

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 26

At this point in this vision, the destruction of Jerusalem was completed. Everyone who was to go into exile had arrived. The poorest of the poor who were left behind in the Southern Kingdom were on their way to live in Egypt in the hope of being out of the line of fire of Nebuchadnezzar's wrath. The leaders of the Southern Kingdom who should have been watching over their human flocks had been persecuted by the LORD. The leaders in exile from the Northern Kingdom had been persecuted by the LORD and promised that they would no longer shepherd the LORD's people. And finally, the LORD had declared that He was taking over the shepherding process for all the Israelites and He would gather them and care for them to provide for them as only He could. With that summary, we come to the way of the Savior of Israel and His search for His sheep.

2. The Way of the Savior of Israel (34:1-10)

a) The Search for His Sheep (34:11)

34:11 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

Because the human shepherds of the *house of Israel* had taken advantage and failed the people, the LORD would step in from heaven above. He spoke, "*Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.*" It is important to take note at this point. When all human leaders have failed, the LORD is still there and He never fails. The LORD would search for His sheep. He would seek them out. He would find them. He would provide for them.

b) The Care for His Sheep (34:12)

34:12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.

See the LORD care for His sheep. The shepherds should have kept up with the sheep. That is what a shepherd does. He should know each one and he should recognize when one or many are missing. Yes, the days of destruction were terrible, but shepherds must do their jobs in every circumstance no matter how terrible. But the shepherds of Israel did not do their jobs. What they failed to do, the LORD would do, if not through humans following the heavenly instruction, then by heaven giving forth the Sovereign of all the ages.

c) The Place for His Sheep (34:13)

34:13 "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.

See the LORD provide a place for His sheep. He said, "*I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries*" He had the plan. The land the Israelites were removed from was still their land. He had promised it to them. They will return to it, with new leaders, when the time is right. The LORD will then be their leader instead of a false god and idol.

d) The Feeding for His Sheep (34:14)

34:14 "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

See the LORD feeding His sheep. Surely these words from the LORD given to the house of Israel through Ezekiel stirred great emotions with the exiles. None could probably wait for the new Shepherd's arrival. They could imagine the feel of the grass under their feet and cast their visions in their mind's eye to the "rich pastures on the mountains of Israel." "When will He come?" they must have asked among themselves. "Today! Maybe today! Why not today? Is there anything that must be done before He snatches us away and takes us back to our Promised Land?" Yes, there was something. It was the divine promise of seventy years in punishment. Some of those years had passed – twenty-one to be exact. Forty-nine were still ahead before they could return to the place they had been taken from.

e) The Rest for His Lost Sheep (34:15-16)

34:15 "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD.

34:16 "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.

See the LORD providing rest for His lost sheep. Not all the *exiles of Israel* would be retrieved by the LORD. He had no intention of rescuing the "fat and the strong" leaders who had taken advantage of their positions to line their pockets with the wealth of the people, causing the people to be broken and sick in their despair. It was the intention of the LORD to gather all those who were broken and sick because of the dreadful *elders of Israel* and lead them to a place of rest far from the oppression of the lords. The LORD spoke, "*I will feed them with judgment.*" What a terrible fate to have the LORD feed the fat and strong with His fierce judgment!

3. The Way of the Sovereign of Israel (34:17-31)

a) The Interrogation by the Shepherd (34:17)

34:17 "As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats.

From the way of the Savior of Israel we move now to the way of the Sovereign of Israel Who is the ultimate Judge of Israel. The fat and the strong leaders who were directing the sheep of Israel away from the Savior of Israel would be judged. As Judge, the LORD will begin the process with an interrogation by the Shepherd. This Judge will make a separation between the people of Israel. Two sheep stand together but they are different. One sheep stands by another; one is a ram, the other a goat. Multitudes standing together; many are rams, many are goats. What might be the difference between the two? And what is the difference between a ram, a goat and a sheep? The Hebrew word for "sheep" is *seb* and it was used in the Old Testament to refer to either a male sheep or a goat. In closer scrutiny, it was used to indicate an animal which was *one of the flock* of either the sheep or the goats. Therefore, in this passage, the LORD will judge between the different animals within the flock. We would not use the same name for sheep and goats, but the Hebrew Scripture does. Therefore, the LORD is going to judge between the flock that contains both rams and male goats.

The Hebrew for "rams" is *ayil* and it means *the exalted*. Even in flocks of animals there exists a pecking order. In every flock there is a hierarchy of dominance and that is the case in a flock of sheep or goats. In each flock there are the leaders. The main leader can be easily discerned, and the other layers of leaders can be identified with close inspection. However, in every flock there is one exalted animal which controls all the rest.

Then we see in this passage the "male goats." In Hebrew it is one word, *attud*, and it means *leaders or male goats*. These male goats were used for sacrifices (Psalms 66:15) and we see it used to define the chiefs of the tribes in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah (Isaiah 14:9; Zechariah 10:3; Jeremiah 50:8). With this as

the background, we can see that the LORD was going to interrogate the exalted and the chiefs. We might rightly discern here that both the rams and the male goats referenced in this verse would have the same judgment come upon them from the LORD.

b) The Question by the Shepherd (34:18)

34:18 'Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?'

