

Ezekiel 34:1–31
(Preliminary Draft)

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Prelude

A word about methodology is in order. The question to address is, “Should we examine the Old Testament for guidance regarding shepherds/pastors in the Church Dispensation?” We need not conjecture for the New Testament unequivocally answers the question. Note the apostles’ responses:

Whatever things were written before [=the Old Testament] were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

(Romans 15:4)

Now these things [=Old Testament events] became our examples ... all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

(1 Corinthians 10:6, 11)

All Scripture [including the entire Old Testament] is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Moreover, we possess the prophetic word as an altogether reliable thing. You do well if you pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet’s own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

(2 Peter 1:19-21 NET)

Where does this lead us? The Old Testament is “for our learning,” delivers “examples” and “admonition,” as well as “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.” In addition, it is “reliable”¹ not causing disappointment, thus we should “pay attention.” And all this to what end?—that teaching pastors may become fully equipped for every good work, such as shepherding a flock with patience and hope.

In addition, 1 Peter 2 says that Christ left us an example for managing suffering (1 Peter 2:21-24), then adds that Christ is the Shepherd of our souls (2:25).

Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously ... that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness ... For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21-25

¹ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 172, say: The word translated “reliable” in 2 Peter 1 is Βέβαιος. It denotes something that can be relied on not to cause disappointment.

Accordingly, the methodology of this paper will observe what scripture reveals about the Lord as Shepherd. Then we will examine Ezekiel 34, relating it to Old and New Testament passages about shepherds: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

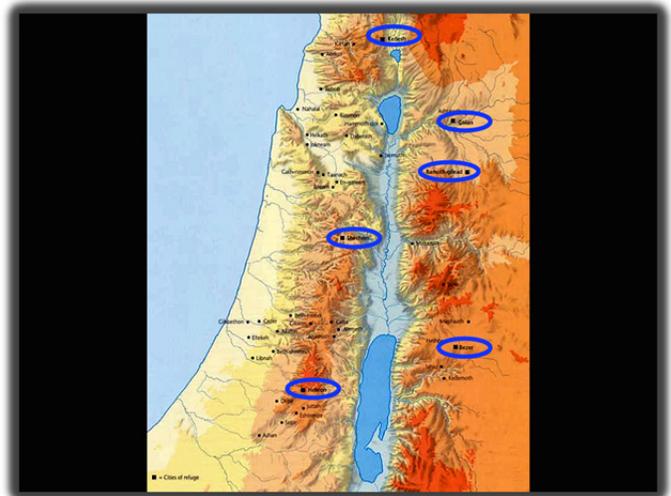
- From good shepherds, we uncover positive guidance for shepherding sheep entrusted to our care.
- From the bad and ugly, we learn how not to shepherd God's people. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the reproof and correction may sting.²

The vast majority of English versions, by the way, use the term “shepherd” to translate ποιμήν, mirroring the herding/farming orientation of the eras in which the authors wrote scripture; Ephesians 4:11 is an exception. The Vulgate, on the other hand, consistently translates ποιμήν as “pastor,” reflecting later ecclesiastical tradition.³

Background

When Israel had sufficiently conquered the land of Canaan, God instructed Joshua to give the Levites 48 cities with their surrounding farmlands and orchards.⁴ Six of the 48 cities served a double purpose, becoming also Cities of Refuge for those who accidentally killed another.

THE LEVITICAL CITIES Joshua 21		
LEVITICAL CLANS	LOCATION OF CITIES	NUMBER
Family of Aaron	Judah, Simeon Benjamin	13
Other Kohathites	Ephraim, Dan, Manasseh West	10
Gershonites	Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh East	13
Merarites	Zebulun, Reuben, Gad	12
TOTAL LEVITICAL CITIES		48



As the map displays, Joshua distributed the priests in good proximity to Israel's entire population so that the Levites might teach everyone the word of God, i.e., shepherd them by means of scripture. Early on, the Levites were the hands-on shepherds of Israel, though later in Israel's history, Judges, kings, and prophets were also shepherds.

The Shepherd of Israel, of course, is the Lord: *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth* (Psalm 80:1; cf. Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11)! Where can we find a better model of good shepherding than the Lord? He alone is worthy to be called the good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), even the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25). Thus we will first scour the Old Testament for His personal characteristics—His virtues and successes to establish a benchmark for all pastors. From the Lord's example, we may extrapolate principles that apply to shepherds in all dispensations. Let's not lose sight that the Old Testament is for our learning, delivers examples, and equips pastors for every good work of shepherding/pastoring a flock/congregation.

² Recommended reading: “The Shepherding Aspect of the Pastoring and Teaching Ministry,” by Tod Kennedy, *CTSJ* 9 (Fall 2003) 35-49.

³ Carroll D. Osburn, “Vulgate,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Logos edition) 1361, says that “The Latin version of the Bible [was] prepared by Jerome (ca. 347–420) ... [however] the supremacy of the Vulgate [for the Catholic Church] was not assured until ... the Council of Trent (1546).”

⁴ Numbers 35:1-8; Joshua 21:41-42.

Categories of Shepherds

Military

Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man [Joshua] over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd (Numbers 27:16-17).

