a sheep is in trouble. Anything less becomes little more than dignified hypocrisy. We cannot be so preoccupied with matters of our own choosing, while the shepherd-deprived sheep languish enfeebled and "un-strengthened."

When a sheep is weak is probably not the time to lecture that sheep on the dangers of careless living any more than a home fire is the time to research the history of firefighting. Instead, shepherds must look for ways to remove the weaknesses of the sheep. Perhaps then they are better able to understand the ultimate provision of the One who "gives power to the weak, / And to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isa 40:29). I will talk more about this in chapter 3.

### ***Shepherds Must Heal the Sick (v. 4)***

When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He appointed them to both preach and heal (Luke 9:2).<sup>41</sup> Later, He reminded the sanctimonious Pharisees that those who are whole do not need a physician, “but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31). Finally, as He admonished the goats on His left, He explained, “I was sick . . . and you did not visit Me” (Matt 25:43).

Indeed, if people who are sick cannot turn to the church, where can they turn? I have often said that in church work, you never know how much you need the church until you need the church. The servant of the Lord must be both preacher and physician. In ministry, we encounter people with wounds medical doctors cannot see and with sicknesses that health insurance cannot cover.

Few things are worse to see than something or someone not carrying out the function for which they exist. Like clouds that never rain, ministers who cannot heal perpetuate the unfulfilled anticipation of those who have sought but have not found.

To be sure, not all who are sick suffer from the same maladies, nor will one treatment be universally effective. Some may be sick physically, others spiritually. Some will suffer diseases of conviction, others of a wounded heart. Some will be infirm from bereavement; others, from estrangement. Thus, the shepherd must be widely familiar with the science of spiritual therapeutics, understanding that the Lord grants grace at the bedside as well as in the pulpit.

Healing may come through your comfort, counsel, and care, or perhaps merely through your presence. The type of care required depends on the nature of the condition. In order to understand the sicknesses of the sheep and apply the appropriate care, as a faithful shepherd, you must be “diligent to know the state of your flocks” (Prov 27:23).<sup>42</sup>

As believers, we know that the only true healing is through the act of God in Christ and is only fully realized upon His return. Yet God expects that His servants will be agents of healing, availing themselves of the spiritual

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<sup>41</sup> Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 38.

<sup>42</sup> For a helpful discussion on the importance of knowing the condition of the flock, see Kevin Leman and William Pentak, *The Way of the Shepherd: 7 Ancient Secrets to Managing Productive People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 15–28.

power He extends to them to render aid for whatever ailments may be encountered. Paige Patterson will talk more about this in chapter 4.

***Shepherds Must Bind Up the Broken (v. 4)***

My wife and I have four boys. One of the things you learn quickly with multiple males in the household is that the world is a dangerous place. Boys aren't looking for beauty; they are looking for adventure. But with great adventure comes great risk.

In our case, when our boys were young, injuries were a somewhat common occurrence. Among other things, we experienced six broken arms. I remember one spring when our twin boys wore casts simultaneously, casualties of the same playground only two days apart (and we got a call each time from the same school nurse). I vividly remember, in every case, the helplessness of a non-medically trained father sitting in the ER with a child hurting from a broken arm I could not fix. My earnest wish to trade places with my son was drowned out only by my fervent prayers to the true Healer.

Broken bones usually heal, but in ministry we deal with hurts of a much more lasting nature. Some of the wounds we encounter are physical, some are spiritual, and some are emotional. Only the timely salve of truth from God's Word, the love of the heavenly Father, and the hope of eternal life delivered through a caring shepherd can heal hurts X-ray machines will never reveal.

The Lord holds shepherds responsible for binding up the broken among the sheep. In context, this charge occurs immediately after acknowledgment of the shepherd's failure to heal the sick. However, binding that which is broken demands an even more personal connection than healing.

The Lord turned to this aspect in His message in the synagogue:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,  
 Because He has anointed Me  
 To preach the gospel to the poor;  
 He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
 To proclaim liberty to captives

And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:16–19)

One thing is certain: We will not bind up the broken from a distance; we will not bring healing to people’s lives by dictate, rebuke, persuasion, or even good intentions. Healing requires touch. It requires proximity. It is hands-on, close contact. The kinds of hurts most people encounter won’t be assuaged by an email, a tweet, or a post on social media. Shepherds touch sheep. They hold them.<sup>43</sup>

One of the few things I know with certainty about pastoral ministry is that if you do not like people, you are not going to be a good shepherd. Indeed, one of the primary reasons why pastoral tenures are so shockingly brief today is because too many shepherds never get close to their sheep. You cannot do the work of a pastor from a distance. A preacher may sequester himself in his study, but the work of a pastor begins in the hearts of the people he touches.

Shepherds who fail to bind that which is broken have embezzled God’s authority and wasted its privilege. If even the world knows that the first responsibility of a physician is to do no harm, shouldn’t shepherds of our Lord follow that dictum and more? The sorrow of our Lord’s rebuke revealed the irony of caregivers who administered no care. Like the religious leader who passed by the injured man on the other side of the road is the pastor who does not bind up the broken among his sheep. Dale Johnson will talk more about this in chapter 5.

### ***Shepherds Must Protect the Flock (vv. 5, 8)***

Years ago, in the once-popular police television drama *Hill Street Blues*, every episode climaxed with Sergeant Esterhaus completing roll call with the admonition to his officers, “Let’s be careful out there.” This phrase circulated as that generation’s version of “going viral” because it captured the stark reality of which we are all too often reminded today:

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<sup>43</sup> See Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 126: “Physicians never deal with men in crowds. . . . [they deal with them] ‘one patient at a time.’”

police work is dangerous business. In a very similar way, pastors must be so reminded of the dangers of their work, and they must assiduously protect the sheep.

Twice in Ezekiel 34 (vv. 5, 8) the Lord rebuked the shepherds for their failure to protect the sheep. The sheep were scattered and ran away when danger approached and were overpowered by an enemy who was more powerful “because there was no shepherd.” The shepherds had become selfishly concerned about their own needs and ignored those of the vulnerable sheep.

The fact that the Lord has chosen the image of sheep to describe His people is both appropriate and relevant, despite an increasingly urban society. Sheep are vulnerable. They do not possess the ability to defend themselves from predators, and they are too slow to outrun them. Moreover, it is not always clear that they are smart enough to identify impending danger. Thus, failure on the part of the shepherd to protect them is tantamount to ministerial treason.

Upon Paul’s completion of a three-year ministry in Ephesus, he challenged the church leaders in Acts 20 to “take heed to yourselves and to the flock.” To do that they were instructed to watch and warn the sheep over whom they had been made overseers. Paul cautioned the leaders that after his departure, “savage wolves” would come to attack the sheep, implying both the reality of dangers to the sheep and the fact that Paul had protected them.

Shepherds must watch and warn. They cannot just ignore the wolves that move ever closer to the sheep. The shepherd must stand in the gap, declaring to the wolves of the world that they can only get to the sheep through him. He must be vigilant in guarding the door and watching the exits for possible dangers ahead. When false truth and weak theology threaten the fellowship, the shepherd must warn the sheep. When the church blurs the lines of right and wrong, the shepherd must disambiguate the message. When technology makes compromise convenient, the shepherd must courageously expose it. And when absolute truth is mocked, the shepherd must lovingly, passionately, persuasively, and relentlessly defend it as the foundation of our faith and the bedrock of our authority. Wrong is not wrong because the world disagrees with it; it is wrong because God

declared it to be so. Where there is no absolute right, there can be no consensus on what is wrong.

Faithful shepherds cannot be found sleeping while the sheep are in peril. They cannot flee when danger approaches. They must watch over the flock, and they must warn the sheep. The world can be a dangerous place, especially if you are a sheep. Malcolm Yarnell will talk more about this in chapter 6.

### ***Shepherds Must Bring Back Those Driven Away (vv. 4, 6, 8)***

Just as the 5,000 hungry congregants were about to leave to secure food for themselves, Jesus directed the disciples, “They do not need to go away. [They need you to] give them something to eat” (Matt 14:16).

