

Why Israel Was Scattered and Will Be Regathered

There are a number of passages, chapters, and verses in the Bible that both Christians and some unbelievers love. Probably the favorite sermon in the gospels is the Sermon on the Mount but often people do not really understand what it says. The favorite verse in the Bible is John 3:16. We see it on billboards, at sports games, on websites, and in magazines and books. It is the summary of the gospel in one verse. Psalm 23 is the favorite chapter in the Bible. Even many unbelievers love the passage. It is loved by Jews and Gentiles. It is often read as a devotional, in a church service, to the sick, at funerals, and during weddings. It is a chapter that I did not understand when I was a young boy. The first verse says,

**The LORD is
my shepherd,
I shall not
want.
Psalm 23:1
(NASB)**

I thought the verse said that I should not want the LORD, for the second line says, "I shall not want." I was confused. I wondered why we were not to want the LORD. I did not understand that the meaning of the Hebrew expression for "not want" was "not lacking." That is, God would meet my basic needs and even some of my desires so that I did not lack. I did not understand the verse until I was an adult. Because God is my shepherd, I will not be wanting as a pattern of life.

The message of the chapter is that God is a shepherd to everyone who believes in Him. Verse 1 is only true for believers. The psalm is a description of how a good shepherd cares for his flock. Psalm 23 reveals that as a shepherd, our God cares for believers in three different ways. First, He meets our physical needs. Verse 2 says that the Lord gives us time to rest, provides food to eat, and water to drink. In short, as our Shepherd He provides our basic needs. Matthew 6:11 tells us that Jesus encouraged us to pray that God the Father would meet our daily needs. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus promised that if we seek the Father's kingdom and His righteousness, our basic needs will be provided.

In James 1:27, He tells us that,

**Pure and
undefiled
religion in the
sight of our
God and Father
is this: to visit
orphans and
widows in their
distress, and to
keep oneself
unstained by
the world.
James 1:27**



Shepherd
and His Flock

(NASB)

Notice that this is pure and undefiled religion. Notice Galatians 6:10 which says,

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to

all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:10 (NASB)

That is, our God cares for everyone because He loves everyone, especially the believers of all the ages. Acts 14:17 says that God provides rains and fruitful seasons in order to satisfy our hearts with food and gladness. That means God provides for believers and unbelievers.

Our God directed the early church through the apostles to provide food for believers who had needs (Acts 2:45) and for believing widows who had a need (Acts 6:1). In 1 Timothy 5:5-16 the apostle Paul taught that the church is to provide for those women who are true widows. That is, if a widow needed money and had faithfully served in the church, verse 16 says they are widows indeed.

Our Lord is our example of a biblical shepherd who cares for the physical needs of all men, especially for believers. That is the first characteristic of a good shepherd. He will provide and will provide for our physical needs.

The second way that our Lord shepherds us is that He has given us the Scriptures through His prophets and apostles. We could say He is a prophet, for Christ was a prophet. As a result, His Word helps us to learn about Him. The Word of God guides us in the paths of righteousness, tells us how to be saved, and has shared His plan for our future. Psalm 23 says it this way. He restores our soul, and has shown us how to be righteous in verse 3. Verse 6 speaks of eternal life for believers. As a shepherd, He provides us with spiritual guidance through the Scriptures.

The third way our Lord cares for us is as a High Priest. Psalm 23:4 says the God uses a rod and staff. That means He disciplines and guides us. Verse 6 says our Lord loves us. It says “goodness and lovingkindness” will follow. They follow us because of our Lord. Verse 3 says He restores our soul. That is, we have eternal life. The book of Hebrews has told us that Jesus is our great high priest. He makes intercession for us before the Father. 1 John 2:1 says that He is our advocate who defends us before the Father when we sin. Why is it important to know that God is our high priest? Psalm 23 describes our Lord as a high priest or a pastor.

We could say He is a priest because the Bible says Jesus is our high priest. The book of Hebrews describes Jesus our Savior and our great high priest. As our Savior, Jesus took on human flesh and blood so that He could defeat sin, death, and Satan, and give us eternal life. Jesus is also our great high priest because He makes intercession for us before the Father. 1 John 2:1 says that He is our advocate who protects us from accusations of having committed sin. Why is it important to see God as our Savior and high priest? Psalm 23 says the Lord protects us, disciplines us, guides us, heals us, loves us, and ensures that He loses none of His sheep. We will spend eternity with Him.