[The Lord] says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid (Isaiah 44:28; cf. Proverbs 16:4; 21:1; Romans 9:17).

Judges

Wherever I have moved about with all Israel, have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar (2 Samuel 7:7 || 1 Chronicles 17:6)?

Priests/Levites

Aaron & his descendants: **teach**⁵ *the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses (Leviticus 10:11).*

Shemaiah: He served during King Jehoshaphat's reign and **taught** *the cities of Judah the Law (2 Chronicles 17:8).*

Ezra: ¹*In the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of ... Aaron the chief priest— ⁶this Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given. ... ⁸And Ezra came to Jerusalem ... ¹⁰For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to **teach** statutes and ordinances in Israel (Ezra 7:1-10).*

Kings

King David: *Also, in time past, even when Saul was king over us, you [David] were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD your God said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel (2 Samuel 5:2; cf. 1 Chronicles 11:2).*

He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance (Psalm 78:70-71).

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will **teach** transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You (Psalm 51:12-13).*

David in the Millennium: *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, ²²therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall **feed** them—My servant David. He shall **feed** them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken" (Ezekiel 34:20-24).*

Other Kings: *A noise will come to the ends of the earth—For the LORD has a controversy with the nations; He will plead His case with all flesh. He will give those who are wicked to the sword,' says the LORD." ³²Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Behold, disaster shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the farthest parts of the earth. ³³"And at that day the slain of the LORD shall be from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall become refuse on the ground. ³⁴"Wail, shepherds, and cry! Roll about in the ashes, you leaders of the flock! For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions are fulfilled; you shall fall like a precious vessel. ³⁵And the shepherds will have no way to flee, nor the leaders of the flock to escape. ³⁶A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and a wailing of the leaders to the flock will be heard. For the LORD has plundered their pasture, ³⁷and the peaceful dwellings are cut down because of the fierce anger of the LORD. ³⁸He has left His lair like the lion; for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the Oppressor, and because of His fierce anger" (Jeremiah 25:31-38).*

⁵ I have highlighted the terms "teach" and "feed" throughout the paper to draw attention to the most prominent feature of shepherding, though by no means the only feature. This lines-up well with a prerequisite for elders in 1 Timothy 3 who must be "apt to teach." We should not construe what is prominent to imply that teaching is the only function of elders/pastors—a position that enjoys zero biblical support

Prophets

Scripture identifies Moses as a prophet in Deuteronomy 34:10 and Acts 3:22; 7:37. Besides leading/shepherding Israel for 40 years, his ministry profile included what follows: *Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe* (Deuteronomy 4:1; cf. Exodus 24:12; Leviticus 10:11; cf. Isaiah 63:12-13). In a later section, we will uncover much more about the prophets as the Lord censures corrupt shepherding.

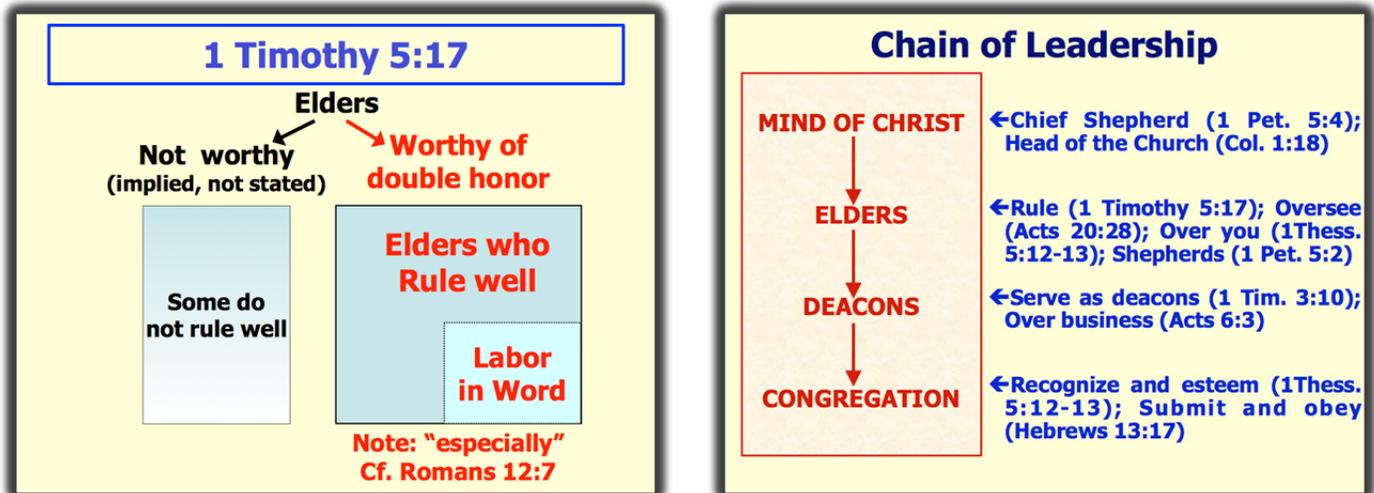
Church Age Elders/Shepherds (3 key passages)

(#1 of 3) *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood* (Acts 20:28). The same group of men—the overseers—is called “elders” (note Acts 20:17; likewise Titus 1:5, 7). Thus, elder = overseer and we see that they are to shepherd the church. So, elder = overseer = shepherd.

