Main Point: God brings judgment upon the wicked and guides His people with justice and peace.

White water rafting offers a thrilling and adventurous way to experience God’s creation. In order to really enjoy the experience, it’s essential to have a great river guide who knows every twist, turn, and rapid. If you don’t have an experienced guide, there’s a strong chance you are going to get dumped out of the boat and go for a swim!

The best guides know every contour of the river and can chart an exact course through all the rapids. They know how to get you just wet enough to enjoy yourself. They can guide the boat away from hazards or danger in order to help everyone have a great time! Much like a good river guide, God charts a course for His people through rough water, challenging our faith to trust that He knows best. Ezekiel offers a picture of God’s good guidance even as the people of God live in exile from the Promised Land.

*Have you ever gone white water rafting or done some other nature activity requiring an outdoor adventure expert? Did you enjoy it? Why or why not?*
What makes a guide “good” or “bad” in your opinion?

What’s the importance of having a good guide when you are doing something new or adventurous? Has anyone ever had a bad experience with a “bad guide?”
Week 11: The Messiah Who Guides *Ezekiel 34*

**Book**

**Main Point:** God brings judgment upon the wicked and guides His people with justice and peace.

**Text Summary:** *Ezekiel 34* God judges and condemns wicked leaders who exploit others. In His grace, He restores His people to a place of peace. Through the promised Davidic king, Jesus, God will gather His children and guide them through life. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus lays down His life for the sheep in order to bring life to the sheep.

**Ezekiel 34:1–10 [Read]**

**Sub-Point** Jesus saves penitent sinners but judges the calloused and unrepentant.

God’s love for His people knows no boundaries and He stands in opposition to those who seek to destroy His children. Ezekiel’s message in chapter 34 resonates as He proclaims a message of judgment against unrepentant sinners (vv. 1–10) and restoration for God’s people to a place of peace through His covenant promises (vv. 11–31). Verses 1–10 paint a contrasting picture. In the face of the unrepentant and wicked, God stands in judgment. Yet, in the presence of the desperate and humble, God stands ready to save.

Ezekiel’s prophetic oracle comes down directly upon the heads of those leading the nation, those who exploit their power and privilege for personal gain (vv. 1–2). God’s message to Ezekiel is a message of doom to wicked leaders (v. 1). While Ezekiel does point out the people’s responsibility for their sin and God’s judgment throughout this book, passages such as this chapter point to the particular culpability of Judah’s leadership in bringing divine wrath and exile.¹

Verses 3–4 point out particular ways the leaders in Judah, the kings, priests, and false prophets brought suffering and stood in direct opposition to God’s desires for His “sheep.” Leaders as shepherds represented a common image for this period of time and geographic location.² In Israel’s case, David is likened to a shepherd (2 Samuel 5:2) tasked with guiding the people.

The proper task of a shepherd was to care for the flock, guarding the sheep and promoting well-being. Good shepherds gathered straying sheep, led the flock to good pasture and clean drinking water, and would take special care of the poor and the weak. Rather than caring for the people in this way, Judah’s leaders neglected and abused the sheep, exploiting the people for personal gain and denying necessary care to those in need (vv. 3–4). God’s people

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experienced much more than neglectful or lazy leadership. They experienced kings and priests who actively oppressed them and endangered the entire nation.

As a result of this poor leadership, the nations was scattered from the land, language indicative of the exilic state of the nation in Ezekiel’s day (vv. 5–6). Again, rather than offering protection and guidance, Judah’s shepherds saw the people as personal property to be used and discarded whenever expedient. Instead of self-sacrificial watch care, Judah’s shepherds sacrificed the people to hold their own power, privilege, and prestige (v. 5). As the people scattered, there was no one to search them out and draw them back to place of security and peace (v. 6).

In the absence of good shepherds, the flock of God was scattered and plundered (v. 8). The passage seems to beg the question, “If Judah’s shepherds are taken away, who will guide the people?” Quite simply, the Lord will step in and remove the false shepherds from their office so that they can no longer feed themselves at the flock’s expense (v. 8).³ In the place of wicked shepherds, God will come to protect and guard His own. Because of all their evil, God’s word of judgment comes upon the shepherds as He stands against the wicked and unrepentant (v. 9–10). Ezekiel uses the same language used in God’s denunciation of Jerusalem (5:8), and was typically used against the enemies of Yahweh.⁴

It’s impossible to read this passage and not be drawn to Jesus’ description of Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10). Unlike the evil leaders of Ezekiel’s day, Jesus ever lives as the shepherd to sacrifice His very life for His sheep. He does not exploit His people but serves them in humility and love. Jesus seeks out His own lost sheep and brings them into His kingdom by grace (Luke 15:1–7). Jesus protects His own from false shepherds, standing in judgment for those who resist His reign. Jesus restores those who call on Him, offering peace and new life through His finished work.

