

12. Unfit shepherds

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In the last 22 years in America, we've seen one too many unfit political leaders in this country. They all have silver tongues to spellbound the easily -persuaded dumb crowd. These leaders can sell more ice to Eskimo people and room heaters to the people in Africa. And those people would think that they are getting something great that they don't have.

But in reality, these political leaders are only increasing their own personal finances and power even if what they do is illegal.

However, this is not anything new. As long as we have the human history, there have been a plenty of corrupted political leaders everywhere.

I am sure that you all have seen the obnoxiously over -spent mansion of the ousted president of Ukraine on the 360 acre land. While the majority of the Ukraine citizens are living in poverty, its worth is about \$75 million even though the president 's annual salary was \$25,000. He kept all that money for himself that was supposed to go to taking care of the people of his country .

In chapter 34 of the Book of Ezekiel, God speaks out against the corrupted leaders of Israel, referring them as "the shepherds." The Lord already exposed the sins of these people in chapter 22. But He hasn't finished with them yet, because what they did bring forth the return of the Israel people in here as well as the following chapters when the Lord brings back His scattered people to their land Israel.

Throughout the chapter 34, the main vocabularies are for taking care of sheep – shepherds, flocks, wool, bound up the broken, sheep, etc. When the Lord spoke about "the flock," He was referring to the nation of Israel. While we study this chapter, we would be reminded of a couple of chapters in the Bible: P salm 23 and John 10:

Psalm 23:1-2 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

John 10:11-12 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.

God has never intended that spiritual leaders become lords over the body of Christ, rather the servants to them. Unfortunately, we see way too often that not only political leaders, but also pastors start to get an attitude of lordship or superiority and start abusing their positions.

You may say, "I am not a pastor, so this doesn't apply to me." Yes, it does, because you may come across someone who is younger in the Lord and you might minister to that person as a mentor or brother or sister in the Lord.

A. THE LIST OF THINGS THAT UNFIT SHEPHERDS DO

Ezekiel 34:1-6 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ' Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed

themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? 3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock. 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. 6 My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them."

In the OT, Kings and officers in government often were referred to as "shepherds". It was their responsibility to care for the people, protect them, and see to it that their needs were met. But the selfish leaders of the kingdom of Judah had abused and exploited the people because they thought only of themselves.

The spiritual side of 'shepherd' is 'pastor'. The origin of the word 'pastor' comes from Latin which means 'shepherd,' literally, 'feeder.' The root word is 'pasture.'

From v2 to v5, the Lord lists the things these unfit shepherds do to their flocks. When you read them, you can understand how this list fits perfectly with the unfit pastors of our days.

- 1) You do not feed the flock
- 2) You have not strengthened
- 3) You have not healed those who were sick
- 4) You have not bound up the broken
- 5) You have not brought back what was driven away
- 6) You have not sought what was lost
- 7) You have ruled them with force and cruelty
- 8) You are not their caring shepherd, so they were scattered

Did you notice something in this list? There is only one thing they do – ruling the flock with force and cruelty. In the rest of the list, they show what they don't do as shepherds. If the leaders' sins of commission were bad, their sins of omission were even worse.

It is sad, but it is so true that many pastors in the ministry today who are only fulfilling psychological need and became nothing more than motivational speakers, not spiritual leaders who lead their congregation with examples of their lives. I love the way apostle Paul showed the way in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

Jesus said to Peter, "Feed My flock" in John 21:15. The most important need in the church today is that the Christians be fed properly from the Word of God, not from anywhere else. Many pastors become lazy and complacent. Instead of digging into the Word of God and dividing it properly and studying and delivering spiritual food to their congregation, they'd rather rely on the latest fad psychology mumbo jumbos.

If that is not bad enough, many of them are into money making, their own empire building, and power grabbing mode. Many of the Word of Faith Movement teachers are in this category.

