



SHEPHERDS, SHEEP & SHEEPFOLD

BY GERALD ROWLANDS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reverend Gerald Rowlands of Queensland, Australia, has been a Minister of the Gospel for more than fifty years. During this time he has served in various roles such as a Pastor, Evangelist, Missionary, Christian Radio Teacher, Bible College Lecturer and Principal.



Gerald and his wife Elizabeth have traveled to some seventy nations of the world having lived for various periods of time in Africa, Asia and Israel.

Gerald is the founder and president of Church Planting International (CPI) and these notes form part of the CPI Training Course for prospective church planters. The CPI Course is being used effectively in some 23 nations around the world.

Gerald's CPI vision for training potential leaders in evangelism, church planting and pastoral ministry was birthed whilst Gerald and his wife were missionaries in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1980. During his first twelve months in Africa in 1975, Gerald had conducted numerous large crusades with many "conversions" recorded and he observed that it was relatively easy to draw a crowd and to see hundreds of people "make decisions" for Christ. The real challenge came after the crusade when those working with Gerald would seek to integrate the "converts" into the Body of Christ and walk in a truly Christian lifestyle. He had begun to realise how crucial it was to train local pastors in the principles of church growth and development. As a result, Gerald began to organise Pastors' Seminars in various parts of Africa to provide teaching and training. In 1979 when God led him to start a Bible College in what was then Rhodesia. At that time, Gerald was able to obtain an old guest house/motel and commenced a one year training course, the for-runner of the CPI Course.

During later visits to Zimbabwe, whilst conducting Church Growth seminars with national pastors, Gerald was able to introduce the CPI training program to many hundreds of ministers. As an ongoing result, the program has been adopted by some 27 denominations in Zimbabwe. All of these denominations and hundreds of graduates of Gerald's CPI Courses participated in a national decade long project called TARGET 2,000. Even now, despite many adverse circumstances within the nation, hundreds of new churches are started every year.

In 1992 Gerald received what he terms a "Macedonian Call" from Asia to place the CPI Course into some 30 new Bible Colleges in several parts of S.E. Asia. Gerald was based in Singapore at that time, and the colleges were in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. It took a few months to accomplish the necessary editing and printing. After this he began to organise pastor's conferences at which his strategy could be shared and the materials made available to all pastors that desired them. Zimbabwe became a missions' focussed nation, sending church planters into several surrounding nations. There are also many churches using the CPI Course in Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, South Africa, Malawi, Nigeria and Namibia.

Gerald's CPI Course has also been adopted in colleges in India, China, Israel, and in many parts of the former USSR including the Ukraine, Kazakstan and Siberia and Russia itself.

In 2006, Gerald was awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) by the Australian government for services rendered in the emerging world and today Gerald still ministers via a regular radio program focusing on God's plan for Israel and the Church in the end times.

INTRODUCTION

The Biblical image of sheep and shepherds may seem antiquated and obsolete to the modern mind, an old fashioned picture with no relevance to our modern world. This perception is far from the truth. The ethos of the Biblical shepherd is still absolutely relevant today. The characteristics and philosophy required for a truly good shepherd in Bible times, is still the criteria that God requires today in His shepherds. God views every leader of His people as a shepherd and expects all of them to live according to the Biblical criteria of shepherds. Just as Jesus valued our lives above His own and gave Himself for us, the true shepherd values the life of his sheep even above his own. This image is consistently seen throughout the Bible. When one's work as Christian leaders is complete, God will judge them, not by how successful or popular they may have been, but as to how well they have fulfilled and exemplified the heart affection and loyalty of a true shepherd towards God's sheep.

In a nomadic society, every man from the sheikh down to the slave, is deemed to be a shepherd. The progenitors of the Jews in the patriarchal age were nomads, and their history is rich in scenes of pastoral life. The occupation of tending the flocks was undertaken, not only by the sons of wealthy chiefs, Gen. 30:29ff.; 37:12ff., but even by their daughters. Gen. 29:6ff.; Ex. 2:19. And also their servant slaves.

God wants every leader to be a shepherd according to what His heart deems to be a good and genuinely suitable shepherd. It is therefore essential that we know how God sees such shepherds, what is His criteria, and how we may meet His standards.

Jer 3:15

15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (NIV)

This scripture is a prophetic one, speaking to Israel of a time when God will give to them shepherds according to His heart. i.e. the kind and quality of shepherds that his heart truly longs for them to have. Though in this specific context it is prophetic, it also indicates the kind of shepherd that God always wishes His people to have.

All Pastors should be true shepherds of the kind and quality that God, in the depths of His heart, desires all his people to have. They should have a friendly, companionable relationship with their sheep. They should responsibly lead and feed them with knowledge and understanding and with the wisdom that affords "good success" (Heb: Sakal) in every area of one's life. Joshua 1:8.

The Shepherd of Israel, (Psa 80:1) the Great Shepherd of His sheep, (Heb 13:20) longs for His flock to have "shepherds, according to His heart". (Jer 3:15) He has desired to make all His pastors, shepherds in harmony with His heart. When He appears, as the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) to visit His under shepherds, He will be looking for just that, shepherds who have lived and functioned as true shepherds, according to the definition of God's heart.

Many Christian ministers today assume a variety of different roles and titles. They are at times known as Pastor, Reverend, Doctor, Bishop, Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist etc. Some pastors also assume a role of Chief Executive Officer as though their church were a

registered company rather than a flock of God's sheep. (In which case their charges may possibly regard themselves as share holders, rather than sheep!)

However, from God's perspective, on Biblical evidence, they are all seen by Him as "ro'him" i.e. "shepherds." The pre-eminent Biblical image of a leader of God's people is that of a shepherd. As such, God has certain criteria by which He determines what constitutes a "good shepherd." It is according to this specific definition and criteria that He will one day examine and judge every minister.

1 Peter 5:4.

4. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. (NIV)

This verse clearly intimates that when Christ returns it will be in the role of Chief Shepherd obviously to judge His leaders by His criteria of true shepherds. The Bible is timeless in its applications. Its images are ancient, yet always current. Its applications are always of contemporary relevance and importance no matter in which century or geographic location. This is certainly true of the shepherd image that constantly recurs throughout its pages.

Matt 9:35-37

36 When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. NIV

Although portraying a Middle Eastern shepherd in Bible days, the message conveyed is still vital to the 21st century church and particularly to the shepherds of that church. An outstanding image, without comparison, Jesus is powerfully depicted as The Good Shepherd. People, seen as sheep without a shepherd, powerfully impacted upon the heart of the Good Shepherd.

Here are two of the numerous features that distinguish a good shepherd.

INTIMATE PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF HIS SHEEP.

John 10:14-15

*14. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-
15. just as the Father knows me and I know the Father"*

NIV

The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and is known by them in the same manner as God the Father knows and is known by His beloved Son. This describes an intimate, mystical relationship that exists in the God Head and intimates that Jesus wants to know each of His sheep in the same manner. Obviously a good pastor must make the time to get to know each member of his flock in a similar loving, concerned and intimate manner.

To the good shepherd every individual sheep is precious, not merely as a marketable commodity but as though his own child. His deepest concern for the smallest, individual sheep is vividly portrayed in Luke 15:3-7

3. Then Jesus told them this parable: 4. "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6. and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7. I tell you that in the same way there will be more

rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. NIV

The story suggests that a certain shepherd who has lovingly cared for his flock all day, diligently leading, feeding and watering them, finally gets them safely to a fold that night. As he wearily counts them into the safety of the fold he realises that one of the hundred sheep he possesses is missing. His first natural thought could well be, “Ninety nine sheep are safely enfolded. Only one is missing. The day has been long and trying and I am desperately tired, how important is just one sheep?” He might easily have persuaded himself, “I will probably find it again tomorrow and if not, is it merely one sheep out of a large flock. Why push myself into the dark night when I am already so tired and weary?”

His love and concern for even one lost sheep overcomes any such natural arguments and leaving the ninety nine safely enfolded he risks his own life and limb to go out to search of that one sheep. His faith and sacrifice are justly rewarded and his rejoicing knows no bounds when the lonely frightened sheep is found again. Lovingly placing it upon his weary shoulders, he carried it safely back to the fold, inviting his friends and neighbours to “rejoice with me for I have found that which was lost.” Jesus concludes the story with a clear reminder that the lost sheep is actually a type of some poor lost sinner about whose redemption all heaven will rejoice.

A good shepherd does not regard his sheep and flock impersonally as mere chattels and possessions, an item of his wealth. He values each sheep to the degree that he develops an intimate, personal knowledge of each and every one of them. He is closely acquainted and deeply concerned with their individual distinctions. Every lamb and sheep has a name with which the shepherd is familiar. He calls each one by name. The shepherd closely observes each of his sheep, carefully noting any injury or discomfort from which they may suffer. He scrutinises them closely each evening to ensure that any wound incurred that day is immediately anointed with soothing oil.

INESTIMABLE VALUE PLACED ON EVERY SHEEP

What value does the good shepherd place on every individual sheep? He counts each one of greater value than even his own life. The true shepherd, in complete contrast to the hireling, willingly places his own life at risk and in danger in order to safeguard the well being of one sheep. He struggles through the dark, cold night, over mountains, rocks and streams, anxiously searching for that one sheep that has lost its way. He is determined to expend everything in his power to save that pitiful sheep. In our modern context, particularly in the Western world, there are too many “shepherd-less sheep”. Many sheep have wandered from their fold and are “church-less”. Sadly, one of the reasons for this is the scarcity of true shepherds who truly have a heart dedicated to the care of God’s sheep.

God views every leader of His people as a shepherd and expects each of them to live by and demonstrate this definition and criteria. The “shepherd” of the Old Testament, (Heb: ro’eh, “one who lovingly tends his flock) is essentially the “pastor” (Gk: poimen) of the New Testament. The true shepherd values the life of his sheep even above his own, just as Jesus valued our lives above His own and gave Himself for us. This image is frequently seen in the Bible, e.g. Jesus said,

John 10:11

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down(sacrifices) his life for the sheep. NIV

God wants every leader to be a shepherd according to what His own heart deems to be a good and suitable shepherd and to value the lives and well being of the sheep above that of their own. It is therefore essential that we know how God regards such shepherds, what is His criteria, and how we may meet His standards? The Shepherd of Israel, (Psa 80:1) the Great Shepherd of His sheep, (Heb 13:20) longs for His flock to have “shepherds, according to His heart.”

Jer 3:15

15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. (NIV)

He wants to make all His pastors shepherds in accordance with His own heart. This scripture is a prophetic one, speaking to Israel of a time when God will give to them shepherds according to His heart. i.e. the kind and quality of shepherds that His heart truly longs for them to have. Though in this specific context it is prophetic, it also clearly indicates the kind of shepherd that God always desires His people to have. Pastors should be true shepherds, the kind and quality that God, in the depth of His heart, desires all His people to have. They should have a friendly, companionable relationship with their sheep. They should responsibly lead and feed them. When He appears, as the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) to visit His under shepherds, He will be looking for just that, shepherds who have lived and functioned as true shepherds, according to the definition of God's heart.

1 Peter 5:1-4

5:1. The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2. Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3. nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

4. and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

NKJV

This passage is addressed specifically to “the elders” i.e. the leaders of Christ's church.

1. They are charged to diligently shepherd, (Guard, protect, tend, feed, water, skilfully lead) the flock of God placed in their charge.
2. This task must not be undertaken by compulsion, nor for monetary gain.
3. Elders should never assume to be “lords over their flock” regarding themselves as superior and privileged.
4. They must always be examples to the flock, faithfully portraying in every way the image of what they urge their charges to be. (Less than this is hypocrisy)

These requirements constitute something of what is essential who may be deemed worthy to receive a shepherds reward. Therefore, if we as shepherds, expect to receive a shepherds reward, we need to know:-

1. What is a shepherd according to God's heart?
2. What is God's criteria for shepherds?
3. What is God's expectation of such a shepherd?
4. How may we measure up to His expectations?

It is imperative that all pastors thoroughly understand what God expects of them. Ignorance is no excuse. When the shepherds answer to God, He will expect them to know and to have

faithfully fulfilled His criteria for their calling. The criteria of success will not be how successful and effective one has been but how faithful to the calling and criteria of a shepherd.

Chapter One

GOD IS A SHEPHERD BY NATURE

In the Bible God reveals Himself by many and varied names, all of which indicate the various aspects of His character and being. Most of those names emphasise His pre-eminence, (His greatness, glory, majesty, incomparability, perfection and total superiority) the manner in which He utterly transcends and supersedes all others. Other names emphasise His immanence, (i.e. His nearness, proximity and identification with humanity) Probably the image of God's nearness that out-shines all others in the Bible, is that of the Good Shepherd, selflessly sacrificing his life for the sheep.

HIS PRE-EMINENCE

The two main personal names of God in the Hebrew Scriptures are Elohim and Jehovah (more correctly pronounced Yahweh); the former calling attention to the fullness of divine power, the latter meaning "He who is" and thus declaring the divine self-existence.

It is by the name Elohim that God is initially introduced in the Bible. (first sixteen chapters of Genesis) The plural name Elohim occurs some 2,500 times throughout the Bible, with regard to the true God. The compound plurality of the name (**Elohim**) intimated by its ending, indicates more than two persons. A simple plural form, i.e. less than three persons, would be Elohayim.

However, the compound plural form of this name also indicates the unlimited greatness, majesty and power of God. Elohim derives from the Hebrew word El, which means strength, might or power. Thus indicating and emphasising the incomparable, inexpressible, exceeding greatness and power of God beyond our human comprehension. Elohim emphasises the multi facets of such greatness.

The divine name Yahweh is usually translated LORD in English versions of the Bible, because it became a practice in late Old Testament Judaism not to pronounce the sacred name YHWH, but to say instead "my Lord" (Adonai) or Ha Shem, -The Name, -a practice still used today in the synagogue. When the vowels of Adonai were attached to the consonants YHWH in the medieval period, the word Jehovah resulted. Today, many Christians use the word Yahweh, the more original pronunciation, not hesitating to name the divine name, since Jesus taught believers to speak in a familiar way to God.

These terms are varied or combined with others to emphasise certain attributes of the Godhead, such variations or combinations being rendered in our English version "God Almighty," "the Living God," "the Most High," "the Lord," or "the God of Hosts." The English word God is identical with the Anglo-Saxon word for "good," and therefore it is believed that the name God refers to the divine goodness. As the transcendent God, He exceeds us in every way. i.e. Our finite knowledge, comprehension, understanding and imagination. We are unable to fully properly "know" Him.

God is also known as

1. El Shaddai. (Gen 17:1) the Almighty God.
2. El Olam. (Gen 21:33) the Everlasting God.
3. El Elyon. (Gen 14:18-20) the most high God.
4. El Kodesh (Josh 24:19) God the Holy One.
5. El Chai. (Josh 3:10) the Living God.

6. El Elohe Israel (Gen 33:20) God the God of Israel.
7. El Gadol waw Nora (Deut 7:21) the Great and Awesome God.

HIS IMMANENCE

There are also some beautiful names that emphasise His immanence. (i.e. His nearness, proximity and identification with us) Probably the two most comforting such names are “Father” and “Shepherd.” There are many characteristics that are common to a good father and a good shepherd. E.g. The Father nature of God is seen in many ways throughout the Old Testament. His disposition towards parenthood is clearly seen initially in Genesis 1 in that He, the creator of humanity, is their father by creative right.

Gen 1:27

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (NIV)

However, it is Jesus, who is the fullness of the Godhead manifest in human form, who brings to us the clearest revelation of the Fatherhood of God when teaching His disciples how to pray.

Matt 6:8-9

*8. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.
9. In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. (NKJ)*

GOD'S FATHERHOOD NATURE

It would be impossible to fully and accurately define and describe the nature of the infinite God. However, the image that most accurately conveys the nature of His character is that of the eternal Father. Try to imagine the most wonderful earthly father, unselfish, loving caring, reliable, protecting, providing and constantly nurturing his children. Then multiply that image a trillion times and you begin to understand what God is truly like.

God is consistently represented as a Divine Father, possessing all the attributes of perfect father-hood. E.g.

In Psalm 89:26-29. God said, concerning David,

- 26. He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Saviour.'*
- 27. I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.*
- 28. I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. NIV*

Through His immanence we are able to meet and know Him, particularly in His manifestation as The Living Word. (Logos) Jesus as the Son of man, is the ultimate human expression and image of God. Jesus is God in a form appropriate for living amongst humankind. He presents us with an image of God in human form to enable finite man to gain a somewhat vague idea of what the infinite almighty God of the universe is really like.

John 1:17-18

18. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared (manifested) Him. NKJV

GOD IS A FATHER BY NATURE

The nature of a true father is that of love, concern, care, responsibility and reliability. When a man possesses such characteristics, people say, “He would make a wonderful father”

meaning that his character is eminently suited to caring for children and lovingly fulfilling the role of a concerned and caring father to his family. God's integral characteristics make Him an ideal father. Such characteristics are intrinsic to the nature of the infinite God who created us. Ultimately, He is and ever wishes to be, our great heavenly Father.

BY DISPOSITION

The disposition of a good father is to cherish, train, discipline, chasten, inspire, and encourage his children. God built into mankind the disposition (inclination) towards parenthood. Both male and female were endowed with such disposition. It is the natural, God given, inclination towards reproduction and parenthood.

BY DESIRE

The natural desire of a father is to reproduce, procreate and create children in his own likeness and image. The parent's desire for children goes beyond their disposition to parenthood. It is the singular and practical purpose to actually reproduce children because of a strong yearning to assume parenthood. It is also the Divinely inbuilt desire to see one's own descendants consistently perpetuating the family likeness and appearance.

THROUGH REALISATION

A man may possess the right characteristics for fatherhood but he only activates his fatherhood, when he sires his first child. He then becomes a father indeed. Likewise, when one legally adopts a child, his fatherhood is actualised. A father cannot be a father without children. They are the sign and proof of his fatherhood. However, true parenthood is not merely the procreation of a child. It is also the ongoing, continuous care for that offspring throughout its dependent life span. Once a father, one is a father all their life. The original initiation into fatherhood begins at the birth of one's offspring but it certainly does not end there. Paul recognised Timothy as his "son in the Gospel" because he had actually brought him to Christ through spiritual travail. (birth pains)

1 Cor 4:17

17. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. NIV

He also intimated that the Corinthian believers were also his children.

1 Cor 4:14-15

14. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. 15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. NIV

His fatherly concern for them continued as he strived to see Christ, "fully formed" in his converts.

Gal 4:18-20

19. My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you, NKJV

Gal 4:19-20

19. Oh, my children, how you are hurting me! I am once again suffering for you the pains of a mother waiting for her child to be born-longing for the time when you will finally be filled with Christ. TLB

BY CREATIVE RIGHT

Gen 1:26-27

26. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. NIV

When Elohim took the initiative to create mankind in His image and likeness, He literally became the father of all mankind. He was then eternally responsible for their being. God is the procreator and father of all mankind. The whole human race exists because God determined to create mankind and be a father to them. Sadly, our primary forebears, (Adam and Eve) chose to reject God's parental oversight of them. They cast off His parental advice and commands and forfeited His watch care. But God devised a plan of salvation and restoration. A route whereby man could return to God's family and be reinstated under His Fatherly care.

The intimate role between a creator and his creation is denied by secular mankind. This is the main reason why the theory of evolution is accepted so eagerly by Godless man. It seems to provide for him a reason to deny the very existence of a creator God and thus provide an excuse for man to blatantly deny any moral absolutes that are purported to issue from his creator. Faith in the evolutionary concept of man's origins replaces the need to acknowledge the existence of an Almighty God. Evolution is the religion of God denying and God defying humans.

BY REDEMPTIVE PURPOSE

Through The Fall in Eden, Adam forfeited mankind's vital living relationship to his creator. But God did not leave it there. His plan was always to redeem mankind, restoring him to a willing and chosen relationship to his heavenly Father. He accomplishes this through re-birth or new birth actuated through faith in Christ's atoning work of redemption.

James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of all he created. NIV

Eph 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. NIV

The story of the Prodigal son, (Luke 15:11-31) beautifully illustrates this dual relationship. The father represents God to whom a son is born. (creation) Sadly, that son becomes lost to his father through rebellion (sin) and by going to live in a far country. (separation) Upon his return, confession and repentance, the son is restored to his original place once again through his father's immense redemptive love. (redemption) The subsequent celebration typifies the great joy expressed in heaven when even one sheep is restored to His fold.

THE FATHER'S HEART

Ps 103:13-14

13 *As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;*
14 *for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (NIV)*

Along with the honour of the position as head of the family, the father was expected to assume certain responsibilities. These responsibilities can be classified into three categories: spiritual, social, and economic.

Firstly, the father was responsible for the spiritual well-being of the family. In the earliest ages, the father functioned as the priest of his family, sacrificing on their behalf. (Gen 12:8; Job 1:5). Later, when a priesthood was established in Israel and the layman no longer functioned at an altar, the father's spiritual role was redefined. He continued to be the religious leader in the home. This involved the training of the children in godliness. (Ex 12:3,26-27; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4).

From this background we can more fully appreciate God as the believer's Father. He knows all about His child, even numbering the hairs on his head (Matt 10:30). He protects His child and rescues him when he gets into trouble (Isa 63:15-16). He teaches him the way that he should go (Hos 11:1-3) and supplies all of his needs (Matt 6:33). In turn, the Father expects respect and honour from His child, although He does not always receive it (Mal 1:6). Jesus sought to instil reverence and honour in the disciples when He taught them to pray: "Our Father in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10).

GOD THE SHEPHERD

Figuratively, the Old Testament often pictures God as Israel's Shepherd-Leader (Ps 80:1; Ezek 34:15; Gen 48:15). E.g.

Ps 80:1

Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; NIV

Ezek 34:15-16

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. NIV*

Gen 48:15

May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, NIV

The only book in the world, in the entire range of literature, that presents the glorious image of "The Good Shepherd," is the Bible. The representation that emerges is that of a loving, kind, tender, compassionate shepherd who, having counted his sheep at night, discovers that one is missing. Though ninety nine are safe in the fold, he willingly ventures forth into the cold dark night, searching the wilderness for that one lost sheep. Having found it, he gently places it on his shoulder and carries it back to the fold. This is a picture of Almighty God, depicting his unfathomable love for fallen mankind. It is an image of the Good Shepherd who is also the Gentle Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd. It is the figure by which God wants His people to know and understand Him.

God is described in Scripture as the Shepherd who will feed His flock, gather the lambs in His arms, carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those with young. (Isa 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:11-16). Jesus applied this name to Himself (Luke 15:4-7; John 10:11-16), making Himself equal to God; and Jesus Christ is so named by His followers (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 7:17).

WHY IS GOD LIKENED TO A SHEPHERD?

Jehovah Rohi (The Lord our Shepherd) is only one of the many names and titles of God but I believe it is the one that best describes His nature, temperament and disposition in respect of His immanence. Each of His names describes a particular aspect of His being but I feel confident that Jehovah Rohi more completely defines His total character than do any of His other names.

In the Old Testament God is often likened to a shepherd. David used this beautiful analogy for God in Psalm 23. The prophet Isaiah used the same image, probably with Psalm 23 in mind, comparing God with a faithful shepherd because of His compassionate nature, and His attitude towards men.

Isa 40:11

11. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. NIV

When I read "The Shepherd Psalm" (Psalm 23) I note the seven redemptive aspects of God are all to be found in it. The total of those aspects portray God as Jehovah Rohi, the Lord Our Shepherd. The role of the Good Shepherd, combines every aspect of Jehovah's altruistic and redemptive character.

- 1) The LORD is my shepherd, (Jehovah Rohi; the Lord our Shepherd, also Jehovah Nissi: the Lord our Banner Ex 17:15; Psa 20:5; S. of Sol 6:4)
I shall not be in want. (Jehovah Jireh: Provider. Gen 22:14)
- 2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, (Jehovah Shalom: the Lord our Peace, Judges 6:23)
- 3) He restores my soul. (Jehovah Rophi, Our healer. Ex 15:26) He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Jehovah Tsidkenu: Our Righteousness. Jer 23:6)
- 4) Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; (Jehovah Shammah: the Lord is there, Ezek 48:35) your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. (Jehovah Jireh) You anoint my head with oil; (Rophi: Healer Ex 15:26) my cup overflows. (Jehovah Jireh: Abundant provision)
- 6) Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NIV)

The image of a shepherd immediately conveys certain attributes of character that are integrally part of a good shepherd. The typical shepherd would be a strong, outdoor type. A reliable individual with immense patience and fortitude. A selfless person who is not primarily concerned with his own personal creature comforts. A shepherd is genuinely more concerned with the welfare of his sheep than with his own well being. He regularly neglects his own comfort in order to be better able to exercise proper care of his sheep. In the culture of Bible times a shepherd used to look upon his sheep as a father would his children. In the

inclement weather of winter they would often be sheltered in his house. The shepherd is traditionally big hearted and warm hearted. His heart often rules his head. He frequently obeys his heart when his head warns him not to do so. This brief description is a very natural one but there is something about the essential nature of God that is very much that of a shepherd. Above and beyond all His other attributes and characteristics shine those specific ones that remind us of an excellent shepherd. The rendering of this psalm in the Living Bible conveys an even deeper intimacy:

Ps 23

23:1. Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!

- 2. He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He gives me new strength. He helps me do what honours him the most.*
- 4. Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.*
- 5. You provide delicious food for me in the presence of my enemies. You have welcomed me as your guest; blessings overflow!*
- 6. Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home. TLB*

Figuratively, The Old Testament Pictures God As Israel's Shepherd-Leader

Isa 40:10-11

- 10 Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.*
- 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. (NKJ)*

Ps 80:1-2

- 1 Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth. (NIV)*

Ezek 34:14-16

- 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. (NIV)*

JACOB'S UNIQUE BLESSING OVER JOSEPH

Gen 48:15-16

- 15. Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,*
- 16. the Angel who has delivered me from all harm --may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth." NIV*

Paraphrased, the blessing that Jacob spoke was "May Yaweh, the God of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, be as wonderful a shepherd to you as He has been to me all my life." What greater blessing could one confer upon another? What more could one wish for his dearest children?

According to Jeremiah, God the shepherd instinctively protected His flock

Jer 31:10

10. Hear the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.' (NIV)

The Prophet Ezekiel Spoke Of The Divine Shepherd Who Seeks Out His Flock

Ezek 34:12-15

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.

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. (NIV)

MOST OF GOD'S GREATEST LEADERS WERE SHEPHERDS E.G.

It is highly significant that so many of the eminent Bible characters were originally shepherds. It is obvious that the qualities of character and disposition that made them suitable for the task of shepherding also qualified them to become appropriate leaders and protectors of God's people. E.g.

ABRAHAM

Gen 21:27-28

27 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty.

28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, (NIV)

The Sons Of Abraham, Isaac, And Jacob Herded Sheep Gen. 13:7; 26:20; 30:36.

Rachel Also Was A Shepherdess

Gen 29:9

9 While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. (NIV)

N.B. There were obviously some female shepherds.

Moses Was A Shepherd

Ex. 3:1,

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (NIV)

Following the first forty years of his life as a prince in the court of Pharaoh where he undoubtedly learned all the principles of politics, diplomacy, management and authority necessary to rule in a secular environment, God led Moses to the backside of a desert to serve as a shepherd, thus learning all the new skills of a shepherd. It was these latter skills that prepared him to rule God's people Israel. The skills and attitudes of a CEO, (Chief Executive Officer) were obviously not appropriate for the role of a shepherd. In a sense,

Moses' forty years in the desert caring for the sheep of his father in law, was a time of unlearning all he had imbibed in secular Egypt. The managerial skills of Egypt were not appropriate for leading the people of God.

David Was A Shepherd Too

Ps 78:70-72

- 70 *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens;*
71 *from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance.*
72 *And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them. (NIV)*

In ancient Hebrew writings (Schmot Raba 2.2) it is recorded, "He who knows how to look after sheep, bestowing on each the care it deserves, he shall come and tend My people."

The occupation of shepherd was considered so important and honourable in ancient Israel, that it became the symbol of supreme leadership. It is obvious from various scriptures that the shepherd skills of David were integral to God's plans to make him the royal leader of the Hebrew nation. The attitudes that David personified and displayed, as he cared for his father Jesse's sheep, were essential to his successful reign over God's people Israel. David's role as a shepherd was essentially preparatory to his royal leadership role in later life. It was also an essential part of the prophetic role of leadership that God ordained for David in the eternal manifest Kingdom of God's rule over the nations. To inherit such an important role, it is imperative to first be proven as a true and faithful shepherd.

2 Sam. 5:2;

- 2 *In the past, while Saul was king over us, you (David) were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'* (NIV)

Ezek 34:23-24

- 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 *the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. (NIV)*

Jesus Is THE Good And Great(est) Shepherd

John 10:14

- 14 *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--(NIV)*

John 10:11

- 11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. NIV*

Matt 2:6

- 6 *'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'* (NKJ)

1 Pet 2:25

- 25 *For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Bishop) of your souls. (NIV)*

Because God is a Shepherd and Jesus is "the express image of the Father," (Heb 1:3; John 14:8,9) He also is perceived to be One with the ideal heart and nature of a shepherd. He

frequently acknowledges this and His attitude towards people consistently confirms it. It also follows that since He is portrayed primarily as a shepherd, we, being changed into His likeness, (2 Cor 3:18) should also mature into shepherds of like disposition. The New Testament reveals Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep. John 10:11. One cannot be truly "Christ-like" without possessing and displaying the vital characteristics of a good shepherd

When He said, "I am the good shepherd," Jesus linked His own divine nature with one of the most ordinary occupations in Israel thus displaying His humility and His inner confidence. Though He was meek and humble in spirit, He was also sublimely confident in His own self. Jesus declared that He is the good shepherd who cares for, protects, and rescues His flock-- the people of God. John 10:2-16. He is the good shepherd who willingly suffers for the sheep. Matt. 26:31. Jesus is our finest example of a shepherd. His life supremely exemplifies these leadership traits. Jesus knows each of His sheep intimately. He cares deeply and totally for each and every sheep under His protection.

John 10:3-5

- 3 *The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*
- 4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*
- 5 *But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice." (NIV)*

The Bible shepherd knew his sheep individually often giving a name to each one. Sometimes several shepherds would pen their sheep together in a cave or a sheepfold at night. The next morning each shepherd calls to his own sheep with his own unique cry. Each sheep knows his shepherd's voice and responds immediately. Even in a large flock, one individual sheep will run to his shepherd when his own pet name is called. They will not respond to a stranger.

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (NIV)

JESUS IS THE GENTLE SHEPHERD

Isa 40:11

- 11 *He will feed His flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. (NKJ)*

1 Peter 2:24-3:1

25. *For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. NIV*

Gentleness is an intrinsic aspect of the character of Jesus the good shepherd. It is also an essential result (fruit) of having His spirit live within one.

Gal 5:22-24

22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. NIV*

HE IS THE GREAT SHEPHERD

Heb 13:20

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, (NKJ)

The Chief Shepherd

1 Pet 5:4

4.and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.(NKJ)

ISRAEL'S LEADERS ARE FREQUENTLY DEPICTED AS SHEPHERDS

God, who has a shepherd's heart, chooses to represent Him those who also have the heart of a true shepherd. Thus, in the Old Testament, leaders of God's people are often called shepherds. They function in many different roles. They have different callings and tasks, but a common denominator is that they are shepherds in their heart attitude. They have the highest regard for the well being of God's sheep. They value the life of their sheep even above their own.

Num 27:16-17

16 *May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community*

17 *to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd." (NIV)*

I King 22:17

17. *Then Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, "These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace." (NIV)*

Kings who led Israel Jer. 6:3; 49:19 and certain ministers Jer. 23:4 are also called shepherds.

NEW TESTAMENT LEADERS WERE SEEN AS SHEPHERDS

Eph 4:11-12

11 *It was He (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors (poimen: shepherds) and teachers,*

12 *to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (NIV)*

A good pastor, in New Testament times, is the feeder, protector, guide, companion, or shepherd of a flock of God's people. In speaking of spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul wrote that Christ "gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" Eph. 4:11. The term pastor at this time in church history had not yet become an official title, it singularly implied the nourishing of and caring for God's people. This is its original and basic meaning and application. Every servant of God, whatever their specific ministry role, should have a shepherd heart that manifests itself in genuine and deep concern for God's people. No true shepherd will abuse or misuse the sheep, for they are God's sheep. Sheep are very trusting animals and their trust can be easily abused. Sheep are also extremely gentle and sensitive animals, easily bruised and hurt. Shepherds who do so will one day have to answer to the Chief Shepherd for the abuse of their authority. The manner in which some preachers cleverly extort money from God's people is like a hireling, fleecing the flock for his own advantage.

All sheep need a faithful altruistic shepherd and a good sheepfold. Sheep are curious but naïve animals, often unable to find their way home even if the sheepfold is within sight. Knowing this fault, the shepherd never takes his eyes off his wandering sheep.

Ps 32:8

8 *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.* (NIV)

The average, typical sheepfold was a very simple structure. Usually made in a circular fashion from thorn bush, like a fence and without any roof, much like an African boma. (primitive shelter made from thorn branches) Its main purpose was not so much to afford protection but rather to keep the sheep together at night so that the shepherd could protect them. The fold did not usually have a physical gate. The shepherd himself would sleep at night with his body across the entrance, thus he himself was literally the gate or door.

John 10:7

7 *Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep." (NKJ)*

EASTERN SHEPHERDS ALWAYS LEAD THEIR FLOCKS

Ancient shepherds in the East, always went before their flocks and led them rather than driving them. This is still true today.

John 10:4-5

4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

5 *But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice." (NIV)*

Every flock knew its shepherd's voice and would follow only him. Often for protection flocks were lodged together at night and separated in the morning when the shepherds called their sheep by name. Each sheep and each flock would only follow the sound of their own master's voice. They obviously did not only recognise their own shepherds voice, they loved and trusted that voice and were willing to follow him anywhere.

Shepherds provided their flocks with water and food Ps. 23:2; Jer. 31:10. They knew each sheep and lamb. When one was lost, they went out to find it Ezek. 34:12; Luke 15:4-5. Small lambs, unable to keep up with the flock, were often carried next to a shepherd's breast inside the fold of his outer garment Is. 40:11. The shepherd also protected his flock, risking his life if necessary.

