

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The prophet is commanded to declare the dreadful judgments of God against the covetous shepherds of Israel, who feed themselves, and not their flocks; by which emblem the priests and Levites are intended, who in Ezekiel's time were very corrupt, and the chief cause of Israel's apostasy and ruin, Ezekiel 34:1-10. From this gloomy subject the prophet passes to the blessedness of the true Israel of God under the reign of David, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ being named after this prince by a figure exceedingly frequent in the sacred oracles, of putting the type for the antitype, vv. 11-31.

Verse 2

Prophesy against the shepherds of Israel - The shepherds include, first, the priests and Levites; secondly, the kings, princes, and magistrates. The flock means the whole of the people. The fat and the wool, the tithes and offerings, the taxes and imposts. The reprehensible feeding and clothing with these, as to the priests and Levites, the using these tithes and offerings, not to enable them the better to fulfill the work of the ministry, but to pamper their own bodies, and support them in an idle voluptuous life; and in reference to the state, the employing the taxes and imposts, not for the support and administration of justice and good government, but to subsidize heathen powers, and maintain their own luxury and idolatrous prodigality.

Verse 3

Ye eat the fat - I think חֶמֶן (hacheleb) should be translated the milk, and so most of the Versions understand it. Or they lived on the fat sheep, and took the wool of all.
 "The priests," says Calmet, "eat the tithes, the first-fruits, and the offerings of the people; the princes received the tributes and imposts and instead of instructing and protecting them, the latter took away their lives by the cruelties they practiced against them: the former destroyed their souls by the poison of their doctrine, and by their bad example. The fat sheep point out the rich to whom these pastors often disguised the truth, by a cruel condescension and complaisance."

Verse 4

The diseased have ye not strengthened - No person is fit for the office of a shepherd, who does not well understand the diseases to which sheep are incident, and the mode of cure. And is any man fit for the pastoral office, or to be a shepherd of souls, who is not well acquainted with the disease of sin in all its varieties, and the remedy for this disease, and the proper mode of administering it, in those various cases? He who does not know Jesus Christ as his own Savior, never can recommend him to others. He who is not saved, will not save.

Neither have ye healed that which was sick - The prophet first speaks of the general disease; next, of the different kinds of spiritual infirmity.

Neither have ye bound up that which was broken - If a sheep have broken a leg, a proper shepherd knows how to set the bones, and splint and bind it till the bones knit and become strong. And the skillful spiritual pastor knows, if one of the flock be overtaken in a fault, how to restore such. Those sudden falls, where there was not a strong propensity to sin, are, to the soul, as a broken bone to the body.

Neither have ye brought again - A proper shepherd loves his sheep: he feels interested for their welfare; he acquaints himself with them all, so that he knows and can distinguish each. He knows also their number, and frequently counts to see that none is missing; if one be lost or strayed, he goes immediately and seeks it; and as he is constantly on the watch, it cannot have strayed far before he is apprised of its absence from the flock; and the less it has strayed, the sooner it is found and brought back to the fold.

The shepherds of Israel knew nothing about their flock; they might have been diseased, infirm, bruised, maimed, their limbs broken, strayed, and lost; for they watched not over them. When they got fat sheep and wool for their table and their clothing, they regarded nothing else; as they considered the flock given them for their own use, and scarcely ever supposed that they were to give any thing in return for the milk and the wool.

But with force and with cruelty - Exacting tithes and dues by the strong arm of the law, with the most ungodly feeling; and with a cruelty of disposition that proved it was the fat and the wool they sought, and not the safety or comfort of the flock.

Verse 5

And they were scattered - There was no discipline kept up; and the flock, the Church, became disorganized, and separated from each other, both in affection and fellowship. And the consequence was, the grievous wolves,

false and worldly interested teachers, seized on and made a prey of them. Of the communion of saints such shepherds know nothing, farther than that it makes a part of the common creed.

Verse 6

My sheep wandered through all the mountains - They all became idolaters, and lost the knowledge of the true God. And could it be otherwise while they had such pastors?

“Himself a wanderer from the narrow way;

His silly sheep, no wonder that they stray!”

Reader, if thou be a minister, a preacher, or a person in holy orders, or pretended holy orders, or art one pretending to holy orders, look at the qualifications of a good shepherd as laid down by the prophet.

