

Ezekiel 34:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

"Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" This indictment targets corrupt leaders who exploit rather than serve God's people. The shepherd metaphor appears throughout Scripture—leaders as shepherds, people as sheep. True shepherds feed, protect, and guide the flock; false shepherds exploit sheep for personal gain. This passage anticipates Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Reformed polity emphasizes plurality of elders and accountability to prevent shepherds becoming hirelings who flee danger or exploiters who fleece the flock.

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied against Judah's corrupt leadership (586 BC)—kings, priests, nobles who enriched themselves while neglecting people's spiritual welfare. These shepherds led Israel into idolatry, political alliances with Egypt, and social oppression. Archaeological evidence reveals extreme wealth disparity in pre-exilic Judah—luxury for elites, poverty for masses. The shepherds' failure culminated in exile and Davidic monarchy's collapse. This pattern repeats when church leaders pursue power, wealth, or prestige rather than faithful ministry. The passage warns that God holds shepherds accountable for flock's spiritual condition.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 – Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this indictment challenge leaders who use ministry for personal advancement rather than serving God's people?
2. What characteristics distinguish genuine shepherds from hirelings or exploiters?

Interlinear Text

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 23:1 (References Lord): Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 3:15 (Parallel theme): And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Isaiah 40:11 (Parallel theme): He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

2 Peter 2:3 (Parallel theme): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Jeremiah 10:21 (References Lord): For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

Acts 20:29 (Parallel theme): For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Romans 16:18 (References Lord): For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Zechariah 11:17 (Parallel theme): Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

Ezekiel 13:19 (Parallel theme): And will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live, by your lying to my people that hear your lies?

Acts 20:26 (Parallel theme): Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.