In what ways do God’s people still struggle under bad shepherds who manipulate and exploit the family of God? What does Ezekiel’s message say about these leaders and what hope does he offer for God’s children?

How do bad leaders exploit people today? How does the Gospel help us have peace even under bad leaders?

Ezekiel 34:11-24 [Read]
Sub-Point: Jesus treats us with kindness by providing for our every need.


Continuing the message of rescue from verse 10, Ezekiel expands the promised provision found in God’s righteous rule over the people. Unlike the rulers who look to devour and consume the people (v. 10), God seeks out and sustains those who wander far from Him (v. 11). God takes over from the disgraced human leaders and restores the true divine kingship—the covenantal theocracy that was meant to have been the distinguishing mark of Israel. As king, God will bring the people together to tend and feed them with justice.

God takes initiative in drawing the scattered people back to a place of safety (v. 12–13). When Ezekiel uses the language of “clouds and thick darkness,” he is describing how the Lord goes out and seeks His people from even the most terrifying and uncertain places (cf. Joel 2:2; Zephaniah 1:15). There is no limit to God’s great love. In fact, Jesus Himself described His mission “to seek and to save what was lost” including the “lost sheep of Israel” (Luke 19:10; Matthew 10:6; 15:24; cf. Luke 15:3–7).

God also promises provision for His people. Instead of scraping a living together in uncertain circumstances, God offers the people the richness of land (v. 13). Much like Joseph’s imagery in Genesis 48 and David’s language in Psalm 23, Ezekiel paints a picture of satisfaction, rest, and wholeness under God’s caring leadership as the perfect shepherd (v. 14). While comforting circumstances surely bring some peace, God’s presence offers rest and security for His people and is the final cause for their lasting joy (v. 15). God promises to be their nurse (He will “bind up” their wounds, v. 16), rescuer (vv. 11–12), protector (v. 15), provider (vv. 13–14), and guide (vv. 11, 16).

God takes initiative for His people to experience a total reversal of fortunes. Verses 16–17 take the misshapen leadership condemned by God in verse 4 and reveal how God plans to restore a life of fullness for His children. Instead of neglecting the lost, God seeks those who wander. Instead of ignoring the strayed, God pursues those who are far away from His love. Instead of abusing the injured, God heals the hurting. Instead of exploiting the weak, God strengthens them for good works. Instead of protecting the privileged, God hunts down the wicked for judgment. Instead of oppressing the people, God sustains the people in justice.

Ezekiel’s message of comfort and divine restoration takes a turn against any who would seek to continue the cycle of exploitation promoted by the bad shepherds. It seems that Ezekiel is warning of any who perceive the leadership void as an opportunity for personal gain (v. 17). The imagery of sheep trampling down good grass or muddying clean water indicates individuals who would shortchange or oppress others simply out of malice or ill will (v. 18–19). Not unlike the judgment against Judah’s bad leadership, God stands against any who look for ways to

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6 Thomas, God Strengthens: Ezekiel Simply Explained, 221–222.

marginalize or exploit others (v. 20). Ezekiel’s message points the finger of judgment at any who
would jostle for position in what seems to be a power vacuum (v. 21–22).

In the moment when the people are in need of a strong shepherd, God offers a strong promise
of a coming Davidic king who would rule well (v. 23). Indeed, Ezekiel’s language of a coming
Good Shepherd who feeds the people draws to mind Jesus’ self-proclamation as the Good
Shepherd (John 10) and the Bread of Life (John 6:25–59). Through his body and blood, Jesus
who call upon Christ in faith experience a wellspring of life flowing out of the Spirit’s renewing
presence (John 4:14).

How does God’s leadership over our lives change the way we lead those around us?

How does Jesus’ humble kingship challenge the way we use our power and privilege?

What do people today see as the characteristics of a good leader? How does this line up or
depart from Ezekiel’s description of God’s leadership over His people?