1. He professes to be a shepherd, and to be qualified for the office.

2. In consequence he undertakes the care of a flock. This supposes that he believes the great Bishop of souls has called him to the pastoral office; and that office implies that he is to give all diligence to save the souls of them that hear him.

His Qualifications

1. He is skillful; he knows the disease of sin and its consequences; for the Eternal Spirit, by whom he is called, has convinced him of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

2. He knows well the great remedy for this disease, the passion and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. He is skillful, and knows how to apply this remedy.

4. The flock over which he watches is, in its individuals, either, -

1. Healthy and sound.

2. Or, in a state of convalescence, returning to health.

3. Or, still under the whole power of the general disease.

4. Or, some are dying in a state of spiritual weakness.

5. Or, some are fallen into sin, and sorely bruised and broken in their souls by that fall.

6. Or, some have been driven away by some sore temptation or cruel usage.

7. Or, some have wandered from the flock, are got into strange pastures, and are perverted by erroneous doctrines. Or,

8. Some wolf has got among them, and scattered the whole flock. Now, the true shepherd, the pastor of God's choosing, knows: -

1. How to keep the healthy in health; and cause them to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

2. How to nourish, feed, and care for the convalescent, that they may be brought into a state of spiritual soundness.

3. How to reprove, instruct, and awaken those who are still under the full power of the disease of sin.

4. How to find out and remove the cause of all that spiritual weakness of which he sees some slowly dying.

5. How to deal with those who have fallen into some scandalous sin, and restore them from their fall.

6. How to find out and turn aside the sore temptation or cruel usage by which some have been driven away.

7. How to seek and bring back to the fold those who have strayed into strange pastures, and have had their souls perverted by erroneous doctrines; and knows also how, by a godly discipline, to preserve him in the flock, and keep the flock honourably together.

8. How to oppose, confound, and expel the grievous wolf, who has got among the flock, and is scattering them from each other, and from God. He knows how to preach, explain, and defend the truth. He is well acquainted with the weapons he is to use, and the spirit in which he is to employ them.

In a word, the true shepherd gives up his life to the sheep; spends and is spent for the glory of God; and gives up his life for the sheep, in defense of them, and in laboring for their welfare. And while he is thus employed, it is the duty of the flock to feed and clothe him; and see that neither he nor his family lack the necessities and conveniences of life. The laborer is worthy of his meat. He who does not labor, or, because of his ignorance of God and salvation, cannot labor, in the word and doctrine, deserves neither meat nor drink; and if he exact that by law, which he has not honestly earned by a proper discharge of the pastoral function, let him read this chapter, and learn from it what a fearful account he shall have to give to the chief Shepherd at the great day; and what a dreadful punishment shall be inflicted on him, when the blood of the souls lost through his neglect or inefficiency is visited upon him! See the notes on Ezekiel 3:17, etc.

Verse 7

Therefore, ye shepherds, (ye bad and wicked shepherds), hear the word of the Lord - In the preceding character of the good shepherd the reader will find, by reversing the particulars, the character of a bad shepherd; and therefore I may be excused from entering into farther detail.

Verse 10

I will - cause them to cease from feeding the flock - God, in this country, unpriested a whole hierarchy who fed not the flock, but ruled them with force and cruelty; and he raised up a new set of shepherds better qualified, both by sound doctrine and learning, to feed the flock. Let these be faithful, lest God cause them to cease, and raise up other feeders.

Verse 12

Cloudy and dark day - Times of general distress and persecution; in such times the shepherd should be especially watchful.

Verse 13

I will - feed them upon the mountains - When I bring back the people from their captivity, I will raise up to them a holy and diligent priesthood, who shall in all places give them sound instruction. But this, and some of the following promises, belong to the Christian Church, as we shall find below.

Verse 16

I will destroy the fat and the strong - I will destroy those cruel and imperious shepherds who abuse their authority, and tyrannize over the flock.

Verse 17

And as for you, O my flock - After having spoken to the shepherds, he now addresses the flock.

I judge between cattle and cattle - Between false and true professors; between them that have only the form and them that have the power of godliness; between the backslider in heart and the upright man.

Verse 18

Have eaten up the good pasture - Arrogate to yourselves all the promises of God, and will hardly permit the simple believer to claim or possess any token of God's favor.

