

# THE BAD SHEPHERDS (LEADERS) CONTRASTED WITH THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE MESSIANIC SHEPHERD: A PICTURE OF GOD SAVING HIS PEOPLE FROM BAD LEADERS EZEKIEL 34: 11–31

## *Introduction*

Bad leadership damages any organization or nation. The very least damage that bad leaders do is to slow down growth or impede progress. However, bad leaders also usually damage the lives of people. They cause hurt, injury, loss and in some cases destruction and death.

The present Scripture looks at the bad leaders or shepherds, of Israel. Remember that Scripture often refers to leaders and rulers as shepherds (2 Sam 7:7-8; Psa 78:70-72; Isa 44:28; 56:10-11; 63:11; Jer 23:1-4, 34-38; Mica 5:4-5; Zec 11:4-17) and to God's people as His *sheep* or *flock* (v. 31; Mat 10:6; 15:24; Acts 20:28-29; 1 Pet 5:2-3; Num 27:17; 1 Kng 22:17; Psa 78:52; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; 119:176; Jer 13:17; Zec 10:3).

Ezekiel had already issued God's indictment of Israel's leaders (22:23-31). As with any nation that collapses, bad leadership was one of the major causes for Israel's downfall. Now the LORD has a very special message for the bad leaders who had led Israel down the path to destruction. But in this message the LORD also has a wonderful promise for the discouraged, despondent exiles. The Babylonian army had totally destroyed their nation and crushed any hope they had of returning to their homeland. However, a day was coming when God would return His people to the promised land and give them a Good Shepherd. In this passage the LORD gives His people the greatest hope ever given to the human race. This is, *The Bad Shepherds (Leaders) Contrasted with the Good Shepherd and the Messianic Shepherd: A Picture of God Saving His People from Bad Leaders*, Ezekiel 34:1-31.

- I. The bad shepherds (leaders) (vv. 1-10).
- II. The Good Shepherd, the LORD God Himself (vv. 11-22).
- III. The promised Messianic Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 23-31).

## **I. *Ezekiel 34: 11–22 The Good Shepherd, the Lord God Himself***

Ezekiel contrasted the bad shepherds or leaders, with the Good Shepherd, the LORD God Himself. Whereas bad shepherds are selfish and exploit the sheep, the Good Shepherd loves the sheep and diligently cares for them.

Remember that the Jewish exiles in Babylon were deeply discouraged. Their nation had been destroyed, including their homes, businesses and communities. Most of their families and relatives had been slaughtered. Almost all the survivors were now scattered

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throughout the nations of the Babylonian Empire. Hopelessness and despair gripped their hearts. Thus the message they were about to hear was bound to be very encouraging.

Note the wonderful assurances the LORD gave them:

1. God proclaimed His loving care for His people. Note the eight “I will” promises that declared God’s love for His people.
  - a. “I will” deliver them from their distressing circumstances (vv. 11-12). Broken-hearted over their affliction, God declared that He would search for His sheep. Like a shepherd looking for His scattered flock, God would look for His people until He found them. He would rescue them from all the places the Babylonians had sent them. This is a clear picture of God’s rescuing us from the hardships and trials of life, including our bondage to sin and death.

*Isa 46:4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

*Gal 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

*Heb 2:14-15 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

*Psa 23:4-5 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

- b. “I will” return the flock to their inheritance in the promised land (v. 13). This wonderful promise of restoration was partially fulfilled when some of the Jews returned to their land under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But the promise will not be completely fulfilled until the Messiah establishes the kingdom of God on earth. Remember that the promised land of Canaan is a type of heaven, the wonderful inheritance God promises to all who truly believe and trust Him.

*Rom 8:16-17 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

*Titus 3:7 So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

*1 Pet 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you.*

*Psa 23:6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

- c. “I will” feed the flock (v. 13b). The LORD Himself would be their Shepherd and provide whatever food they needed. No matter where they lived (in exile or at home), they would have plenty of food because the LORD Himself would provide it. He is the Shepherd who feeds His dear people.

*Psa 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*

*John 4:13-14 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

*John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

- d. “I will” give My flock the good pasture of the promised land (v. 14). No need of God’s people would go unmet. The LORD would abundantly supply every need.

*Psa 23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*

*Mat 6:31-33 “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

*Phil 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

*Deut 30:8-9 You will again obey the LORD, and follow all his commands I am giving you today. Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your ancestors.*

*Psa 132:15 I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor I will satisfy with food.*

- e. “I will” tend My flock and give them peace, security and rest (v. 15). “Lying down” is a picture of facing no threat whatsoever, of living in a society that is completely free from all enemies. God promises peace, security and rest to His people through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*John 14:16 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever.”*

*John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

*Heb 4:9-11 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.*

- f. “I will” seek the lost and bring back the strays (v. 16a). God fulfilled this promise when He sent His Son Jesus Christ to earth.

**Luke 15:4-7** “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders. And goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

**Luke 19:10** “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

**John 9:35-38** Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him.

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

**Psa 23:3** He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

- g. “I will” help the injured and the weak (v,16b). Compassion floods the heart of God for all who are in desperate need. This is one of the strongest declarations of God’s Holy Word:

**Mat 20:28** “Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Heb 4:15-16** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

**Psa 40:17** Yet I am poor and needy; may the LORD think of me. You are my help and my deliverer: O my God, do not delay.

**Isa 41:10** So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

- h. “I will” destroy the rich (fat) and powerful (v. 16c). This is a clear reference to all who are extravagant and oppressive, all who indulge themselves while they abuse the needy. God will severely punish extravagant and oppressive people.