In our fixation on the last part of Jesus’s instructions, we have missed the emphasis on the former. While the sheep need to be fed, they do not need to go away. The idea is that this is where they need to be. Yet, like wandering sheep, too often, crowds are going away from the church today. The Lord reminds in Scripture that these sheep, too, are the responsibility of the shepherd. The church today has become all too comfortable with the “back door,” allowing the exit of as many sheep as the “front door” welcomes.

The Lord rebuked the unfaithful shepherds in Ezekiel 34 for their lack of concern for the sheep who had wandered away.<sup>44</sup> The sheep had wandered and become prey (v. 5; cp. John 10:12); they had been scattered across the world (Ezek 34:5–6; cp. 1 Kgs 22:7) and, most significantly, no one was going after them (Ezek 34:6, 8; cp. Jer 10:21). Sadly, the shepherds were both unfaithful and unconcerned.

To be sure, sheep wander for a variety of reasons—some for their own sin, some due to the oppression of the enemy, and some because of the shepherd’s carelessness. Regardless of why they are missing, the shepherd’s job is to cause them to return.

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<sup>44</sup> See Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 83: “In so many cases church leaders do not even perceive that their people have strayed. What does it mean to stray if there are no fences?”

Shepherds are not given the luxury of customizing the sheep in their congregations. Nor are we allowed the alternative of dismissing some wandering sheep because we like the fact that they are no longer in the fold or because we perceive that retrieving them is not worth the effort.

When the sheep are scattered, regardless of why they are gone, the shepherd's mandate is to bring them back. Shepherds cannot simply focus on bringing in new sheep and disregard bringing back those who have left. They must follow the example of the good Shepherd and be moved again with compassion for all the sheep. Tommy Kiker will talk more about this in chapter 7.

### ***Shepherds Must Seek the Lost (vv. 4, 6, 8, 11–12, 16)***

The 1982 movie *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* was famous for the phrase, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.” In the movie, Spock sacrificed his life to save the ship and all those on her by exposing himself to a lethal dosage of radiation to repair the damaged engineering deck. However, in the sequel, *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, Admiral Kirk and the crew risk their lives, their careers, and even the Federation to rescue Spock, who had been regenerated but had no memory of his career on the starship *Enterprise*. At the climax of the movie, Spock realized the lengths to which Kirk went to rescue him, and he asked the admiral why he would go to such effort to save a friend. Kirk replied, “Because the needs of the one outweigh the needs of the many.”<sup>45</sup>

Although just a movie, and perhaps not logical, the message is true. Sometimes the needs of the one do outweigh the needs of the many. Scripture affirms this principle. Jesus told the story of a shepherd who was willing to leave the 99 sheep (possibly risking their safety in his absence) to search for one sheep that was lost. In that moment, the urgency for the salvation of the lost outweighed the necessity to preserve the security of the found!

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<sup>45</sup> *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982; Los Angeles: Paramount Studios), directed by Nicholas Meyer; *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984; Los Angeles: Paramount Studios), directed by Leonard Nimoy.

Only in understanding the heart of a shepherd who would leave the 99 “unlost” sheep to seek the one that is “unfound” does one begin to understand the heart of a true shepherd. The unmistakable charge of every shepherd is to search after lost sheep. In the work of shepherds, one must not immerse all our ministry resources in managing “found” people. True shepherds also seek the lost.

Shepherds must seek the sheep because they are perishing (v. 4), scattered (v. 5), prey for beasts (v. 5), and wandering (v. 6). Shepherds must seek lost sheep out of genuine love for them and obedience to the command of the true Shepherd. The last thing the text mentions that the evil shepherds did *not* do (v. 8) is the first thing mentioned that the good Shepherd does (v. 11). Shepherds must be willing to leave the safety of the pen and go rescue sheep from the dangers inherent in lostness. Matt Queen will talk more about this in chapter 8.

### ***Shepherds Must Lead the Flock (vv. 6, 13–14, 21)***

Sometimes we are better at talking about things than actually doing them. Nowhere is this more evident than in the topic of leadership. Pass through any bookstore and you will find shelves of books on leadership, leadership principles, leadership keys, and leadership secrets according to [fill in the blank]. Oddly, most would agree that despite the prevalence of leadership resources, leadership ability has not improved noticeably.