(#2 of 3) *He Himself gave some to be ... pastors [=shepherds] and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:11-12).⁶ There is a sequence in context:

- ✓ First He gave grace-gifts “to each one of us” (4:7).
- ✓ Then those men with the gifts of evangelist, pastor, and teacher, He gave to the church to equip all others for the work of the ministry (4:11-12).
- ✓ The upshot is that as all gifted believers—which means “all”—work together in unity, the whole body causes the growth of the body (4:16).

The process leading to growth begins with evangelists, pastors, and teachers exercising their gifts to equip the saints. And it is a process to be carried out within a well-ordered structure. For example:



(#3 of 3) *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: ²shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers,*

- *not by compulsion but willingly,*
- *not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*
- *³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you,*
- *but being examples to the flock;.....*

⁶ Some mistakenly apply the Granville Sharp grammatical rule to “pastors and teachers,” thus inventing one man with a dual-sided gift, i.e., “pastor-teacher.” Sharp’s rule, however, does not apply to plural nouns. See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, who elaborates: “Statement of the Granville Sharp Rule: both substantives (nouns, participles, adjectives) refer to the same person in the article-substantive-καί-substantive (TSKS) construction when: both are personal, *both are singular* [pastors and teachers are plural nouns in Ephesians 4:11], both are non-proper (i.e., common terms, not proper names)” [italics added]. So what?—the implication is that some men have only the gift of “shepherd,” while others have only the gift of “teaching.” Some have both gifts. Regardless of their giftedness, if a man is an elder, he must be *apt to teach* and, along with his fellow elders, faithfully shepherd the flock God entrusts to his care.

⁴and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away (1 Peter 5:1-4).

The apostles' teaching was not done in a vacuum for they possessed the OT that has much to say about shepherds. We will observe this OT gold mine of information in the following pages particularly as we examine the virtues and goals of the Lord as Shepherd.

The Lord as Shepherd

The Lord's Virtues as Shepherd

1. He loves His sheep with an everlasting love, with a heart that yearns to be merciful

³*“Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love [וְאֶהְבֶּתְךָ עוֹלָם אֶהְבֶּתִיךָ]; therefore with lovingkindness [רַחֲמִים] I have drawn you ...* ²⁰*My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD (Jeremiah 31:3, 20).*

Jesus loves His sheep with a perfect love, sometimes called unconditional love. This helps explain why His shepherding did not come across as “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.” Why did multitudes flock to Him?—because they saw that He was genuine, no hypocrisy. He cared for them—“love does not seek its own”⁷—having their best interests at heart. He did not exploit them to promote personal causes, power, or reputation.
2. He is a rock

The Mighty God of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty. (Genesis 29:24)

His sheep can count on their Shepherd to be stable, not fickle. They need not think that He might break His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel has no grounds to cast aspersion on His faithfulness. The Lord may discipline them, even severely, but the adversity He hurls their way, He has designed so as to do them good in the end. He is a rock; His yes is yes, and His no is no; it is impossible for His commitment and promises to collapse.
3. He purposefully cares for His sheep

Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever. (Psalm 28:9)

The word “bear them up” (וְנִשְׂאֵם) pictures a shepherd carrying his sheep (cf. Isaiah 40:11). Today's English Version translates *take care of them*. “In languages in which the term for *shepherd* has the proper meaning to be used in this context, it should be used. Where it does not, or there is no such term, the translator will have to speak of the function of the shepherd, that is, “caring and protecting”; for example, “take care of your people, Lord” or “watch over your people, Lord.”⁸
4. He rules, possessing authority

²*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. ...* ⁴*And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; ⁵and this One shall be peace (Micah 5:2-5a; cf. Matthew 2:6).*

Shepherds rule the sheep; sheep do not rule the shepherd. As obvious as that should seem, it is ignored by many flocks, especially those that have earned the reputation of being killer congregations—going through one pastor after another.

Shepherds/pastors, however, need to cement into their souls that they do not serve at the congregation's pleasure, but serve at the Holy Spirit's pleasure. Why say that?—The Lord commands elders saying, *take heed to yourselves and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God.*⁹ The Spirit, not man, made them overseers, calling them to

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:5.

⁸ Robert G. Bratcher and William David Reyburn, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991. Logos edition) 274.

⁹ Acts 20:28.

their positions of service and authority; hence, only the Spirit is qualified to usurp their authority, a work He accomplishes through the *presbytery*, i.e., board of elders (1 Timothy 4:14 cp. with Acts 20:28).

Though the exercise of authority is sometimes abused, such misuse does not nullify the existence of God-given authority. The apostle shows what the elder/shepherd's attitude must be toward the possession of authority: *I write these things being absent lest being present I should use sharpness according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.*¹⁰ The elder/shepherd must employ his authority to build-up the sheep, not to tear them down. Bottom line: Shepherds have authority, the God-given right to rule—to call the shots for their flock. By God's doing this is inherent to the position.

