

## 20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning

### Week 20 (May 10-16, 2015)

This week, we will turn to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel to continue our study on the relationship of a shepherd and his sheep.

**Sunday**, May 10 (read Ezekiel 34:1-6)

*Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? (Ezekiel 34:2b)*

The promises and commands given to Israel in the Old Testament relate to the New Testament Church and her leaders as well. The truth that we have not **replaced** Israel, but rather have come **alongside** her is stated in Ephesians 3:6 (emphasis mine): “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs **together** with Israel, members **together** of one body, and sharers **together** in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Several denominations have made the serious mistake of teaching that the Church has **replaced** Israel and that none of the promises to the Jews relate to the Church of Jesus Christ; therefore, they are missing out on the warnings as well as the promises of God. We will examine this text in tomorrow’s devotion.

**Monday**, May 11 (reread Ezekiel 34:1-6)

*You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. (Ezekiel 34:4)*

The leaders chosen by God to shepherd His flock have fallen down on the job. They are more concerned with fleecing the flock for their personal gain than they are in caring for those entrusted to them (v. 1-3). Since no effort is being made to nurture the flock, the sheep have scattered in search of the provisions they are lacking (v. 4-6). This has left them vulnerable to the wild animals around them that seek to destroy the flock (v. 5). Can you see the connection to many pastors and teachers in our generation? Many believers have been forced to leave their churches in search of food for their souls because their church/denomination no longer preaches the Word of God. Be careful! There are many false prophets trying to devour these vulnerable sheep for their own personal gain (see Matthew 7:15-16). I am thrilled that many of these sheep are finding refuge within Evangelical ministries. Pray for others that predators will not find them first and devour them.

**Tuesday**, May 12 (read Ezekiel 34:7-10)

*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. (Ezekiel 34:10a)*

James, the earthly brother of Jesus writes, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1). We who are **called** to teach and preach are commanded to provide food, shelter and care for the flock entrusted to us. God will hold us personally responsible if we use the flock to meet **our own** emotional and financial needs while failing to help them grow and flourish in **their** environment (v. 10). Ezekiel teaches this even stronger in chapter 33:1-9. Many pastors have been disgraced and forced to leave their ministries because they have made terrible personal choices that gratified their sinful nature. May God help all of us to take His Word seriously so that His flock is nurtured and led into the green pastures where they will also find still waters (see Psalm 23)!

**Wednesday, May 13** (read Ezekiel 34:11-16)

*For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them."  
(Ezekiel 34:11)*

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Our job as pastors, teachers, parents, grandparents or guardians is to lead the sheep under our care into a personal relationship with the Lord. I included parents, grandparents and guardians to show you that this passage is applicable to all of us and not just **paid** preachers and teachers. If we fail, the Lord will personally provide for His flock so that not one of them will be lost, but woe to those who neglect their duty to provide for them! The Jews waited 2500 years before God brought them back to the land of Israel in 1948 (v. 13). The rest of God's promises in today's text will not be fulfilled until the Lord returns to earth to set up His kingdom in Jerusalem (14-16), but you can be sure, just as He brought them back to the land, He will save them and care for them.

**Thursday, May 14** (read Ezekiel 34:17-19)

*As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I will judge between one sheep and another, and between the rams and goats."  
(Ezekiel 34:17)*

Shepherds are not the only people who are in danger of coming under the wrath of God. In today's text, we find that the **sheep** will also have to give an account of how they conduct themselves within the flock! Power struggles grow up in every church because the membership is made up of sinners who have a tough time dropping their own agenda for the good of the church body. I'm sure you have observed churches in which there exists a person or a group of people who try to dictate the food being offered to others in the fold (music, worship style, etc.). How many times have you seen a few people "muddy up the water" for the multitude (v. 18-19)? As you examine yourself before God, ask these questions: Do you make the new people feel welcome? Are you trying to incorporate them into prominent leadership positions? Are you training others to replace your role in the church? If so, you are safe from the warnings in this text.

**Friday, May 15** (read Ezekiel 34:20-24)

*Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says to them: "See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep."  
(Ezekiel 34:20-24)*

Jesus assures that He will provide for all who come to Him in faith (see John 6:35-37). To accomplish this, He has assigned the care of these believers to individual churches, but, even if the church fails to do its job, He will keep believers eternally safe. The Lord has commanded His people to take the least important seat available to us. It is **His** job to move us up to a more important place of prominence, not **ours** (see Luke 14:7-11). He will judge those who drive others away in order to maintain power and control (v. 20-22). Jesus, who came to earth as part of the tribe of Judah (David's tribe), will return to Jerusalem to rule for 1000 years. At that time, He will provide for all of His sheep, and He will place us in the position of leadership determined by His Father (v. 23-24).

**Saturday, May 16** (read Ezekiel 34:25-31)

*"You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord."  
(Ezekiel 34:31)*

Today's text teaches that there is coming a time when Israelites will finally live in peace, but that will not occur until Jesus returns to earth to set up His kingdom in Jerusalem. The Church Age will end with the rapture, followed by seven horrible years of tribulation under the rule of the antichrist and his false prophet. Then Christ will return with us to begin His rule of 1000 years, during which time we will experience perfect peace, even within the animal kingdom (a review of the past devotions). The Lord wants you to know that you are the sheep under His care if you have given your life to Him. Do not read this as a promise only to Israel! "**You**, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign Lord" (v. 31 emphasis mine).