

God, The True Shepherd

Ezekiel 34:11-31

MEMORY VERSE

EZEKIEL 34:31

“You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God,' says the Lord GOD.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A mixture of beads, M & M's or other small candy, or noodles. Choose a variety of shapes and colors. You will need enough to fill a small cup for each child. Paper towels.

A “Sheep Mask” template for each child (copied on heavy paper), scissors, and string or yarn.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Sorting the Sheep

Choose enough of a mixture of beads, M & Ms or other small candy, or noodles to fill a small cup for each child. (There will need to be a variety of shapes and colors in the mixture.)

Fill cups before class. Ask the children to sit in a circle and place a paper towel in front of them. Ask them to pour out their cup and sort out the contents inside. See who can do it the quickest. Play the game two or three times.

One day, God will do some sorting. He will separate His true sheep from the goats. He is the true shepherd and knows those who are His own.

LESSON TIME!

What does a shepherd do with his sheep? If he is a good and true shepherd, he will take good care of his sheep. He will take them to the best watering places and the best places to eat, places where the grass is rich and green. He will make sure they do not wander away; he will make sure no wolves get to his sheep. If there is a sheep that is lost, he will leave the others to go and find the lost one. If there is a sheep that is rebellious, he will discipline that sheep with his rod and his staff.

Our God is a true shepherd. He takes care of His own sheep, gathering them and feeding them on good pasture. **God is our true shepherd.**

EZEKIEL 34:11-16

'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.

"As 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.

"And 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.

"I 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.

"I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord GOD.

"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."

This passage actually looks forward to the future restoration of Israel, the deliverance of the sheep out of the places to which they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day. Israel was in a place of being judged by God. They were being oppressed and in darkness. God's sheep, Israel, had been driven into strange pastures; they were in bondage to a nation and a king who cared nothing for them. God looks forward to that day he will gather together Israel out of all the nations and restore them to their own land, Israel. He will feed them upon the mountains and all the dwelling places of the land. **God is our true shepherd.**

In verse 11, God Himself says that He will search and seek for His sheep. He will not leave the task to another, but He will seek them Himself. How thankful we can be that the Lord is our Shepherd! A further description of our Shepherd is given as we read, "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick..." In Matthew 18:11-14, we read: For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Can you think of a psalm that reminds you of such a shepherd? Psalm 23 is another beautiful picture of our faithful Shepherd who tends to His sheep with the greatest of care. In both passages, our Shepherd makes His sheep to lie down in rich pastures. It might sound silly to think that a shepherd has to make his sheep lie down. Charles Spurgeon commented, "One would think even a poor silly sheep would have sense enough to lie down when weary, but alas, with the sheep of Christ's flock it is often otherwise."

"I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment." It is sad to realize that those who should be feeding the flock of God can use their position to "fleece" the flock of God, instead. They see ministry and leadership as an opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the flock. God is aware of all that happens to His sheep, and He will be faithful to deal with it. As the true shepherd He will heal those that have been maimed, and will strengthen those that were sick; but the self-sufficient and the strong will face a different judgment as He shepherds His flock in righteousness. **God is our true shepherd.**

EZEKIEL 34:17-22

'And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats.

"Is 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?

"And as for My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet."

'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep.

"Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad,

"therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

God now directly addresses the sheep assuring them that He will judge between the sheep and the sheep, and the rams and goats. The sheep will be separated from sheep; the fat sheep being placed on one side with the rams and goats and kept apart from the lean and the sickly sheep.

Not everyone who says they are of the Lord's flock actually is. God knows those who truly trust in Him and those who do not trust Him. The rams and goats not only kept all the good pasture to themselves, they ate the good food and drank the good water; they would not let the poor of the flock have any part of them. The poor had to eat that which the fat had trodden into dirt and drink that which the fat had muddied. The fat did not care that they not only robbed the poor to make them poorer, but they were troublesome to the sick and weak sheep. They only cared about themselves.

God concludes: "I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey..." It breaks God's heart when people only care about themselves. God cares for the poor and weak, and He desires that His people also care for them. In 1 John 3:17 we read, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

EZEKIEL 34:23-31

"I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them; My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.

"And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

"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.

"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.

"Then 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.

"And 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.

"I 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.

"Thus 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."

"You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God," says the Lord GOD.

God looks forward to the day He will establish one (not many) shepherds over His people. God will raise up His servant David to feed Israel and Judah. God is not speaking of raising King David from the dead; he is speaking of the offspring of King David, Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus is the one true shepherd of Israel. At that time, the people will know that Jehovah is their God and that Jesus Christ, David's descendant, is indeed their promised Messiah.

In that day, God will be their protector; no harm will come to the people of Israel. The beasts will no longer be wild. In Isaiah 11:6 we read, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."

In that day, God will, also, pour out an abundant rain—showers of blessings--so that the field and land can yield rich produce. The Lord will break the yokes that were laid upon His people. They will no longer live in oppression in foreign land. And, He will bring renown to the Israelites; the nations around Israel will acknowledge them as a blessed people. In that day, God will no longer shepherd a wandering flock. His people will know with certainty that He is the Lord, and they are His people. They will enjoy His continual presence.

In summary, one day God will shepherd His own sheep. He will gather them from all the places they have been scattered. He will deliver His people from oppression and abuse. He will feed them with rich pastures. He will establish one Shepherd over His people, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He will bring peace, safety, and blessings in richest measure. In that day, the relationship of God to His people will be fully restored—"They shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people."

Again, as we consider our relationship to our Father and Jesus Christ, we remember the beautiful picture created by Psalm 23 as well as John chapter 10. In John 10:11, Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." In John 10:14 Jesus declares; "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own." With great care, God tends His sheep. We can trust Him fully. **God is our true shepherd.**

Sheep Mask

Have the children make their own sheep mask to remind them that as a Christian we are one of God's sheep. You will need a sheep mask template for each child (copied on heavy paper), scissors and string. Have the children cut out the sheep mask from the template (optional - copy the sheep onto light gray or light beige card stock). Next, cut out the eyes for holes in the mask for the children to see out from. Poke small holes in each ear (holes are marked on the template), and tie a piece of string or yarn onto each side of the mask. Have the children make the strings short enough so the mask can fit their heads snugly. Write the children's names on the back of the mask.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of thanksgiving that God is such a wonderful shepherd. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