What would the LORD say to the rams and the male goats? Here are His two questions. "Is it too slight a thing for you that you should feed in the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pastures? Or that you should drink of the clear waters, that you must foul the rest with your feet?" We can summarize the two questions as follows. "Why are you eating and drinking the best and your flock is eating and drinking from the trash?"

c) The Statement by the Shepherd (34:19)

34:19 'As for My flock, they must eat what you tread down with your feet and drink what you foul with your feet!'

Before allowing the rams and male goats to answer the questions, the LORD made a statement. In that statement we find that the LORD was not happy with the *elders of Israel* because of the way those whom He had saved were being treated, fed and looked after.

d) The Judgment by the Shepherd (34:20)

34:20 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them, "Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 34:21 "Because you push with side and with shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns until you have scattered them abroad,

From the LORD's statement we are directed to the LORD's judgment. "*Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.*" The big fat sheep pushed and shoved to get their way and that must stop in the LORD's eyes. Bullies they were, hard hearted and selfish in every way.

e) The Deliverance by the Shepherd (34:32-34)

34:22 therefore, I will deliver My flock, and they will no longer be a prey; and I will judge between one sheep and another. 34:23 "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. 34:24 "And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.

How would the LORD deliver His flock from the bullies of the nation? He would do it by what we would call an outright miracle. But nothing was too hard for the LORD! He would place one shepherd over them who knew how to treat the flock of the LORD correctly. It was David!

What? King David had been dead for 587 years at the time of this vision. No doubt his bones were but dust in the grave. No doubt his soul was resting in Sheol. How could a dead man be the new shepherd of Israel in the future? How could he be the prince again of the twelve tribes? The LORD said, "*And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them.*" Most definitely, the name of David was not intended to be a metaphorical reference to Jesus when He arrived in the future. The LORD was Jesus. David was David. The two were different. The LORD Jesus would be their God and David would be their prince. When will that take place? How can that take place?

First, David would not be with the Israelites when Cyrus the Great allowed them to return to the Promised Land just 50 years after this vision. That would not happen. But David will be the prince of the restored Israel when they accept the coming Messiah as their LORD and God and He returns to be the King of kings and LORD of lords and reigns on this earth as ruler of the universe for one thousand years.

Second, at that time, David will return in his resurrected body to serve as the prince of Israel and make the sin offering for the people during the LORD's earthly reign (37:25; 45:22; 46:4). Between now and then, many false shepherds will attempt to lead Israel, but, one day, the LORD will lead them, and David will be there once again to tend the sheep.

f) The Security by the Shepherd (34:25)

34:25 "I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

The earthly reign of the LORD will provide extreme security for the *nation of Israel*, free from harm anywhere in the Promised Land during that thousand-year reign.

g) The Blessing by the Shepherd (34:26)

34:26 "I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing.

The one-thousand-year reign of the LORD promises blessings for the *nation of Israel*. Showers of blessings would be coming for His chosen people. Today their life is hard. Nations constantly try to oppress His people. But that will all come to an end when Israel turns to the LORD and He becomes their King.

h) The Increase by the Shepherd (34:27)

34:27 "Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.

All over the media today, we hear of the dreadful state of many Jews around the world. Organizations are constantly raising offerings to feed the suppressed of Israel scattered throughout the land. The living conditions of most Jews in the world, outside the United States, weigh heavily every day on these lives. But when the LORD reigns as King, they will be fed and all the suppression will be lifted when they become the nation of nations; the blessed of the blessed.

i) The Freedom by the Shepherd (34:28)

34:28 "They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.

Look at the freedom from the Shepherd. When the LORD is their King, the Israelites will have a freedom that they have not had since the days of Solomon. No longer will they need highly technical anti-war defense systems to protect their land and their people.

j) The Gift by the Shepherd (34:29)

34:29 "I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.

Look at the gift of the Shepherd. Finally, no national leader, no foreign minister, no U.S. congressperson, not even the devil himself will insult the glorious *nation of Israel*. Israel will not be the victim. It will be the victor.

k) The Predestined by the Shepherd (34:30)

34:30 "Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people," declares the Lord GOD.

Notice the predestined position of the house of Israel. It might be said correctly that during the days of Ezekiel, the exiles were closer to the LORD than they are today. In that day, Daniel was second

in command of the Babylonian Empire and those who had been taken into exile had called upon the name of the LORD for their salvation and He had answered. The majority of those left behind and who had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar by this point in the story line of Ezekiel, were far from allowing the LORD to reign in their hearts. Yet, the *nation of Israel* had always been predestined to be the LORD's chosen nation and nothing could change that. It was His decision, not theirs. He called them "My people" purposefully. But He was not always their God. Nevertheless, He will keep His promise to them and one day, their hearts will change.

1) The Designation by the Shepherd (34:31)

34:31 "As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God," declares the Lord GOD.

Notice the designation given the Israelites by the Shepherd. They are His sheep. He is their God. We see the word "God" used in English twice in this verse, but it is not the same Hebrew word. When He says, "*I am your God*" the word is *Elohim*. It means *might or power*. Therefore, it would be proper to translate this part of the verse as "*I am your Power*." When the LORD signed the statement He had just made, He said, "*declares the Lord GOD*." "Lord" in the Hebrew is *Adonai* which means *sovereign*. "GOD" is the Hebrew word *Jehovah*. It means *the unchanging, eternal, self-existent God, the "I am that I am."* When we put all the names together, we see that for the Israelites, the LORD is their power as a nation certified by His own sovereign, unchanging, eternal, self-existent Self.