

Dr. Leslie Allen, Ezekiel, Lecture 16, Israel's Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34 :1-31

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This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 16, Israel's Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:1-31.

We come this time to chapter 34 of the book of Ezekiel, and I should have mentioned that we are now in the fifth part of the book, according to my reckoning, which began in chapter 33 and is going to go on until the end of chapter 37.

This chapter groups together a series of messages that all share a common metaphor, the metaphor of sheep and shepherd. And we have seen that Ezekiel is a master of the extended metaphor, and so it is in this chapter. We've had read a number of examples of extended metaphors before, which explore a perspective from a variety of angles.

This feature of the book of Ezekiel reappears here, but not in a single message, but spread over three messages. The three messages are given in verses 1 through 16, 17 through 22, and 23 through 31. Though the third one is a collection of three supplements that develop the metaphor in verses 23 and 24, 25 through 30, and 31.

Ezekiel, at times, harks back to earlier prophetic texts and expands them. In this case, he is obviously aware of a text that we know from the book of Jeremiah, and he's taking it up and running with it. And I'm thinking of Jeremiah chapter 23 and verses 1 and 2. Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, says the Lord.

Therefore, thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people, it is you who have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. And that seems to be the scriptural basis, one might say, for this later prophetic message here, especially in verses 1 through 17.

Jeremiah 23 verses 1 and 2 comes near the end of a collection of messages that all focus on the last pre-exilic kings of Judah and challenge their failure to maintain the traditional ideals of Israelite kingship. That collection is spread over Jeremiah 21:11 through 23:8. Individual kings are critiqued first, and then in 23:1-2, there is a summarizing general review of recent kingship that speaks of the kings as poor shepherds who've not taken adequate care of their flock by causing their people to be deported in 597 and 587 BC.

It was that royal policy of rebelling against the imperial power that caused all this upset for the people of Judah, and so fundamentally, those last kings are to blame. So, Jeremiah 23 verses 1 and 2 lie in the background of 34:1 through 16. And here, these verses in 1 through 16, they record a post-587 message and so it can close with a message of salvation as we go on to the second half in 7 through 16.

Verses 1 through 16 as a whole record a post-587 message, and so, yes, that justifies that message of salvation by telling how God, the head shepherd, is going to remedy the deficiencies of the shepherd kings who were his under-shepherds, and he himself would take over the care of the flock. Of course, what is going on here is that there is a rhetorical address to these kings. They were all dead; they no longer existed, but there is this rhetorical address, not merely to people far away in space, but to people now long gone.

There is this dramatic way of presenting the message, but of course, the general company of exiles, 597 and 587, are really the recipients of this message. First of all, in verses 1 and 2, the message elaborates on Jeremiah 23, 1 to 2, by describing the perilous position the human shepherd kings had created. And it does so in verses 1 through 6, which, like Jeremiah 23, 1 to 2, is a message of judgment.

Mortal prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, to the shepherds, thus says the Lord God, are you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves, should not shepherds feed the flock of sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness, you have ruled them. So, they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and scattered they became food for all the wild animals.

My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains, on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with no one to search or seek for them. So, there's this devastating rhetorical oracle of judgment against the last pre-exilic prophets.

And so, this is that perilous situation that we describe in this message of judgment. Notice the direct way, as I say, the rhetorical way in which the kings are addressed, and this is taken over from Jeremiah 23. This rhetorical feature, though their reigns lie in the past now.

So, we have this metaphor of shepherding, and in the Old Testament, it generally has two applications. It can be used by human kings as responsible for their subjects. And this, of course, this usage corresponds to the practice throughout the ancient Near East regarding kings as shepherds.

But the second and more common usage in the Old Testament is to use shepherding as a theological metaphor for the covenant relationship between Israel and their God. And we have some examples of that in the book of Psalms. The Psalms especially attest to this second usage.

Psalms 80 and verse 1 address God as the shepherd of Israel. And then Psalm 100 and verse 3 testify, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. And then, of course, Psalm 23, verses 1 through 4, individualizes that shepherd and sheep metaphor and the psalmist speaks of himself as belonging to God's flock.