So, when Psalm 23:1 says, “The LORD is my shepherd,” we need to realize that this includes more benefits than our salvation. In Jesus’ time the shepherd of a flock of sheep had total responsibility for every member of the flock. The shepherds who were in the field in the cold air on the night Jesus was born were responsible to make sure that each animal was fed, cared for, protected, and their wounds were bandaged. Psalm 23 captures that example because our Lord is a shepherd Who cares about every aspect of our lives, not just for our salvation. That is why 1 Peter 5:7 encourages us to cast all of our care upon Him for He cares for us.

In summary, in ancient Israel the role of the good shepherd in Psalm 23 was divided among the kings, prophets, and priests. The kings were to care for the physical needs. The prophets communicated the Word of God, and the priests taught the people and made atonement for sins. But our Good Shepherd does all three.

Characteristics of the Wicked Shepherds (v 1-10). Our study is Ezekiel 34:1-16 and it is about the shepherds of Israel and our Lord. It is a powerful passage and I trust that it ministers to you. There are three sections to this chapter, but we will only study two of them. The first section is titled, “Characteristics of the Wicked Shepherds.” It starts in verse 1 and ends in verse 10. Here is Ezekiel 34:1-2,

Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘Thus says the

Lord GOD, “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?” Ezekiel 34:1-2 (NASB)

Immediately, the prophet Ezekiel says that he was given a message from Yahweh. He was to prophesy against the false shepherds of Israel. We are told they had been feeding themselves. This expression “feeding themselves” is explained in the verse. But first, notice that the NASB translates the last line of verse 2 as, “Should not the shepherds feed the flock?” However, the literal Hebrew says, “Should not the shepherds shepherd the flock?” That is, the shepherds were not doing their job. Their “shepherds” were not shepherding. They were not true shepherds! They had a title but they were not faithfully performing their responsibility. They could not be described as faithful.

Immediately, we should ask ourselves who were these men that Yahweh called shepherds. To discover the answer, we need to read the next two verses.

“You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.” Ezekiel 34:3-4 (NASB)

Who are these shepherds? They were many of the kings, prophets, and priests of Israel. The charges against these shepherds are all rolled together in these verses. The charges are the opposite of the shepherd in Psalm 23. Notice three things. First, Yahweh said these shepherds were self-centered. They cared only about themselves and not the people. Verse 3 says they slaughtered the fat sheep, ate them, and then used their wool for clothes. The shepherds of Israel exploited the sheep for their own pleasure. Even worse, they did not feed the flock of sheep.

But in Psalm 23, we are told that the LORD, like a good shepherd, feeds His flock. Psalm 23:4 says that the LORD

protects His flock. Most of the kings were wicked. Many of the prophets were wicked. Some of them wanted Yahweh’s prophets killed. Many of the priests did not love the Lord. Their acts of worship and service were of ritual; just read Malachi 1. They did not love the LORD. Serving God had become a job, a duty. These shepherds were self-centered.

The second charge against these shepherds is given in verses 3-4. These shepherds of Israel dominated or lorded it over the flock. These verses say these shepherds did not care enough to strengthen and heal the sick. So, they did not bandage the injured. They did not bring back members of the flock who had been scattered. Even worse, they did not even search for them in order to find them, in order to bring them back. The summary of these verses is given in the conclusion of verse 4 which says, “with force and with severity you have dominated them.” This is an interesting statement. It reveals that when a shepherd does not seek after the members of the flock, he is domineering and abusive.

These shepherds were abusive. They were not faithful shepherds. God had given them a ministry. Apparently, they enjoyed the title. That is, about all we can say about them.

The third charge is given in verses 5-6.

““They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.”” Ezekiel 34:5-6 (NASB)

Before we dig into the verse, we need to ask, “Who is the flock?” Verse 31 of this chapter tells us that the flock is composed of sheep who are men. Verse 2 has already told us the shepherds are the shepherds of Israel. So, that means the flock are the people of Israel. The people of Israel are the flock over which the kings, the prophets, and the priests functioned as wicked, unfaithful, and irresponsible shepherds.

The flock had been scattered to other countries as a result of the Babylonian invasion. They had been scattered as an act of judgment because of their wicked hearts and conduct.

The expression “they became food for every beast of the field” is a figure of speech. It refers to the various nations to which they had been scattered and were being exploited. Then in verse 6, Yahweh rebuked these shepherds because no one was searching for the lost sheep. The shepherds of Israel did not love or care for them. These shepherds ignored their sheep.

Next, Ezekiel 34:7-10 records Yahweh’s announcement of judgment against these wicked shepherds of Israel.