**Mat 25:31-33, 41-43** “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left....

*Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "*

**2 Pet 2:9** *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

**2 Pet 3:7** *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

**Jude 1:14-15** *See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

2. God declared that He would execute true justice among the sheep (vv. 17-22). Even within the flock, some sheep were abusing others. The Good Shepherd would be a righteous judge who dispensed true justice in society.

Ezekiel made several additional charges against the leaders, especially the wealthier Jews (vv. 18-19). They had taken the good land for their own pastures and allowed their animals to trample the pastures that belonged to others. The leaders and wealthy cared only for themselves. Therefore, it mattered little to them if they destroyed the pasture land owned by those who were poorer. The leaders took the best water and polluted the rest. The picture is that of the wealthy misusing the resources of the land. There was no undamaged land or unpolluted water for the poorer citizens. The wealthy ravaged the land and polluted the water to increase their own estates.

The leaders and wealthy people who oppressed the poor would bear the consequences of their evildoing. God said that He would execute true justice between the fat and the lean, or between the rich and the poor (vv. 20-22). God would condemn the wealthy who abused and oppressed the poor. But the LORD would save His flock, those who truly believed in Him. The wealthier and more powerful would never plunder them again. He would personally deliver them from their distressful circumstances. Of course, a just and righteous society is one of the great promises that God gives His dear people. A day of perfect justice is coming:

**Mat 25:32-33** *"All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*

**Acts 10:42** *He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.*

**Acts 17:31** *For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."*

**Rom 2:2** *Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*

**Rom 2:16** *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

**Rom 14:10** *You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*

**1 Cor 4:5** *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

**2 Tim 4:1** *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom.*

**1 Pet 4:3-5** *For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

**Psa 48:10** *Like your name, O God, your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with righteousness.*

**Psa 96:13** *Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

**Psa 97:10** *Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.*

**Psa 103:6** *The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*

**Psa 119:137** *You are righteous, LORD, and your laws are right.*

**Psa 145:17** *The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.*

**Prov 16:11** *Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.*

**Eccl 3:17** *I said to myself, "God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed."*

**Isa 45:21** *Declare what is to be, present it — let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me; a righteous God and a Saviour; there is none but me.*

**Jer 23:6** *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Saviour.*

**Zep 3:5** *The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame.*

## II. *Ezekiel 34:23–31 The promised Messianic Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ*

God promised to send a shepherd who would be totally different from the bad shepherds. He Himself promised to send the people the Messianic Shepherd the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas the bad shepherds neglected the flock, the Messianic Shepherd would take care of God's sheep. This wonderful promise definitely points to the future kingdom of the Messiah, for the promises spelled out in these verses have never been fulfilled on earth, either for the Jews or the Gentiles. Note the Scripture and outline.

God promised to send a Shepherd-King, a descendant of David (see note, 2 Sam 7:11-17). When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns to earth, God will become the God of all the Jews, and the Lord Jesus Christ will be prince among the people. As the prince, He will feed and care for them (v. 24). In that day, the Messiah will be the Shepherd-King of the people.

God's first purpose in sending the Messiah will be fulfilled: the LORD will be the people's God, and Jesus Christ will sit upon the throne of God in the city of Jerusalem. From Jerusalem He will rule over all the nations and governments of earth.

But God's second purpose for sending the Shepherd-King to earth will also be fulfilled (vv. 25-31). The Messiah will establish a "covenant of peace." Apparently this is not the new covenant that Jeremiah and others promised (Jer 31:31-34). Rather it is a covenant that will be established when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth. So many of the promises of this "covenant of peace" are not fulfilled by the work of God's Spirit in the hearts of believers. Some of these promises can be fulfilled only when Christ Himself rules upon the earth. God's "covenant of peace" will be fulfilled through the Messiah. The peace that Christ will bring to earth will have eight wonderful results:

- => God's peace will sweep the land clean of all wild beasts or all evil people (v. 25). God will remove all Israel's enemies from the land. And all the land God promised the Israelites down through the centuries will finally belong to Israel.
- => God's peace will bring showers of blessings upon the people and the land (vv. 26-27). The land will yield bumper crops, and the people will be secure, able to work without fear of enemy attacks.
- => God's peace will rescue the Jews from the bondage of their enemies (v. 27b). No longer will the Jews be enslaved, deported or scattered throughout the nations.
- => God's peace will cause His people to truly know Him (v. 27b). When the LORD breaks their chains of bondage to other nations, they will know that His hand has done it. They will acknowledge the LORD Jesus Christ as the true Messiah. They will know Him and experience His peace.
- => God's peace will make sure that His people are no longer plundered (v. 28). No nation or people will steal their possessions and wealth. Peace and justice will sweep the entire land.

- => God's peace will bring security and freedom from fear (v. 28b). When the Shepherd-King, the Lord Jesus Christ, is ruling upon the earth as the Prince of Peace, no person or nation will strike fear in the hearts of His people.
- => God's peace will give His people a land famous for its strong economy (v. 29). Although famine had been a problem down through the generations, God will never again withhold rain from the earth. No longer will there be economic slumps or the threat of enemies ruining the land. Nor will there be nations mocking His people because they are suffering from the failure of their crops.
- => God's peace will establish a personal relationship between Him and His people (vv. 30-31). The LORD promises to be the people's God and to make them His true followers. The people will be the sheep of His pasture, and He will be their God (v. 31). Note that God Himself guarantees this personal relationship. The promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, will make it possible for people to have a personal relationship with God. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd of God's sheep.

**John 10:11-18** *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

**Heb 13:20-21** *May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, Equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**1 Pet 2:24-25** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

**1 Pet 5:2-4** *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

**Rev 7:17** *For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

**Psa 23:1-2** *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down*

*in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*

**Isa 40:11** *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.* <sup>g</sup>