

A Shepherd King

A long time ago, when King David was still a youth tending his father's flock in the hills of Palestine, he had time to observe, and think. He came to an interesting conclusion, Psalm 23:1 *'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.'*

God was taking care of him in the same way that he was watching over his father's sheep. David watched his sheep wander from one clump of tasty grass to the next, always on the lookout for that different tasty morsel, a flower, a bush low enough to browse, some rare flavoursome herb. He became skilful with his sling, applying a pebble in just the right spot to drive the straying sheep back into the flock, for wandering those hills were several types of carnivore always on the watch for the lone straying lamb or errant sheep. The evidence of their success was to be seen in the scattered bleached bones and widespread wool, from place to place.

One of God's names is Jehovah-ra'ah – the Lord my shepherd, and David recognized the same waywardness in himself that he saw in the sheep, the same tendency to stray into paths that lead away from God, and hence the same need for a shepherd to lead and provide, to heal, correct and protect. David was a successful shepherd, which is why God chose him to care for Israel as its King. He served his people just as carefully, and so in God's Kingdom, David will rule all Israel, as their shepherd king - Ezekiel 34:23 *'And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.'* This, despite David's weaknesses and faults, and we are no different today. Isaiah 53:6, first part, *'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.'*

We might not like the analogy, but we have to face up to Christ's words to Peter after His resurrection - John 21:16. *'He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.'*

We are Christ's sheep and He is our shepherd, Hebrews 13:20-21. *'Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'*

Christ is THE great shepherd – we are his flock with whom he is working 24 hours a day. WHY ? To bring us to perfection!

The word 'bishop' emphasized the responsibility of the shepherd to watch over the sheep. It comes from the Greek word episkopos which means overseer, inspector or guardian. 'Going astray,' in the Greek where it said, 'All we like sheep have gone astray;' actually implies that they were victims of deliberate deception. These sheep were deceived, seduced, led astray, made to err – from the Greek word PLANAO. We all know who is the great deceiver. He works through false shepherds, who can and have appeared to be apostles of Christ even as Satan can appear as an angel of light : 2 Corinthians 11:13-14 *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ, And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.'*

When Christ ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within his people, but Christ also gave other gifts to help his people: Ephesians 4:11 *'And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.'* The Holy Spirit alone would not be enough.

His sheep would need His personal active arm to spiritually and sometimes even physically intervene to protect, preserve and restore their Master's sheep. A shepherd carries a staff or crook. It is a symbol of his control simply because he has authority to get things started within the flock – to lead from in front, and by example, to co-ordinate the movement of the whole group. To be called to become an under shepherd in the last days is no easy task, for it is prophesied that fully half of God's sheep will be led astray, and through idolatry, gradually be lulled into quenching the Spirit, Matthew 25:2-4, *'And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them.'* Indeed Christ will not return until this great apostasy has taken place. 2 Thessalonians 2:3, *'Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.'*

Many of God's people then, are being led astray from the truth while inside the church, by false teachers and becoming apostate in these last days. In God's church, **true** shepherds or pastors do not own their flocks, they are simply called to gather, lead and care for their Master's sheep.

The New Testament example shows that God intends his sheep to have a shepherd. But there is also a danger for the shepherd. James 3:1, *'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.'* The larger the church, the greater the danger – as we know, man's honour provides influence, influence is power, and power corrupts. Ezekiel 34:27, *'And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.'*

God is proving us now. Are we genuine in our concern for others, like a shepherd for his sheep? Or, if we are already shepherds of God's flock, are we like the shepherds that are condemned throughout this chapter? Only those who truly **serve** now, will qualify to **rule** in God's Kingdom! That's why pastors must always bear in mind their accountability to the chief shepherd. 1 Peter 5: 1-4, *'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.'* That way, the sheep are safe, fed and protected by the teaching of God's faithful shepherds. If they do this, the sheep will always recognize them as a true shepherd. They will be following the instruction of the scriptures. Acts 20:28, *'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.'*

1. They will always provide a balanced diet through the scriptures – verse 27 *'For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all** the counsel of God.'* The correct spiritual meat in due season, even as a good shepherd leads his flock to the appropriate herbs, for their health.

2. The true pastor will warn his flock against the dangers of straying away from their calling. God places us in the flock. While the shepherd continues to feed the truth from God's word, he speaks with the authority of God's calling as one who must account for you to Jesus Christ: verse 31, *'Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to **warn every one** night and day with tears.'* Paul shed tears of concern over his flock as he prayed for each of them, that they might be preserved from the roaring lion, such was his involvement and investment in the sheep.

3. The true pastor-shepherd is not in it for material gain but prefers to be a giver, when he is in a position to do so. Verses 33-35, *'I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

Always in the shepherd's mind, is the importance of preparing the sheep for their future role as shepherds themselves in God's Kingdom, or even before. A shepherd is simply a sheep that God's Holy Spirit has worked with over the years, providing the gifts that enable him to serve and lead his brethren a little further towards their great destiny as kings and priests, themselves.

