

6

Sheep Without a Shepherd

Readings for the Week

1 Samuel 16-17

2 Samuel 10-12:13

Ezekiel 34

Psalms 23

John 10

Even at their best, the rulers of Israel fail to lead God's people. Rather than shepherd the flock, leaders turn them astray and take advantage of their power.

What becomes of a flock of sheep without a shepherd? Why do sheep need to be tended?

How does the church need to be guided by God? How much do you think we rely on human leadership rather than God?

God has always been Israel's king, but they want an earthly king like all the other nations. This does not go well and no king, whatever their successes, can replace God.

1 Samuel 8:4-9

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

After God shows how sufficient he is in chapter 7, Israel is quickly calling for a king in chapter 8. Why do you think they want to be like the other nations?

Before having a king, there were judges that ruled. But in asking for a king, rather than the judges (like Samuel), who are the people really rejecting?

In asking for a king Israel wants to be like other nations. Israel thought having a king made others strong, but this revealed a lack of trust that God could protect them. Read 1 Samuel 17:1-10, 24-27, and 32-49 to see how what appearances of strength don't always tell the whole story.

What appears strong and weak in this story? Are the people putting their trust in God or in appearances?

Why does David step up to fight, even though he was only a youth? Does he trust in his own strength and size or his stone-slinging ability?

David believes that it is the Lord who will deliver him, and his trust in and reliance upon God serve him well from this time until he is king. But the great David still makes mistakes and we are reminded that even the shepherd king cannot tend for the people like God can. Read Ezekiel 34:1-16 to see God's plan.

What is the job of a shepherd? How are these responsibilities listed in Ezekiel the same for the leaders of Israel?

Because the leaders of Israel, the shepherds, have failed, what is left for God to do?

To a people whose leaders have failed, God promises that he will come and be their shepherd. Only he can do the job perfectly. We see this fulfilled in John 10:1-18.

What has Jesus done for us as the Good Shepherd? Is this something anyone else could have done?

Even in Jesus' day, they were trusting in appearances of power and when Jesus appeared weak on the cross, they thought it was defeat. How can we better rely on God and not on appearances?

Unlike a hired hand, Jesus doesn't leave us. We are his very own flock and he has died to protect us. Does it help you to trust in Jesus when you know that he would do anything for his sheep?