Ezekiel 34:25–31 [Read]

Sub-Point: Jesus sovereignly serves as our loving and protective guide in every stage of life.

The closing verses of Ezekiel 34 confirm the covenant foundations of God’s judgment against
false shepherds and God’s restoration of His chosen people. Having spoken of the coming
Messiah, Ezekiel now paints a picture of a peaceful existence for God’s people.8 In place of
dispersing and scattering them among the nations, God planned a future of wholeness and
harmony for the people.

When he references a covenant of peace in verse 25, Ezekiel calls to mind the covenant
language and covenant relationship well-known to Judah. Through God’s sure promise, the
people look forward to a day when the Messiah comes to rule and reign (v. 25). While Christ
secures final peace for His people on the Cross, the complete fulfillment of these promises will
not be realized until He comes again. God’s promises here in Ezekiel still offer a strong
grounding for our soul in this life as well as the next.

As well, the peace Ezekiel describes is a full, rich wholeness. Ezekiel uses language indicating
much more than mere absence of conflict. The language describes the welfare of all God’s
creation, and the enjoyment of joyful freedom from conflict in all the relationships between
humanity and nature and between both of those and God.9

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God’s peace brings security from all threats, abundance blessings, and deliverance from human oppression (vv. 25–27). While we don’t fully appreciate the threat of wild animals today, the people of Ezekiel’s day would have identified them with danger to flocks, livelihood, and personal safety. Ezekiel offers a three-fold confirmation of safety by repeating the same idea in verses 25, 27, and 29. God’s people could look forward to His care in every phase of life and trust His plan for the future regardless of how they felt or their present circumstances.

Using agricultural language, Ezekiel points to a time when all the land experiences God’s favor (vv. 26–27). Consider how such abundance sounded to a people who lived during the famine and desperation of Jerusalem’s siege. As a people living in exile and dependent upon crops for food, God’s promise of abundance offered incredible encouragement. Under God’s care, no aspect of creation would hold back from bringing blessing on the people (v. 27).

As well, God offers abundant freedom (v. 27). Living under exile brought pain and shame, but God offers a promise of deliverance. Ezekiel preaches his message to a people in exile and offers a future of restoration with God. Much like John’s words in the New Testament, verse 28 reveals a future free from fear (1 John 4:18). Instead of hunger, God offers satisfaction (v. 29). Instead of fear, God offers joy. Instead of exile and separation, God offers a new identity (vv. 30–31).

*In what ways do people look for satisfaction or contentment in this life? How does God’s peace differ from the peace offered in this world?*

*How can we declare this message of peace to a world in need of hope?*
Week 11: The Messiah Who Guides *Ezekiel 34*

**Took**

**Main Point:** God brings judgment upon the wicked and guides His people with justice and peace.

Ezekiel shows us a God who provides good guidance and care for His people. He condemns those who offer bad counsel or seek to destroy His people. Much like a good guide who knows the best routes through rapids and into calm waters, so God offers a way through difficult days and into lasting peace. Consider these ways to walk with Jesus as your guide.

**Challenges**

**Lead Well by God’s Grace.** The false shepherds of Ezekiel’s day stood under harsh judgment from God. As we seek to guide and lead the Church and lead in the world, we must be mindful of God’s indictment of bad leadership. If we seek to lead for the sake of power and prestige, we will experience divine wrath. Even if we succeed and prosper for a season, it’s only a matter of time until God’s wrath falls swift and sure. Further, if we protect the privileged for the sake of personal gain or out of fear of what we might lose, we stand under God’s judgment. Pause and ask the Spirit to soften your heart to the real reasons you lead others or protect those in leadership positions. Repent if you are guilty of preserving your own power and oppressing the weak. Read Ezekiel’s message against false shepherds and pray for God’s guidance to walk the way of Christ, serving in love and humility rather than pride and selfishness.

**Proclaim the Gospel with God’s Peace.** We have a message of peace and hope for a world longing for meaning and living in fear. Millions of people live in fear of natural disasters, loss of wealth, crime, unemployment, illness, or countless other things. Seek to declare the promises of Scripture that offer a wonderful future of peace secured by Christ. Live a life defined by God’s peaceful presence rather than seeking other sources of comfort. Our future is secure in Christ, and we have the privilege of declaring this message to the world.