5. He is good, self-sacrificing

¹¹*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ...* ¹⁴*I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.* ¹⁵*... I lay down My life for the sheep* (John 10:11-15).

When a shepherd/pastor is good, sheep do not chafe under his leadership authority. Thayer defines "good" (καλος) as "excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well-adapted to its ends ... competent, able, such as one ought to be: ποιμήν, Jn. 10:11, 14."¹¹ Wuest's comment is that "The word 'good' ... refers to external goodness as seen by the eye, that which is the expression of internal, intrinsic goodness."¹²

Observe two things: (1) a man who is "good" is a good fit for the high calling of the pastorate. He is well-adapted to be a shepherd possessing requisite spiritual gifts. (2) What his sheep observe externally about him reflects what he is on the inside. They do not find a disconnect between his outward service and inward character.

Accordingly, a good man is a man of integrity, able to shepherd the sheep as he ought because his shepherding comes from within, from the source of personal integrity.

6. He is compassionate

And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι) for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things (Mark 6:34).

"Compassion" sometimes receives a bad rap, being equated with weakness, being a softie. We should not, however, put a negative spin on the notion because the Lord Himself was compassionate, which motivated Him to forgive, teach, and heal, while executing His shepherding ministry (Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 18:27; Mark 8:2; Luke 7:13; 15:20; cf. 1:78; Philippians 1:8). Ministry for Jesus was not simply a business proposition, a job, a way to earn a paycheck, but empathetic service targeted at helping others prepare for eternity.

Luke 7:13 provides insight into the content of His compassion: *Jesus' heart went out to her and He immediately began to comfort her.*¹³ Jesus' "comfort" arrived in the form of comforting words and actions to this heartbroken widow who had just lost her only son; the Lord said "do not weep," then proceeded to raise him from the dead. A must virtue, then, of a shepherd/elder is compassion—the ability to have and show genuine empathy for the plight of others. Jesus' pastoring manifested such compassion for His flock.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 13:10; cf. 10:8.

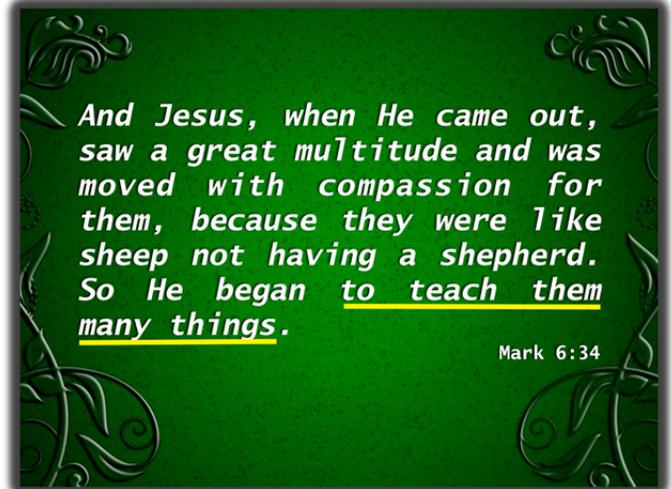
¹¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (NY: Harper & Brothers., 1889. Logos edition) 322.

¹² Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. Logos edition).

¹³ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985. Logos edition) 2:222.

The Lord's Objectives as Shepherd

1. To *feed/teach* His sheep¹⁴



Feeding is teaching scripture. Men who have been trained in a good seminary have received the tools to dig in scripture. And a seminary properly training its students has also instilled in them the importance of spending their lives digging in and teaching the word for that is according to the Lord's heart. An implication is that the Greek and Hebrew Bibles do not become bookends or doorstops, but serve as tools for a lifetime of shepherding. Study and feeding the sheep with knowledge and understanding are the chief part of shepherding because foundational to everything else.

2. To make His sheep strong

The arms of [Joseph's] hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel) ... by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above (Genesis 49:24-25).

Israel's Shepherd did not strive to make Himself great, but Israel great. Of course, He did not have to promote Himself because you cannot improve or add to One who is already infinite in all the attributes of deity.

However, there is a principle here: the concern of shepherds/pastors should not be to exploit the sheep to inflate personal prestige or reputation, enlargement of ministry, development of a world-wide TV, Internet, or Radio ministry for personal glory. A shepherd ought to focus on what he can do to edify and strengthen the sheep in his pasture—his *local* church. If the Lord increases the flock, he can thank the Lord for the increase. If God does not numerically increase his flock, he should thank the Lord for the ones he has and stop bemoaning the ones he does not have. In other words, stop the pity party. Whether a shepherd's flock is large or small, nothing changes so far as what the pastor should do: make strong those sheep the Lord entrusts to his care.