Amos 3:12

12 *This is what the LORD says: "As a shepherd saves from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites be saved, those who sit in Samaria on the edge of their beds and in Damascus on their couches." (NIV)*

John 10:10-11

10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

11 *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (NIV)*

In the parched climate of Syria and Israel, sheep must be watered daily. In such an arid region shepherds have always had to search diligently for water, sometimes for hours every day. The shepherd might find a bubbling stream for the sheep that are always on the move and needing fresh pastures every day Psa. 23:2. Alternatively an old well with a quiet pool or trough close by might provide the water, Gen. 29:7; 30:38; Ex. 2:16. Often the shepherd carries a small bucket with him, patiently filling it many times for the thirsty sheep that cannot reach the available water.

EVERY PASTOR IS A SHEPHERD

The definition of a “pastor” from the biblical perspective, is considerably different from the modern concept. The derivation of the word “pastor” is from the Latin word for pasture, it indicates “One who faithfully provides pastures for his flock.” The word pastor occurs only eight times in the English Bible. One of those is in Eph 4:11., the other references are all in the book of Jeremiah where the meaning is clearly related to the role of shepherds of God’s people Israel.

The word translated pastor in the Bible indicates a shepherd, from the Hebrew Rohi; = shepherd, or “one who tends.” The Greek word is poimen, which has the same meaning. This simile is the finest picture of what a true Christian leader ought to be. It is the preferred Biblical analogy of a leader of God’s people. In New Testament times, “pastor” was not a title, it was a function. A pastor was one who tended, cared for and nurtured the flock.. Its adaptation as a title as used by a minister, is of fairly recent origin. Even when Eph 4:11 was written there were no professional pastors. The churches met mainly in house groups, each of which might have one or more “shepherds.”

All Christian leaders are, to some degree “pastors” in the sense that they have a clear responsibility to value and care for God’s people who are said to be “The sheep of God’s pasture.” (Psa 79:13) True and faithful Christian leaders must have a “shepherds heart.” A disposition of deep loving concern for God’s flock.

The role of a shepherd, is a high and awesome calling. It is a tremendous privilege to be thus called, but it also carries great responsibilities. God has a special affinity to his shepherds, but one day He will bring them to account for the manner in which they have fulfilled their call. Every shepherd will have to answer directly to God, in His awesome presence, as to how he, or she, has discharged their responsibilities.

They will not be judged according to “success,” but faithfulness to God’s criteria. They will not be rewarded according to the number of members in their church, or how fine a building they have built. The criteria for judgement will be in accord with how well they have fulfilled the role of a shepherd, according to the biblical concept.

WHAT IS THE DIVINE CRITERIA?

In the parable of the talents, Jesus clearly intimates the basic essentials of character required in all who would aspire to be His servants.

Matt 25:21

*His master replied, 'Well done, **good and faithful servant!** You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*

The basic criteria is :-

- Godliness
- Faithfulness
- Servant heart

The Successful Christian Leader Will Have Three Dominant Characteristics,

1. Godliness of life and character.
2. Faithfulness. Loyalty, reliability, truthfulness.
3. Servant attitude.

Successful Leadership In The "Upside Down Kingdom."

The criteria for leadership in God's kingdom is very different from Successful Leadership in the secular world.

1 Cor 4:1-2

- 1 *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*
- 2 *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. (NKJ)*

The Greek word translated pastors in Ephesians 4:11, is used elsewhere in the New Testament.

Of shepherders, literally or symbolically Matt. 25:32;

Of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, John 10;

And of "shepherds," or leaders, of the church Eph. 4:11.

- 1 *Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.*
- 2 *Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. (KJV)*

TRUE SHEPHERDS PROTECT THEIR FLOCK AT ALL TIMES

A trusted shepherd also provides loving protection for his flock. Shepherds on the Bethlehem hillsides still use a sling, made of goat's hair or leather and immortalised by David against Goliath 1 Sam. 17:49. At times the shepherd will throw his rod at a stubborn, straying sheep that refuses to hear his voice. At other times he gently nudges the stray with the end of his six-foot staff, crooked at one end to fit his strong hand. Both the rod and the staff work together to protect the sheep. He will also defend them from attacks of wild animals. At times, dogs were seen to accompany a shepherd but this was never to drive the sheep but rather to drive away wolves and other predators from the sheep.

NOT ALL PASTORS TODAY ARE TRUE SHEPHERDS ACCORDING TO BIBLICAL CRITERIA

Some do not truly understand the full implications of the role from a Biblical perspective.

Many enjoy the social prestige of being a Pastor or "Reverend."

Many enjoy the challenge and prominence of a public office.

Many today are Chief Executive Officers of a company, rather than shepherds of a flock.

Many regard the ministry as a profession rather than a calling. These are Biblically "hirelings" rather than true shepherds.

SHEPHERDS AND UNDER-SHEPHERDS

Not all shepherds were of equal status. There were often senior and under-shepherds. For example, it is a mistake to think of Moses as a simple shepherd, caring for a few straggly sheep. He was a sheep master for his father in law Jethro. He probably had numbers of under-shepherds under his care. The management and supervision of those shepherds would be his major responsibility.

It was ironic that later, when he became the Shepherd of Israel, he resorted to doing everything himself until Jethro reminded him that the same principles he had used over his flocks should pertain in his care of God's people. Exodus 18: 13-27. Many under-shepherds were serving an apprenticeship. In a family business, the father would rule as the chief shepherd and his sons would serve under him as under-shepherds. They would thus learn the art of sheep herding and be able to take over from their father in due course. This system and style of leadership is still appropriate today. Every pastor should have under-shepherds, serving the flock under his supervision. In a large church, the senior shepherd should shepherd the under-shepherds and delegate them to shepherd the flock.

Chapter Two

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS SHEEP

The analogy most frequently used in the Bible to represent God's people, in both Old and New Testaments, is that of sheep. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word (so'n) used most frequently for sheep is also translated flock. This word literally means "small cattle" and often includes goats. Sheep, goats and cattle are all biologically related, all being ruminants (multiple digesting animals) with cloven hoofs and hollow horns. I have heard some pastors jokingly say, "God called me to look after His sheep, not His goats." But that is not always literally true. There were frequently a few goats in an average flock, and so it is today too.

The nature of sheep and their relationship to man have given rise to many beautiful images. Undoubtedly the most significant is that of Jehovah as the Shepherd of Israel, and they as His flock.

Ps 100:3

3 *Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (NIV)*

Ps 78:52-53

52 *But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the desert.*
53 *He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies. (NIV)*

Ps 79:13

13 *Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise. (NIV)*

Ps 80:1

1 *Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth (NIV)*

Isa 40:10-11

10 *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*
11 *He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. (NIV)*

Jer 23:3-4

3 *I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.*
4 *I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. (NIV)*

Because the sheep is an emblem of meekness, patience, and submission, it is expressly mentioned as typifying these qualities in the Person of our blessed Lord (Isa. 53:7; Acts 8:32; etc.).

Psalm. 23.

The Lord is a SHEPHERD.

He leads His sheep. (LEADERSHIP) Guidance, wise counsel, direction etc
He gives the sheep confidence to lie down. (SAFETY) Security, protection, peace.
He gives the sheep assurance of adequate provision. (PROVIDER.)
He is a LEADER, going before the sheep and leading them in the right direction.(LEADERSHIP)
He makes me to lie down. (SECURITY.)
He provides green pastures, - tender shoots, for food. (FEEDER.)
His ministry is refreshing and restorative. (RESTORER.)
He sets an example of righteousness for the sheep to follow. (EXAMPLE.)
Through the valley of the shadow, the Shepherd's rod and staff are a constant source of encouragement. (COMFORT)
He provides a safe sheep-fold, where wolves and hyenas are unable to enter. (PROTECTION.)
He anoints the head. (HEALING)
He inspires optimism of life-long goodness and mercy. (OPTIMISM)
This sheep will be a life long subject in the house of its shepherd. (INSPIRES HOPE AND SECURITY FOR FUTURE.)

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS SHEEP

The Biblical image of God as a shepherd holding a lamb to His bosom is clearly one of intimate love and concern. God's infinite and measureless love for His sheep is also seen clearly in that He Himself, became a lamb, - the Lamb of God. The connection is extremely significant. Sheep in the Biblical context have exceedingly more value than most people in our contemporary world can understand. The value of sheep today is mostly seen in the price of meat and wool, but their value in Bible days was so much greater. Sheep in Bible days were often regarded as members of the shepherd's family. They were like his own children each one having a name and were the objects of his fatherly concern. They were regarded as,

VALUABLE AND VALUED POSSESSIONS

Sheep were usually an important part of a man's estimated wealth. For the most part, a family's possessions were invested in their cattle and sheep. The larger their flocks, the greater their wealth. However, a poorer family would also regard themselves as extremely fortunate to possess even a few sheep and goats, without which they would live in virtual poverty.

PRECIOUS

In Australia and New Zealand, both of which are notable modern "sheep" nations, the value of a sheep is generally estimated by its worth at the market. It is solely a commercial commodity. However, the value of sheep, singular or plural, in Bible days, was estimated in terms other than the market value of their wool or carcass. In the culture of Israel and the Middle East, sheep were esteemed of much greater value. They usually represented a substantial portion of a family's wealth and security. In the physical and social isolation of nomadic shepherds, they were also often valued as pets, or even as children. Lowly shepherds, eking out a living in the deserts and wilderness, frequently separated from family and friends, often valued the presence and company of their sheep even for social contact. Particularly in the smaller flocks, every sheep would have a "pet" name. Each sheep would recognise the voice of its own shepherd. In winter the shepherd would usually accommodate the sheep somewhere within the family home where they would be treated almost a member of that family.

NAÏVE AND VULNERABLE

Sheep are naturally naïve and therefore vulnerable (exposed and defenceless) animals. Not only smaller and weaker than many other creatures, but also without a strong weapon of defence. (e.g. horns) Also, its nature is far less wild and ferocious than meat eating animals rendering them almost defenceless before ravaging predators. The sheep is meek and non-aggressive by nature. Most other animals can take advantage of this if they so desire. It is highly significant that the sheep nature is used to typify God's people. Sheep are not known for their innate wisdom.

Alone, they can often act very foolishly. They are extremely dependant on the wisdom of a shepherd. When left to their own devices they can often go astray.

Isa 53:6

6. We-every one of us-have strayed away like sheep! We, who left God's paths to follow our own. TLB

Sheep are by nature innately unwise, foolish, reckless, hasty and irresponsible. If left to wander alone they often take a dangerous route that exposes them to unnecessary harm. They are very much dependant on another's guidance and wisdom. Even when within sight of a fold, which represents safety and provision they don't always have the sense to enter that fold. Instead they may wander off into a wilderness in which roam fierce animals such as lions and wolves waiting to devour such innocent and defenceless creatures as sheep. Every pastor/shepherd must be constantly aware that this portrays the manner in which God sees His people and that He expects His shepherds to be ever mindful of this in all their dealings with His people. Many Christians are extremely accessible to the "lions" that would seek to attack and devour them. The shepherds must never scorn the potential weakness of their sheep. Their vulnerability must be a factor of challenge for the shepherd to help defend them from.

The shepherd should always be ready and prepared to physically defend and protect his sheep.

In this respect, David provides a fine example of the protective role of a shepherd.

1 Sam 17:34-37

34. But David persisted. "When I am taking care of my father's sheep," he said, "and a lion or a bear comes and grabs a lamb from the flock, 35I go after it with a club and take the lamb from its mouth. If it turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. 36I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this beathen Philistine too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! 37The Lord who saved me from the claws and teeth of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!" TLB

INNOCENT

Lambs by nature are inoffensive, naïve and without guile. They are gentle and peaceable. Consequently they can easily fall prey to a variety of wild animals and predators. Sheep are basically simple, humble, unassuming creatures.

2 Sam 24:17

17 Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father's house. (NKJ)

MEEK

The attribute of meekness, being docile, gentle and submissive, is one that specifically makes the sheep a perfect analogy of Jesus. Meekness is an outstanding aspect of the nature and Jesus the Lamb of God. One that He wants us to observe and adopt into our own nature.

Matt 11:29-30

29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, (meek) and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (NIV)

PATIENT

Patience, forbearance and endurance are also traits of the sheep's character. Although not every sheep conforms to this type, most sheep around the whole world are renowned for their stoic patience and forbearance even under the most trying circumstances.

Isa 53:7

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (NIV)

FORGIVING

Sheep do not hold resentment. Even when they are badly treated they show little sign of rebellion or spite. They have an extremely forgiving nature. Jesus taught many important lessons on the subject of forgiveness. He also demonstrated His own commitment to it on so many occasion.

Luke 23:34

34. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. NIV

Matt 6:12-13

12. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' NIV

SUBMISSIVE

Yieldedness and compliance are further characteristics of sheep that endear them to the heart of their shepherd. They are known to be mild, gentle, inoffensive animals. These are attributes that clearly remind us of the character of Jesus.

WHAT A SHEEP NEEDS FROM ITS SHEPHERD

An ancient Jewish tradition suggests that Psalm 23 represents a day and a night in the life of a sheep, which is quietly reflecting on the goodness of its shepherd. It is extremely helpful and inspiring to read the psalm from that perspective. Picture the sheep, lying peacefully in green pasture at the close of another day, wistfully considering how wonderful is its shepherd and how blessed it is to have such a shepherd.

Notice some of the benefits it appreciates.

The American Revised Standard Version provides some interesting insights into the Shepherds care, (Psalm 23)

*Yaweh is a shepherd to me. My every need is met.
He lets me lie down in fertile and pleasant places.
He leads me to oases of rest, where waters quench my thirst.
He renews my life. He leads me along the right paths, as befits His Name.
And even though I pass through the deepest wadi and the darkest night, I will fear no harm. For You O
Lord go with me.
I am comforted by your rod that defends me and by your staff that directs me.
Though surrounded by enemies, you honour me with a banquet.
You anoint my head, with oil like a king and my cup overflows with abundance.
Not my enemies, but goodness and grace shall pursue me all the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the pastures of your presence for a very long time.”*

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS SHEPHERD. V.1.

“The Lord is MY shepherd.” Many flocks in bible days were quite small and a shepherd usually knew each individual sheep. He frequently gave each of them individual names by which he called them. This kind of loving concern encouraged each sheep to personally identify with the shepherd and often a warm relationship was formed. To some shepherds their sheep were almost like their children, so warm and loving was the shepherd’s care. The very presence of the shepherd also offers comfort to the flock. David recognised this in Psalm 23. Sheep are content merely to be in the same field with their shepherd. His presence alleviates and removes their fears. Every sheep needs to know that it is truly loved and appreciated by its shepherd. Sheep need the consistent assurance of their shepherd’s loving care and concern.

CONFIDENCE TO LIE DOWN

The sheep is not saying that the shepherd “makes” or forces it lie down. It is thankfully remembering that the shepherd provides the very environment in which the sheep feels safe, confident and comfortable to lie down. Because sheep are so gentle and nervous they will never willingly lie down if certain circumstances obtain.

★ They will not lie down when they sense or smell that an enemy is in the vicinity. Sheep can always smell wolves, hyenas and other predators from a considerable distance. While ever such a smell is in their nostrils, they will not lie down rendering themselves vulnerable and defenceless.

★ They will not lie down whilst they are hungry. Rather they will go off in search of food and nourishment. However, if the shepherd provides luscious, green pastures and still waters, the sheep is well fed and content , then it will happily lie down.

★ They will not lie down whilst troubled and distressed by various types of flies and other winged insects.

★ They will not lie down when there is friction or jealousy in the flock. Sometimes an old ram or ewe will try to intimidate and frighten the younger sheep. It will exert its mature strength, often by butting younger, timid sheep. Ezekiel alludes to this,

Ezek 34:15-23

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.*
- 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?*
- 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. (NIV)*

There was obviously tension and friction in the flock through self assertion. This sounds very much like the kind of politics that can sometimes, unfortunately happen in a church congregation. There is clearly tension between sheep, rams and goats, shoving with their shoulder and butting younger sheep. James refers to a similar situation.

James 2:2-5

- 2 *Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.*
- 3 *If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"*
- 4 *have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*
- 5 *Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (NIV)*

The Shepherd is obviously held responsible to correct such circumstances and right such social wrongs among the flock.

GOOD LEADERSHIP

Sheep, by their very nature, need good leadership. If left to their own devices they will usually tend to wander, often getting themselves into dangerous situations. They will be inclined to follow some other sheep, not realising where they are really going. Only the wise intervention of a good shepherd will save those sheep from the disastrous result of their foolish wanderings. However, Eastern shepherds always led their sheep and never drove (or forced) them. The good shepherd would gently lead His flock, adjusting their speed according to the condition of the weaker sheep, especially the pregnant ones. In this manner the whole flock could be kept together.

PLENTY OF GOOD, FRESH, NOURISHING FOOD. V.2.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures." Tender young shoots of grass are delightful and enjoyable food for sheep. A special delight. However, tender, green grass was not easy to find in Israel where the blazing sun and lack of water usually made the countryside barren and dry. A good, thoughtful and concerned shepherd, would go to great lengths to find some fresh pasture for his sheep, a fact that his sheep would greatly appreciate. If the sheep

are well fed, with fresh, nourishing food, and lovingly regarded, they will not be inclined to wander off to other sheep folds. In the Middle East, where this psalm was written, fresh grass is usually in very short supply. In many of these lands the average annual rainfall is about 4 inches which means that most of the country is desert and wilderness, so the shepherd often has to work very hard and travel many miles to ensure an adequate supply of fresh pasture.

QUIET WATERS FROM WHICH TO DRINK. V2B.

