

Ezekiel 34:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?

Analysis

This passage employs the shepherd metaphor to contrast failed human leaders with God as true Shepherd of Israel. Ancient Near Eastern kings commonly used shepherd imagery for their rule; Ezekiel exposes how Israel's leaders failed this calling by exploiting rather than caring for God's flock. From a Reformed perspective, this anticipates Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10) who lays down His life for the sheep, and calls undershepherds (pastors/elders) to feed and protect God's flock (1 Peter 5:1-4). True shepherds serve the sheep's welfare, not their own interests, demonstrating Christlike servant leadership.

Historical Context

This passage was delivered during the Babylonian exile (c. 586-571 BCE) after Jerusalem's destruction. The exiled community grappled with theological and practical questions: Why had judgment come? Would restoration occur? How should they live in exile? The historical context of ancient Near Eastern covenant patterns, conquest and exile practices, and prophetic literature provides essential background. Archaeological discoveries from this period illuminate the exile's realities and the return's historical fulfillment. Yet Ezekiel's prophecies extend beyond immediate historical context to find fuller realization in Christ and the church, with ultimate consummation in the new creation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen your understanding of God's character, purposes, or ways of working in history?
2. What specific application does this passage call you to make in your current circumstances or spiritual life?
3. How does this Old Testament passage illuminate New Testament teaching about Christ, salvation, or the church?

Interlinear Text

הֵמָּעַ ט	מָכָּ ׀	מְרִיעֶיךָ ׀	הַטּוֹב		
Seemeth it a small thing	H4480	of your pastures	the good		
H4592		H4829	H2896		
תִּרְעוּ ׀	וְיִתֶּר	מְרִיעֶיךָ ׀	תִּרְמָסוּ ׀		
unto you to have eaten up	the residue	of your pastures	but ye must tread down		
H7462	H3499	H4829	H7429		
בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם ׀	וּמִשְׁקַע	מִיַּם	תִּשְׁתּוּ ׀	וְאֵת	הַנּוֹתֵר יָם
with your feet	of the deep	waters	and to have drunk	H853	the residue
H7272	H4950	H4325	H8354		H3498
בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם ׀	תִּרְפְּשׁוּן:				
with your feet	but ye must foul				
H7272	H7515				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 23:13 (Parallel theme): But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

Luke 11:52 (Parallel theme): Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.

Isaiah 7:13 (Parallel theme): And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

Numbers 16:13 (Parallel theme): Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?

Numbers 16:9 (Parallel theme): Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?

2 Samuel 7:19 (Parallel theme): And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?