But the problem is not unique to our time. The need for shepherd-leaders completes the list of accusations the Lord made against the shepherds in Ezekiel 34. The Lord’s grief was evident as He announced that His sheep wandered from the fold and dwelt in insecurity because their shepherds were not leading them. The absence of shepherd leadership resulted in wandering, unsafe, confused, and hungry sheep. The Lord identified the problem in verse 21, noting that the shepherds’ attempts at leadership consisted of trying to push the sheep around rather than leading them. But, one does not lead from behind. You do not drive sheep; you lead them. You do not shoo them; you woo them. Sheep lie down in green pastures because the shepherd has made them feel safe.

The answer might not be found in a book, but it will be evident in the field. Good shepherds do not lead by proxy, dictate demands, or achieve

goals by good intentions. Shepherds live among the sheep and carefully and consistently lead the sheep from where they are to where they should be. Fred Luter will talk more about this in chapter 9.

### *The True Shepherd*

Ezekiel 34 does not just tell us what shepherds should do; it tells us what the true Shepherd will do.<sup>46</sup> The highlight of this chapter is the reminder that God has not simply outsourced shepherding. He will personally care for His sheep.

Ultimately, the failure of God's shepherds did not go unnoticed. He held His shepherds accountable, but that did not mitigate the damage they caused. The shepherdless sheep needed to be tended. So, God Himself assumed that responsibility. He did not leave His sheep unattended. David conveyed the comfort of a contented sheep when he recounted in Psalm 23 that with the Lord as his shepherd, he would not want (23:1) and he would not fear (23:4).<sup>47</sup> Such is the comfort of sheep under the care of the true Shepherd.

The juxtaposition between the false shepherds and the true Shepherd is seen most clearly in a comparison of verses 4 and 16. Verse 4 delineates what the shepherds of Israel did not do, while verse 16 affirms what God will do. Thus, as Daguid asserts, "[T]he change to be wrought in Israel's situation is not so much a change in the nature of the office as in the nature of the occupant."<sup>48</sup>

The assurance of God's promise to His sheep is seen in the 21 occurrences of the phrase, "I will."<sup>49</sup> Like a 21-gun salute, God declares His sovereignty over the shepherds and compassion for the sheep. His "I will" becomes the ultimate solution for the "did nots" of the anti-shepherds.

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<sup>46</sup> For the juxtaposition of judgment and promise in Ezekiel 34, see Daguid, *Ezekiel*, 394; and Huntzinger, "The End of Exile," 109. See also Allen, who explains how the claims suggesting that repetition within the chapter equals redaction are unwarranted (*Ezekiel 20-48*, 159).

<sup>47</sup> Cp. Ps 23:2 and Ezek 34:15, "I will make them lie down."

<sup>48</sup> Daguid, *Ezekiel*, 396.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of the promises of God in this section, see Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 301.

Twelve different verbs in rapid succession emphatically attest to what God will do for the sheep. He will “search” for (v. 11), “seek” out (v. 11), “deliver” (v. 12), “bring” out (v. 13), “gather” (v. 13), “bring” to (v. 13), “feed” (vv. 13–15), “make . . . [to] lie down” (v. 15), “seek” (v. 16), “bring back” (v. 16), “bind up” (v. 16), and “strengthen” His sheep (v. 16).<sup>50</sup> In the end, there can be no doubt that God will divinely care for His sheep.<sup>51</sup> The ultimate assurance that we have, on divine credit, is that God has and will care for His sheep. Stephen Rummage will address this aspect of the true Shepherd in chapter 10.

### The Accountability of the Sheep

The second half of Ezekiel 34 reveals a final negative impact of the faithless shepherds. They were bad examples for the sheep. Not only were the shepherds abusing the sheep; the sheep were abusing one another. The sheep had taken on the characteristics of the shepherds. Thus, not only were there “wolves in wolves’ clothing, but there . . . also [were] wolves in sheep’s clothing.”<sup>52</sup>

The results of the abuse afflicted by the sheep against other sheep paralleled those of the faithless shepherds—the sheep were scattered (34:20). Moreover, they, like the anti-shepherds, were also held accountable.