Water was in extremely short supply and sometimes the sheep might become desperate with thirst. In such cases the smell of water would greatly excite a sheep. Should it find a fast flowing river and try to drink, it might easily be pulled into the water by the strong current. Immediately its heavy, oily woollen coat would absorb the water and that sheep could easily drown. So the shepherd would carefully search for “still waters,” a quietly flowing stream from which it was perfectly safe to drink. The facial characteristics of a sheep are such that its nostrils are very close to its mouth. If the water is not still, the sheep may well imbibe it through the nostrils and choke.

SPIRITUAL RESTORATION. V.3.

“He restores my soul.” We rarely consider the possibility of a sheep being stressed out. They seem so quiet and docile, so tranquil and undisturbed. But sheep are also highly sensitive and very much aware of potential dangers and problems. They can easily become nervous and frightened, a fact of which the shepherd needs to be very much aware. So he would purposefully deal and speak gently and soothingly to a sheep that was obviously distressed. He would restore its quiet confidence through loving concern. The idea of “restores my soul” is in the continuous present tense signifying that God is always, always, always near and ready to restore our souls.

GENTLY LED IN RIGHT PATHS. V.3B.

The Eastern shepherd never drives his sheep, he always leads them. He never forces them, he always coaxes them. Thus He is an model to them. He consistently leads them in the way they should go. He goes before them setting an example to follow. His gentle attitude is like that of the Holy Spirit. He never ultimately forces us to do anything or go anywhere. He always leads, and entices us to go in His ways.

The phrase, “paths of righteousness” is not an accurate one. A better rendering is “right paths.” The kindly shepherd always leads his sheep in the right paths that lead to verdant pastures and still waters. However, the Good Shepherd’s paths also lead us inevitably in the ways of righteousness too. The Spirit of God in the life of a believer will gently but firmly prompt and urge them to walk in the right paths of righteousness. He will always show us the right and Godly thing to do and gently persuade us to do the right thing.

NO FEAR OF EVIL. V.4.

Ps 23:4

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (NKJ)

Here again the translation is a little misleading. It is not only in respect of imminent death that the shepherd delivers from fear. The Psalmist is actually declaring that “even in the darkest night” the shepherd will save from all fear. This reference may also allude to the

“Dark night of the Soul” i.e. some of the numerous periods of dark despair through which David evidently walked at times. E.g.

Ps 42:9-11

9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

11 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. (NIV)

Careful observation of David's life suggests that at certain periods he experienced grave bouts of depression. Such times have often been called the "dark nights of the soul." Periods of weeks and sometimes months when all of one's life seems darker than the darkest night. Times of emotional despair when death seems more preferable than life. Experiences of life in which one may lose the very will and desire to live.

Jesus, our good shepherd, wants to deliver us from all fear. He does not guarantee to deliver us from all fearful circumstances, nor promise that we will never experience events in life that could easily cause us to fear. He does promise to deliver us from the dread of such evils. Even in life threatening circumstances, if we trust our shepherd implicitly, He will deliver us from fear. Death is an event that frightens many people but God promises that even when the shadow of that prospect falls on our life, God will preserve us from the fear of it.

THE COMFORT OF HIS ROD AND STAFF. V.4.

The rod, usually a firm, straight stick or branch was to defend sheep. The staff, usually having a curved end, was to rescue them. The shepherd usually carried one in each hand. One in the right hand the other in the left. When travelling through the dark nights, he would go before his sheep, tapping the ground alternately with his rod and staff. Although the sheep could not see anything, it was continually assured of the shepherd's proximity by the sound of his rod and staff. As the sheep carefully followed the direction indicated by the sound of the rod and staff, it would always travel in safety knowing that all was well because the good shepherd was still walking ahead. The sheep would gladly follow his leading knowing that it too would be safe.

ENJOYING A PREPARED TABLE. V.5.

Every night, when the sheep were safely in their fold, the shepherd would prepare appropriate food for them. All around them in the darkness, there may be wild animals and other enemies, but in the safety of the fold the sheep could eat without fear. This analogy speaks of the sense of security and safety that sheep feel when properly fed with well prepared food, in a safe environment. Even though surrounded by potential enemies they enjoy safety and security within a protected sheepfold.

EXPERIENCING THE ANOINTING. V.5.

As the sheep passed under the shepherd's rod each night when entering the fold, he would inspect every head for indications of sun burn. The fierce heat would often burn into the bony head of a sheep. Flies might then infect the burn. So the shepherd would carefully look for such wounds and when he found them he would anoint that sheep's head with pure olive oil to soothe the wound and protect it from further infection.

The anointing of God's Spirit on our lives achieves a similar purpose. We may sometimes get burned by life's experiences but the anointing of God's Spirit will soothe and heal those sore spots. So the shepherd needs to ensure that the anointing oil is always flowing and the sheep have abundant opportunities to receive a fresh anointing. The pastor/shepherd must always oversee his sheep ensuring they regularly receive an anointing with fresh oil.

Ps 92:10

10. But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. NKJV

An Overflowing Cup. V.5c.

The overflowing cup signifies the abundance of God's mercy and provision towards His sheep. It also speaks of the abundant life that Jesus promised (John 10:10) God does not merely fill our cup with His blessings and benefits. He causes it to overflow. God is generous and large spirited. This overflow also represents our ministry to others. God does not bless us for our own good alone, He blesses us that we might bless others. While ever our cup keeps flowing into the lives of others, God will continue to fill it.

AN ETERNAL SENSE OF SECURITY. V.6.

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The safety and security that God gives is not for this life only; it is for eternity. God's sheep, who stay within His flock and care, may feel eternally secure. Christians are comforted by the very presence of the Lord. This thought is especially comforting when darkness overshadows the believer. Jesus is our Door; nothing can touch our lives without touching Him first. This is a perfect picture of the shepherd. He literally becomes the living door of the sheepfold. He curls up in the door or in the entrance of a cave. Through His atoning death on the cross, He puts his own body between the sleeping sheep and ravenous animals or thieves.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only the Chief Shepherd and owner of the flock, He is also the good shepherd. Not only morally good in terms of His character, but also good in the sense that He is good (excellent) at shepherding. He loves His flock deeply and passionately, every individual one. He has also appointed many under-shepherds to love and care for them in His name and stead. When He returns, He will demand an account from every shepherd as to how well they tended and cared for HIS sheep.

SIGNS OF HEALTHY SHEEP

When sheep are lovingly cared for by a good shepherd they enjoy everything required for the positive maintenance of good health and well being.

Prov 27:23

23. Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; NIV

HEALTHY SHEEP HAVE A GOOD APPETITE

When sheep are in a good state of health, they are always hungry. They will consume enormous amounts of food and still keep eating. If ever a sheep's appetite disappears, the shepherd knows immediately that something is wrong with that sheep. Likewise, if a Christian loses their appetite for God, His Word and His Spirit, it is usually a sign that something is amiss with their spiritual health.

HEALTHY SHEEP CHEW THEIR CUD WELL

Ps 1:2-3

2 *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

3 *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (NIV)*

Healthy sheep always chew their food well and in doing so they obtain from it the maximum benefit and nutrition. Chewing the cud occurs when the sheep regurgitates its food and slowly chews it again for a second time. This action of ruminating is like musing and meditating on a subject in order to extract all the nourishment. The shepherd may supply the food, but the sheep ensure that they get the very best out of it. They are keen Bible students who spend quality time meditating on God's words to their heart. They are diligent souls who wait continually upon God considering His words and His ways and feeding their hungry inner being on God.

HEALTHY SHEEP ARE FREE FROM INFECTIONS AND SORES

Each night, as the sheep passed under the shepherds rod into the sheep fold, he would view each one diligently, looking for wounds and infections. Often the heat of the day in the desert or wilderness would burn a hole in the head of a sheep. The shepherd would immediately begin to treat any such problems by anointing those sheep with medicinal oil. The oil had a soothing and healing quality.

HEALTHY SHEEP HAVE STRONG FEET

Ps 18:33

33 *He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. (NIV)*

Strong, healthy feet are essential because of the mountainous and dangerous places the sheep will often need to scale. David, likens himself to a sheep, but one that has feet like a deer, able to safely scale the highest mountains and rocky crags. The sheep frequently has to negotiate slippery and slimy places. Rocky crags that at certain times of the year may become extremely dangerous and could easily cause the sheep to plunge to its death. Fortunately its feet, like those of a hind, are large and strong, able to take a strong grip and prevent the sheep from falling. God's true saints are like this too. Through their fellowship with Him and devotion to Him, their feet are strengthened and He enables them to remain safe even in treacherous places.

HEALTHY SHEEP PRODUCE MANY HEALTHY LAMBS

Deut 7:12-13

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.

He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land--your grain, new wine and oil--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you. NIV

Jer 23:2-3

3. *I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. NIV*

HEALTHY SHEEP LOVINGLY CARE FOR THEIR YOUNGER ONES

Healthy ewes are able to effectively nourish their young. The ewe has powerful maternal tendencies and strong concern for her young. However, if her teats are damaged and painful she may be loath to feed to suckle and feed her offspring. The better nourished the ewe is, the better she is able to suckle and feed her young. The healthier the mother, the healthier is the milk with which she suckles her young.

HEALTHY SHEEP STAY WITH THE FLOCK

Sheep that are well fed and contented do not tend to stray from the flock. It is usually some measure of discontent, an indication of uneasiness, dissatisfaction and restlessness. The shepherd will always recognise that something is amiss when a sheep begins to wander away from the flock. He will diligently follow that sheep and carefully examine it to see if there is any evident cause. He will seek to remedy and heal such a condition and gently re-introduce the sheep back into the flock.

HEALTHY SHEEP BEAR HEALTHY FLEECES

One of the numerous signs of a healthy sheep is the quality of its fleece. The wool is thick and plenteous and of a very high standard. Sheep in the Middle East were highly prized for their wool which represented the main source of wealth and income for the shepherd. Sheep shearing took place annually in the Spring. It was a happy and festive occasion for the sheep breeder. Even when the shearing site was a considerable distance away, the owner went out to the site to supervise the work and also to joyfully join in the celebrations. It was a time equivalent to harvest time. The time when an owner would usually hire and pay labourers. It was also a season for generosity, which was why David became so angry with Nabal when he refused to share food with his men who had helped Nabal's men in the fields.

1 Sam 25:2-3

2 *A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel.*

3 *His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings. (NIV)*

How sad that Nabal, a descendant of such an illustrious character as Caleb, should be so mean and surly in temperament. He was certainly unworthy of his forebear. Sheep owners often travelled long distances to be present at the shearing of their sheep. E.g.

Gen 38:12-13

12 *After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.*

13 *When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep," (NIV)*

The first fleece, like the first fruits of the harvest, was given to the Levites.

Deut 18:4

4 *You are to give them the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep, (NIV)*

The fleece is typical of tithes and offerings. The healthier the fleece, the healthier the offerings.

Chapter Three

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SHEPHERD

The role and function of a shepherd of God's flock is an extremely consequential one that should never be undertaken lightly. The shepherd's role is like that of the head of a family. He has the ultimate responsibility for the oversight, care and well being of all the members. In the Bible, shepherding was often a strenuous, demanding and sometimes dangerous task. It required a temperament and constitution that was strong yet thoughtful, tender and patient. It also required resourcefulness, tenacity and courage.

The commissioning of a spiritual shepherd

John 21:15-17

- 15 *So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."*
- 16 *He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."*
- 17 *He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. (NKJ)*

1.	Feed My lambs	Indoctrinating new believers in the Word of God. Establishing them firmly in the Faith.
2.	Tend My sheep. (Shepherd My sheep)	Involves training, discipling, counselling, caring for, encouraging, protecting, healing the sheep. Laying down ones life for them
3.	Feed My sheep	Feeding, teaching, training, edifying the more mature believers.

There are certain characteristics that are essential in a good shepherd.

A DEEP LOVE FOR CHRIST

This scenario may well represent the ordination of Peter as a shepherd. If so, the assurance that Jesus insistently required was that Peter truly loved Him. Christ persisted three times asking basically the same question, "Peter, do you LOVE Me?" It is out of a deep abiding love for God and Jesus, that love for the people of God springs. We see this truth emphasised in the "Great Commandment"

Matt 22:37-40

- 37 *Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."*
- 38 *"This is the first and great commandment.*
- 39 *"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'*
- 40 *"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (NKJ)*

First we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and body and then love our neighbour as ourselves. The phrase, "The Lord is My Shepherd" is in Hebrew,

“Yaweh Ro’eh.” The word Ro’eh is very closely linked in origin to Re’ah, which means neighbour. Further, it signifies a “shepherd type care” of your neighbour, signifying, concern, care, friendship, companionship etc. E.g.

Lev 19:18

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour (Re’ah) as yourself: I am the LORD. (NKJ)

Effective ministry may be summed briefly as, “Loving God and serving people.”

A GENUINE COMPASSION FOR THE SHEEP

Matt 9:36

36 When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (NIV)

Compassion is that distress of one’s inner being, when confronted with a person in great need. It is then a loving and appropriate response to their need in a dedicated attempt to meet that need and rescue the person from their distress. The heart of a true shepherd is a heart of compassion, tenderness and empathy, without which no person can ever truly be a shepherd to God’s people. Compassion is essentially a deep concern for others. Someone, has described compassion as “Your pain in my heart!” A shepherd cannot be a selfish, self centred person. His primary concern is for others above himself. A good shepherd will always place the welfare of his sheep above his own interests. The role of a “good” shepherd is necessarily a sacrificial one. The good shepherd sacrifices his own life for the good of the sheep.

John 10:11

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (NIV)

I often remind aspiring ministers that the Christian ministry is ultimately about two things,

1. It is about GOD
2. It is about PEOPLE

Therefore to be an effective and good shepherd we should concentrate on those two things. Knowing God and understanding people. Unless a shepherd has passion for God and compassion for people, they will never realise their full potential.

MOST PASTORS ARE IN THE MINISTRY FOR THREE MAIN REASONS

- A genuine, deep love for God and consequent strong desire to please Him
- A desire to fulfil the call of God to the ministry.
- A desire to help and bless people through the Gospel and the teachings of Christ

Anything less than this constitutes an invalid reason to be in ministry.

I have sometimes heard a pastor jokingly remark, “Being a pastor would be great if it was not for the people.” Although such a remark may be spoken in jest, it is still vastly unworthy of a true shepherd.

GENUINE CONCERN FOR THE STRAYING SHEEP

Concern goes far beyond compassion and becomes positively active to do something about the one for whom he has compassion. Shepherding cannot be accomplished by words alone. Words must be translated into actions of concern.

A classic biblical image of the good shepherd is presented in Luke 15. Ninety-nine sheep are safe in the fold, but rather than be content to care for the safe ones, the shepherd goes out again into the dark and dangerous night to search for the one that is missing. Having finally found it, he carries it home on his shoulder. The concern for one sheep that is in trouble exceeds his interest in ninety-nine that are safe and secure in the fold.

Luke 15:3-6

3 *Then Jesus told them this parable:*

4 *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?*

5 *And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders*

6 *and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' (NIV)*

This is a graphic picture of a shepherd who not only cares for the sheep inside the fold but ventures outside it, often at great inconvenience and risk to himself to rescue a sheep that is lost. It is an image of a pastor with a genuine concern for the lost and a determination to win them to Christ. If a shepherd is not seen and known to be actively involved in seeking the lost, his church members will rarely become brave and effective witnesses. Therefore, that church is unlikely to grow from the addition of new born lambs. A good shepherd should not only be active in winning others to Christ, he should also train, inspire and motivate his people to do likewise.

COMMITMENT IN HARD TIMES

A shepherd's life is not always an easy one. There are many sacrifices to be made. There are hardships and reversals to be endured. There are often disappointments and discouragement, but, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." The ministry is often like the covenant of marriage, it is entered into "for better or for worse." Hard times and difficult circumstances often bring out the best and finest attributes in a true shepherd.

The office of the eastern shepherd, as described in the Bible, was often accompanied with much hardship, and even danger. He was exposed to the extremes of heat and cold, Gen. 31:40; his food frequently consisted of the precarious supplies afforded by nature, such as the fruit of the "sycamore" or Egyptian fig, Amos 7:14, the "husks" of the carob tree, Luke 15:16, or perhaps the locusts and wild honey which supported John the Baptist, Matt. 3:4; he had to encounter the attacks of wild beasts, occasionally of the larger species, such as lions, wolves, panthers, and bears, 1 Sam. 17:34; Isa. 31:4; Jer. 5:6; Amos 3:12; nor was he free from the risk of robbers or predatory hordes. Gen. 31:39.

Whilst we were living in Africa some years ago, we heard of the death of the Ugandan Anglican Arch-Bishop, at the hands of the cruel dictator Idi Amin. The Arch Bishop secretly called all his bishops into a private meeting. He had received confidential information to the effect that Amin intended to kill all those Bishops. He therefore ordered them all to immediately gather their family members and escape into Kenya. The Bishops began to insist that he also must accompany them too but he refused to do so. He said, "I

am under surveillance. If I disappear the soldiers will become suspicious and take you all into custody. You must all first make good your escape before the President suspects anything.”

Within hours Amin discovered what was happening and ordered soldiers to arrest the Arch Bishop who was forced to kneel before Amin who then thrust a revolver into the Bishop's mouth and blew off the back of his skull. All the Bishops, including our good friend Bishop Festo Kivengere and family, made good their escape. It was he who later told me this story.

