

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The desert series (3 of 3)  
by Abri Brancken, 12 Nov 2017

## INTRODUCTION

The Bible is not detached from history, geographical events and sequences. It is therefore important to read the Bible with an understanding of the context in which it was written. To understand the beautiful analogy of Jesus being our Shepherd, we need to understand the role of the shepherd in ancient times. These shepherd images helped the Israelites understand their relationship to God and their dependence on him.

The shepherd had a very important responsibility because sheep helped to sustain the family.

- From the sheep and goats, they got milk from which they could make various produce to eat.
- Sheep provided meat, food to eat.
- Sheep provided wool from which they made clothes, blankets and could sell it to receive an income.

Abraham, the father of the Jews, was a shepherd.

Moses, the great lawgiver (Ex. 3:1) was a shepherd.

David, the king who established Israel's national identity (1 Sam. 17:28) was a shepherd.

The people in the Bible identified with the shepherd concept and that is why Jesus used this image quite often in speaking to and teaching the people.

## SHEPHERDS WERE OFTEN YOUNG

Adult Bedouin males usually delegated the care of flocks to young boys and girls. This responsibility was learned early in childhood. We see that the young boy David tended his father's sheep. He killed Goliath at about age 13. David was a Shepherd before he became King. It was as a shepherd that he killed Goliath.

## PROTECTING THE SHEEP

The shepherd's responsibility was great, and it was dangerous. A good shepherd would lay down his life in order to protect his sheep. The shepherd had to protect the sheep from attacks like lions (David killed a lion), wolves, bears, leopards and thieves. You could lose your life being a good shepherd. They faced burning sun and cold winds. Regardless of the conditions, they were responsible for the care of their sheep. To protect their sheep at night, the shepherd would put his flock in a sheepfold or pen. On occasion, the shepherd laid across the opening of the sheepfold, acting as a gate to protect the sheep and prevent them from straying. At night, thieves would be careful to climb over the shepherd guarding the sheep because the shepherd could wake up and fight off the robber. Therefore the robber would sneak in some other place, like climbing over the sheep fold. The enemy's goal was to snatch the sheep out of the shepherd's hands. It was most likely this image that Jesus was referring to when He described Himself as the gate or door to the sheepfold (John 10:9).

## **THEY KNEW ONE ANOTHER**

The shepherd and the sheep knew each other well. Often the shepherd would sleep with his sheep. The shepherds smelled like their sheep because they spent every day with them. If something happened with the shepherd, it was very difficult to handle the sheep because they would not follow another shepherd.

## **THE SHEEP KNEW THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE**

Each shepherd would have his/her own unique call that the sheep recognized. Sheep followed only the shepherd they recognized, ignoring all strangers. A simple call from their shepherd was sufficient for an entire flock to follow his lead.

## **THE SHEPHERD WANTED WHAT IS BEST FOR THE SHEEP**

The shepherd wants the best for their sheep. The shepherd would scout to find the best areas for his sheep to graze. This took time and energy. Jesus said this in John 10:10: "I am come that you may have life and have it in abundance. (Jn 10:10)

## **GREEN PASTURES**

Our Shepherd doesn't promise a life of comfort, but he will always give what we need. Many Westerners imagine lush, green meadows when they hear the word "pasture," but "green pastures" in Israel actually look like rocky, barren hillsides. Scattered amidst the rocks are blades of grass. Where a drop of rain fell, or dew collected beneath a rock, a single tuft of grass can sprout up. Even though they eat all of one day's grass, the sheep do not worry about where tomorrow's grass will come from. They trust the shepherd to find new pastures for them. It is the shepherd's responsibility to find green pastures.

Psalm twenty-three's image of God providing "green pastures" challenges believers to trust God day by day. The Good Shepherd doesn't promise a life of luxury or long-term supplies, but he will always give the pasture needed for the moment. As his sheep, we should trust God today rather than worrying about the future. You may not see it now, but a new tuft of grass will always be there in the morning.

Jesus also said that we need not to worry about tomorrow. Matt 5-7.

## **QUIET WATERS**

Last week we took a closer look at the difference between stormy waters and still waters. The shepherds lead his sheep to still (safe) waters.

## **PATH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The path of righteousness for Christians today is a lifewalk that follows in the footsteps of the Shepherd. Sheep always travel in a straight line, which creates problems when a shepherd calls to sheep further up the hillside: The animals will not walk around hazardous obstacles, but plummet straight down, getting hurt in the process. To avoid this problem, shepherds guide their sheep using straight trails that slowly zig-zag down the hills.

The Hebrew language uses the same word for "straight" and for "righteousness." Thus the "straight paths" of the shepherd were the "paths of righteousness" mentioned in Psalm 23. The Israelites understood that the path of righteousness is

the path that leads straight to the shepherd. Our Shepherd is good, and he will always make sure the path is safe for us to travel.

### **THE ROD AND THE STAFF**

Using a rod, they attack the unwelcome animal to keep it from hurting the flocks. This protective rod is never used to hurt the sheep themselves. If a sheep does wander, the shepherd's staff is used to gently nudge the animal back to safety. When David wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me," he surely envisioned the protection and care of a shepherd. Like a shepherd, God always walks closely with his people through the dark hours of life. His rod and staff are never used to harm us. During life's most difficult moments, God draws closer, giving us comfort while also protecting and disciplining us to keep us safe.

### **JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

In Ezekiel 34, God said that he would send a shepherd to the earth to take care of us as people.

#### **Ezekiel 34**

Eze 34:1 The word of the LORD came to me:

Eze 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?

Eze 34:15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD.

In John 10 we see that Jesus is that Shepherd, the fulfilment of Ezekiel 34's promise!

#### **John 10:1-29**

Joh 10:1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

Joh 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

Joh 10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Joh 10:4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

Joh 10:5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Joh 10:7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

Joh 10:8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Joh 10:9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Joh 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Joh 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Joh 10:12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

Joh 10:13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

Joh 10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

Joh 10:15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Joh 10:16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Joh 10:26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.

Joh 10:27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

Joh 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Joh 10:29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd" - Jesus claims to be the one that David wrote about.

Are you following the Good Shepherd?