The Lord is my shepherd. Looking back at Jeremiah 23 and verse 1, it combines those two metaphorical applications. Woe to the shepherds, the kings, who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture.

And so, the political usage plus the theological usage already in Jeremiah 23 1. And so does Ezekiel 34 verses 1 to 10, which speaks both of the shepherds of Israel in verse 1 and of my sheep more often in verses 6 and 7 and 10. Judah's kings were meant to be Israel's shepherds too, but subordinate to and responsible to Israel's God, who was the head shepherd, one might say. And so that's the development and that's the coordination between those two applications, the political and the theological applications of this shepherding metaphor.

Both messages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel have in view the reigns of the Judean kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and they blamed their rule as leading eventually to the deportations of 597 and 587. And moreover, both those kings, it's claimed, had exploited their subjects. In shepherding terms, they'd taken their curds to eat and take their wool.

I take the translation curds from the NIV in verse 3. The new RSV has you eat the fat, clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the fatlings. But there's something a little bit wrong with that interpretation as fat. It would be better as curds because getting the fat depends on slaughtering the animals first, and that comes only later in this sequence, a sequence of three things: eating the curds, clothing yourselves with the wool, and slaughtering the fatlings and getting the fat.

And so, the slaughtering to get the fat only comes later in that sequence. To take the milk for curds and to take the wool are, of course, unobjectionable in themselves, but the point is being made in the context that taking was not accompanied by giving, and the shepherding role needed both. And rights were not matched in this case by responsibilities.

They did not feed the sheep. They didn't adequately look after their human flock. Slaughter, in this social context, blames the kings for not maintaining civil order and permitting unnecessary deaths.

The kings are called dictators because they rule with force and harshness, in verse 4. They're pure dictators, and only their own concerns and what they want count for them in their shepherd ruling. But above all, the sheep, who were poignantly called my sheep by God, were lost in deportation and in the flight of refugees, all due to the poor rule of these kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah.

And so, verses 7 through 10 can move from accusation to a statement of punishment. And we notice therefore that tells us that, that signal. After the accusation, the punishment follows.

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. My sheep have become prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals since there's no shepherd. My shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves and have not fed my sheep. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord, I am against the shepherds. I will demand my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves.

I will rescue my sheep from their mouths so that they may not be food for them. Well, we can see that, actually, verse 7, after announcing that judgment, has a recapping of the accusation. And so, in verse 9, we get a repetition of that, therefore, in verse 7, in verse 9, therefore, again, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.

That's repeated because now you're coming to the actual judgment. All this is a rhetorical way of denouncing those pre-exilic brains and saying wrong was done, which eventually led to the exile. And here it's the kings who are blamed.

The two in the book, some sins have been credited to the king, but in the main, it's the community as a whole. But in this particular chapter, it's the kings who take a central role. God holds the kings responsible for their negligence.

They must be removed from their royal posts. This is all speaking figuratively and rhetorically, because they were all dead and gone by now, but there's this dramatic denunciation of those past reigns. The end of Judah's pre-exilic monarchy is interpreted as a necessary reprisal for gross incompetence on the part of the shepherd kings.

Now, verses 2 to 10 have the role of setting the scene for the real point of the overall message that we move on to in verses 11 to 16, which is not simply repointing, repeating past history and interpreting it, but it's coming to the present and to the situation of the exiles themselves, where they are now in exile. And these verses promise that God himself will take over the old responsibilities of the monarchy and he will care for my sheep. Verse 11, I myself will search for my sheep.

I will seek them out. Verse 12, I will seek my sheep. I will rescue them.

And then we've got it twice in verse 12. And then, no, no, it's once in verse 12. Later on, in verse 15, I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down.

There's this concern. Now, it's taking up, leaving behind that political use of the word shepherd in terms of human kings, and staying with that theological usage. And there was no monarchy now anyway, so naturally, there are only the theological uses left.

But he's going to take over the old role that the shepherd kings had. And so, in a greater sense, they're going to be my sheep as God becomes directly responsible for them. And so this is, of course, a word of encouragement that God is their shepherd, in fact.

It's a word of assurance where the people are concerned. And it's really a reference to the covenant relationship, that expression, my sheep. So, the exiles have been victims of the royal government, and now God will make himself directly responsible for their welfare.