I know a Calvary Chapel pastor who loves to go to Ruth's Chris Steakhouse in San Diego whenever he is on the way to the Senior Pastors Conference in CA. He always

pays for a dinner for those who join him. In case you don't know Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, their cheapest steak starts at \$42.95 and it was a la carte. It sounds extremely generous of him to buy a dinner for everyone with him, but I knew him enough to say that he was not using his own personal credit card, rather his church credit card. Maybe the Lord spoke to him to spend that much money for a dinner in that fancy restaurant. But somehow that idea doesn't settle with me right. It is not his own money, rather God's money and God's people's money.

You remember what the sons of Eli did in Book of 1 Samuel:

1 Samuel 2:12-17 Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord. 13 And the priests' custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged flesh-hook in his hand while the meat was boiling. 14 Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. 15 Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, "Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw." 16 And if the man said to him, "They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires," he would then answer him, "No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force." 17 Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.

Eli's sons had horrible attitudes toward God and His service. As priests they should have known better, but they could care less and their corruption was really affecting the people that people even abhorred the offering of the Lord. They were fleecing the flock of God rather than feeding them.

This still happens. This morning I found out that the pastor and founder of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea of the largest Pentecostal church in the world, David Yonggi Cho, has been sentenced to three years in prison for embezzling \$12 million in church funds. At the press conference, the elders revealed the findings of an internal investigation into Cho's financial dealings, including millions of dollars in church money that was borrowed by Cho and never returned.

My biggest fear is not death or cancer or anything like that, rather I might sin against the Lord that my sin gives great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

B. THE TRUE SHEPHERD

Let's compare what these unfit shepherds do with the True Shepherd our Lord does:

Ezekiel 34:11-16 'For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. 16 I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment."

In Ezekiel's time, the Lord brought His people back from Babylon; but the picture here is certainly much broader than that, because the Lord spoke about "countries" in v13. Ezekiel promises that in the end times, the Lord will gather His flock "from all the places where they were scattered" and bring them back to their own land where He will be their Shepherd.

It's difficult to apply this prophecy to the return of the remnant after their exile in Babylon, and even more difficult to spiritualize it and apply it to the church today. That's why the Replacement Theology is so wrong. The followers of the Replacement Theology take Scriptures out of context. But in here the prophet is speaking about a literal future regathering of Israel, a topic that is mentioned frequently in the Book of Ezekiel in chapters 11, 20, 28, 36, 37, and 38.

C. ONE SHEPHERD

Ezekiel 34:23-24 I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them--My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

This is definitely a prophecy of future events. When Israel is regathered to her land in the end times, the Messiah will rule over them and be their Shepherd-King. The "prince" in v24 will not be king David, resurrected and enthroned again, but the Lord Jesus Christ whom Israel will receive and trust when they see Him.

Jeremiah 23:5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

Hosea 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.

D. I WILL MAKE YOU PERPETUALLY DESOLATE

Ezekiel 35:8-11 And I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those who are slain by the sword shall fall. 9 I will make you perpetually desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited; then you shall know that I am the Lord. 10 "Because you have said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,' although the Lord was there, 11 therefore, as I live," says the Lord God, "I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you.

Chapter 35 starts with the Lord's Word against the Edomites who lived in the area of Mount Seir. Actually He already pronounced judgment on Edom through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel in chapter 25. Edomites held their hatred against the Jews throughout the generations since their ancestor Esau. There was bad blood between them.

The Edomites dwelt in the area of south from Moab and in that area where their capital was the rock city of Petra.

Edomites had been looking for every opportunity to attack the Jews. When Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed Jerusalem, the Edomites also came to loot whatever they could find there. They rejoiced greatly over the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. And because of this, God pronounces a judgment to come against the Edomites.

The word 'desolate' against Edomite was mentioned 8 times in chapter 35. In v9 the Lord declared, *"I will make you perpetually desolate,"* He meant it. That area is still desolate as you can see in this aerial photo.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) **We can do great things for the Lord if we are willing to do little things for others.**

2) **A leader must deeply care and love his or her people.**

If a leader doesn't care about his followers, it will be revealed to them one way or another. A family or group that lacks loyalty to one another is like a pile of wet sand. As soon as a wind blows it starts to fall apart.

Proverbs 20:28 Mercy and truth preserve the king, And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne.