

Ezekiel 34:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.

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

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

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

תַּלְבֵּשׂ	שְׂאֵל	בְּנֵי	לְבָבֶךָ	תְּאַכֵּל	אֶת	לְבָבֶךָ	בְּנֵי	לְבָבֶךָ
and ye clothe	H3847	H6785	you with the wool	H853	Ye eat	H2459	the fat	H853
תְּרַעֲמֵנָה	לְ	אֵלֶּה	בְּצָא	אֲנָזְנֵב	בְּנֵי	חֹזֶק	כְּבָרִיאָה	הֵם
but ye feed	H7462	H3808	H6629	H2076	ye kill	H1277	them that are fed	

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 11:16 (Parallel theme): For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.