He promises to seek them out, those lost sheep, and bring them back to their home pasture. And so here is a metaphorical reference to this major new positive message of Ezekiel, of return to the land. And future blessings are depicted as rich grazing land and feeling secure enough to lie down.

Verse 13, I will feed them on the mountains of Israel by the water courses and in all the inhabitants, inhabited parts of the land. Verse 14, I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel should be their pasture. There, they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture in the mountains of Israel.

And so, this enticing description of what it means to go home, and all cast in the imagery of the shepherd, the sheep that has a good shepherd who looks after his flock, and ministers to all their needs. And so God would reverse the irresponsibility of those human kings that was described in verse 4. Let me reread verse 4, and there's a special reason for my doing that. Verse 4, you have not strengthened the

weak, you have not healed the sick, you've not bound up the injured, you've not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness, harshness you have ruled them.

And now look at verse 16: I will seek the lost, I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and there we are, I will feed them with justice. And there's a reversal, step by step. And so what the kings did not do, their own shepherd is going to do.

There's virtually a mirror image of verse 4 when we come to verse 16. There's an interesting reference in verse 12 because it looks back to the fall of Jerusalem and the end of Judah, but it puts it in a very special way. I will rescue them from all the places to which they've been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

This is a reference to the day of the Lord. And especially in chapter 7, we had that sinister use of the day of the Lord, that prophetic phraseology, which referred back to the, in former prophets, the coming intervention of God in judgment upon the covenant people for their disobedience. And this is picked up here.

But now it's in the past, now it's in the past, that day of clouds and thick darkness, which led to the exile. It was a terrible time, but it's over now. The day of the Lord has come and gone.

That that phrase was a canonical phrase from Amos onwards, and it was looking ahead to 587, but now that is past. So, a fascinating little phrase there, which has got a lot of theological significance, not only in the other prophets, but Ezekiel has used it himself in looking forward, looking ahead to the exile. One of the ideals of Israelite kingship was justice.

And verse 16 goes on to say that, the fat and the strong I will destroy, and I will feed the flock with justice, with justice. And that was what Israel had expected all through the monarchy, but so seldom did they find justice, or justice and righteousness, those old ideals of monarchy, so seldom did they find these ideals coming true in their experience. And so, God's shepherding from now on is going to be marked by justice.

And then there's a fresh message that develops this shepherding theme, and it comes in verses 17 through 22. And really, it leads on to that thought of opposing the fat and the strong. This is a sort of a lead-in to what this new message has to say in 17 to 22.

As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God, speaking directly to the exiles now, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of the pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet?

And must my sheep eat what you trodden with your feet and drink on what you fouled with your feet? Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep, those who had too much to eat and those who couldn't get enough to eat. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged, and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

Now, is this familiar? We've come back to the judgment with a small j. And there were people among the exiles who were not playing their part. They were very influential people, and they seemed to be getting the best of the bargain when considering any of the options of exile. They were having a good time, and as part of their good time, they were making sure that other people didn't have so good a time, and they were exploiting other people among the exiles.

And so, here we get a direct message to the exiles. This is not sort of pie in the sky and not thinking about the past, but here we are, this message of judgment, along with this salvation metaphor, God doing his good work as the Lord of the covenant. Yes, well, sometimes that good work means rescuing victims of other exiles.

And so, this is what is coming to the fore here in this message in 17 through 22. And as I say, the mention of the fat and strong in verse 16 provides a lead-in to what this new message has to say. And these are irresponsible, leading members among the exiles who are exploiting others as their victims.

And so, what God has to say not only applies to the future, we had that wonderful description of what life would be like back in the land, and that was where God's shepherding role would take him in his looking after the people, but it's relevant for now. And in his shepherding role, he's got to do something about those who are victimized, and he's got to do something about those who are making them their victims. And so, in this context, these are the bad ones, the fat sheep who are victimizing the lean sheep.

And so, judging between sheep is mentioned at the beginning and end. Notice verse 17, I shall judge between sheep and sheep. And then, in verse 22, at the end, I shall judge between sheep and sheep.