The Arch-Bishop, like the Good Shepherd, laid down his life for his sheep. John 10:11. The image of the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep is similar to that of Jesus the “Lamb of God who was slain.” Rev 5:12. And takes away the sins of the world. John 1:29.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES OF A GOOD SHEPHERD?

Total Commitment To God

Matt 16:24.

²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

To even become a disciple of Jesus demands a denial of oneself and a total commitment to God whatever the cost. To become a leader/shepherd requires all of this and more.

Total Commitment To The Call Of God

1 Tim 1:12.

¹²And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.

Commitment To The Care And Well-Being Of The Sheep

John 21:16

¹⁶He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

Basic Goodness

The quality of being good; of praiseworthy character; and moral excellence. The Bible speaks often of the goodness of God Ex. 33:19; Rom. 2:4. God's goodness consists of righteousness, holiness, justice, kindness, grace, mercy, and love. Goodness is also one of the fruits of the Spirit that should characterise Christian believers. Christians are called to goodness, even as God the Father is perfect and good Matt. 5:48. I have often observed that there is usually something essentially good in a true shepherd. They may not be perfect people, but there are underlying attributes that are good, well meaning and admirable. Persons who are drawn to the life of a shepherd usually evidence those desirable attitudes of genuine concern for others.

Unselfish Dedication (Gives His Life For The Sheep)

A good shepherd is essentially altruistic. (selfless, considerate of others, kind, generous) It is impossible for a self centred person to be a good shepherd. Dedication in the Bible is a religious ceremony in which a person or an object is set aside or consecrated to God's service. In Bible times, many different things were included in such services: the Temple 2 Chr. 2:4, a field Lev. 27:16, a house Lev. 27:14, articles of precious metal. 2 Sam. 8:10, even spoils won in battle 1 Chr. 26:27. Once a person or item had been dedicated to God in

this manner, it was considered “holy unto the Lord,” and could not be bought back. Once dedicated to God it could never again be used for one’s personal use or pleasure.

John 10:11

11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (NIV)*

The shepherd has a true servant heart. Like Jesus, he does not come to be served, but to serve others. (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)

Matt 20:26-28

26 *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,*
27 *and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--*
28 *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (NIV)*

The good shepherd adapts his interests and life style to accommodate his calling. He does not choose his own way but a way that is pleasing to his master, and beneficial for the sheep. He makes many personal sacrifices in order to properly fulfil his role. His calling as a shepherd inevitably dictates the course of his life. He is doubly owned by his master. Twice called, to salvation and to service. His life is not his own.

THE LAMB THAT BECAME A SHEPHERD

In the New Testament setting, Jesus is first introduced as a lamb, The Lamb of God.

John 1:29.

29 *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (NIV)*

John 1:36

36 *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (NIV)*

It is interesting and extremely significant that The Logos (Christ) became the Lamb of God and experienced life as an innocent lamb before He became The Good Shepherd. David too thoroughly understood the lot of a sheep before he ever became the Shepherd/King of Israel. It is extremely important that a shepherd thoroughly understands the anatomy, psychology and various needs of sheep. It is certainly not coincidental that God chose good shepherds to lead His people.

2 Sam 7:8

8 *Now then, tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. (NIV)*

Ps 78:70-72

70 *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens;*
71 *from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance.*
72 *And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them. (NIV)*

HUMILITY

Humility is a freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God. The Greek philosophers despised humility because it implied inadequacy, lack of dignity, and worthlessness to them. This is not the meaning of humility as defined by the Bible. Jesus is the supreme example of humility Matt. 11:29; Mark 10:45; John 13:4-17; Phil. 2:5-8, and He is completely adequate and of infinite dignity and worth. Biblical humility is not a belittling of oneself Matt. 6:16-18; Rom. 12:3, but an exalting or praising of others, especially God and Christ John 3:30; Phil. 2:3. A humble person, then, focuses more on God and others than on himself.

Biblical humility is also a recognition that by ourselves we are inadequate. Yet, because we are created in God's image and because believers are in Christ, we have infinite worth and dignity 1 Cor. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19. True humility does not produce pride but gratitude. Since God is both our Creator and Redeemer, our existence and righteousness depend on Him John 15:5; Acts 17:28; Eph. 2:8-10.

Phil 2:6-8

6 *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
7 *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
8 *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! (NIV)*

The incarnation of Christ is a story of condescension and humility. He humbled Himself in order to become a man. He further humbled Himself to take the form of a slave. Having done so he surrendered Himself to the final humiliation, the death of crucifixion, usually the fate of the lowest criminal.

Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth, humbles Himself to the greatest degree when He announces Himself as a Shepherd. Christ manifests the same humility in appearing as a servant. Both are strong indicators of the attitude required of a servant of the Most High God and a shepherd of His people.

Jesus set the supreme example of humility before His disciples

John 13:3-5

3 *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;*
4 *so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.*
5 *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (NIV)*

MEEKNESS

Meekness is an attitude of humility toward God and gentleness toward men, springing from a recognition that God is in control. Although weakness and meekness may look similar, they are not the same. Weakness is due to negative circumstances, such as lack of strength or lack of courage. But meekness is due to a person's conscious choice. It is strength and courage under control, coupled with kindness.

The apostle Paul once pointed out that the spiritual leaders of the church have great power, even leverage and influence of position. But he cautioned them to restrain themselves in meekness Gal. 6:1; 5:22-23. Even toward evil men, a man of God should be meek, knowing that God is in control.

Meekness is a virtue practised and commended by our Lord Jesus Matt. 5:5; 11:29. As such it is part of the equipment which every follower of Jesus should wear. 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:23; 6:1; Eph. 4:1-2.

It is surely more than coincidence that the two greatest shepherds of God's people were renowned for their meekness. (Humility, submission and mildness) Some dictionaries suggest that meekness is being weak and spineless, but nothing could be further from the truth. Meekness is strength under control. Neither Jesus nor Moses could be said to be weak. Both were persons of great strength of character and endurance, yet they are also the finest examples of meekness.

JESUS IS THE FIRST AND FINEST EXAMPLE

Matt 11:29-30

29 *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

30 *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (KJV)*

MOSES IS THE OTHER

Num 12:3

3 *(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.) (KJV)*

THE SHEPHERD'S DUTIES

A shepherd's duties as in Bible are clearly defined.

Every night he would keep them safely in a sheep fold.

Each morning he would lead his flock out from their fold. (John 10:4) in search of fresh pastures on which the sheep might safely feed. He did this by going out before them and calling them to follow him. (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17)

Arriving at the pastures he would carefully watch over the flock. If any sheep strayed from the flock, the shepherd would immediately begin to search for them until he found them. Ezek 34:12; Luke 15:4.

He sought for and supplied them with water, either from a quietly running stream or from pools or troughs that were attached to the wells. Gen 29:7; 30:38; Ex 2:16; Psa 23:2.

He defended them against all enemies, predators and potential dangers, often risking his own life in order to save theirs.

In the evening he brought them back to the fold, carefully counting them to ensure that none were missing, by passing them "under his rod" as they entered the sheepfold. Lev 27:32; Ezek 20:37. He would then guard the entrance to the fold all night, usually placing his body across the gateway whilst he slept.

The shepherd's duties required him to be actively watchful over his sheep, particularly by night when wolves and other wild animals would try to attack the sheep under cover of darkness.

A good shepherd was always particularly concerned for those ewes that were pregnant and also towards the young or feeble. Isa 40:11. This was especially true when he was leading them to and from the pastures. Gen 33:13.

The life and role of a shepherd in Bible times usually involved considerable hardship and frequent danger. Living outdoors much of the time he was exposed to extremes of blazing heat during the day and intense cold at night. His food supplies were often limited and he often faced attacks from wild animals, such as lions, bears and wolves. 1 Sam 17:34; Isa 31:4; Jer 5:6. He was also exposed to attacks from marauding robbers and thieves. Gen 31:39.

To help him combat these hardships and dangers, he had numerous items of equipment

A sheep skin robe to combat the cold night air. Jer 43:12.

It is significant that his coat derived from the sacrifice of some sheep. The wool was normally worn inside for extra protection from the cold night air. There is an area of ministry in which sheep are able to provide some comfort to their shepherd through thoughtfulness and generosity.

A pouch containing a small supply of food. 1 Sam 17:40.

Whilst he was in the field with the sheep he usually subsisted on meagre and plain rations that were easily transportable. He often ate foods he could collect from various plants in the wilderness. His own demands were often denied for the sake of his sheep. However, a shepherd always needs a personal supply of nourishing food. His work is hard and demanding. He needs to take care of his strength.

A sling, with which to throw stones. 1 Sam 17:40.

A sling was largely a weapon of defence. The shepherd used it against predators, to defend his sheep, but he would also at times use it to defend himself. The slingers were the most effective long-range warriors in Old Testament times. The advantage of such a long-range weapon is illustrated by the most famous sling story of all -David's victory over Goliath. The young, inexperienced David killed the giant because of his trust in God. David also had a decided advantage in the contest because Goliath was armed with a spear and a sword, both of which were short-range weapons.

Sling throwers were important elements in the Israelite army. They were the elite infantry of their day. The Benjamites also had a unit of 700 left-handed sling throwers who could "sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss" (Judg. 20:16). Stones hurled from a sling by shepherds and warriors (Job 41:28; Zech. 9:15). Sling stones were usually small stones or clay pebbles. But sometimes they were made of limestone or flint and were as large as a baseball.

A ROD

Hebrew; shebet, or club, usually about three feet long with a large knob on the end. This was a weapon with which to defend himself and the sheep. The most primitive weapon of all was the club, consisting in its early development of little more than a piece of wood especially shaped for hand-to-hand combat. In later years metal was added to these primitive weapons, and they evolved into a type of war club (Prov. 25:15), (RSV) or mace. Another variation on the club was the staff, generally used by shepherds to care for their flocks but also mentioned in the Bible as a weapon of war (2 Sam. 23:21; 1 Chr. 11:23). Other words

for club used by different translations of the Bible include maul (Prov. 25:18), (KJV) and cudgel (Matt. 26:47),

The rod is also figurative or symbolic of

Christ. Isa 11:1. "A rod out of the stem of Jesse."

Messiah's rule. Psa 2:9. Shall rule with a rod of iron.

Christ's authority. Isa 14:5, 29. Christ's rod breaks the staff of the wicked.

The Kingdom rule. Psa 110:1,2.

1 *The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

2 *The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. (KJV)*

A Staff, Or Crook, about six feet long to assist him when walking or climbing and for rescuing sheep. A short pole or stick used for many different purposes in Bible times. A staff was used much like a walking cane by travellers (Gen. 32:10), the elderly (Heb. 11:21), and the lame (2 Sam. 3:29); but it could also serve as a simple weapon, especially in the hands of a shepherd (1 Sam. 17:40). A staff also symbolised a leader's authority (s. 14:5), as well as God's protection of the believer Ps. 23:4).

DOGS

Although fierce dogs often accompanied shepherds, they were never used to drive the sheep as sometimes occurs in the West. The shepherd led his sheep and controlled them by the sound of his voice. His dogs were for the sole purpose of chasing off wolves, hyenas and other enemies and predators. This fact alone speaks volumes about the attitude that God requires from His shepherds towards the sheep. They are not to be rounded up nor driven as by yapping dogs but by the controlled voice of the shepherd.

A SMALL TENT

made of water repellent woven material from the hair of black goats. The shepherd's life was often a nomadic one as he sought out fresh pastures and quiet waters. Tents have been the housing of nomadic and semi-nomadic people in the Middle East since the beginning of history. The patriarchs-- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob-- all lived in tents as they criss-crossed the Promised Land. For 40 years after they left Egypt, the Israelites lived in tents. Tents continued to have several uses even after the Israelites settled into villages. Probably the most frequent use was by nomadic shepherds who always carried a small light tent.

Song 1:8

8 *If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds. (NIV)*

Isa 38:12

12 *Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. (NIV)*

SHEEPFOLDS OF WHICH THERE WERE VARIOUS KINDS

Sometimes they were located within a cave. (1 Sam 24:3) Some were permanent enclosures with walls and a roof. Others were temporary, consisting of an open pen with thorn bush or

stone sides. The sheepfolds were actually very simple and basic. It was the shepherd's concern and loving care that constituted their real protection. In certain localities, towers were erected for the double purpose of spying on an enemy at a distance and also protecting the flock. Shepherds also frequently found shelter in caves such as those near Bethlehem or at 'Ain Feshka, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were uncovered, or the Cave of Pan at Banias in the Galilee area.

WHO ARE SHEPHERDS, "ACCORDING TO GOD'S HEART?"

Jer 3:15

15 *And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. (KJV)*

(The word translated pastors is ro'yim, the Hebrew word for shepherds) It is used in Jeremiah to indicate kings, priests, prophets, guides of the people, yet is must always be perceived in connection with the agricultural and pastoral connotations.

Let's analyse the verse : (Using Strong's reference)

Jer 3:15

15 And I will give you pastors (ro'im 7462. shepherds)
according to mine heart, (Ki li bi. 3820, the centre of one's being)
which shall feed (ra-ah. 7462 to lead and feed) i.e.

To tend, watch over, lead and pasture a flock.

To keep company with a companion.

To form a friendship with.

Lead in the right paths

with knowledge (dee ah 1844: knowledge)

and understanding.(sagal, 7919: cause you to act wisely in order that you might be successful.

(See Joshua 1:8 for sakal, "good success.")

The context on which this verse occurs is clearly prophetic, speaking of a future time when Jerusalem will be exalted above all cities, viz. Jer 3:17

17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. (KJV)

Nevertheless, the criteria for such shepherds, as Jeremiah outlines them, remains consistently the same at all times. What constitutes a shepherd "according to God's heart?"

A SHEPHERD'S HEART SHOULD BE ONE WITH GOD'S HEART.

Jer 3:15.

In his deepest heart, he should feel and desire those things that God feels and desires for the sheep. David was a man whose heart was like (after) God's heart.

Acts 13:22

v22. *After removing Saul, God made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' (NIV)*

The shepherd should not only seek to think God's thoughts but also to "feel His feelings" especially with regard to God's sheep. He has no authority to make judgements about the sheep according to his own initiative. They are God's sheep, not the shepherd's.

It is often surprising to learn what God's thoughts and feelings are toward a particular flock or individual sheep. It is most interesting to learn of God's intimate heart thoughts regarding some persons and circumstances. His thoughts are certainly not our thoughts. They are always higher and nobler. Whilst we were living in South Africa during the 1970's I was invited to speak at the Easter Convention of a large, traditional Pentecostal church. As I prayed about the invitation and about what I should teach on, the Lord spoke a very interesting word into my spirit. He said, "I want you to be very gentle with this people because they are extremely precious to Me, but unfortunately they have wax in their ears."

I was very intrigued with this interesting statement and bore it in mind the whole time I was there. From the first service many Charismatic visitors came along. They apparently heard some extremely challenging and inspiring "words" from God about which they became very excited. Many wonderful things happened amongst them through prophesies, visions and words of knowledge. But the local congregation appeared to hear nothing. It was as though they were all deaf. I continued to minister patiently and gently over that weekend, loving those local people and being extremely tender towards them. On the final day, after much personal, private prayer, it was as though God suddenly opened their ears. The whole congregation came awake. What a day it was as God moved among them in a manner they had not experienced since the inception of that church. God, the gentle shepherd had gently nursed and led them through that weekend eventually bringing them to "green pastures and still waters." At last he was able to move afresh among them and revive that congregation.

Another interesting word that God spoke to me in Africa concerned a man who began to attend some church services that we held in our house there. He and his wife had moved down to South Africa from Southern Rhodesia to escape frequent terrorist incursions and brutal murders. Although he and his wife had been beautifully converted, the man still smoked and enjoyed his pipe and tobacco. After each Sunday morning meeting the congregation would retire to our kitchen for coffee and toast. As we all crowded into the large kitchen talking and fellowshiping, this dear man would bring out his pipe and begin to fill the house with tobacco smoke. Nobody enjoyed this but he himself. I felt embarrassed as the host. I would fling open the windows to indicate my displeasure but the message did not reach him. Eventually I decided to tell him that he was very welcome in our home, but his pipe was not. But first I determined to pray about it.

I told the Lord, "Next week I will tell this man that his pipe is not welcome here." Then I heard Him quietly say to me.

"Do you believe that I have accepted this man?"

"Of course" I replied.

"Do you believe that I have accepted him with his pipe?"

"Yes" I replied. "I have no problem believing that."

"Well then why don't you accept him too?" God said.

I asked God's forgiveness and determined to give the man an extra warm welcome the next week and to say nothing about his pipe. The following Thursday morning we received some devastating news. The previous night a group of terrorists from Mozambique had raided the home of this older couple. They hacked them to pieces with machetes and then burned their remains in a fire that completely destroyed their home and all their possessions. How

grateful I was to God for His intervention. Had He not spoken that word to me, my last memory of this dear man and his lovely wife could have been one of confrontation, a sad one indeed.

KING DAVID WAS A MODEL SHEPHERD, BEING A MAN AFTER GOD'S HEART

Acts 13:22

22 *After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'* (NIV)

HE WAS APPOINTED AND ANOINTED TO BE A SHEPHERD/KING OVER THE LORD'S PEOPLE

1 Sam 13:14

14b *the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."* (NIV)

2 Sam 7:16

16 *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."* (NIV)

HE WILL RULE ETERNALLY WITH MESSIAH, AS VICE REGENT TO HIS THRONE.