There is a subtle trap to avoid. Sometimes a man will think—rationalize—that he wants an expanded ministry in terms of numbers because he will then be able to help more people. The Lord sees the heart. Is it because he wants to help more people, being driven by love, compassion, and care for them, or is it because lurking in the depths of his soul he wants the approbation of man? He wants to be seen as successful. He longs for the recognition of the denominational or mission headquarters. The accolades of the evangelical world drive him. This is a matter between the human shepherd and the Chief Shepherd. God knows the heart and each shepherd should keep in his mind's-

¹⁴ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) comments on the verb as follows: is רָעָה: **1. be a shepherd**, i.e., care for any needs that flocks of small mammals have, and so active as a herdsman, with a focus on providing grazing pasture for the flock and moving the flocks around to the grazing grounds (Genesis 30:31), note: a shepherd both cares and tends for sheep, but also has authority over or rules a flock as a superior; **2. graze**, feed, pasture, browse, eat, i.e., the action of small mammals eating plant materials from pastures; **3. rule**, i.e., have authority over people and so govern usually with a focus of care and concern, as a figurative extension of being a shepherd over sheep (Jeremiah 2:8; 3:15; Micah 5:5[EB 6]).

eye that at the Bema Seat the Lord will *bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts*,¹⁵ moreover, all shepherds *must give an account*.¹⁶

Paul kept the Bema in the forefront of his mind, envisioning the Great Shepherd/Judge on His throne to evaluate believers with perfect justice and impartiality.¹⁷ Speaking specifically of the Judgment Seat of Christ, the apostle says *knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*.¹⁸ The prospect that for some the Bema will not be a Sunday School picnic motivated the apostle to shepherd his sheep by persuading them to get their spiritual acts together. Why?—so their appearance at the Bema Seat would not be characterized by shame, regret, and loss of reward, but one of confidence and rejoicing. This is a wonderful insight into his concern and care for fellow believers best interests.

A recurring theme of the New Testament is that believers should grow strong in the word and Lord. For example:

- *The child [John the Baptist] grew and became strong in spirit* (Luke 1:80).
- *The Child [Jesus] grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom* (Luke 2:40).
- *Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong* (1 Corinthians 16:13).
- *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might* (Ephesians 6:10).
- *You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus* (2 Timothy 2:1).

Paul adds that Christians are not to remain *children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14). Peter exhorts us *as newborn babes, [to] desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby* (1 Peter 2:2). It is the chief responsibility of shepherds—of teaching pastors—to discipline themselves in the study so that when they are in the pulpit they deliver sound doctrine, enabling the sheep to grow strong in their walk with the Lord.

3. To restore the souls of His sheep

The LORD is my Shepherd ... He restores [יְשׁוּבֵב] my soul (Psalm 23:1-3a).¹⁹

“Restore” presupposes that one’s soul has had a setback. A keen disappointment. Loss of a loved one. A cherished hope has popped like a child’s bubble. Thus he struggles with singing the blues. A good shepherd is not oblivious to the sheep of his flock, so that when noticed, he comes alongside of a downtrodden sheep with encouragement, with the precious and magnificent promises of scripture. He deliberately seeks to restore his sheep stirring up their emotional vitality, their inner animation.

4. To lead His sheep in paths of righteousness

- ✓ *He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake* (Psalm 23:3b).
- ✓ *I will lead them ... in a straight way in which they shall not stumble ... as a shepherd does his flock* (Jeremiah 31:9).
- ✓ *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock* (Psalm 80:1).
- ✓ *He will ... gently lead those who are with young* (Isaiah 40:11).

A point to make here is that proper shepherding directs the sheep to follow sound doctrine in all areas of life. It presupposes that shepherds first teach what is right, then exhort their sheep to put into practice what is right and good regarding marriage, family, church, relationships in the business world and neighborhood, and as citizens.

The Chief Shepherd challenges His sheep to *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*. What is this thing called “and His righteousness”? It is doing what is right as scripture defines the right in all areas of life. As 2 Peter 1 puts it, sound Bible doctrine covers everything that pertains to life and godliness.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 4:5.

¹⁶ Hebrews 13:17.

¹⁷ Remember the awesome scene in Revelation 1:12-18, especially the descriptive assertions that Christ’s “eyes are a flame of fire” (1:14) and out of His mouth goes “a sharp two-edged sword” (1:16).

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:9-11.

¹⁹ Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Logos electronic ed. (New York: E.J. Brill, 1999) 1431, explain “restore” saying “שׁוּבֵב נָפֶשׁ to refresh, restore the soul Ps 23³, literally “to bring back liveliness, vitality” ... equivalent to הָשִׁיב נַפְשׁ ... שׁוּבֵב לְשִׁבְתָּ to repair, restore what has been demolished Is 58¹².”

Leading one's sheep down righteous paths includes equipping them, not merely to enjoy relationship with the Chief Shepherd, but to serve.

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

5. To give rest to His sheep

¹*“At the same time,” says the LORD, “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.”* ²*Thus says the LORD: “The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness [i.e.,] Israel, when I went to give him rest.”* (Jeremiah 31:1-2)

In my travels, I have talked to folks, many of whom have left one church to attend another. When asked why they left, it came down to this: their previous shepherd spent much of his time being negative, criticizing the government, berating other pastors, especially those of mega-churches, or pushing a pet agenda that he insisted they should join. Week after week such “teaching” rained down from the pulpit providing no “rest,” no repose, but an unsettling worship experience.

So they moved on, sometimes accused of being negative to doctrine. Yet the next church they chose teaches scripture. Not the same way. Different personality. Dissimilar vocabulary. Sometimes with less depth. But the consistent exposition of the word recharges their souls; they are at rest, encouraged, and animated to serve the Lord.