And God, as he looked at the exiles, he didn't see a homogeneous mass. He saw two groups. And there were the wicked there, the wicked exploiters and the poor people who were being exploited. And he has to do something about that situation.

That's part of his shepherding role, which he's going to take over even now during the exile. And once again, it's this message of responsibility that rests upon the exiles, obligation that rests upon the exiles, and even now they're held accountable.

And what was happening was that there was social exploitation among the exiles, and it was done by those who were called fat sheep.

They shoved the weak out of the pasture, and they muddied the drinking water after they drank so that it was rather nasty for the others to come and drink at. God's concern was not only to deal with the general problem of exile and to change it for the future, with a return to the land, but God's concern spread to here and now, during the exile, to providentially put right inconsistencies and inequities that caused extra suffering for the exiles. And this is a problem from within the exilic community.

It was ironic that the powerful among the exiles had abused their power, and they were now outsiders because over against them, it's the victims who are my flock, my flock, I will save my flock from the bad guys. And so, it's all the exiles, and they're not all my sheep now. There are some people who've expelled themselves, as it were, by their rough actions from my flock.

And so, God's flock are the victims. It's made very clear that there's a judgment against these irresponsible leaders among the exiles. And then, 23 through 31 concludes the chapter with three supplementary messages.

Their role is to supplement the promise of restoration to the homeland, which is in verses 11 through 16. So, in thought, we go back and develop what was said in 11 to 16, and we're talking to what refers to what is relevant for the return to the land. And the first supplement is in 23 and 24.

I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I, the Lord, have spoken them.

As we read on in the book of Ezekiel, we're going to find these verses again. And in a sense, their proper place, or their expected place, was in the later passage. And it's in chapter 37 and verses 24 and 25.

I'll read them and see how close it is. My servant David shall be king over them. They shall all have one shepherd.

They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. And then at the end of 25, my servant David shall be their prince forever. So, very, very close to what we're reading here.

In the context of chapter 37, One Shepherd, we're going back to the political use, but it's now a subdivision of the theological use. This is the good under-shepherd of the good divine shepherd, God himself. There's going to be a restoration of the monarchy, in fact.

In the context of chapter 37, One Shepherd refers to the reunion of North and South. No longer, as in pre-exilic days, two kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of Judah, the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom, but one shepherd. But in this context, it means something else.

This one shepherd is over against the disunity that we've been reading of in verses 20 through 21, the disunity because of bad leadership. Well, now there's going to be one shepherd over them, and his role will be to establish unity among the flock, unity among the people of God, back in the promised land. And so there's going to be a return to the undivided monarchy of David and Solomon.

Yes, but it's in the context here of the divisions that had broken out in the community, expressed in verses 17 to 22. And so, God has got a future plan which will eventually deal in a very thorough way with this problem of disunity. There will be a single authority in charge, thus ensuring social unity.

My servant David, twice it mentions David, and the old tradition of the dynasty, the Davidic dynasty, is going to be maintained. As in the old southern kingdom, kingship would be rooted in the Davidic dynasty. And Judah's bad kings had all been descended from David.

They'd all been Davidic kings. And so, what guarantee was there that this one would turn out to be a good king? Well, David is qualified with another phrase, my servant David, my servant David, twice we read that. Because those pre-exilic kings nowhere do they acknowledge themselves as servants.

In fact, by their actions, they do it alone. And they're independent of God and of God's requirements for their reign, including justice. And so, they're very much doing their own thing.

But here, my servant David. And interestingly, that has a political relevance. In the ancient Near East, when there was an imperial overlord, he would have many nations under him, and very many of them were ruled by their own kings.

And they would be vassal kings. And that word vassal was the word lord, was the word servant. And he was lord over them as their overlord.

And they were his servants or his vassals, the vassal kings. And so, this new human king is represented as a vassal king who obeys. He'd better obey.

He signed a treaty he's going to obey. And we had to deal with that factor back with Zedekiah in an earlier chapter. He was obliged to obey.

So, my servant David, I'll be the overlord, and he's going to be my vassal king who will be obedient to me as a vassal. And so, we are moving on in a development. The monarchy is going to be restored.

But it's going to be a good monarchy, in fact. In verse 24, rounding off that account, I, the Lord, will be their God. And that, of course, we know by now that is the one half of the covenant formula.

