

1. My title for this lesson is "Accountability and Leadership".
 - a) Chapters 33 and 34 both deal (directly and indirectly) with accountability issues and leadership. These two chapters give an excellent guide in terms of what God expects of those in charge and what is their accountability.
 - b) Which leads to the classic reminder: Aren't Christians saved by grace alone? Yes. Still, if one is saved by grace, then how one lives their life should naturally follow that faith.
 - i) The idea is that "faith and works" go hand in hand together. If one believes in God and one believes we are saved by our faith, then one just naturally wants to do good works as to follow up with that faith that is inside of us.
 - c) Which leads me back to accountability: I don't believe anything we do or don't do affects our salvation other than accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. With that said, I do believe God holds us accountable for whatever role and position He has called us to.
 - d) Whatever specific gifts God has given to us, there is a sense that we are accountable to Him in terms of how we have used those gifts. For example, if God has given us the gift to teach, we are accountable in terms of how we use that gift. If one has a God-given gift of "encouragement" or "giving", God holds us accountable based on how we use those gifts. Does that mean we have to give up our day jobs and spend 100% of our time focusing on those gifts? No. It does mean God holds us accountable for the time He gives us on earth and expects us to use our time wisely for Him.
 - i) God understands we still have to make a living and get "stuff" done. At the same time, God gives all Christians spiritual gifts. There is accountability in the sense that He expects us (Christians) to use those gifts for Him and He would like to use us to bring glory to Him in all that we do.
2. This leads us back to the lesson theme. Let's talk about what is "going on" in these two chapters:
 - a) In Chapter 33, God lectures Ezekiel on the issue of being a "watchman". A "watchman" was somebody who worked the lookout tower of the city walls watching for enemies. If a watchman saw the enemy coming and then warned those living in the city, then the watchman has done his job and God does not hold him accountable if that watchman has done his job. If the watchman fails to warn the people, then God holds the watchman accountable for his failure to do his job. The underlying idea is that Ezekiel has been warning everybody of the coming danger and no one has listened.
 - b) In Chapter 34, the issue is the leaders of Israel at that time. It can refer to both the spiritual as well as the civil leaders. The point is God holds them accountable if they fail to lead His people. The other point in this chapter is a promise that God Himself will lead them! It is another hint of the Messiah to come!
3. With that said, it's time to talk a little about our limits of accountability before God:
 - a) Does God hold us accountable if the person we are witnessing to does not accept Christ? The answer is a "strong no". One's salvation is an individual choice and "that's it". God holds us accountable to "do our jobs for Him", but the results are up to God and not us.
 - b) That is what is being taught in these chapters. The idea is that God holds leaders and "watchman" and "us" accountable for what He wants us to do for Him in our lives, but the results are strictly up to God and not up to us.
 - c) If we fail in our particular role for God, somehow, someday, God will raise up other people to be His witnesses. God's "work" still goes on whether or not we are witnesses for Him or not. The danger of messing up is we can lose rewards or God can take away or limit our "witness" for Him.

4. As one can tell, the issue here is much more than being the leader of a church or say, a leader of a town or country. God calls most of us into some sort of leadership role at some point of our life. At the least, God gives each of us special spiritual gifts and expects us to use them for His glory. No matter what is one's status as a Christian, the issue of responsibility affects all of us.
 - a) What if I don't know what God calls me to do? Start with asking Him. Some churches and denominations have put together written tests to determine what one's spiritual gift(s) are. The better tests include asking a few Christian friends if you or I have a particular gift. That way, it is not just "us" thinking we have a particular gift, but other Christians have also noticed we have such special talents.
 - b) I have found one of the great joys in ministry is to combine one's spiritual gifts with something we enjoy doing or something we are good at already.
 - i) For example, some people work well with children and some work well with adults. Spiritual gifts can include teaching roles and "helping" roles.
 - ii) For me personally, God combined my ability to write with my love of scripture to start this ministry.
 - iii) The point is to find what one enjoys doing and combine it with some sort of work for God.
 - iv) I should also say that one's spiritual gift does not get one out of doing chores either around the church or around the house. Not too many people would consider "washing dishes" their spiritual gift, but that chore has to be done. I'm using "dishes" as an example that everyone has to do their part to help out and sometimes that means doing a task one is not particularly fond of doing.
 - a) The point is our role as Christians should never be limited to just using one's spiritual gifts. There are times and places where we simply need to help out based on whatever the situation calls for.
 - c) OK, now that I've got everyone thinking about what should our role or duty be for Christ, I can start to focus on the text itself and we'll discuss those roles and accountability.
5. Chapter 33, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me:
 - a) The chapter begins with another vision of God to Ezekiel. There is no time stamp here.
 - b) We know this occurred soon after the news of Jerusalem falling reaching Ezekiel and his fellow Jews in Babylon because Verse 21 of this chapter says that news just reached them.
6. Verse 2: "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: `When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman,³ and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people,⁴ then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head.⁰"
 - a) From Verse 2 through Verse 5 is Ezekiel laying out a principal through a parable.
 - b) The essential idea of this parable is about a city that has a danger of enemies attacking. Therefore, the city puts a guard in the tower with the job of watching out for invaders. The job of the watchman is in this case to blow the trumpet to warn the town.
 - i) The principal so far is that if a person living in this city hears the trumpet and ignores it, no blame will be given to the trumpet blower as he did his part.
 - c) One thing that will become clear later in this chapter is the focus is not so much on the trumpet blower, but on the fact the people of the town did not respond. The underlying point is that the Israelites failed to respond to Ezekiel of the cost of turning from God.
 - i) The idea here is that Ezekiel has done his job of communicating God's message. The problem is the Israelites who heard God's message did not respond. This leads to my accountability issue. The Israelites have heard God's message of repentance. The fact that they have not changed their ways means they are "accountable" for knowing better, and still, have not changed.
 - d) Let me give the rest of this parable and then some more comments.

7. Verse 5: Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. ⁶ But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'
- a) The point of this parable is that if the guy on the tower failed to blow the horn and warn the people, then the horn blower is at fault and God will hold the horn blower accountable. If the horn blower did his job and then the city failed to react, the blame is only on the residents of the city and not the horn blower.
 - b) The principal of this five line principal is that God holds us accountable for our actions. The man with the horn has a responsibility and God holds him accountable. If the people of the town hear the horn and fail to react, God will hold them accountable.
 - i) You may ask, "Well, what about the invading army? Aren't they to blame? The issue is not whether or not the invaders were "fair or not". The issue is about leadership and following that leader and do we do what we are supposed to do!
 - c) The point is that God called Ezekiel to be a preacher "32 chapters ago". ☺ At this point, the Israelites cannot blame the messenger in that Ezekiel did his job of warning the people, but the truth is the people refused to change based on Ezekiel's message.
 - d) This gets back to my opening comments about accountability. God does not hold us accountable for the salvation of others, but God does hold us accountable to be a witness for Him. God gives us talents and puts us in positions and holds us accountable for the positions he gives us. Further, God can hold us accountable when other people witness to us and we fail to react. Think of those who fail to seek God despite being told by witness after witness of the necessity of serving God!
 - i) This type of accountability is the underlying message of the whole chapter!
8. Verse 7: "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ⁹ But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.
- a) In case you had any doubts that this parable is about God judging Israel for their sins, these verses make it more obvious.
 - i) In other words, the point of the parable in Verses 2-6 is explained here.
 - b) These verses are "for" Ezekiel. God gave him the specific task to speak God's words to the Israelites and God held Ezekiel accountable to preach what God told him to preach.
 - c) At the same time, God held the Israelites accountable to "obey" Ezekiel. God gave Ezekiel enough validations to know that his words will come true. Ezekiel is filled with historical details that were stated in advance that proved Ezekiel's messages were from God. With that truth stated, the people were held accountable to trust in Ezekiel.
 - d) The message itself has to do with obedience to God. The nation of Israel at this time in history had turned their collective backs on God and worshipped idols. Yes, they still gave God "lip service" and went through some of the Jewish rituals, but at the same time they were guilty of violating the law and worshipping other gods as well.
 - e) The point is not that each of us are responsible for the repentance of others. The point is that God calls each of us to be witnesses for Him. The results are up to God and not us.
 - i) This does not usually mean (there are exceptions) where we have to quit our jobs or "quit our lives" as we know it to be witnesses for Him. We can be witnesses for God right where we are in our lives. It does not mean we use our work time to preach for Him in the sense that we are hired to do a job and not to violate that job. The point is we use our free time wisely. We belong to God and "live for Him".

9. Verse 10: "Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" ' ¹¹ Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'
- a) The Israelites listening to Ezekiel understood their guilt. Give the Israelites enough credit to understand they have collectively turned their backs on God.
 - i) With that said, the Israelites were asking Ezekiel the question, "How can we have eternal life? We are "stuck" with our sins and are guilty of them.
 - ii) That leads to the question of how can a perfect God forgive us and then "still be perfect"? The answer has to do with God Himself paying the price for the sins. That fact is not mentioned, but implied in the sense God is willing to forgive them!
 - b) This leads back to the text itself. God is saying through Ezekiel that He (God) has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and therefore, God is more than willing to forgive all of one's sins if one is willing to change their lifestyle and turn to God.
 - i) The idea is that as long as one is living on earth, one always has the opportunity to turn from one's lifestyle and turn to God. If that is true, why should someone turn "now" and not just wait until their deathbed?
 - a) One reason is one never knows when one is going to die. You or I could die today and never have that opportunity. The second answer is living for God now leads to more fulfilling life than any alternative choice.
 - c) The text says in Verse 11, "I (God) take no pleasure in the death of the wicked". I've been stating that fact on and off for the last few lessons. Every time the text has a "dirge" for the death of those who turn from Him, I've made the statement in effect that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Here, God states that principal literally. ☺
10. Verse 12: "Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.' ¹³ If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. ¹⁴ And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right-- ¹⁵ if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.
- a) The idea of these five verses is that if a "righteous person" turns from his or her righteous ways and becomes wicked, that person will not make it into heaven. At the same time, if a wicked man truly repents and starts to live for God, that person is saved.
 - b) OK, let me ask the tough question: What if a truly good person has a bad day or a bad week. Is that person still saved? The answer is yes, if they have a heart for God. The issue is not about making mistakes. The issue is whether or not one's heart is for God or against God. The text is not teaching about being perfect. The text is teaching about one truly changing one's heart about one's attitude for God and the life that follows.
 - c) This leads to another tough question: Does this mean someone can lose their salvation? The safe answer is to say, "As long as one is trusting in Jesus Christ (and understands who He is), one is always saved." The problem from our perspective is that we as humans can't judge someone's heart, only their behavior. Therefore we make our judgments on people based on their behavior. God knows the heart and judges accordingly.
 - i) This is why in the New Testament, we are told to judge behavior when it comes to making decisions about who to "be with". God wants us to judge behavior when it comes to the issue of who to trust and who to be with in "church" fellowship.

- ii) This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 16:19 when Jesus told Peter that whoever he "binds on earth" will be "bound in heaven". That means the church makes the decision who can and cannot join. We are to judge behavior and act accordingly.
 - iii) When it comes to salvation itself, we are not to judge whether or not someone is saved as only God can read people's hearts. One has to separate judgment of one's lifestyle (that is acceptable) from judgment of salvation (that is unacceptable).
 - iv) All of this is "stated" in this text in Ezekiel in an indirect way. In the New Testament, these principals are more blatantly taught by Jesus. In the Old Testament, these principals are given in text like this.
- d) Before I move on, let me comment on Verse 15. That verse says that, "If he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die."
 - i) My point is Verse 15 is a good example where we can judge people's hearts about their actions. If somebody returns what is stolen, it is a sign that their heart is in the right place and we should judge their behavior accordingly.
 - ii) My other point is that "returning stolen goods" is not the only example, but is listed in this text as an obvious example of how to judge one's behavior.
- 11. Verse 17: "Yet your countrymen say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But it is their way that is not just. ¹⁸ If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. ¹⁹ And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so. ²⁰ Yet, O house of Israel, you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' But I will judge each of you according to his own ways."
 - a) Notice Verse 17 says, "Your countrymen say". In other words, the rest of this paragraph is an expression that was popular among Israelites. The saying is that God is not fair to use a system where a righteous person who does evil will be sent to hell and a bad person who sincerely turns to God will be forgiven eternally.
 - i) The response is in effect, "Who are you to argue with God? It is His world and therefore, it is His privilege to make the rules about salvation."
 - ii) The complaint was in effect, "Is it fair of God to condemn someone who has been good all of their life and then change for the worse to be condemned"?
 - a) The answer is that if a person truly wants to turn from God, why should God want to spend eternity with that person? At the same time, if a wicked person truly wants to be with God for eternity and turn from their sins, then God is willing to welcome that person with open arms.
 - b) Again, the issue is not about a good person having a bad day. The best of people still sin at times. The issue is our heart and do we desire to please God in all that we do.
 - b) The point is God will judge us based on how we act. If we truly want to turn from God then we will be judged accordingly. If we truly desire to turn to God, no matter what we have done in our lives, then we are saved. This also leads back to the issue of "why should we turn to God now", but I already covered that question under Verses 10-11.
- 12. Verse 21: In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month on the fifth day, a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, "The city has fallen!" ²² Now the evening before the man arrived, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he opened my mouth before the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened and I was no longer silent.
 - a) This is a key point in time here. This is when the Jewish exiles in Babylon discover that Jerusalem has fallen. It took about eight months for those Jews in Babylon to hear the news about the fall of Jerusalem. One has to remember that those who escaped had to sneak their way to the Jewish refugees living in Babylon (several hundred miles away) to report this news. (The date of the fall of Jerusalem is in 2nd Kings 25:8. 2nd Kings uses the reign of Nebuchadnezzar to mark time and Ezekiel marks time by their exile.)

- b) Verse 22 says that the night before the man arrived to announce the fall of Jerusalem, God was "upon Ezekiel" and told Ezekiel he didn't have to be silent anymore.
 - i) Well, for a guy who has been talking for about 33 chapters so far, I'm pretty surprised that he was "silent" all of this time. ☺
 - ii) To understand this, we have to go back to Ezekiel Chapter 3 (Verses 26-27). God said then, "I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be silent and unable to rebuke them, though they are a rebellious house."
 - a) Does this mean Ezekiel was really "silent" for about 30 chapters and was just acting out what God had told him? Not exactly.
 - b) For the most part God told Ezekiel back in the early chapters to act out the siege of Jerusalem and to do visual demonstrations. If you recall from those early chapters, Ezekiel built a scale model of Jerusalem and Ezekiel also had to lay on his sides for well over a year as a demonstration.
 - iii) By the way, "Ezekiel's silence" had nothing to do with Ezekiel preaching about the destruction of the other nations, which was Chapters 25-32. The silence was about preaching against the destruction of Jerusalem. If you go through the other chapters, Ezekiel preached on the sins of Israel but if you read it carefully, Ezekiel was actually silent on this particular topic of Jerusalem's destruction. One also has to study some of the date stamps of Ezekiel's preaching to Israel to get this.
13. Verse 23: Then the word of the LORD came to me: ²⁴ "Son of man, the people living in those ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land. But we are many; surely the land has been given to us as our possession.' ²⁵ Therefore say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Since you eat meat with the blood still in it and look to your idols and shed blood, should you then possess the land? ²⁶ You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Should you then possess the land?'
- a) Ezekiel's next message has to do with rebuke another "common saying" among the Israelites at this time. First, let me discuss what this common saying was and then I'll discuss God's rebuke of that saying in Verses 25-26.
 - b) The idea behind this saying is that when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem just about all of the Israelites were taken captive. However at this moment in history, the Babylonian army left a small number of Israelites to work the fields. (See 2nd Kings 25:11-12.)
 - i) With that fact in their mind, the Israelites who got to stay in that land thought the promise given to Abraham that the Jewish people would inherit the land will be fulfilled through those Israelites who were allowed to remain in the land.
 - ii) In other words, God is about to rebuke the notion that because He promised the land of Israel to the descendants of Abraham, those few that remain in the land will get the promised blessings of the land due to that promise given to Abraham.
 - c) Now let's get to God's rebuke: The underlying principal is that yes, one day the Israelites will inherit the land due to God's unconditional promises. At the same time, God will punish "his" if they turn from Him and that is what the Israelites (collectively) have done at this time. The point is those still in the "land" are not the ones who start God's unconditional promise about inheriting the land.
 - d) In Verses 25-26 God gives examples of disobedience to His laws. These issues listed are about eating meat without draining the blood, (2) shedding of innocent blood, (3) killing innocent people and (4) having sex with other's wives. The idea is not that this is a complete list of sins. The idea is that God is giving examples of the violations of His laws that have occurred and the necessity of "cleaning out the land of His people".
 - e) The point as it applies to us is that God does hold us accountable for the rules He lays upon us. It may not affect our salvation, but it will definitely affect our lives as witnesses for Him. The ultimate punishment is to no longer be a living witness for God, which is the symbolic idea of being kicked out of the Promised Land.

14. Verse 27: "Say this to them: `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, those who are left in the ruins will fall by the sword, those out in the country I will give to the wild animals to be devoured, and those in strongholds and caves will die of a plague.²⁸ I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them.²⁹ Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.'
- a) God now addresses the issue of those Israelites who are still left in the Promised Land. God is saying these people will fall by the sword or be killed by wild animals. God will fulfill His promise that the land will be a total empty of His people for 70 years and even those Israelites that the Babylonians left to farm the land will be killed.
 - b) The point is not that those who survived the siege were better people than those who did not. The point is that the nation of Israel was collectively guilty of turning from God and the whole nation had to be punished to a point of banishment. God had to resort to this method of punishment as the "only way" God could get the nation to turn from idolatry.
 - c) That's the point of this paragraph: The land of Israel had to become totally devoid in order for future Israelites to understand how seriously God expects those that follow Him to be obedient to Him and no "mixed loyalty" is ever allowed.
15. Verse 30: "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, `Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.'³¹ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain.³² Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.
- a) The idea behind these verses is that the Israelites in Babylon were willing to listen to Ezekiel preach. It became a form of entertainment. The problem was their heart was not in it and people were not willing to really change their ways and follow God.
 - i) The last sentence of Verse 31 is a good summary of the problem. It says, "With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain".
 - b) Let me give some modern equivalents of this issue: It would be like an unmarried couple who were living together but were still coming to church every week. It would be like an unrepentant drunk or drug abuser not willing to change their lifestyle, but like to hang around church folks and "feel better for a short time". It would be like somebody who steals, but then goes to church to help alleviate the guilt.
 - i) In other words, we're back to the issue of a "changed heart". God is not interested so much in how we act around other church folks, but how we act the rest of the week. Is our hearts really given over to God? This is the underlying question.
 - ii) I should again stress the idea of "perfection". God does expect that when we realize we sin to turn against that sin and live a life pleasing to Him. We all make mistakes and that is not the issue of the moment. The issue is whether or not we have a desire to please God and we let our actions follow that desire.
16. Verse 33: "When all this comes true--and it surely will--then they will know that a prophet has been among them."
- a) Ezekiel ends this chapter with a message from God that there will not be any true repentance until all of this sinks in. In other words, the Israelite people still haven't "gotten it" despite all of the preaching from Ezekiel. It is going to take the 70 years of captivity for the Israelites to realize they have turned from God.
 - b) The other idea of this sentence is that the Israelites still have not fully accepted the idea that Ezekiel is a prophet of God and they won't accept it until Ezekiel's predictions have come true. Remember Ezekiel predicted not only the fall of Israel but the fall of all the powers surrounding Israel as well.

17. Chapter 34, Verse 1: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them:
 - a) Chapter 34 begins another undated message.
 - b) Verse 2 says this message is to the "shepherds" of Israel. OK, who are they?
 - i) First of all, it is not literally referring to those who are shepherders. ☺
 - ii) It is a reference to the leaders of Israel. Scholars debate whether or not it just refers to the civil leaders or both the civil and religious leaders.
18. Verse 2 (cont.): "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?" ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.
 - a) The essential idea of these verses is that the leaders of Israel only cared about taking care of themselves and not the "common" people. Verse 2 says in effect these leaders ate well and were well fed. At the same time, God accuses these leaders of not taking care of their flock, which are the people under their rule.
 - i) The accusations include not helping the weak or sick and ruling brutally.
 - ii) The lack of good leadership meant the Israelites were scattered with no one looking for them or looking after them.
 - b) It meant that God held the leaders of Israel to a higher standard than the "every day" people. It may have meant that during the last few years when Israel faced the siege, the leaders focused on saving themselves and didn't care about those under them.
 - c) The application ties to the title of this lesson. We are accountable to God for whatever position we are in. If we are called to be some sort of leader and take that position, God holds us accountable to do our job and do it right.
 - i) The application doesn't just apply to civil leaders or religious leaders. It can be as apply to whatever role God has called us to do in our life.
 - ii) A point to get across is that we are all accountable in all aspects of our lives, and not just life in our church settings. Yes we are still saved if we are believing Christians and if we mess up in our leadership roles. We can still suffer in this lifetime or the next one for failing to do our duty in whatever God calls us to do.
 - iii) On that happy note, I can move on to the next set of verses. ☺
19. Verse 7: "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ⁸ As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, ⁹ therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁰ This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them.
 - a) Before I get into the punishment of these leaders, which is Verses 8 to 10, notice the "power" behind the messenger. Ezekiel says, "Here the word of the LORD". The idea is that God Himself has and will ordain this punishment and it's not just Ezekiel's opinion.
 - b) The essential idea is God says He will punish these shepherds, hold them accountable and God will remove them from being leaders.
 - c) Remember this is the Word of God. That means this principal still applies today. Anybody called to any role of leadership is held accountable to God for that role.
 - d) The second idea is that God will "rescue His flock from their mouths" (Verse 10).
 - i) The idea is God protects those who are under him.

- e) I made a conscious decision in this lesson to not overly-focus on what makes a bad leader. I could spend half the lesson describing false prophets and false-leaders in Israel then and the church today. I have learned the best way to spot a bad-leader is to focus on what God desires of a true leader.
 - f) When it comes to false teachers, it is like a point I teach every so often: The best way to spot counterfeit money is to spend time "playing with" real money. In other words, the more time one spends in God's word, the easier it is to spot a false teacher.
 - g) Let me give an example of dealing with a bad ruler: Let's say we are part of a group where the leader is not what he or she "should be". Let's also say that we prayed about it and God has made it clear that despite the difficulty, God wants us to stay in that situation. My point is we have to remember that we belong to "God's flock" and not "that flock". We have to trust that somehow, someday, God will rescue us out of that situation. It may not happen until we are resurrected, or it may happen in our lifetime.
 - i) Along the same line of thinking, nobody on this e-mail list belongs to me. Assuming you are saved, you are part of God's flock and not my flock. I never get upset when people quit this e-mail list.
 - h) My point is if God calls us to lead, then He will also guide those are to follow. One way to know if God calls you to lead is to see who follows. If somebody wants "out" of your leadership and can legally do so, it is best to let them go and say that it was not meant to be. If they are friends, obviously one can talk about it and find out their reasons.
20. Verse 11: " `For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.
- a) In Verse 11, the focus shifts from the problem to the solution. The problem for the Israelites is they suffered from bad leadership. Again, this could refer to the civil leaders as well as the religious leaders and it could also apply to false prophets.
 - b) The solution is "God Himself" will look after his sheep. It means that God Himself will rescue "His sheep" from the places they are scattered.
 - c) Let's talk a little about what that means both then and now.
 - i) For starters, it refers to the fact that God will gather Israel again as a nation from the places they were scattered after next seventy years.
 - ii) It means that despite the fact the nation of Israel has ended and the people are now scattered through the Babylonian Empire, God will bring them back again.
 - iii) Don't take that lightly. In the history of civilization, Israel may be the only nation to be scattered and then comes back together again as a nation. It happened to that nation twice. If you ever want proof that the bible is the Word of God, think about the Nation of Israel. The Hebrew language is the only language in world history ever to be a dead language and then come back into daily use.
 - d) Every so often I make the point that bible predictions often have double fulfillments.
 - i) What I mean by that is often the bible makes a prediction where there is a short term fulfillment of that prediction and a long-term fulfillment of that prediction.
 - ii) The short term fulfillment helps to validate the speaker as a prophet of God.
 - iii) The long term fulfillment is often the key point that God wants to make and helps us see the ultimate fulfillment of such prophecies.
 - iv) I state that here because the 20th Century existence of Israel is a fulfilled long term fulfillment. We will discuss the issue of modern Israel more in future lessons.
 - e) So what is the "long term" fulfillment of this prophecy? Let's state what it is again: It is the fact that God Himself will lead His people.
 - i) One can interpret that as being about the modern state of Israel and the fact that Jews from all over the world are being gathered there.

- ii) One can interpret it as a future day when the Messiah (Jesus) will rule the world from Jerusalem. More on that idea in a moment.
 - iii) It can also apply to Christians as well. The essential idea is that we are led by God to run our lives. For us, that means studying one's bible for guidance as how one should live. In that sense, through prayer and studying, God is our leader in deciding how we should live our lives.
21. Verse 13: I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.
- a) Verses 13-16 give more details along this same prophecy.
 - b) The verses say God will gather the Israelites from all the places they have been scattered and God himself will take care of them.
 - c) For those of you familiar with Psalm 23, it begins with "The Lord is My Shepherd". In a sense, these verses are very similar to that Psalm line. The idea is to acknowledge that God exists, He controls the universe, and He wants to be in charge of our lives. Once we understand that, we give our lives to Him and let Him (Jesus as God) take care of our sins. The rest of our lives are then all about living a life pleasing to God. The idea of God guiding us can be expressed with the idea that the "Lord is My Shepherd".
 - d) This text does not mean that if we trust in God, no bad thing will ever happen to us. Nowhere does the bible promise our lives will be perfect and only full of good moments if we trust God at all times. If that were true, people would give their lives to God only to avoid the bad things of life! What it means is God will guide us through such times. I like the line "God provides a rescue rope to pull us through tough times".
 - e) Verse 17 says that God will destroy the "sleek and strong". I'll explain that at Verse 20 when the text explains the fate of bad leaders.
22. Verse 17: "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹ Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?
- a) OK, with the good news of God acknowledging He is guiding us, comes the bad news that we still have to deal with judgment. I don't mean judgment in terms of salvation, but judgment in terms of our eternal rewards based on our faithfulness to whatever roles God has called us to and whatever gifts He has given us. These three verses are not talking about salvation, but about judgment of our lifestyle. Again, the price one pays for following God is that He judges our lifestyles and constantly guides us through prayer, through His word and through Spiritual guidance on how to live.
 - b) With that out of my system, ☺ let me explain these verses: The biblical idea of having one's "feet dirty" is about being saved but still needing to be regularly cleansed from sin.
 - i) If you recall the story of Jesus washing the disciples feet, Jesus made the point that the whole body is cleaned, but only the feet need to be washed. (John 13:10). Jesus' point was not that bathing was unnecessary. ☺ The point is that if we "cleansed" of all our sins by Jesus, we still need to deal with the sins we commit in our life as we still walk in this world. That is a reason why Jesus washed His disciples' feet and told them to do likewise.

- ii) That principal does tie to these verses. In these verses here in Ezekiel, God is stating that He provides the Israelites with clean water. Then God says, "Must you dirty up the water with one's dirty feet?" The point has nothing to do with washing. It is about getting "dirty" by being involved in the sins of the world.
 - c) This leads me back to the first verse in this paragraph. God says He will judge between one sheep and another. I believe the main point is for those who are saved, God is talking about how we live our lives will be judged by Him and our status or rewards in heaven are determined based on how we live our lives for God. The point is God is judging individual sheep and He means us!
 - i) The second reference is that God will judge between "rams and goats". It could be a reference to judging the Gentiles or it could be a reference to judging between those who are saved and those who are not. The main point of this is God is going to judge His "sheep" which are believers.
 - d) This ties to "leadership and accountability". If we choose to be led by God, then we are to be accountable to His leadership as well!
23. Verse 20: "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.
- a) Now the message is back to the leaders in Israel. God says He will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep, referring to the leaders and the people of Israel. If you recall from early in this lesson, God was accusing the leaders in Israel of taking care of themselves and not the "average citizen" in Israel.
 - b) I regularly like to pray for the leaders over me. That includes the ones I did vote for as much as the ones I did not vote for. In days when I am mad at my government for passing laws I don't like, I have to remember verses like this. I have to remember that my civil leaders are accountable to God whether or not they realize it. God will take care of judging both good and bad leaders. Meanwhile, let's back to the text itself. ☺
 - c) God is specifically condemning the leaders of Israel for how they have treated the people. God compares the leaders to animals with horns and the fact those leaders have used their horns to "push away" the people.
 - i) Again, the text emphasizes how God will judge between one sheep and another. The point is we are all going to be judged by God based on what roles (and status) we had in life and how we used those roles as we led or followed.
 - d) This leads to Verse 23 and 24. In these verses, God promises that He will appoint David to be their leader. King David lived several hundred years prior to Ezekiel. King David was thought of as the greatest king in the history of Israel. The verses say that God will rule over His people and David will be God's "prince".
 - i) To understand this, first, one has to remember that the promise of a Messiah to rule the world was given to King David. Back in 2nd Samuel Chapter 7, a promise was made to David that a descendant of his would rule forever. It is a reference of the Messiah to come. Jesus was a descendant of David both from His mother and His father's side. 2nd Samuel, Chapter 7, Verse 14 says this descendant of David will be "God's son". (It is a hint of the divine origin of the Messiah.)
 - ii) One can then interpret this as the Messiah ruling the world one day from Jerusalem. Remember that Ezekiel in a sense is done condemning all of Israel and is mainly focusing on God's future promises. One promise is that God Himself will rule over the people and the descendant of David will be "God's son".

- iii) There are other interpretations of this verse too. Because the text says that "David Himself" will be a prince among them, there are some who think that when the "millennial kingdom comes" (a 1,000 year period where the Messiah (Jesus) rules the world from Jerusalem) that David himself will be in charge of Israel.
 - a) When we get to chapters 40-48 of Ezekiel, we will discuss in detail the Messiah ruling from Jerusalem. That text also speaks of a "local prince" and some suspect it is David himself. More on that in later chapters.
- 24. Verse 25: "I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. ²⁶ I will bless them and the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ²⁸ They will no longer be plundered by the nations, nor will wild animals devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will make them afraid. ²⁹ I will provide for them a land renowned for its crops, and they will no longer be victims of famine in the land or bear the scorn of the nations. ³⁰ Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD. ³¹ You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD."
 - a) In these final verses, we are still talking about a future day when God rules over Israel. Here we get some details of what will happen whenever that time comes:
 - i) Verse 25 says that God will rid the land of wild beasts.
 - ii) Verse 26 says there will be plenty of rain. One has to remember that Israel is a dry climate and seasonal rain is a good thing. This also shows that during the millennium, people will still have to eat food.
 - iii) Verse 28 teaches how they will not be enslaved anymore. One has to remember that after the 70 year period, Israel became part of the Medo-Persian Empire, then the Greek Empire and then the Roman Empire. My point here is that this paragraph in Ezekiel is not describing any time in Israel's past history.
 - iv) The last part of Verse 28 says "no one will make them afraid". Further, in Verse 29, it says that Israel "will no longer bear the scorn of the nations". That means that whenever this time period is, Israel will not have to worry about enemies.
 - v) My point here is that whatever Ezekiel is describing is not describing modern Israel prior to Jesus ruling. If you know anything about modern Israel, is that they have had to deal with enemies consistently since the nation was formed.
 - b) The point I'm getting at here is Ezekiel is teaching of a future day "to us" as well as to those living in Ezekiel's time. There will come a time when the Israelites live in peace from their surrounding enemies and the Messiah will rule the world from Israel.
 - c) As I stated earlier, bible prophecy often deal in double-fulfillments. In other words, some of what Ezekiel predicted came true after the 70 years of captivity. Some of it came true when the modern state of Israel was born. All of it will come true when the Messiah rules the world one day from Israel. When is that day? Only God the Father knows.
 - d) Last thing and I'll wrap it up. There are many Christians who don't believe in a literal 1,000-year period where Jesus will rule the world from Israel. There are many Christians who believe that modern Israel has nothing to do with God's predictions about Jesus ruling the world one day. This is called the "amillennial view" (i.e., no literal millennium). This view tends to spiritualize verses like this and believes that it is only talking about God ruling in our hearts and nothing more than that.

- i) Do I think that Christians who hold that view are going to hell? No, in the sense that our salvation is based only on our trust of Jesus paying the price for our sins and nothing more. At the same time, this lesson is about "accountability" to God's leadership. I would much rather take the text literally than to spiritualize it!
 - ii) I have a hard time denying the literalness of the text! As we get into the next few lessons, we'll read much more about a literal time when Jesus rules the earth.
25. I promised myself after last week's marathon lesson, to keep this one to about 12 pages. I came close, but I still ran a little long. ☺ With that said, I'll end it here and now.
26. Let's pray: Father, help us to remember that You and You alone are in charge of our lives. Help us to live a life pleasing to you in all that we do. We pray for our civil and spiritual leaders over us. Help them to make decisions pleasing to You and lead them so we can live a life pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to remember that You are in charge of them as well as us. Guide us, as you are our "Good Shepherd", in Jesus name we pray, Amen.