It is true that some people move on for the wrong reasons. Maybe they have become negative to doctrine. Perhaps it became apparent the previous shepherd did not have the gift of pastoring or teaching. As Howard Hendricks used to say, he should instead be selling pencils on some street corner. The list of wrong reasons can get quite long!

Nevertheless, before a shepherd asserts that someone left his flock for a wrong reason, especially if many someones are leaving, he needs to humble himself and measure himself as objectively as possible by the six virtues of the Good Shepherd, and by what the Good Shepherd seeks to accomplish in the lives of His sheep. He should ask, Are Christ's virtues being formed in me? Am I emulating the Lord's ministry objectives, or have I invented my own ministry agenda?

6. To gather scattered sheep

✓ *“But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will **feed** them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,”* says the LORD (Jeremiah 23:3-4).

✓ ⁸*Behold, I will ... gather them from the ends of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and the one who labors with child, together; a great throng shall return there. ...* ¹⁰*“Hear the word of the LORD ... ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock’”* (Jeremiah 31:8-10).

This gathering by the Lord is a future sovereign work, accomplished when He whistles²⁰ for His sheep at the 2nd Coming. The point is that He gathers them; He does not leave them to fend for themselves. He is intentional to seek out His sheep, to gather them under His shepherding.

The parable of the “Lost Sheep” (Luke 15:1-7) provides an superb illustration of what it means to gather one's sheep. When a shepherd receives intelligence that one of his sheep is lost, that news encroaches on his day. The timing may be inconvenient, even bad. Yet, he will put down what he is doing, and go out of his way to seek the lost sheep. If one is a shepherd/pastor, such interruptions are part of his ministry profile.

When assigning the 12 a ministry, and being moved with compassion because Israel was weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd, Jesus sent the 12 to these weary and scattered sheep (Matthew 9:36-10:6). In effect, Jesus sent them to be Israel's shepherds, including unbelieving Jews; thus, in part, as shepherds their assignment was to do the work of evangelism.

²⁰ Zechariah 10:8.

7. To give His sheep joy & comfort

I will turn their mourning to joy, will comfort them, and make them rejoice rather than sorrow (Jeremiah 31:13).

The first time “comfort” occurs in the Psalms, we find it in what may be the most famous of the Psalms: *The Lord is my Shepherd ... You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me* (Psalm 23:1, 4). This pictures a shepherd with his sheep, not keeping them at arm’s length.

Moreover, there are these items called a rod and staff. Though “rod” has several uses, the one that best fits Psalm 23 is that of a metaphor that speaks of counting one’s sheep. The OT expression is to *pass under the rod* (Leviticus 27:32; Jeremiah 33:13; Ezekiel 20:37). The custom among shepherds was to stand at the entryway of their sheep-pens. As each sheep entered, it passed under its own shepherd’s rod who counted the sheep and carefully examined its condition. The rod then speaks of the Lord who takes each of His sheep into His special care.

“Staff” is a term related to the verb that means to lean upon, to support oneself. Examples: (1) Staff or cane (Ezekiel 29:7) pictures Egypt as a weak staff/reed that if one leans on it, it breaks. It does not offer real support. (2) The idea of support is vivid in 2 Samuel: *They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support* [staff] (2 Samuel 22:19). The common denominator is “support.” The Lord is someone the believer may lean on without fear that He will collapse like a weak reed.

Therefore, David says that the rod and staff are objects of comfort. In fact, he fears no evil because he knows that the Lord will support him through life’s shadowy valleys. So it should be with the Lord’s under-shepherds and their flocks. One’s sheep should be comforted because he knows that his shepherds—his elders/pastors—have his best interests at heart, and that they are with him to offer support in times of need. Note the prominence of “comforting” God’s people in Isaiah 40-60.

8. To satisfy His sheep

I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:14).

The Good Shepherd said that He came to give believers life and to give it “more abundantly” (more at #10 below). John 6:60-66, however, is clear that Jesus did not satisfy all His followers for “many” abandoned Him on that occasion. The point is that no shepherd will win all the people all the time. Regardless, each shepherd should be hungry and thirsting for the word and righteousness so that when he opens his mouth to minister, he has what it takes to satisfy the souls of those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

9. To extend mercy to wayward but repentant sheep

¹⁸*“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, like an untrained bull; restore me, and I will return, for You are the LORD my God’ ...* ²⁰*“Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,” says the LORD* (Jeremiah 31:18, 20).

Though Ephraim, the Northern Kingdom, is a “dear son,” “a pleasant child,” over whom the Lord’s “heart yearns,” God disciplined “Ephraim” for behaving like “an untrained bull.” “Untrained” derives from מִלֵּךְ that with a negative denotes one who is unlearned, untrained, thus behaving in an unruly manner.²¹ Particularly, he is not submissive to information passed along by the Lord’s teaching authorities. In this case, Ephraim had been disobedient to the knowledge passed on by the scrolls containing the Mosaic Law and by the prophets.

Discipline is not something the Lord enters into with glee; but, He did what had to be done. Ephraim responded to discipline with repentance (“I will return”), evidenced by “bemoaning himself,” owning up to the Lord’s chastisement, and praying for restoration. The Lord’s shepherding response to such repentance is His pledge to “surely have mercy on him.”