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: “As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely because My flock has become a prey, My flock has even become food for all the beasts of the field for lack of a shepherd, and My shepherds did not search for My flock, but rather the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand My sheep from them and make them cease from feeding sheep. So the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore, but I will deliver My flock from their mouth, so that they will not be food for them.””’”
Ezekiel 34:7-10 (NASB)

Notice that Yahweh tells these shepherds that He will remove them as leaders and take their flock away. Notice that God did not say “Your flock.” He said, “My flock.” Yahweh’s flock was not owned by the shepherds of Israel. Just as Yahweh removed Moses from leading Israel when he sinned, these shepherds were removed because of their self-centeredness, domination or lording it over Yahweh’s flock, and indifference to the scattered. The message of verses 5-6 is that God will remove evil leaders. The book of Ezekiel has taught us that the Good Shepherd will destroy wicked nations when kings, prophets, and priests rule wickedly.

This should remind us of some of the leaders in our nation today from the lowest level to the highest levels. Many of them do not care about the people and have exploited the people in order to gain wealth. They oppress

the people. They do not care if innocent people die because they have their own agenda. Wicked, unjust, oppressive, self-centered leaders are easy to identify by their behavior. We can see their hearts. The shepherds of ancient Israel were examples. Just as Yahweh judged Israel because the shepherds of the nation were wicked, He will do the same to other nations too!

Revelation 2-3 reveals that our God also destroys churches if wicked pastors and leaders do not repent. He will judge pastors and church leaders. I am sorry to say that there are pastors and leaders in churches today who are just like the shepherds of ancient Israel. They run the church not as God desires but as they desire. They are like Diotrephes in 3 John 9. For example, one pastor owned the church property and consequently controlled the church. Other pastors select family members and friends to be the leaders of the church to maintain control. One church leader did not believe that parts of the New Testament apply to us today. Others are more concerned about how they want the church to function, than about how God wants the church to function. So, they lord it over the congregation in direct violation of 1 Peter 5:3.

Character of the Good Shepherd (v 11-16).

Verse 11 introduces us to the next section of Ezekiel 34. The section extends to verse 16. In verses 11-16 Yahweh repeatedly says He will search for “My sheep.” He does not say, “My flock.” There is a change in expression from the general “flock” to the more personal “sheep.” He shows His love for each person in Israel. He promises to search for His sheep and care for them. He keeps promising that He will regather His sheep to the land of Israel. Notice how many times Yahweh says, “I will” in this section. In verse 11, He says, “I will.”

“Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep.” Ezekiel 34:11-12a (NASB)

He tells us that His sheep are scattered, therefore He will seek them out. In the last part of verse 12, He says, “I will”

again.

“ . . . 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.” Ezekiel 34:12b (NASB)

Now Yahweh says that because He cares for them, He will regather Israel. Then in verse 13, Yahweh literally and explicitly promises to regather His sheep to the land of Israel. He says, “I will” twice.

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. Ezekiel 34:13 (NASB)

In verse 14, Yahweh says again, “I will.” He will feed them on the mountains of Israel.

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. Ezekiel 34:14 (NASB)

In verse 15, Yahweh says, “I will” again. He will lead them to rest.

I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 34:15 (NASB)

In verse 16, Yahweh says again, “I will.” He will seek His lost sheep; He will bring back the scattered. This is a strong statement about regathering Israel back to the land for He says they are scattered, but He will regather them.

“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.” Ezekiel 34:16 (NASB)

In the last part of the verse, Yahweh promised to destroy the wicked shepherds who did not care for the sheep. But in the first part of the verse, Yahweh once again promised to bring His sheep back to the land of Israel.

Just as Yahweh repeatedly promised to scatter Israel as an act of judgment, at least 18 times in the book of Ezekiel, He repeatedly promised to regather Israel. Since He literally scattered Israel into other countries around the world because they refused to repent of their wickedness, then we would be foolish to not believe that He will regather Israel back to the land. Why? Because in these six verses Yahweh, Himself, has promised to regather His sheep back to Israel. He repeatedly said, “I will.” Here He promised to regather Israel, and it has already started. He is the Good Shepherd of John 10. He is the king, prophet, and priest to His sheep.

So, the regathering started in the year 1948 when the United Nations gave the Jewish people the land of Israel after Germany was defeated in World War II. It was in that war that Germany tried to kill every Jew. So, the regathering has already started. When will the regathering be completed? The answer will be revealed in the next study.

In conclusion, Yahweh is the Good Shepherd. Psalm 23 describes what He does. First, He cares for every aspect of our lives. Second, Ezekiel 34:1-16 tells us that God keeps His every promise. He promised to scatter Israel for their sin. Now He promised to regather Israel back to the land and it has already started. So, we can be confident that He will not abandon believers. Our God is the Good Shepherd. Therefore, we will not want.