Ye must foul the residue with your feet? - Ye abuse God's mercies; you consume much upon yourselves, and ye spoil more, on which the poor would have been glad to feed. There are some who would rather give food to their sporting dogs than to the poor around them, who are ready to starve, and who would be glad of the crumbs that fall from the table of those masters!

Verse 20

I will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle - Between the rich and the poor; those who fare sumptuously every day and those who have not the necessities of life.

Verse 23

I will set up one Shepherd - my servant David - David, king of Israel, had been dead upwards of four hundred years; and from that time till now there never was a ruler of any kind, either in the Jewish church or state, of the name of David. This, then, must be some typical person; and from the texts marked in the margin we understand that Jesus Christ alone is meant, as both Old and New Testaments agree in this. And from this one Shepherd all Christian ministers must derive their authority to teach, and their grace to teach effectually. By the kind providence of God it appears that he has not permitted any apostolic succession to be preserved, lest the members of his Church should seek that in an uninterrupted succession which must be found in the Head alone. The papists or Roman Catholics, who boast of an uninterrupted succession, which is a mere fable that never was and never can be proved, have raised up another head, the Pope. And I appeal to themselves, in the fear of God, whether they do not in heart and in speech trace up all their authority to him, and only compliment Christ as having appointed Peter to be the first bishop of Rome, (which is an utter falsity, for he was never appointed to such an office there, nor ever held such an office in that city, nor, in their sense, any where else); and they hold also that the popes of Rome are not so much Peter's successors as God's vicars; and thus both God and Peter are nearly lost sight of in their papal enumerations. With them the authority of the Church is all in all; the authority of Christ is seldom mentioned.

Verse 24

I the Lord will be their God, and my Servant David a Prince - Here we find God and his Christ are all in all in his Church, and Jesus is still Prince among them; and to him the call and qualifications of all genuine pastors belong, and from him they must be derived. And he has blotted out what is called uninterrupted succession, that every Christian minister may seek and receive credentials from himself. Here is the grand reason why the uninterrupted succession cannot be made out. And here is the proof also that the Church that pretends to it, and builds upon it, must be a false Church; for it is founded on a falsity; an uninterrupted succession which does not exist either in history or in fact.

Verse 25

I will make with them a covenant of peace - The original is emphatic: $\text{vecharatti lahem berith shalom}$, $\hat{a} \text{ And I will cut with them the peace covenant;}$ that is, a covenant sacrifice, procuring and establishing peace between God and man, and between man and his fellows. I need not tell the reader that the cutting refers to the ancient mode of making covenants. The blood was poured out; the animal was divided from mouth to tail, exactly in two; the divisions placed opposite to each other; the contracting parties entered into the space, going in at each end, and met in the middle, and there took the covenant oath. He is the Prince of peace, and through him come glory to God in the highest, and peace and good will to men upon earth.

And will cause the evil beasts to cease - These false and ravenous pastors. Christ purges them out of his Church, and destroys that power by which they lorded it over God's heritage.

Verse 26

The shower to come down - The Holy Spirit's influence.

There shall be showers of blessing - Light, life, joy, peace, and power shall be manifest in all the assemblies of Christ's people.

Verse 29

I will raise up - a plant of renown - matta leshem , $\hat{a} \text{ a plantation to the name;}$ to the name of Christ. A Christian Church composed of men who are Christians, who have the spirit of Christ in them, and do not bear his name in vain. I believe the words might be applied to the Christian Church; but that Christ may be called a plant or plantation here, - as he is elsewhere called a branch and a rod, Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; so Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 35:15, - is most probable. He is the Person of name, leshem , Jesus; the Savior, Christ; the Anointer, long spoken of before he was manifested in the flesh, and since the daily theme in the Church militant. It is he who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, no other name being given under heaven among men by which we can be saved; he who has a name above every name, and at whose name every knee shall bow; through whose name, by faith in his name, the diseased are healed; and in whose name all our prayers and supplications must be presented to God to make them acceptable. This is the Person of Name!

They shall be no more consumed with hunger - For this glorious plant of name is the Bread of life; and this is broken in all the assemblies of his people where his name is properly proclaimed.

Verse 31

And ye my flock - That is, under the allegory of a flock of sheep, I point out men; under that of a pasture, my Church, and under that of a shepherd, the Messiah, through whom I am become your God. And he who is your God is Adonai Jehovah , the self-existent Being; the Governor and Director, as well as the Savior and Judge of men.