²¹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

Our shepherding skills are challenged when we have to deal with “untrained bulls” in the congregation. Shepherds must rely on the promise of Matthew 18:19-20 that contextually deals, not with prayer, but with executing their responsibility to discipline a sheep:

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

10. To know His sheep by name, even giving His life for the sheep

“Most assuredly, I say to you ... the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ...”¹⁰“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... ¹³The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care²² about the sheep [Implication: a good shepherd does care]. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep” (John 10:1-15).

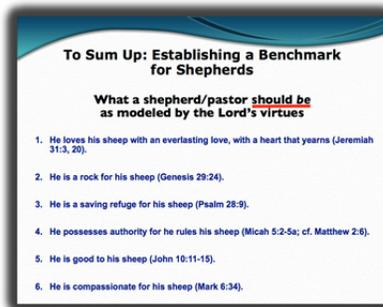
11. Christ’s unique shepherding

At 2nd Coming: All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32).

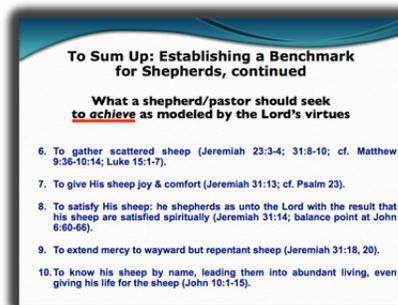
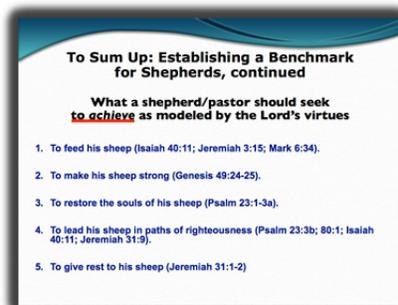
In afterlife: Therefore [because they are believers] they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:15-17).

To Sum Up: Establishing a Benchmark for Shepherds

What a shepherd/pastor should be as modeled by the Lord’s virtues



What a shepherd/pastor should seek to achieve as modeled by the Lord



²² Two chapters later John will say of Judas: *This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it (John 12:6).*

Ezekiel on Shepherds: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (Ezekiel 34)

The Bad and Ugly (34:1-10)

The Lord Censures Corrupt Shepherding (34:1-4)

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? ³You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not **feed** the flock. ⁴The 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.”

Ezekiel is to “prophesy against the shepherds” for several reasons:

1. They “**feed** themselves” not the sheep, i.e., they fleece the sheep (34:2-3). This has been no small problem throughout the ages.



Observe the following:

[Jerusalem's] heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her prophets divine for money.

Micah 3:11

The shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the Lord; therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered.

Jeremiah 10:21

His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yes, they are greedy dogs which never have enough. And they are shepherds who cannot understand; they all look to their own way, every one for his own gain, from his own territory.

Isaiah 56:10-11

<p>Other relevant passages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremiah 2:8 (<i>the rulers</i> [וְהָרְעִים = shepherds; LXX = ποιμένες]). • Jeremiah 23:1-2. • Zechariah 11:1-17. 	<p>Accordingly, Peter urges Church Age shepherds/pastors:</p> <p><i>shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers ... <u>not for dishonest gain but eagerly.</u></i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 Peter 5:2</p>
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2. Do not strengthen the weak (34:4a).
3. Do not heal the sick nor bind up the broken (34:4b).
4. Nor brought back what was driven away (34:4c).
5. Nor sought what was lost (34:4d).
6. Have ruled with force and cruelty (34:4e).

Consequences of Corrupt Shepherding (Ezekiel 34:5-6)

#1 of 5: Sheep are scattered and vulnerable

So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. ⁶My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them.

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered' (Matthew 26:31 || Mark 14:27). Cf. Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered (Zechariah 13:7).

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... ¹²But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. ¹⁵As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep (John 10:11-15).

#2 of 5: Sheep are leaderless

Then he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each return to his house in peace (2 Chronicles 18:16).

#3 of 5: Sheep are lost without a resting place

“My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray; they have turned them away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting place. All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, ‘We have not offended, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice, the LORD, the hope of their fathers’ (Jeremiah 50:6-7).

#4 of 5: Sheep become deluded and lose comfort

For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble because there is no shepherd. “My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle (Zechariah 10:2-3).

#5 of 5: Sheep become weary

But when [Jesus] saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36).

Discipline of Corrupt Shepherds (Ezekiel 34:7-10)

⁷Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not **feed** My flock”— ⁹therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD! ¹⁰Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require My flock at their hand; I will cause them to cease **feeding** the sheep, and the shepherds shall **feed** themselves no more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouths, that they may no longer be food for them.”

Why the discipline (34:7-8)?

- They let the flock become prey ... food (34:7-8a).
- They shirked their shepherding responsibilities, i.e., they did not search for lost sheep (34:8b).
- They fed themselves, not the sheep (34:8c).

The Lord resolves to:

- Be against the shepherds (34:9-10a). That is always a no-win situation for shepherds!
- I will require (שָׁרַף), i.e., hold the corrupt shepherds accountable (34:10b). Cf. *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).* At the Bema, Church age shepherds “must give an account” of their shepherding (Hebrews 13:17).
- Cause them to cease feeding flock & to feed themselves no more (34:10c).

The Good Shepherd: A Prototype (Ezekiel 34:11-31)

A good shepherd resolves to seek & deliver his sheep (34:11-16)

¹¹For thus says the Lord GOD: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will **feed** them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will **feed** them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and **feed** in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I will **feed** My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶“I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and **feed** them in judgment.”

- Search ... seek them out, i.e., the sheep who have been exploited by corrupt shepherds and left to scatter (34:11-12a).

- Deliver them (34:12b-13). Interpretation is ultimately of millennial restoration. Application to Ch Age shepherds is to seek to deliver scattered sheep who have been sucked into cults, Perseverance/Lordship teaching, bad doctrine such as watering down of the sanctity of life expressed by creation of death panels, euthanasia, the murder of unborn children, etc.
- I will feed them (34:13, 14, 15, 16; note “feed” occurs 5x). “Feed” used in two-fold sense: (1) feed with material blessing (“good pasture” ... “rich pasture” ... “lie down”), and (2) teach the sheep in contrast to the corrupt shepherds who did not teach.

A good shepherd’s 3-fold resolve to judge (34:17-31)

(#1 of 3) He resolves to judge impartially (34:17-24)

Note the several occurrences of “I will ...” speaking of the Lord’s determination to shepherd His people who have been fleeced, which includes disciplining/judging corrupt shepherds.

¹⁷‘And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. ¹⁸Is it too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture—and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? ¹⁹And as for My flock, they eat what you [corrupt shepherds] have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet.” ²⁰Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: “Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, ²²therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. ²³I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall **feed** them—My servant David. He shall **feed** them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

(#2 of 3) He resolves to deliver peace & safety (34:25)

I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.

(#3 of 3) He resolves to supply material blessing & deliverance (34:26-31)

²⁶*I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. ²⁷Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase. They shall be safe in their land; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. ²⁸And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall beasts of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid. ²⁹I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger in the land, nor bear the shame of the Gentiles anymore. ³⁰Thus they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people,” says the Lord GOD.’ ³¹“You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,” says the Lord GOD.*

Summation

The pastoring aspect of the pastor and teacher’s ministry emphasizes the care for the congregation. Most pastors overemphasize this part of the ministry and neglect the teaching aspect. If we do that, the sheep become undernourished and susceptible to a multitude of spiritual diseases. We as pastors and teachers must teach the Word of God to our flocks. However, we may have a tendency to err in the other direction: all teaching and not much pastoring. We should and can do a better job of shepherding our congregations. A good part of the shepherding ministry is feeding the sheep spiritual food, the word of God. But the pastor also has the privilege and responsibility to shepherd his congregation—to lead, protect, encourage, rescue, heal, and comfort. This is nothing less than spiritual warfare. This warfare, though time consuming and often discouraging, offers great blessing to the pastor and the congregation.²³

²³ Kennedy, “Shepherding,” 47.

We know through our own experience that studying and teaching the Word of God to our congregations brings great blessing to them and to us. Shepherding our congregations can bring equal blessings. Let us concentrate on fulfilling our entire ministry, and not miss out on part of God's purpose and blessings.²⁴

Afterword

Superman does not exist and never will. Thus, with a growing flock, it is preposterous to suppose that one man—a single elder/pastor/overseer—will accomplish everything that shepherding and teaching require. One or the other will suffer.

For this reason, when Paul, retracing his steps on the first missionary journey visited the new churches, he appointed elders (plural) in each and every church (Acts 14:23). As we saw earlier all elders rule, but some concentrate on study and teaching the word (1 Timothy 5:17). In fact, without exception, every time the term elder occurs, denoting church leaders, it is always plural.

The point is that not all elders have the same spiritual gifts and, therefore, not all elders should be expected to do all the same things to the same degree. Nevertheless, when they properly function as a team, collectively they will achieve the shepherding and teaching required to maintain, and keep growing, a healthy congregation.

But “doing” what shepherding and teaching requires is only part of the picture. As we learned from the model provided by the Lord's shepherding, and reinforced by NT challenges to elders/shepherds, the character or integrity of the elder/shepherd matters.

Don't believe for a moment that it is only the message and not the messenger that matters. It is true that only the message or gospel can bring about regeneration. But the messenger who brings the message may neutralize its effectiveness; thus, we have passages like these:

Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity ... Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save [Phase 2] both yourself and those who hear you.

1 Timothy 4:11-16

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [dishonorable conduct], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.

2 Timothy 2:21-23

--End--

¹⁴Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise.

¹⁵Indeed they say to me, "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!"

¹⁶As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows You, nor have I desired the woeful day;

You know what came out of my lips; it was right there before You.

¹⁷Do not be a terror to me; You are my hope in the day of doom.

¹⁸Let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed.

Bring on them the day of doom, and destroy them with double destruction.

(Jeremiah 17:14-18)

²⁴ Ibid., 49.