

Ezekiel 34:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.

Analysis

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. This verse contains God's severe judgment against Israel's unfaithful leaders ("shepherds"). The prophetic formula "Thus saith the Lord GOD" (koh amar Adonai Yahweh) introduces authoritative divine pronouncement. The phrase "I am against" (הִנֵּנִי אַל) is one of the strongest expressions of divine opposition in Scripture, appearing when God declares judgment on nations or wicked individuals.

"I will require my flock at their hand" uses legal terminology—God will hold shepherds accountable for those entrusted to them. The shepherds had exploited rather than protected God's people (Ezekiel 34:1-6). God's judgment is threefold:

1. He will remove them from leadership ("cause them to cease from feeding")
2. He will end their self-serving exploitation ("neither shall the shepherds feed themselves")
3. He will rescue His people from their destructive influence ("deliver my flock from their mouth").

The phrase "that they may not be meat for them" depicts false shepherds as predators devouring the flock rather than protecting it.

This chapter culminates in God's promise to become the shepherd Himself and to raise up a true shepherd—the Davidic Messiah (Ezekiel 34:23-24), fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-18).

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied during Judah's Babylonian exile (593-571 BCE), addressing a community traumatized by Jerusalem's destruction and grappling with questions about God's justice and faithfulness. The "shepherds" referred to kings, priests, prophets, and civic leaders who had led Judah into idolatry, injustice, and political folly, resulting in national catastrophe. Leaders like Jehoiakim and Zedekiah exemplified the self-serving shepherds described in this chapter.

The shepherd metaphor for rulers was common in the ancient Near East. Mesopotamian kings frequently used shepherd imagery, and the Code of Hammurabi presents the king as shepherd of his people. However, while pagan rulers claimed to shepherd on behalf of patron deities, Israel's leaders served as under-shepherds for Yahweh, the true Shepherd (Psalm 23; 80:1). Their failure to recognize this delegated authority led to their judgment.

This passage profoundly influenced Jesus' self-identification as the Good Shepherd and New Testament teaching on church leadership (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-29). The early church applied these principles to bishops and elders, emphasizing servant leadership rather than exploitation. Throughout history, this text has provided prophetic critique of church and civic leaders who abuse authority for personal gain rather than serving those under their care.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does God's fierce defense of His flock encourage those who have been spiritually abused or exploited by leaders?
2. What characteristics distinguish faithful shepherds (pastors/leaders) from false shepherds according to this passage?
3. In what ways does this passage inform our understanding of leadership accountability both in church and society?
4. How does Jesus fulfill God's promise to shepherd His people Himself while also establishing human under-shepherds?
5. What warnings does this passage offer to those in positions of spiritual or civic leadership today?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	יְהִי	הָנָנִי	אָמֵן	רַבָּנִי	כִּי
H3541	Thus saith	the Lord		H3068	H2005
	H559		H136		H413

מִלְּמָד	צָאַנִּי	אָתָּה	וְדַרְשָׁתִּי	בָּרָעַ יְמִים
Behold I am against the shepherds and I will require H7462	my flock H1875	H853	H6629	at their hand H3027

וְהַשְׁבַּתִּים	קָרְעֵ יָם	צָאַנִּי	לֹא
and cause them to cease	Behold I am against the shepherds	my flock	H3808

בָּרָע יְמִינָה וְבָרָע יְמִינָה
Behold I am against the shepherds H5750 Behold I am against the shepherds H7462

אֹתֶם	וְהַצְלָתִי	צָאַנִי	מִפְיָחֵם	וְלֹא
H853	themselves any more for I will deliver	my flock	from their mouth	H3808

לֹא־כְלָה: לְפָנֶיךָ מִתְהִלָּה
H1961 H0 that they may not be meat H402

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 10:3 (References Lord): Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats: for the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle.

Ezekiel 34:2 (References God): Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Jeremiah 21:13 (References Lord): Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, and rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?

Ezekiel 13:8 (References God): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, saith the Lord GOD.

Hebrews 13:17 (Parallel theme): Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Psalms 23:5 (Parallel theme): Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Nahum 2:13 (References Lord): Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.

Ezekiel 5:8 (References God): Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations.

Ezekiel 3:18 (Parallel theme): When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

Ezekiel 34:8 (References God): As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock;