

# FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

## Israel's New Shepherd

THE BIG YEAR SEASON 3 WEEK 4

1

### WHAT YOU NEED

- Balloons (at least 2)
- Permanent marker
- Cane/stick of some sort
- Cone/marker of some sort
- Timer

### LET'S READ THE BIBLE

Take turns reading the following passages:

- Ezekiel 34:1-8
- Ezekiel 34:9-16

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### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

So far in our story we've seen how God's people, the Israelites, have suffered because of their sin. Now, in this chapter, the leaders of Israel are held responsible for failing to do their jobs.

Ezekiel is ordered to prophesy against the "shepherds" of Israel – the kings, the princes, the judges, the priests and the religious leaders. Ezekiel says that these shepherds only cared to get themselves further ahead, to make themselves rich and to make themselves greater than everyone else. They are supposed to take care of the sheep (The Israelites) but instead they are only taking care of themselves.

The princes and judges did not care when wrong was done to or among the people of Israel and they didn't even try to make things right. They didn't take care of the poor and made sure they were provided for. The priests didn't instruct or teach the people to do right and to obey God. Everything was going downhill, and no one did anything to try and fix it. The flock, the people of Israel, were being carried off and scattered all over the earth and the leaders did nothing to try and stop this or to help these people get back to Israel.

The people were scattered because there were no real shepherds. There were those who called themselves shepherds, but really, they were not. God is saying through Ezekiel that these shepherds' days are numbered and that they would have to answer to Him for what they have done.

Then God says that when the time comes, He will gather His scattered sheep and bring those back who have wandered. God says that He will feed His sheep (His people) and that He would bring the captives safely back to their own land. He will heal the broken, strengthen the sick and comfort those who are sad.

God says that even though the shepherds of Israel have failed, He is the Good Shepherd who takes the best care of His Sheep. Does this story remind you of another story from the Bible? (*Take responses*). It reminds us of a very famous Psalm, Psalm 23 where God also says that He is the Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep. His sheep lay down in green pastures (beautiful fields) because He takes care of and protects them. And even when dangerous things are around the flock, God protects His sheep.

Jesus also said in John 10:11, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." In the Old Testament, the sheep of the Good Shepherd were the Israelites. But after Jesus came, it changed things. Now, the sheep of the Good Shepherd are those people who believe in Jesus and what He did for them on the cross. When we ask Jesus to forgive our sins, when we accept His gift of grace and we ask Jesus to come and live inside of us, we become part of the Good Shepherd's flock.

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## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

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- What were the shepherds of Israel supposed to be doing?
- What were they actually doing?
- In Ezekiel 34, what is the Good Shepherd like?
- What does He do for the sheep?

## LET'S GO A BIT DEEPER

5

- After reading Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23 and John 10:11, how do you feel about this Good Shepherd? Is He the kind of Shepherd you feel you can trust?
- What did Jesus mean when He said, "The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep"?
- Have you decided to become part of the Good Shepherd's flock yet? *(Parents, please take this opportunity to talk to your children about what Jesus did for us and how we can become part of God's flock).*

## LET'S PRAY TOGETHER

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Pray together:

- Thank Jesus that He is the Good Shepherd who takes good care of His flock, even to the point of laying down His life.
- Ask Jesus to help you trust in Him as the Good Shepherd.
- Ask Jesus to help you live the kind of life He wants you to - to be a "good sheep" in His flock.

## LET'S HAVE SOME FUN

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- Blow up 2 balloons and draw sheep faces on them using the permanent marker *(if you have more than 2 balloons, you can blow up and draw a few more - this will make the activity a bit more challenging).*
- Choose a space where a balloon can be rolled on the floor without popping. Set up a starting point and put your cone/marker a few meters away.
- Each family member will get a turn to use a cane/stick *(any stick like object you have around your home)* to herd their "sheep" (balloons) from the starting point, around the marker, and back *(if you have more than 2 balloons, you can do a few rounds where you start with 2 balloons and then increase the number of balloons to make it more difficult).*
- Time each family member. The timer will only be stopped once all of the balloons are back at the starting point. The fastest family member wins.