Revelation 5:10, *'And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.'* We can all recognize those who are growing in this way, because they are the ones we see following the example of the chief shepherd in genuine love and service to the brethren: 1Peter 2:21, *'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.'*

Jesus contrasted himself, as the good shepherd, with the evil shepherds and ministers of his day, John 10: 11-13, *'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.'* The sheep follow because the true shepherd has a deep relationship with the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ, speaks His words and follows His great example. The true shepherd's concern is with his Master's sheep, not wages, and the sheep know this, but will flee from a stranger who is merely a hireling.

Notice Genesis 4:2. Abel's sheep were dear to his heart. To Jesus each of His sheep is a priceless possession. *'And Abel was a keeper (one who cherishes and values) of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.'*

The true church is the one fold and the true pastor-shepherds will always be on guard against the wolf, even as David had to fight off the bear and the lion or even robbers who would make off with his father's sheep. Education in the word of God is the surest protection against wolves from without and false teachers from within, but the true shepherd will always be on guard, prepared to act against any threat to those God has entrusted to him. God's shepherds will be the arm that rules for Him in His Kingdom, giving account to the chief shepherd: Isaiah 40:10-11, *'Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.'* The Hebrew word 'rule' here speaks of reigning with power, but verse 11 shows how gently and mercifully God's shepherd will exercise that power.

Notice then, that God's shepherds will **'feed'** their flocks – sheep need to be led to the appropriate pasture. Similarly a shepherd must urge God's people into those portions of God's word that will confront and change their lives as they obey them.

Years ago when I owned sheep, I quickly found that I could move them easily to appropriate new pasture by rewarding them with good food. It's impossible to chase sheep with a stick, but my flock would come running from all directions when I called because they knew they would be rewarded. A true shepherd will provide varied and nourishing food from God's word, guided and directed by God's Holy Spirit.

Next, notice that verse 11 also mentions the need to **gather** the sheep. Sheep instinctively flock, but when all seems peaceful they can wander and become separated. The shepherd must maintain the unity of the flock by watching and calling for the stragglers to avoid losing any. Those of us who wander away from God's flock can become depressed by the problems of this world, deprived of good spiritual food available in the true church. Shepherds should restore such sheep to the flock by calling them to the opportunities of involvement in God's work. God measures our work by our outgoing concern especially for those He is calling through the gospel. This verse also tells us that shepherds also carry the lambs in their arms. New-born lambs may need shielding from bad weather inside his cloak for a time. The shepherd knows all his lambs and will need to **carry** them less as they mature.

As Isaiah also says, *'The shepherd will gently lead those that are with young.'* Even mature sheep must be cared for, and pregnant ewes tire easily. Sometimes they need special food, and if they don't get it they can die of exhaustion. Genesis 33:13, *'And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die.'* King David learned this lesson – Psalm 78:70-72, *'From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.'* That's why he will rule in God's kingdom!

In these verses of Isaiah's he is describing the DIVINE PASTOR SHEPHERD, JESUS CHRIST and future members of the God family, but these basic principles hold true for God's pastor shepherds in the church today.

Also, we can examine ourselves as one of God's sheep. In every flock there are one or two always found on the edge. Sometimes they stray out of sight, but reappear from time to time. These are the sheep easily devoured by a roaring lion or a wandering wolf. Sheep can also become cast – that is they roll over in a hollow and cannot regain their feet, especially after rain and with a heavy fleece. If a sheep is cast out of sight it may never be found. Shepherds wonder why these sheep are never content with the good pasture provided and are always looking for something more exciting. Those sheep that stay in the heart of the flock are more easily cared for as the shepherd will occasionally use his crook to detach one sheep for healing, or maybe it has some encumbrance dragging along behind it, caught up in its wool, which needs removing. The fact is that sheep are prey to all kinds of pests. Flies and insects, having laid their eggs of doubt, guilt, depression and discontent, may require that the shepherd clean and anoint the sheep: Psalm 23:4, *'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'*

Rarely, a sheep may develop such a contagious disease that it may need isolating for a while until it is no longer a danger to the flock. It is all part of the shepherd's job in caring for the whole flock.

If we are to become shepherd kings in God's Kingdom, we must understand the importance of providing the environment in which God's sheep can safely grow and develop. As they mature, new leaders will emerge. The shepherd will recognize the work of God's Holy Spirit in revealing its fruits and this is what the apostles required the brethren to do when the first deacons were chosen. Acts 6:3, *'Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.'*

The congregation here had recognized the leadership qualities of those who delighted in serving the flock, who loved sharing God's word with others and who had the ability to grasp what is going on - something that is not always apparent to the congregation!

The shepherd can use the help of such individuals in caring for the flock until, with their extra responsibilities, they have become spiritually mature enough to become shepherds themselves, hopefully, eventually in the Kingdom of God.

That is what being one of God's shepherds is all about – caring for God's sheep, nurturing and guarding their development, watching, feeding and encouraging their progress until God's family is increased and new sheep take their place.

At the moment though, **we** are the sheep. Let's make sure that we are making the kind of progress our chief shepherd wants, so that we will be qualified to fit the description of Jeremiah 23:3-4: *'And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.'*

In conclusion, this is our future role in the Kingdom of God, which is pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles – kings and priests, but also the shepherds of God's flock!

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