



[Ezekiel 34:1-5](#)

(1) 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.

New King James Version

Godly leadership existed in short supply throughout most of Israel's relationship with [God](#). The scriptural record chronicles that an occasional Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, or another good leader arose among them, but Ezekiel 34 succinctly summarizes Judah's leadership, in particular, as shepherds who ruled for their own well-being rather than the citizens'. Such leadership does not produce good results.

Normally, a shepherd is a person who leads a flock by serving the sheep through his care for them in many areas of a sheep's life. However, in a context like Ezekiel 34, the terms "shepherd" and "sheep" are being used in a figurative sense. A shepherd is a human leader in some position of authority, and sheep designate human citizens the leader has authority over. It is also helpful to understand that "shepherd" includes far more than the religious ministry. It includes, in short, leadership in government, education, business, entertainment, and media, reaching all the way to parents in the family home.

God created the domesticated sheep to be among the most dependent of all animals. They are so dependent upon the leadership of a human shepherd that it seems a

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wonder that they survive in the wild at all. Sheep are quite timid by nature, easily frightened, as well as subject to many diseases and easy prey for predators.

In like manner, humans need quality leadership in important areas of life, or because of Satan's influence on the carnal mind, human community life tends to degenerate into a mode of survival of the fittest, resulting in large numbers of people living as little more than slaves of those mightier than they are. For the majority, life in such a community becomes a hopeless existence.

The prophet penned [Isaiah 3:12](#) over a hundred years before Ezekiel 34 was written, but it exposes that community life in Judah was already in severe decline: "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths."

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Leadership and Covenants \(Part Two\)](#)

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