And I will be their God. And it indicates that this time, the under-shepherds rule would be compatible with God's covenant relationship with his people. And at this point, I'm reminded of what 2 Samuel said at one point about David's reign.

It's in 2 Samuel, chapter 5, and it corresponds very nicely with this verse: 2 Samuel, chapter 5, and verse 12. David then perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people, Israel.

Notice that? The Lord, his people. And God had exalted David's kingdom for the sake of his people, Israel. And so, you've got a coming together of David's political kingdom and then this covenant relationship that God has with the people of God.

And so, there's an echo of such a verse as that. David was then regarded as a good king who established justice and righteousness, and so it will be here. I, the Lord, will be their God.

My servant David shall be prince among them and working out my covenant will by means of his reign. Now, this supplement in verses 23 and 24, endorses an earlier prophetic promise that we find in some of the prophets, especially Isaiah and Micah, the tradition of a restored prophetic tradition of a restored monarchy and one that would live up to the old ideals of monarchy and really express what monarchy was meant to be according to God's will. And, of course, in turn, those prophets were leaning back on a tradition associated with the start of the monarchy and stated in 2 Samuel 7 that David's family would provide an everlasting dynasty.

Psalms 89, it bemoaned the threat to that promise posed by enemy attacks on Judah, but here in an exilic setting, the old promise is renewed. The end of a failed monarchy did not mean the end of the Davidic monarchy in principle. Then we have a second supplement in these closing verses, and this moves from verses 25 to 30, and we'll read those.

I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land so that they may live in the land, in the wild, and sleep in the woods securely. I will make them and the region around my hill a blessing. I will send down the showers in their season, and they shall be showers of blessing.

The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil, and they shall know that I am the Lord when I break the bars of their yoke and save them from the hands of those who enslave them. They shall be no more plunder for the nations, nor shall the animals of the land devour them.

They shall live in safety, and no one shall make them afraid. I will provide them with splendid vegetation so that they will no longer be consumed with hunger in the land and will no longer suffer the insults of the nations. They shall know that I am the Lord their God, that I am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God.

You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am the Lord your God. I am your God says the Lord God. Well, actually we've moved on into chapter 31, but our next supplement is actually 25 through 30.

And what this is doing, we've had an implicit mention of the covenant relationship in the citation of that first half, I the Lord will be their God, and there's a spelling out of what that covenant relationship is going to mean. It starts with me making a covenant of peace with them, and there's this idyllic picture of a paradise of what restoration to the land will be and the outworking of that salvation that God intended that his people should enjoy. But in verse, one interesting thing about this particular passage is that there's a key word in it, and the new RSV lets us down slightly, but it's the word securely in verse 25.

Security, securely in verse 25. And then it comes again in verse 27, they shall be secure on their soil. And then lastly, in verse 28, they shall live in safety, but between you and me, it's the same Hebrew word as was translated secure and securely.

And so, there's this promise of security, and what a promise that that is. The period of exile could be summed up in the word anxiety, anxiety to be homeless, to have lost everything. But now over against that, there's that soothing word secure, and it is so reassuring what a comfort such a word would bring to a people who had their homeland invaded, their capital conquered, who'd been deported, and who made that long trek from Judah to Babylonia.

They'd lost their national independence, and they'd lost face before other nations, and they'd lost their property, which had been plundered by foreigners. And now there comes the comfort too, in verses 28 and 29, they shall no more be plunder for the nations, and verse 20, that was 28, and in 29 they shall no longer suffer the insults of the nations. And so there's an ending of these bad things, these worrying things, and this bolsters up this keyword supports and develops that keyword secure.

And the interesting factor is that there are, in fact, echoes of Leviticus 26. In verse 27, when it says, when I break the bars of their yoke, here in verse 27, and save them from the hands of those who enslave them, well, this was the priest prophet speaking, and back in Leviticus 26 and verse 13, it was part of the covenant blessings to say this in verse 13, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be their slaves no more. I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

And so, it's looking back to the Exodus, so that now you can walk tall, and that was the bars of their yoke that God had broken, the Exodus from Egypt. But what's being done here? There's a look forward to a second Exodus. Remember we had earlier material dealing with the second Exodus? Well, it's just picked up in passing here, and it says, when I break the bars of their yoke, and now, of course, it's Babylon that's the new Egypt, and there's going to be this new Exodus back to the promised land.