The obvious parallel to the work of the church is beyond the focus of this book. Not every lost sheep is the shepherd’s fault. Some sheep are lost because of their own sin, and others are scattered because of exploitation by other sheep. Thus, the message is clear: shepherds must care for the sheep, and sheep must care for each other because the true Shepherd will hold them both accountable.

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<sup>50</sup> See Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd*, 58. Chae notes a parallel in the “I will” statements of God in Ezek 34:13–17 and 20:34–35.

<sup>51</sup> See also Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 304–5 for a good discussion on the promises of the good Shepherd.

<sup>52</sup> Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*, 36.

### **Provision for the Sheep (vv. 23–31)**

The final section of Ezekiel 34 focuses on the messianic anticipation of the coming of the good Shepherd. This section reveals that someday the one true Shepherd will rule over all God's people. The coming of the one Shepherd will inaugurate a covenant of peace.<sup>53</sup> The explanation of this covenant corresponds with Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34).

In a similar way as the chapter began with a verdict against the shepherds, it ends with a pronouncement for the sheep. God climactically concludes with a fourfold message of assurance to His sheep, with the first two written in third person and the last two written in second person.<sup>54</sup> Verse 30 is a message from God to the prophet regarding the people. He told Ezekiel that when the good Shepherd reigns, then "they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people." Perhaps this message was as much for the prophet as it was for the people.

The final message of assurance is addressed by God directly to His people. Heretofore, God spoke to His people through His prophet. This message He wanted them to hear directly from Him. He closes the message with a personal word of affirmation, wanting them to be certain of their identity: "You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men [i.e., human], and I am your God."

Those are the last words of God's message in Ezekiel 34 regarding the shepherds and the sheep. In them, we learn two things about God and two about His sheep:

- "I am with them." God promised to be with His sheep. Circumstances may shake us, but God's abiding presence sustains us.
- "They are My people." God wanted them to know that they are His. Though we may have wandered from the flock, He knows us and we belong to Him.

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<sup>53</sup> Cp. Num 25:12; Isa 54:10; Ezek 37:26; Mal 2:5.

<sup>54</sup> Note this tense shift as a counter balance to the previous shift in verses 2 and 3.

- “You are My flock.” God stamped His name upon them. The hireling may abandon the sheep in their need, but the divine Shepherd never abandons His flock.
- “I am your God.” We are His flock—that is who we are. He is our God—that is who He is. Although human shepherds may fail to live up to their name, God always is faithful to His.

Those are words sheep and shepherds both need to hear.

## **The Ministry of a Shepherd**

This book is addressed especially to church ministers and to those preparing for ministry positions. The purpose is not to propose a new strategy or recommend a new program. In fact, it is just the opposite. The point of this book is to present something God made clear over 2,500 years ago. He has made His intention known. The ministry of a shepherd has not changed.

If we are called by God, then we should do the work He desires to be done. More than hearing from the sheep, we need to listen to the true Shepherd. More than pursuing the felt needs of the needy, we must follow the established design of the Creator.

Pastor, God has told you in His Word what He expects from you. The responsibilities of your calling are clear. He expects His shepherds to feed the flock, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, protect the flock, bring back those driven away, seek those lost, and lead the flock. This is where your calling begins. Whatever else you do must not be at the expense of what God said must be done.

Every minister should want to do the Lord’s will. Even those who have ended poorly in ministry did not start out looking to fail. Somewhere along the way, they lost focus, forgot their calling, or started pursuing their own interests. This book is designed to help prevent that. Some shepherds are tired in the field. The needs of the sheep overwhelm, frustrate, and sometimes confuse them. This book has something for every shepherd. Others are burdened and questioning their calling. My prayer is that this book will encourage you and reaffirm God’s desire for your life and ministry. If you are a new shepherd preparing for the responsibility of ministry, there is no

better place to turn than the words of the Father outlining the duties of your calling. This is what God said you are to do. If God honors you with the care of His sheep, follow the ministry of the true Shepherd.