



[Ezekiel 34:2-4](#)

(2) Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? (3) Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. (4) The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.

King James Version

In days gone by, sheep were a common symbol of wealth. Whether they were raised for their wool or for their meat—or both—or traded for other items of value, raising sheep used to be a tried-and-true way to make a living. As a man's flocks grew in size, so did his financial security, as well as his status and influence in the community. Sheep used to be a valued resource, one that over time provided great dividends without a lot of expense.

Not much has changed.

Today, physical shepherds are far more rare than spiritual shepherds, making shepherding a booming industry. [Mega-churches](#) are springing up in every major city, and the shepherds of these massive flocks are becoming symbols of affluence, and in some cases, even extravagance. Among the various purposes for having such a large following, some shepherds may have a genuine desire to spread their good news to all [the world](#), but one cannot help but notice that, in the process, they are pulling down million-dollar

salaries and creating personal empires. All the while, they are serving up McSermons that may satiate but do little to urge the people toward *real holiness* or point them back to [God](#) in a truly meaningful way.

Disturbing as this is, the businesslike approach of valuing of large flocks over healthy sheep has also infiltrated parts of the church of God. We see sheep being enticed to ditch their current shepherd to follow a new one, and the reasons given for doing this reveal the carnal focus. Sheep are being lured, not with good food, clean water, [peace](#), and protection against pestilence, but with promises of being a part of something big and of protection from the Tribulation, along with the "privilege" of being able to support an especially qualified shepherd.

Such leaders see the sheep as mere personnel to serve them, their interests, and their projects, rather than accepting the gravity of their responsibility to care for their health and to dedicate themselves to "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of [Christ](#), till we all come to the unity of the [faith](#) and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" ([Ephesians 4:12-13](#)).

God's emphasis is on spiritual health—quality, not quantity. While this priority may contradict the designs of some to build a personal empire, the fact remains that the quantity of true sheep during this time of judgment is a limited number. Because God is only calling a certain number of people right now ([John 6:44](#)), only so many true sheep are available for the various shepherds to care for. The question becomes, then, who determines which sheep will be overseen by which shepherd? Considering the great care God has for His physical creation, is it logical to believe that He leaves His far more important *spiritual* creation to happenstance or the whims of mere men?

Do the individual shepherds determine this, or is this the responsibility of the Chief Shepherd—the One who can truthfully say, "Of those *whom You gave Me* I have lost none" ([John 18:9](#); compare [John 17:12](#)). Clearly, *all* of the sheep belong to the Chief Shepherd, and those who hear His voice follow Him ([John 10:27](#))—including following Him to whatever human shepherd He knows will be best for what the individual sheep needs. For a shepherd to lose sight of this fact and lure away sheep that have not been given—and if

they have been given, they need not be lured—is to be guilty of sheep rustling. During the days of the Old West, rustling was a hanging [offense](#)!

Consider the example of Abraham. Abraham and his nephew Lot both kept herds, yet even with the impressive title and standing before God—actually *because* of it—he did not try to rustle Lot's sheep. He did not assume that all the sheep should be his. He did not try to entice Lot's sheep to come join his flocks. Rather, when there was strife between Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen, he proposed they each choose his own land, so there would be no confusion or discord. He even deferred—for the sake of peace—to his nephew and gave him first pick!

Abraham knew that God governs in the affairs of men, and that he was not going to lack any good thing if he put His trust in the Most High. Abraham "believed in the LORD"—believed in His ability to manage His creation; in His sovereignty; in His leadership of His people; and in His promise to supply every need. He believed in all of this rather than try to further enrich himself with more sheep or better land—"and it was counted to him as righteousness" ([Genesis 15:6](#); [Galatians 3:6](#)).

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[**Sheep Rustling**](#)

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