And so, it's appropriately applied to a new Exodus from Babylon, and an ending of exile. Well, we mentioned in verse 24 that there was the first half of the covenant formula, I will be their God, and we expect they should be my people, but we only get that first half. But in fact, the full covenant formula is two-sided, such as I, the Lord, am their God, and Israel is my people.

The second half of the formula nicely appears in verse 30. They, the house of Israel, are my people, and they shall know it. There's going to be proof of that when they're back into the promised land.

And so those old covenant ideals, there's a promise that at last, they're going to come true. Then, the third and last supplement and summary come as a summary in verse 31. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I'm your God, says the Lord God.

And what happens is that it restates the covenant bonding in its full double form, but it does so by tying together the chapter's metaphorical and literal references to the covenant relationship. Because earlier on, the covenant relationship was in turn, in terms of the sheep, the sheep of my pasture. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture.

And then the other side was in verse 23, I will be their God. And so, it's put together first in a metaphorical way, and then in a plain way, the two halves of the covenant formula. That nicely looks back to that covenant metaphor, which was so much a part of the earlier section of the chapter.

Well now, as we read chapter 34, Christians among us must have realized that there are New Testament parallels to the language that's being used here. Parallels in the

ministry and mission of Jesus. And Jesus uses shepherd and sheep language, and he's picking it up from Ezekiel 34.

This is where it comes from. And especially John chapter 10 and verses 1 to 18, that section especially comes to mind because it contains Jesus' own extended metaphor of sheep and shepherd. And it's being picked up, as I say, from Ezekiel 34.

Jesus is the good shepherd who does the will of the Father. This is an application of what Ezekiel 34 is saying and claiming as relevant and realized in the work of Jesus. John 10 in verse 11, I am the good shepherd.

And then, in verse 14, I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me. And so, there's this good relationship. What makes him good is that there's that close relationship between Jesus and his own flock.

It goes on to say that just as the father knows me, I know the father. There's not only a relationship between Jesus and his flock but also between himself and the Father. And he does the will of the Father, and he carries out the commands of the Father.

Verse 18, I've received this command from my Father. And so there he is. He is indeed the good shepherd.

And so here is Ezekiel's double relationship of God and the human king and his agent. Not now, the disobedient human kings of Ezekiel 34, 2 to 10, but the obedient shepherd king of 34, 23. This is coming to the fore now.

And then it's not only John's gospel that speaks in these terms but Luke chapter 19 says, the son of man came to seek out and to save the lost. And that, too, is taken straight out of Ezekiel 34. It doesn't explicitly use the shepherd-sheep metaphor, but it's clearly an echo of God's work in 34 and in verse 16.

What did that say? I will seek the lost and bring back the straight. I will seek the lost and bring back the straight. And that work of God is taken over by Jesus in Luke 19.10. So, it's an echo of God's own work back in 34.

And then lastly, we recall that parable of judgment in Matthew 25, verses 32 through 46. And you've got this simile used. He will separate people.

The son of man will separate people in this time of judgment. People one from another. As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, he will put the sheep at the right hand and the goats at the left.

And they're going to be different futures for them both. And this, of course, is picking up Ezekiel 34, especially at the point of verse 17. I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.

And so, here again, Jesus is taking over the role of the divine shepherd of his father. So, Jesus is here, the agent of this divine function, this time the function of judgment. And so Ezekiel 34 provides valuable source material for how Jesus is described in the New Testament.

Of course, the last reference we might give is Matthew 18 and the parallel in Luke 15, the parable of the lost sheep. This uses the metaphor of shepherd and sheep. The ultimate source for this thinking is Ezekiel chapter 34.

Next time, we will be looking at two chapters, 35 and 36, from 35:1 down to 36:15. Israel's good shepherd, Ezekiel chapter 34 verses 1 through 31.

This is Dr. Leslie Allen in his teaching on the book of Ezekiel. This is session 16, Israel's Good Shepherd, Ezekiel 34:1-31.