



Home group study questions on Ezekiel 34

By Phil Bailey

Theme: YHWH will rescue his scattered and abused flock, settling them in the land under one Davidic shepherd and a covenant of peace and blessing.

Aims (to Israel/Judah at time of Babylonian exile):

- Bad shepherds and bullies – repent or expect judgment
- The rest of the flock – don't lose hope! Your divine/Davidic shepherd is coming to care for you and bring you home

Aims (now):

- Rejoice that God has kept his promise: Jesus, the divine and Davidic shepherd, has come and is shepherding his church now, even when under shepherds fall, fail or die.
- Bad shepherd and bullies be warned: Jesus' judging work continues!
- Elders - remember whose flock it is and remember your job description.
- All – look for leaders who are not just impressive speakers/personalities, but godly examples who care for the flock.
- When discouraged by suffering of God's church, take heart – Jesus will bring us home to peaceful pastures.

Questions:

To recap the passage (this was covered in the sermon, so the leader may prefer to summarise it to allow better time for discussing the application):

- 1) In vv.1-10, what was wrong with Judah's shepherds at the time of exile, when Ezekiel wrote? *You may want to read chapter 22:6-12 to get more of an idea.*
- 2) In vv.11-31, how was God going to remedy the situation?
- 3) What parts of the prophecy have already been fulfilled by Jesus' coming? (John 10 may be a helpful place to go!)

Application:

- 4) Where/when are you most hurt, disappointed or discouraged by the state of leadership in the church?
- 5) How does it help to know that Jesus is the true shepherd of the church, who is always caring for his flock?
 - You may find it encouraging to look at vv.11-16 and share how you've seen/experienced him caring for you or others in some of these ways.
 - You may like to look at John 6:35-40 and reflect on just how secure every one of Jesus' sheep are.*
- 6) Verses 1-10 and 16-21 contain some stark warnings for bad shepherds and bullies in the flock today. Let's not deflect attention from ourselves by thinking about what this means for church leaders and others 'out there'. Rather, discuss how we might need to hear these warnings in MRC – e.g. if you are in a position of leadership or you are a strong personality who might be more easily tempted towards bullying behaviour?
- 7) Read 1 Peter 5:1-4, which picks up the image of Jesus as Chief Shepherd and elders as under shepherds. What kind of leaders should we follow and seek to raise up in the local church?
- 8) The promises of Ezekiel 34:25-31 may seem a long way off. When do you find it hardest to believe that Jesus will bring his people home in this way?
 - Of things we've seen in Ezekiel 34 and it's partial fulfilment, what encourages you to keep hoping and waiting patiently for Jesus to bring you home?

**N.B. the verses in John 6 may raise questions about people who appear to be Christians but then fall away – perhaps because of abusive leadership in the church. Jesus goes on to say in verses 44 and 65 that no one can come to him unless the Father draws/enables them. If Jesus will never drive away any who come to him (v.37), yet only those whom the Father enables can truly come to him (vv.44, 65), then presumably those who appear to follow Jesus for a while, but then fall away, have not been drawn by the Father in the first place. This is very sad to see at a human level. However, theologically, it fits with what we saw in Ephesians 2:8-9, where everything about us is so dead in sin, that God must give the whole of salvation to us as a gift – even the ability to have true faith. Without true faith, enabled by the Spirit, it is seemingly possible to be drawn to Jesus for a while, but not to persevere. This is because, as Jesus says in the Parable of the Sower, trouble, persecution, worry, the deceitfulness of wealth, etc. eventually overwhelm that person's interest in Jesus (Mark 4:16-19).*

If this causes us to question our own salvation and worry about whether we have been given saving faith, that very worry may itself be a good sign that our hearts are transformed, because we don't want to be separated from Jesus! But John 6:37 offers the further reassurance that so long as we keep coming back to Jesus, he will never drive us away. So don't get bogged down in speculation about your own faith; keep coming to Jesus and he will not disappoint! In addition, the longer we walk with him and see him at work in our lives, transforming us, providing for us, etc. the more we can draw confidence that we genuinely belong to him – we can look back and see the evidence of him shepherding us.

This is a complex area, so it's probably best not to go into it unless someone asks. Even then, it may be more fruitful to pick up afterwards in a 1-2-1 conversation, where you can explore what is behind those concerns/fears.