

Matthew 9:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Analysis

Jesus' response to the crowds: 'he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd' (εσπλαγχνισθη περι αυτων οτι ησαν εσκυλμενοι και ερριμμενοι ωσει προβατα μη εχοντα ποιμενα). 'Moved with compassion' (εσπλαγχνισθη) describes gut-level, visceral emotional response—feeling in the depths of one's being. Jesus sees beyond individual needs to systemic spiritual crisis. 'Fainted' (εσκυλμενοι) means harassed, troubled, weary. 'Scattered abroad' (ερριμμενοι) means thrown down, helpless. The sheep metaphor evokes Old Testament imagery of Israel as God's flock and leaders as shepherds who often failed their trust (Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 10:2). Jesus sees Israel's spiritual leaders have failed—the sheep are harassed, helpless, without true guidance. His compassion leads to mission: providing the shepherding Israel desperately needs.

Historical Context

Shepherding metaphor was central to Israelite understanding of leadership. God is Shepherd (Psalm 23), as is the Messiah (Ezekiel 34:23). Jewish leaders—priests, scribes, Pharisees—were supposed to shepherd Israel but had become oppressive rather than caring. Heavy legal burdens, emphasis on external conformity, and neglect of mercy left the people spiritually exhausted. Jesus' description echoes Ezekiel 34, where God condemns false shepherds and promises to shepherd His people Himself. Jesus fulfills this promise as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus' compassion for harassed and helpless people teach about His heart?
2. How do contemporary Christians sometimes function as inadequate shepherds?
3. What does it mean to be 'sheep without a shepherd' in modern spiritual context?

Interlinear Text

Ἰδὼν	δὲ	τοὺς	ὄχλους	ἐσπλαγχνίσθη	περὶ	
when he saw	But	G3588	the multitudes	he was moved with compassion	on	
G1492	G1161		G3793	G4697	G4012	
αὐτῶν	ὅτι	ἦσαν	ἐκλελυμένοι	καὶ	ἐρρίμμενοι	ὥσεὶ
them	because	G2258	they fainted	and	were scattered abroad	as
G846	G3754		G1590	G2532	G4496	G5616
πρόβατα	μὴ	ἔχοντα	ποιμένα			
sheep	no	having	shepherd			
G4263	G3361	G2192	G4166			

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 27:17 (Parallel theme): Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

Mark 6:34 (Parallel theme): And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

Jeremiah 50:6 (Parallel theme): My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace.

Matthew 14:14 (Parallel theme): And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

Zechariah 10:2 (Parallel theme): For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

Matthew 15:24 (Parallel theme): But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew 15:32 (Parallel theme): Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

2 Chronicles 18:16 (Parallel theme): Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace.

Hebrews 5:2 (Parallel theme): Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

Matthew 10:6 (Parallel theme): But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