Ezek 34:24

24 *I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.* (NIV)

DAVID'S CHARACTER AND DISPOSITION

David's character and disposition are extremely admirable. He was obviously admired and honoured by God. God had a tremendous respect for David. This respect was not terminated when David fell into sin. Though God led him through repentance and allowed deep grief to smite David, God did not cancel His plans for him. When a person of God falls into temptation and sin, we ought not to immediately forget all the years that have walked with God, nor the fact that they are near to His heart. We ought not to be hasty in judging God's servants, nor should we hasten to "cast the first stone."

HE WAS VERY HUMAN

1 Sam 17:42

42 *And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was only a youth, ruddy and good-looking.* (NKJ)

Though David ranked high in God's estimation and was a great leader and king of Israel, he was still very human. Being chosen by God does not necessarily make one a superman, absolutely immune to all temptation. Nor does it render one perfect. Though a chosen vessel of God, he was still very much flesh and blood. He was a person greatly conscious of the fragile nature of his humanity.

HE HAD NORMAL HUMAN INTERESTS

Music, poetry, nature, astronomy and many other interesting subjects obviously ranked high in David's interests. Though recognised as a man after God's heart, and a person of great

spirituality, he also had many human, physical interests. He was not so “heavenly minded that he had no earthly interests.” Though his spirit was frequently in heavenly places, his feet always touched the ground when he walked.

HE WAS “ON GOD’S WAVE LENGTH”

I am personally greatly encouraged that with all the evidences of his humanness, David was still “A man after God’s heart.” In modern colloquialism I believe this phrase indicates that he and God were “on the same wave length.” They clicked. They saw things from the same perspective. They enjoyed each others company. They understood each others heart. They knew where each other was coming from.

HE WAS NOT IMMUNE TO TEMPTATION

Heb 4:15

15 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. (NIV)*

Because David was flesh and blood he was vulnerable, exposed to the subtle powers of temptations. There was sufficient red blood in his veins to make him susceptible to sensual, visual temptation. David must have known this from previous experience. He must have known that it was dangerous to even look at a woman in such circumstances. He should have terminated the scenario as soon as he became aware of its subtle and powerful danger.

HE WAS SEVERELY TEMPTED

2 Sam 11:1-3.

- 1 *In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.*
- 2 *One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,*
- 3 *and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*

Strategic leaders are always a special target of Satan who knows that if he can destroy the shepherd, the whole flock will be adversely affected.

Zech 13:7 b

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.” (NIV)

WITHOUT TRYING TO EXCUSE OR VINDICATE DAVID, SEVERAL THINGS COULD BE NOTED

a. David was in mid life now and could have been experiencing what we now call mid life crisis. His emotions and nerves may well have been affected by this. The mid life crisis can also have a profound effect on one’s sexuality. There may a desperate realisation that one’s sexual strength is disappearing. This can lead to a final sexual “fling”.

b. After many years as a great military leader, he was probably battle weary, suffering from the toll that those years had taken on his nervous system. This type of sickness is now known as battle fatigue but in earlier days it was not recognised as a genuine disability.

c. As a leader with many tasks and responsibilities he could have been experiencing a degree of what we now recognise as “Burnout” from being overworked and under too much pressure. Many persons today, in various areas of the caring professions, including clergy members, are experiencing emotional breakdown or burnout.

Obviously, if these conditions did prevail, David should have recognised his ultra vulnerability and exercised even greater caution than usual. Unfortunately many leaders feel their relationship with God and their high calling makes them exempt from the very temptations they would warn others about. God has been so good to them they subconsciously feel they can do nothing wrong. This is a clever and subtle deception of the enemy. **Pastors therefore need to be extraordinarily vigilant, always aware of the possibility of Satan’s subtle strategies to destroy them. All manner of dangers exist particularly in respect of money, power and illicit sex.**

1 Pet 5:8-11

8 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

9 *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

10 *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

11 *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)*

HE SUCCUMBED TO TEMPTATION

2 Sam 11:4

Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. (NIV)

Bathsheba was a religiously observant woman who desired to keep the Law of God. However, she was also lonely and possibly feeling neglected since her husband was absent at the war. Many Godly people are overcome by sexual temptation when their personal circumstances expose them to its powerful, insidious influences. Jesus did not tell us to pray we would never be tempted. Temptations are inevitable in this life. King David also found himself with spare time to which he was unaccustomed. He possibly thought that as king of Israel he would be above or immune to temptation. Unfortunately his public office made him all the more conspicuous as a target for the enemy.

1 Cor 10:12-13

12 *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (NIV)*

WE ARE TO PRAY THAT WE SHALL NOT ENTER INTO TEMPTATION

Matt 6:12-13

12 *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

13 *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (NIV)*

We are not told to pray that we may never be tempted but rather that we should not succumb (enter “into”) to it. Shepherds should be especially alert to the extraordinary dangers associated with temptation from the opposite sex. Their public office and their image as a “shoulder to cry upon” makes them particularly attractive to women with marital problems and the associated emotional issues. A pastor is often a figure of prominence and influence which may also make him attractive to some women.

James 1:12-15

12 *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

13 *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;*

14 *but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*

15 *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (NIV)*

HE KNEW HOW TO TRULY REPENT

Ps 51:1-4

1 *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.*

2 *Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

3 *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.*

4 *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. (NIV)*

It was certainly NOT David’s waywardness that so endeared him to God’s heart. Rather it was his disposition towards repentance following a transgression. King David’s prayer of repentance, (read Psalm 51) is a classic example of repentance. It should be studied and followed by all who need to find God’s deep forgiveness. True and genuine repentance always essentially precedes forgiveness and thorough cleansing.

I Jn 1:9-10

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (NIV)

HE KNEW HOW TO SEEK, PURSUE AND FIND GOD

He was a man who was after (in pursuit of) God’s heart, i.e. he pursued God, with all his heart.

Ps 42:1-2

1 *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.*

2 *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? (NIV)*

David likened himself to a deer pursued by a wild animal. The deer’s throat is parched and dry. Every part of its being cries out for the refreshing of moisture. Its heart beats quickly, it longs for the smell and taste of water with all its being. It illustrated how David often felt as he longed after communion with God.

Ps 27:4

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. (NKJ)

HE WAS A PRAYERFUL PERSON

Ps 55:1-2

LISTEN TO MY PRAYER, O GOD, DO NOT IGNORE MY PLEA; HEAR ME AND ANSWER ME. NIV

Ps 109:4 b

4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. (NIV)

So many psalms are entitled “a prayer of David unto God.” He was constantly talking with God, crying out to Him, seeking His help. His life was a constant prayer.

HE WAS A PRAISING PERSON

Ps 103:1-5

*1 Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
2 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits--
3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,
5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (NIV)*

HE ALWAYS ACKNOWLEDGED GOD AS THE SOURCE OF HIS STRENGTH

Ps 71:5-7

*5 For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.
6 By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.
7 I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge. (KJV)*

Paraphrase: “I am a wonder to many, but God is the explanation.”

Ps 27:1

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation-- whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life-- of whom shall I be afraid? (NIV)

Ps 46:1-3

*1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah (NIV)*

HE ASCRIBED ALL HONOUR AND PRAISE TO GOD

Ps 71:8

Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. (KJV)

David never exalted himself. Throughout his life, from shepherd boy to national hero and King, he maintained his humility of heart. He was ever exalting, magnifying and praising God.

THEY SHOULD FEED THE FLOCK WITH KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Jer 3:15

And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. (NKJ)

I BELIEVE THIS SCRIPTURE INFERS THREE THINGS

1. Shepherd's are meant to be "on God's wave length" in respect to His sheep.
2. The food they provide is the true knowledge and understanding of God.
3. They deliver this food with special knowledge and understanding of what and how God desires His sheep to be fed.

These are pastors after God's own heart who make it their business to feed the flock, not to feed themselves and fleece the flocks, but to do all they can for the good of those that are in their charge, who feed them with wisdom and understanding (that is, wisely and with understanding), as David fed them, in the integrity of his heart and by the skilfulness of his hand, Ps 78:72. These who are not only pastors, but teachers, must feed them with the word of God, which is wisdom and understanding, that is able to make us wise to salvation.

A good shepherd ought not to fill his people's minds with philosophies, theories, or head knowledge, but with true knowledge and the understanding it imparts. People need to be fed on simple, practical wisdom from God's Word, and be trained in how to use and practise that wisdom. People cannot live victoriously on theological niceties. They need pragmatic and practical principles they can successfully apply to their circumstances. Someone has said, "If the student has not learned, the teacher has not taught" (properly). True believers need to walk in truth, not simply fill their minds with it.

SHEPHERDS MUST "KNOW GOD AND TEACH HIS LAWS."

Jer 2:8-9

- 8 *The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.*
- 9 *"Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children. (NIV)*

It is not sufficient for a pastor to "know God's law" (Word). He must also know God, in such a manner and depth that he interprets God's Word according to God's heart. The law, in essence, is legalistic, but God is not. He always tempers justice with mercy. The pastor must always do the same.

Ps 85:10

10 *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. (KJV)*

Truth, is to be administered with mercy, righteousness and peace have formed a pact and work together hand in hand.

Jesus clearly indicated that the Sabbath, and similar laws, were made for the blessing of man not to rule him. E.g.

Mark 2:27-28

27 *Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*

28 *So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (NIV)*

THEY MUST BE EARNEST SEEKERS AFTER GOD. JER 10:21

Jer 10:21

21 *The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered. (NIV)*

The shepherd who does not consistently inquire of the Lord, gaining His mind and wisdom for the care of the flock is a senseless pastor, whom God will one day judge for his carelessness. The shepherds are to guide God's flock according to His wisdom, not their own!

THEY MUST HAVE GOD'S WISDOM TO KEEP HIS FLOCK TOGETHER.

Jer 10:21

For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the LORD; therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. (NKJ)

Sometimes the personal emphases of a pastor may be divisive in nature. Some like his emphasis, others cannot accept it and thus it divides the flock. If the pastor will seek for and walk in God's wisdom he can introduce emphases and change in such a manner that it will not rend or scatter his flock. He is obliged to seek and obtain that wisdom. He should preach and teach truth that unites his flock rather than dividing them.

THEY MUST PROTECT AND UNITE THE SHEEP.

Jer 23:1.

Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. (NIV)

True shepherds gather their sheep together, they do not separate and scatter them. When you observe sheep rallying to their shepherd you know that this is a good shepherd. When a preacher or pastor scatters the people, he is not one with God's heart.

THEY MUST CARE FOR THE SHEEP.

Jer 23:2.

Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. (NIV)

THEY MUST COMFORT THEM IN TIMES OF FEAR AND ANGUISH. JER 23:4.

I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. (NIV)

THEY MUST REMAIN MORALLY CLEAN. JER 23:14.

14 *And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah."*

15 *Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty says concerning the prophets: "I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land." (NIV)*

Immorality and uncleanness is always an abomination to God, especially when manifest in His own people. It is a particularly loathsome thing when it involves those who are called to be leaders and examples to the flock. Immorality in a shepherd can easily be transmitted to his sheep. If the shepherd should stray his sheep may even sub consciously follow him.

THEY MUST BE HONEST, PERSONS OF INTEGRITY. JER 23:25.

25 *"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!'"*

26 *How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? (NIV)*

To have integrity is to be honest and firm in one's convictions and lifestyle.

THEY MUST SPEAK GOD'S WORD, NOT THEIR OWN. JER 23:16.

16 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.*

17 *They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The LORD says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.' (NIV)*

Jer 23:28-32

28 *Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the LORD.*

29 *"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*

30 *"Therefore," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me.*

31 *Yes," declares the LORD, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The LORD declares.'*

32. *Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least," declares the LORD.*

THEY MUST STAND FAST IN GOD'S COUNSEL AND PROCLAIM HIS WORD. JER 23:22.

22 *But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.*

To "stand in someone's council" is to be present in their company and to receive their counsel, i.e. wisdom, guidance, advice, admonition and instruction.

THEY MUST DISCOURAGE EVIL DOERS. JER 23:14B.

Jer 23:14

14 *They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah." (NIV)*

A weak, compromised message condones and encourages sinners in their sinful ways. Thus the shepherds of that day were an abomination to God, because they provided neither example or inspiration to righteousness.

THEY MUST CAUSE PEOPLE TO REMEMBER GOD AND HIS WAYS. JER 23:27.

27 They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship. (NIV)

False shepherds may become so engrossed in teaching their pet ideas, dreams and “revelations” that they severely neglect teaching the people the real truths about God. The emphasis of some preachers today is so influenced by new age concepts that it ceases to represent the thoughts and words of the Living God. People begin to worship themselves and their own potential rather than God. They have more concern for their own name than for the Name of God.

Chapter Four

CONCERNING SHEEPFOLDS

It is a sad and unfortunate fact that many modern Christians, especially in the Western World are no longer attending a local church. Possibly millions of such Christians have voted against the manner in which some churches are run by withdrawing their attendance and membership. It is not that they do not love God or Jesus any more. Their disillusionment is not with Jesus, but with the modern church the philosophy of which is often clearly different from that of the early New Testament church. They are often disillusioned with a church that is managed like a business institution rather than a sheepfold. The modern contemporary church has in many ways departed from the Biblical standards of the first church. The structure of the early church was patterned on the Biblical sheepfold model. Many contemporary churches are fashioned on the model of modern business. Many church buildings are very ornate, built at huge financial cost, but the heart of the sheepfold is not there.

Sheepfolds were simple shelters built and used by shepherds to house their sheep by night. They were used to keep the flock together and provide safety and protection from wild predators and other potential dangers. Sheepfolds took many varied forms according to their location, whether town, village, wilderness etc. Obviously those in a town were more elaborate than sheepfolds in the wilderness. The rendering of the following Heb. and Gk. terms describes such sheep folds:

1. Heb. *gedera*, an enclosure (1 Sam 24:3; Num 32:16,24,36; Zeph 2:6), a built pen, such as joins buildings, and used for cattle as well as sheep.

2. Heb. *mikla*, a fold or pen (Ps 78:70; 50:9; Hab 3:17), probably constructed of thorn bush. A circular fence or pen.

Grk. *aule*, a court (John 10:1), the roofless enclosure in the open country into which flocks were herded at night.

None of them were elaborate or ornate buildings. They were usually very basic and often primitive. Their value lay in the protection they provided for the sheep. Even in this regard, the shepherd was more pertinent to the sheep's safety than was the fold itself. He himself served as the door or gate to the fold. At night he would sleep with his body across the entrance to the fold. The average, typical sheepfold was a very simple, temporary structure. Really just a circular thorn bush fence, without any roof.

This reminds us that the actual physical structure is NOT the important thing. The shepherd is the true defence against potential enemies and predators. A sheepfold is much more than a mere building or structure, even as a local church is much greater than and not dependant on a building. A church is NOT a building. It is a local community of Christians who meet together regularly for worship and are wholly committed one to another. The sheep fold is a type of both the synagogue and later a local church.

THE SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue concept was first introduced in times of enforced exile from Jerusalem and the Temple. When the Jews were taken captive into a strange land and were no longer able to attend the Temple, they instituted the Synagogue as a temporary substitute for the Temple

of God. The synagogue became an “outpost” of the Jewish Kingdom, just as a local church is an outpost of God’s Kingdom today. The Jewish captives in Babylon did not have a temple or an altar but they longed for communion with God. This longing is clearly reflected in Psalm 137:1-4

- 1 *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.*
- 2 *There on the poplars we hung our harps,*
- 3 *for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*
- 4 *How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (NIV)*

Ps 126:1-3

- 1 *When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.*
- 2 *Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."*
- 3 *The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. (NIV)*

As captives, absent from their homeland, they longed for the proximity and fellowship of their own countrymen. It was only natural for them to meet in local groups for prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. The synagogue, therefore became ethnic social centres as well as a place of education and worship. It was their spiritual home away from home.

The word synagogue comes from the Greek sunagoge (literally, "a leading or bringing together"), which refers to any assembly or gathering of people for secular or religious purposes. Eventually the term came to refer exclusively to an assembly of Jewish people. The synagogue was a place where local groups of Jews in cities and villages anywhere could gather for fellowship, the reading and explanation of the Jewish sacred Scriptures and for prayer. In the synagogues, the people took part in worship, reading of the Scriptures, and prayer. The system presupposes a religious community. It also became a social and cultural centre that helped Jews to maintain their Jewishness even when thousands of miles away from their homeland Israel.

In the time of Christ "teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day" was already an established custom (Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16,31; 6:6; 13:10; Acts 13:14,27,42,44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). By New Testament times synagogues were very numerous and popular. They became centres of community activity, playing a number of important roles. The synagogues first became a rallying point for Jewish believers and later became a pattern for the local churches that were formed from new believers.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The modern concept of “church” is vastly different from the Biblical model. It has been handed down to us mainly from the Western, European example rather than any Biblical one. This is especially true of the church in the form of a building which is a very popular and prevalent modern idea. However, it is also very true of the manner in which “church” is conducted and perceived. The church in the New Testament is very much a living community of people, not an institution and certainly not a building. The church was very much people oriented and so it ought to be today too.

The New Testament church was a local assembly of believers within a geographical location or a particular community. The earliest examples of the New Testament church did not own their own buildings. In fact the early church did not possess its own buildings until about the

3rd Century AD Until then they would meet in a variety of informal meeting places, including caves, private homes and sometimes in the grounds of a Jewish synagogue. In Rome, the early church would often meet in the Catacombs. (burial places)

In the four gospels of the New Testament, the term church is found only twice in (Matthew 16:18 and 18:17). This scarcity of usage in those books that report on the life and ministry of Jesus is perhaps best explained by the fact that the church as the body of Christ did not begin until the day of Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:1-4). That the church began on the day of Pentecost may be demonstrated in various ways:

The Greek word mainly used for church is *ekklesia*, meaning “the called out ones.” This word is used 115 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Book of Acts and the writings of the apostle Paul and the general epistles. At least 92 times this word refers to a local congregation. The other references are to the church general, or all believers everywhere for all ages.

When the church general is implied, church refers to all who follow Christ, without respect to locality or time. The most general reference to the church occurs in (Ephesians 1:22; 3:10-21; 5:23-32). Since the church general refers to all believers of all ages, it will not be complete until after the judgement; and the assembly of all the redeemed in one place will become a reality only after the return of Christ (Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21—22).

Because the church general will not become a tangible reality until after Christ's return, the greatest emphasis in the New Testament is placed upon the idea of the local church. The local church is a visible local operation of the church general in a given time and place.

Speaking to His followers after His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples and teach them what He had taught (Matt. 28:16). The entire Book of Acts is the story of the early church's struggle to be loyal to this commission. As one reads this book, he is impressed by the reality that Christ, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, continues to direct His church as it carries out its commission.

The early church met in the Temple and Jewish synagogues, as well as private homes of believers (Acts 5:42). Later, in recognition of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, Sunday became the principle time for public worship (1 Cor. 16:2). At these public worship services, Gospel teachings and outreach in the name of Christ were offered to all within reach.

In the worship services of early Christians, prayer was offered, not only on the Lord's Day, but on special occasions as well (Acts 12:5), and Scripture was read (James 1:22; 1 Thes. 5:27). Sacred hymns and psalms were also sung. The breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup on the Lord's Day were observed as a continuing proclamation of Jesus' death, an anticipation of His return, and a participation in His "body and blood" (1 Cor. 11:20-29). Offerings for the needy were also received (1 Cor. 16:2).

At first, church organisation was flexible to meet changing needs. (e.g. Acts 6:1-6) As the church became more established however, church officers came into existence. These included the apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders, bishops, ministers or teachers, deacons, and deaconesses. With the emergence of “church buildings” largely through the influence of the Emperor Constantine, the church also became more physically oriented and static.

Although church organization today varies from denomination to denomination, the pattern and image of the New Testament church should remain a model for churches as they pursue their mission in the world.

The task of the shepherd could not be effectively discharged without the use of sheep folds. Sheepfolds were places of safety and refuge in which the shepherd kept his sheep at night. These might vary greatly in size and structure, from a large communal village sheep fold used concurrently by numerous shepherds, to a small, primitive fold in the mountains or some remote plain. In the early church, houses of the believers became sheep folds.

Acts 2:46-47

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (NIV)

THE “CAVES OF ADULLAM” MODEL

1 Sam 22:1-2

22:1 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there.

2 All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him. NIV

As David fled from the persecutions of Saul, (1 Sam 21:10) he made for the town of Adullam (which means “refuge”) a town South West of Jerusalem about midway to Lachish. It first appears as the resident city of a Canaanite king (Josh. 12:15; 15:35) but is most famous for its caves in which David hid as a fugitive from Saul (1 Sam. 22:1; 2 Chr. 11:7). Adullam was close to his home town of Bethlehem. Although often translated the cave (singular) of Adullam, the original Hebrew prefix suggests “caves” (plural) It may denote a group or a region of caves; it is certainly not confined to the idea that there was one immense cave in which David and his 400 men all found accommodation at once. The caves became David's headquarters during a part of the period when he was a fugitive from Saul (1 Sam 22:1; 2 Sam 23:13; 1 Chron 11:15). So David's community of some 400 men, plus their wives and children probably exceeded 1,000 persons, and lived in a series of caves, as a tightly knit community rather like a modern Israeli Kibbutz.

David had undoubtedly used these caves previously as a sheep fold and now that his life was in mortal danger, he returned to them seeking refuge and safety. David's brethren and kinsmen joined him partly from sympathy for him, and partly because their own lives were also in jeopardy from Saul's rule. David's call to rulership came as he was tending sheep. It was this skill and experience that God used to prepare him to become the Shepherd/King of Israel.

2 Sam 7:8

Now then, tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. (NIV)

The typical sheepfold had no roof. It was open to the skies and to the scrutiny of the shepherd over its walls. This is typical of a community whose lives are open to the scrutiny of God.

HERE ARE SOME ASPECTS OF THE ADULLAM COMMUNITY

REFUGE

The literal meaning of Adullam is Refuge, thus it became to them a place of asylum and sanctuary. God Himself has become such a refuge for every believer.

Ps 46:1-2

1 *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*

2 *Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (NIV)*

Ps 91:4

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (NIV)

His church is also intended to be such a place for us. This refuge is not provided by the walls of a building but by the love and care that God has promised His people. It takes the form of God's presence and also the brotherly love, understanding and prayers of fellow believers. Every local church today should exemplify this model of a refuge for refugees from the kingdom of Satan. The local church should be like a spiritual hospital where patients may be nursed back to spiritual health through the loving care and attention of their Christian family. Churches should be rehabilitation centres where sinners may come to be restored to the image of their Father God.

A WELCOMING COMMUNITY

David was persecuted by King Saul who sought to kill him. He sought refuge in several places before eventually coming to the caves of Adullam to which David "escaped" as a refugee from the clutches of Saul, to the welcoming anonymity of the isolated caves outside the town. Living there he was able to escape the attention of Saul and thus save his own life. Numbers of his relatives and associates who likewise fled from Saul's oppression, joined him there. They formed an alliance of people with one heart and mind, who also warmly welcomed other refugees

David, and all his comrades, were escapees from the carnal injustices of Saul's reign. They had all been oppressed by his pride and selfishness. Christians are also escapees from the rule of Satan having been delivered out of his kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. The local church community is intended to provide a welcoming refuge and loving succour to those who come out from the World system.

The Biblical theme of redemption began in Exodus when God determined to deliver His people from Egypt, the land of bondage and slavery. Through God's redemptive plan they were able to escape from Egypt, Pharaoh and bondage, into a land of liberty and salvation. It continues in the New Testament with the escape of former captives to Satan, into the Body of Christ, the community of the redeemed on earth.

Col 1:13-14

13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,*

14 *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (NIV)*

A NON-CONDEMNATORY COMMUNITY

Although the majority of persons at Adullam were oppressed, distressed and in debt, they were not rejected or patronised by the others, who, for most part were in a similar plight. They were therefore understanding and strongly supportive of each other. They knew what it meant to be ostracised and persecuted and therefore welcomed the fellowship and company of others who had also suffered under King Saul. They formed a loving community of understanding people who welcomed and supported all who came to them seeking refuge. Their wholesome acceptance of each other created a closely knit community of fellow travellers and companions. . None were self righteous, treating newcomers by patronising them. They did not merely meet periodically to fulfil some religious rites together, they were bound to each other in love in every aspect of their lives. They lovingly entered into each others hearts and lives in a powerfully supportive and encouraging manner.

PROTECTION

The main idea of the sheep fold was to provide protection for the flock from all manner of potential dangers that often surrounded them. In the face of wild animals, domesticated sheep were almost defenceless. They depended totally on the care of a shepherd and the sheep fold in which he would house them. At night the sheep are driven into a sheepfold, particularly if they are in a district where there was danger from robbers or wild beasts. These folds are simple walled enclosures.

2 Chr 32:27-29

- 27 *Hezekiah had very great riches and honour, and he made treasuries for his silver and gold and for his precious stones, spices, shields and all kinds of valuables.*
- 28 *He also made buildings to store the harvest of grain, new wine and oil; and he made stalls for various kinds of cattle, and pens for the flocks.*
- 29 *He built villages and acquired great numbers of flocks and herds, for God had given him very great riches. (NIV)*

Ps 78:70-71

- 70 *He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens;*
- 71 *from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance.(NIV)*

Zeph 2:6

- 6 *The land by the sea, where the Kerethites dwell, will be a place for shepherds and sheep pens.(NIV)*

On the top of the wall is heaped thorny brushwood as a further safeguard. Sometimes there is a covered hut in the corner for the shepherd. In the winter time caves were keenly sought after (1 Sam 24:3; Zeph 2:6).

PROVISION

The members of the refugee community supported each other in every aspect of their lives. They all lovingly valued one another and lived each for the other in families and groups. They probably ate their meals together and would certainly have ensured that each member family of the fellowship had sufficient supply of food, shelter, clothing etc. Thus each one regarded David as their good shepherd, under whose watchful care, they would want for no good things. (Psa. 23:1)

RELATIONSHIP

Many of the people who came to seek refuge with David at Adullam had to leave behind family members and friends. The community of 400 men, together with their wives and children found a new family and relationship with David and his mighty men. We are told that “David became a captain over them.” (v.2) This clearly suggest the formation of ranks, order and relationship.

Many of the people who joined David at Adullam were his own family members. However, even those not related by blood became related in an extended spiritual family relationship.

Eph 3:14-15

14 *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
15. *from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (NKJ)*

GOOD FATHERS ARE SHEPHERDS TOO

The Biblical roles of shepherds and fathers are remarkably similar. The Biblical word for father, (Hebrew, ‘ab, Greek, pater) literally means, nourisher and protector, which are also the two main functions of a shepherd. Shepherds and fathers are intended to work and govern together over the people of God.

The Great Shepherd Owns The Whole Flock, World Wide



Shepherds Are Leaders Of Flocks.



Under Shepherds Are Associate Leaders.



Fathers And Mothers Are Spiritual Overseers, Under The Shepherds



God’s People, His Flock. Psalm 100:3

Every church community should be a family or fraternity. Every new believer should inherit spiritual fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. They should be integrated into the family circle. The community of a local church should provide the benefit and strength of a family relationship for every member. In particular, younger members should have the blessing of spiritual parents in God. E.g.

1 Tim 5:1-2

1 *Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers,*
2 *older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (NIV)*

The older, mature, spiritual men in a congregation should be as fathers and shepherds,(mature mentors) to the young men. Likewise, the older, mature, spiritual women should be as “Mothers in Israel” to the younger women and girls. This is never an official, appointed office, it is simply a fact that younger sheep will gravitate towards older men and women who obviously have the heart and disposition of true shepherds. They will look to them for an example and role model of what a mature Christian should look and behave like. They will seek their advice and counsel, gaining their assistance and encouragement in order to walk worthy of their Lord.

Titus 2:1-7

- 1 *You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.*
- 2 *Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.*
- 3 *Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.*
- 4 *Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,*
- 5 *to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*
- 6 *Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled.*
- 7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness (NIV)*

FRIENDSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

The fugitives from Saul's cruel reign formed a community within the caves of Aduallam. Their lives were lived inter related to each other. They depended on one another for the very basics of life itself. Within that community of their newly established relationship, they discovered and enjoyed a special spirit of comradeship with many families that were in similar circumstances to themselves. They consoled and encouraged each other because they were all experiencing similar problems in life. It becomes very obvious in the narratives describing the deeds of David's mighty men that a very special spirit of unity and oneness existed among them.

There was obviously a very close expression of friendship and comradeship amongst them all. They were not a legalistic society but a society of friends and good companions who enjoyed and deeply appreciated each others support. This is also the kind of relationship that Jesus wishes to have with His people and disciples.

John 15:14-15

- 14 *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*
- 15 *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. (NKJ)*

"Friendship" ought also to be the foundation of relationship within the local church with members meeting together in a relaxed, informal, friendly atmosphere of mutual love and appreciation. The families and members of the Adullam Caves Community would undoubtedly meet together for meals and fellowship in each others "houses." This forms a prophetic image for God's redeemed community on earth.

"Fellowship" within the early church was very different to the "fellowship" with which most Christians today are familiar. In New Testament times, fellowship was (Greek) "koinonia," which means true partnership. The ideal partnership of marriage in which each partner lives primarily for the other, typifies koinonia fellowship. As does a business partnership in which both members are equal partners in the benefits, privileges and responsibilities of the alliance.

House churches today endeavour to replicate a similar pattern:

Meet together regularly in the home(s) of one of the believing families.

Arrange everything to produce an informal, warm friendly environment.

Avoid trying to duplicate a "church" atmosphere or service.

Serve light refreshment before or after the meeting.
Enjoy some community singing of edifying Christian songs.
Teach positive, faith building and uniting truths from the Bible.
Use some type of teaching curriculum.
Invite everyone to participate with questions and comments.
Make opportunity to pray for the various needs of those present
Be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
Always make opportunity for someone to “meet” Jesus as Lord.
Meet at regular times so people can schedule it into their commitments.

TRAINING AN ARMY

It was here, in the caves of Adullam, that the Israeli army was first formed. Under the skilled leadership of David and his mighty men. (2 Sam 23:13-39) many tremendous exploits were accomplished.

In our current speech "cave of Adullam" suggests an collection of ill-assorted and disreputable men. This is not justified by the Bible record. David's men included his numerous and respectable kinsmen, and the representative of the priesthood, and some of David's military companions, and some men who afterward held high office in Israel. Even those who are described as being in distress and debt and bitter of soul were doubtless, many of them, persons who had suffered at the hands of Saul on account of their friendship for David. Doubtless they included a few adventurers in their number; but the Scriptural details and the circumstances alike indicate that they were mainly of the same composition as David and that most of them were worthy citizens. (Compare 30:6; 2 Sam 17:8.) The word discontented here denotes those who were exasperated by Saul's tyranny. The community of fugitives that formed there became a type of human sheep fold or a local church. The sheepfold was an enclosure made in fields where the sheep were collected by night to defend them from robbers, wolves, etc. It was not commonly covered, as the seasons in Judea were generally mild. By the figure here we are to understand the Jewish people, or the church of God, which is often likened to a flock, Ezek 34:1-19; Jer 23:1-4; Zech 13:1.

In the Adullam community, David is referred to as a “captain,” this clearly indicating that a structure of command was present within the community.

1 Sam 22:2

And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. (NKJ)

We later learn that numerous “mighty men” emerged around David and they subsequently become officers in his great national army. They evidently received their earliest training whilst part of his “refugee” community. Likewise, in the local church, there are various degrees and dimensions of leadership in which future rulers of God’s Kingdom may receive their earliest training and experience.

The term Bishop was also used with a different connotation than today.

A Bishop, was an overseer, elder, or pastor charged with the responsibility of spiritual leadership in a local church in New Testament times. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses bishop to refer to those who exercise power; sometimes it indicates those who hold positions of authority. It represents a Hebrew term that refers to those who are overseers or officers (Num 4:16; Neh 9:9).

In the New Testament, Jesus is called the "Overseer (Bishop) of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). In this passage the word is associated with the term shepherd. It is also used to identify the leader of a Christian community or the one who filled the office of overseer. In Acts 20:28 the elders of the church at Ephesus summoned to meet Paul are identified as overseers. Their responsibility, given by the Holy Spirit, was "to shepherd the church of God." In Phil 1 bishops are associated with deacons, and the qualifications are outlined in 1 Tim 3:2-7 and Titus 1:7-9. Included are standards for his personal and home life, as well as the bishop's relationships with non-believers.

In Acts 20:17,28 and Titus 1:5,7, the terms bishop and elder are used synonymously. Also the word bishop, or its related words, appears to be synonymous with the word shepherd, or its equivalents (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2). In his work, the bishop was to oversee the flock of God, to shepherd his people, to protect them from enemies, and to teach, exhort, and encourage. He was to accomplish this primarily by being an example to his people. He was to do this willingly and with an eager spirit, not by coercion or for financial gain. To desire a position as bishop, the apostle Paul declared, was to desire a good work (1 Tim 3:1). Every local church should also be a training centre where potential leaders can be trained in the skills of witnessing, soul winning, evangelism and new church planting. Such leaders, in addition to learning leadership skills, should also grow in spiritual maturity and become elders in the church. The Senior pastor, or his appointee should be in charge of this and it should be seen as an integral aspect of the church's program.

CONCERN AND CARE FOR AGED AND FOR INFANTS

1 Sam 22:3-4

- 3 *From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?"*
4. *So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold. (NIV)*

Both the aged and children represent the particularly vulnerable of a community. Both groups often require special care and attention. They are the members of any community that need particular patience and assistance.

Isa 40:11

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. NIV

Acts 6:1

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. (NIV)

1 Tim 5:3

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. (NIV)

There is obviously an important role to play in the sheepfold concerning the particular care of both infant and aged.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The community at Adullam did not retain its refugee status for long. It soon became an organised army of skilled soldiers intent on installing God's chosen King. They did not

simply share a vision of providing refuge for the disenfranchised, they had a glorious vision of living under the benevolent, just reign of a new and righteous King.

David's mighty men and the community of Adullam became the foundation members of his government in the nation and kingdom of Israel. This is a prophetic picture and type of the role that "saints" will play in the future manifest Kingdom of God on earth. Leaders are presently being trained and prepared by God for their future roles as Shepherd/Rulers, together with Christ. This is a very great and grave responsibility. Every leader must take it very seriously so they are fully prepared and competent to undertake not only the shepherding of a flock here and now but the future far greater responsibilities of reigning with Messiah Jesus.

Chapter Five

THE CHIEF SHEPHERD WILL RETURN

1 Pet 5:2-4

- 2 *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;*
3 *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;*
4 *and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*
(NKJ)

The judge, (Messiah) appears in His role as the Chief Shepherd, when He comes to judge His shepherds. He will come to judge His under-shepherds in respect of the discharge of their calling.

THE CRITERIA OF HIS JUDGEMENT WILL BE :-

- Did they faithfully shepherd the flock God placed in their care?
- Did they do this willingly and eagerly?
- Did they have to be compelled?
- Did they do it for monetary gain?
- Were they Lords over God's people?
- Did they present a good example to the flock?
- Was their flock in excellent health and unity?

IF SO THEY WILL RECEIVE A "CROWN OF GLORY" RESERVED FOR FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS.

What Is The Shepherds "Crown Of Glory"?

It is a recompense and reward from the Sovereign Lord, who loves His flock like a shepherd, to His faithful under-shepherds. It signifies their role and authority as a ruler/shepherds in the manifest Kingdom rather than a literal crown of gold.

Isa 40:10-11

- 10 *See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.*
11 *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.* (NIV)

THE LORD HIMSELF IS THEIR REWARD

There is and will be a special affinity of intimate fellowship between the Great Shepherd and His faithful under-shepherds. This, in itself, will be an exceeding great reward.

Gen 15:1

- 1 *After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."* (NIV)

THE CONVERTS WON TO CHRIST AND FAITHFULLY SHEPHERDED

Phil 4:1

Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! (NIV)

One of the greatest rewards and recompenses will be to see in eternity those believers that the under-shepherds have fed, nurtured and matured throughout their ministry. They will be, to each shepherd, both an everlasting joy and an eternal crown.

THE PRIVILEGE TO REIGN WITH CHRIST

Dan 12:3

3 *Those who are wise ★ will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. (NIV)*

★ The original Hebrew word translated “wise” infers “wise teachers.” Teachers are those who feed the flock and their reward will be to shine as stars and to reign with Messiah eternally. Viz.,

Dan 7:18

But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-- yes, for ever and ever.' (NIV)

Dan 7:27

Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.' (NIV)

Here are some of the criteria that qualify shepherds for these rewards. 1 Peter 5:1-11. The persons to whom this exhortation is given-- to the presbyters, pastors, and spiritual guides of the church, elders by office, rather than by age, ministers of those churches to whom he wrote this epistle.

FAITHFUL FEEDERS OF THE FLOCK. V.2.

1 Pet 5:2

Feed the flock of God which is among you, (KJV)

How faithfully and well has the shepherd fed those sheep that God gave into their care? The answer to this lies not in how brilliantly the pastor taught but in the spiritual health of those sheep. Was the food of such a quality that the sheep grew, consistently becoming healthier and stronger in God. Sheep need constantly fresh pasture. The Hebrew word *ra-ah*, means to “provide fresh pasture and allow the sheep to graze.” An important aspect of grazing is to also provide a relaxed atmosphere in which the sheep can comfortably eat and digest their food. To do so, they must be free from fear and insecurities. They must have absolute confidence in their shepherds wisdom and love that the place to which he has led them is safe from all perceived dangers.

The shepherd must also have a heart filled with love for Christ and this must be the main, if not sole reason why he is a shepherd. Jesus ensured that Peter had such a heart of love before he commissioned him to feed and care for His sheep and lambs.

John 21:15-17

15 *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

- 16 *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*
- 17 *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. (NIV)*

It is out of such a heart of love for Jesus that true love for His sheep ensues. No man can truly love God's sheep unless their heart is first filled with unceasing, passionate love for the Good Shepherd.

TRUE OVERSEERS OF THE FLOCK

1 Pet 5:2

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; (KJV)

Money, in itself, is not filthy lucre, unless it becomes the main reason that one desires to be a pastor.

1 Pet 5:2

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; (NIV)

An Overseer is One who exercises oversight, responsible for controlling and managing, a group of people or a task. In the Old Testament, overseer refers to those responsible for getting a job done and to those who helped rule a people. In the New Testament an overseer is an Bishop in the church. Some scholars equate this officer with the "elder," while others see it as a distinct office.

Every pastor is an overseer of his flock responsible to diligently and lovingly keep watch over the sheep for their safety and well being. It is a task that must be treated very seriously and with great commitment. A good shepherd would number his sheep at least every day. Certainly each night as they entered a sheep fold, he would stretch forth his rod and count the sheep as they passed under it. At this time he would also inspect them for any signs of wounds or injuries they may have suffered that day. He was also responsible to protect them from savage wolves that might threaten them.

Acts 20:28-29

- 28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*
29. *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. (NIV)*

DO NOT LORD IT OVER THE SHEEP. V.3.

The pastors of the church ought to consider their people as the flock of God, God's redeemed heritage, and treat them accordingly. The sheep are not theirs, to be lorded over at their pleasure; they are God's people, and should be treated with love, meekness, and tenderness, for the sake of Him to whom they belong. Sheep are such gentle, non demanding creatures by nature that it could easily be assumed that they have no valid aspirations. However, the shepherd must never take advantage of this apparent weakness. The Biblical shepherd is not the owner of the flock. He is the caretaker/custodian.

Lead them by example. V.3b

Eph 5:1-2

- 1 *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;*
2 *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. (KJV)*

God wants His people to grow up into His likeness that they might be His true sons and daughters. Jesus is the finest example of a son of God but we often feel that He is too high and lofty for us to emulate. So God wants His shepherds to imitate Him before their sheep that they might have a fellow human example of God likeness to follow. Every shepherd therefore must be a genuine example of a true child of God so the sheep may have an excellent role model.

1 Cor 11:1

- 1 *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (KJV)*

1 Cor 11:1

- 11:1 *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. NKJV*

Phil 3:17

- 17 *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. (NKJ)*

A father once took his young son on his knee to explain what a true Christian was. At the close of his talk, he was mortified when his son asked, "Daddy, have I ever seen one?"

BE SUBJECT ONE TO ANOTHER. V.5.

1 Pet 5:5

- Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (KJV)*

Eph 5:21

- Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (KJV)*

The people of God are a Body to which every part is essential. It is also essential that all the parts be joined together, acting in perfect unity. No member of the Body can survive or function alone. All members are inter dependant one on the others. This is also true of shepherds. No shepherd should "live unto himself." All shepherds need other shepherds to whom they can relate and who can provide a covering (protection) for them. Every shepherd should cultivate relationship with fellow shepherds in their locality. This provides a fellowship of shepherds who can minister wisdom and encouragement to each other and also provide safety and protection.

BE CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY

1 Pet 5:5-6

- 5 *Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

6 *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, (NKJ)*

Jesus, the Good Shepherd is the supreme example for all his under shepherds in all things. This is particularly true in respect of a humble mind and attitude. Every leader is basically a servant and every good servant must have a humble heart. Jesus commanded every believer to learn from His own humility.

Matt 11:29

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (KJV)

HE FREQUENTLY DEMONSTRATED HIS HUMILITY AND TOLD HIS DISCIPLE TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE.

E.g. John 13:13-17

13 *Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.*

14 *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*

15 *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

16 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.*

17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. (KJV)*

TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY SERIOUSLY

The call to be a shepherd of God's sheep is a very serious issue, never to be undertaken lightly. No one should take this office to themselves unless they are certain that God has called them to do so. The ministry is never a hobby or past time. It should never be undertaken to satisfy one's ego or ambitions. It represents far more than the opportunity to preach regularly or to stand in some exalted position before a group of listeners. It is always to be undertaken on the behalf of God and as a holy service to His well beloved people.

CAST ALL THEIR CARE UPON JESUS

Although every shepherd must exercise conscientious care and deep concern for the sheep, he must also always remember that ultimately those sheep belong to God and He will take care of them. Paul took his charge most seriously,

2 Cor 11:27-28

27 *I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.*

28 *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. (NIV)*

Nevertheless, the Bible also tells us clearly that we must "cast ALL our care on God, because He cares for us. 1 Peter 5:9.

BE VIGILANT AGAINST SATAN

1 Pet 5:8

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (NIV)

Shepherds should never imagine that that because they are such, they will never be tempted or attacked by Satan. It could be for that very reason that he will definitely attack you because if he can effectively strike you, your sheep will be scattered.

Matt 26:31

31 *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (KJV)*

RESIST SATAN "IN THE FAITH."

1 Peter 5:9

Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Satan can only be overcome and defeated through the use of one weapon, the Blood of Jesus and the Word of God.

Rev 12:10-11

10 *Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.*

11 *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (NKJ)*

GOD'S WORD IS THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Eph 6:16-17

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; (NKJ)

To effectively use that sword we must be thoroughly versed in those scriptures that define and substantiate our "Faith" that is the things most commonly believed amongst us. We must be particularly conscious of all that God's Word declares about Satan and his defeat through the blood of Christ.

DISCOVER THE GOD OF ALL GRACE

2 Cor 12:9-10

9 *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

10 *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (NKJ)*

It is usually in our times of testing and especially in moments of apparent defeat that we truly discover that our strength does not lie in ourselves but in God. We also discover, in our times of personal weakness that God never fails us and that His abounding grace is always and will ever be sufficient for us. Even the mighty Apostle Paul had to learn this vital truth which made him ultimately rejoice in his infirmities realising that God's strength is truly made perfect in our innate human weakness.

SUFFER AFFLICTIONS

2 Tim 3:12

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. (NKJ)

2 Tim 2:12

If we suffer for Him, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: (KJV)

Heb 5:8

Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; (KJV)

The requirement to reign is not that we have to suffer, rather the lessons we learn through suffering. How remarkable that Jesus, though He was the Son of God, learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Suffering in itself, does not qualify one to reign with Christ. However, the lessons we learn from suffering and discipline build into our character the traits necessary to the enormous responsibility of reigning with Jesus in His eternal kingdom.

BE PERFECTED, ESTABLISHED AND STRENGTHENED

1 Pet 5:10

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. (NIV)

The apostle prays a powerful prayer, which he addresses to God as the God of all grace, the author and finisher of every heavenly gift and quality. Acknowledging, on their behalf, that God had already called them to be partakers of that eternal glory, which, being his own, he had promised and settled upon them, through the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ.

What he prays for on their account; not that they might be excused from sufferings, but that their sufferings might be moderate and short, and, after they had suffered awhile, that God would restore them to a settled and peaceable condition, and perfect his work in them-- that he would establish them against wavering, either in faith or duty, that he would strengthen those who were weak, and settle them upon Christ the foundation, so firmly that their union with him might be indissoluble and everlasting.

All grace is from God; it is He who restrains, converts, comforts, and saves men by His grace. All who are called into a state of grace are called to partake of eternal glory and happiness.

Those who are called to be heirs of eternal life through Jesus Christ must, nevertheless, suffer in this world, but their sufferings will be but for a little while.

The perfecting, establishing, strengthening, and settling, of God's people in grace, and their perseverance therein, is so complex a work, that only the God of all grace can accomplish it; and therefore he is earnestly to be sought by continual prayer, and dependence upon his promises.

The lessons learned and experience gained in times of suffering will equip the believer to rule and reign with Christ eternally

GIVE GOD ALL THE GLORY

1 Pet 5:11

11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NKJ)

IRRESPONSIBLE LEADERS ARE HIRELINGS RATHER THAN SHEPHERDS

Job 7:1-2

- 1 *"Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man?*
- 2 *Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, (NIV)*

Job suggests that a hireling, as distinct from a shepherd :-

Always complains that he is having a hard time. V.1.

Spends his days waiting for evening when he can finish work. V.2.

Is more interested in his wage and rewards than in caring for the sheep. V.2b.

Jesus identifies some differences between hirelings and shepherds.

John 10:11-15

- 11 *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*
- 12 *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.*
- 13 *The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*
- 14 *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*
- 15 *As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (KJV)*

Poor leaders, rebellious against God, are called irresponsible shepherds who desert, mislead, and mis-feed God's flock Jer. 23:1-4. New Testament leaders are also called shepherds of God's flock and are admonished to lead and protect His people Acts 20:28-30.

Hirelings are more interested in their reward than in the well being of the sheep. Job 7:2

Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages, (NIV)

They are portrayed as hired workers interested primarily in the close of the working day and to that time when they receive their wages.

God will one day judge unfaithful shepherds.

Zech 11:15-17

- 15 *And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd.*
- 16 *For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces.*
- 17 *Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened. (KJV)*

THE CRITERIA OF HIS JUDGEMENT.

The Hebrew word for shepherd is rohi. (Poimaino is the Greek, N.T. equivalent.)

The three main functions suggested by poimaino are

TO TEND AND CARE FOR A FLOCK. (POIMAINO = SHEPHERD)

To act as a shepherd tending and caring for the flocks.

To adequately feed it. (poimaino= to feed sheep. John 21:16)

“With knowledge and understanding.” Jer 3:15.

To exercise rule over a flock. (poimaino= to rule over Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; Matt 2:6) Poimaino also carries the idea of ruling, exercising dominion and rule. Viz. Rev 12:5. "and she brought forth a man child who was to rule (poimaino) the nations with a rod of iron."

Rev 19:15. "And he shall rule (poimaino) them with a rod of iron."

Matt 2:7. "for out of you shall come a governor who shall rule (poimanei) my people Israel."

RULING WITH A ROD ALLUDES TO SHEPHERDING SHEEP

The rod of iron is wielded by the right hand of one with a shepherd's heart.

1. He judges by His criteria, not man's.
2. Shepherds according to HIS heart, not man's.
3. Men often judge by the visible, overt signs. God judges by the heart's motive.

1 Sam 16:7

7 *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (NIV)*

Isa 11:3-4

3 *and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;*

4 *but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth. (NIV)*

Men judge by outward success.

How well they preach, teach, exercise gifts.

How large their congregation has grown.

The splendid facilities in which they worship.

Many ministers, successful in the eyes of their colleagues and members, may be relegated to a back seat in the judgement hall of Christ.

2. The shepherd exists for the sheep, not the sheep for the shepherd.

John 10:14-15

14 *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--*

15 *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. (NIV)*

Just as Jesus, the Good Shepherd, sacrificed His life for the sheep, so a good shepherd will also sacrifice his life for the good of the sheep. The sheep are not there for the shepherd's benefit, he is there for their good and well being.

The Greek word for sheep is probaton and is applied in Scripture to :-

Christ Himself (figuratively) Acts 8:32.

Saved men and women .Matt 10:16; 26:31; John 21:16.

Lost men and women. (1 Pet 2:35)

Mankind in general. (Matt 25:31-46)

FULFILLING A DIVINE CALLING

The role of shepherd is a divine gift or calling. The fulfilment of that role must be accomplished in the enabling that comes with the call.

1 Pet 5:2-3

- 2 *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;*
3 *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (NIV)*

WHOLEHEARTED IN HIS LOVE FOR GOD. JOHN 21:15-17. DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21:15-17

- 15 *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
16 *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."
17 *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. (NIV)***

Jesus required an assurance of Peter's whole-hearted love before He would commission him to tend and feed His sheep. Jesus used the Greek verb *agapao* in the first two questions, which means "Do you love me ardently, totally, perfectly, with all your being?" To which Peter responded with the verb *phileo*, i.e. you know that I like you, and am fond of you as a friend.

The third time Jesus asked him, "Peter, do you like (*phileo*) me?" This humbled and broke Peter bringing forth a confession of his real love.

NOT FOR FINANCIAL REWARD

John 10:12

- 12 *But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. (NKJ)*

A hireling is one who tends sheep, primarily for the wages he receives. We should never do this in respect of the ministry. It is certainly not unscriptural for the shepherd to receive wages. Jesus confirmed this. However, the wage should not be the primary motive for service. Nor should a shepherd serve for personal gratification and fulfilment.

Luke 10:7

Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. (NIV)

1 Pet 5:2

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; (NIV)

HE HAS ALTRUISTIC, UNSELFISH MOTIVES

The true shepherd is not a shepherd to fulfil some personal agenda or ambition.

He serves to fulfil God's will. To honour Him and bring glory to His name.
To bring the lost to Christ.
To serve the highest interests of God's sheep.
To offer himself as a shepherd to mankind, who are scattered, as sheep without a shepherd.

Someone spoke of the JOY of serving Jesus, in this manner,
Jesus first,
Others next,
You last.

HE IS A FINE EXAMPLE TO THE FLOCK

He leads the sheep,(by example) does not drive them with mere words.

1 Cor 4:15

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. (NKJ)

1 Cor 11:1

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (NKJ)

HE SERVES WITH DIVINE ABILITY

1 Pet 4:11

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

The true shepherd serves only in the ability that God gives. He preaches the very messages that God gives to him. He serves Christ through the very strength He supplies. That everything he says and does may bring glory to God and Jesus Christ.

Not human effort, education, knowledge.

1 Cor 2:1

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. (NIV)

Paul certainly had the ability and education to be a powerful, dynamic, charismatic personality. But he deliberately determined not to use those natural abilities but only the spiritual abilities which Christ gave him. If we minister out of our human ability, we may receive glory and praise of men, but that is our only reward. God does not reward shepherds for such service but for the ministry that issues from their inability and inadequacy.

HE HAS CLOSE PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF HIS SHEEP.

John 10:3-5

3 *The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

4 *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

5 *But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice." (NIV)*

He knows and values them all individually. They know and trust his voice. They will not respond to nor follow the voice of a stranger. Shepherds must earn the trust and confidence of their sheep.

John 10:14

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- (NIV)

He knows them all by name and is interested in all their personal issues and problems,

HE FEEDS THEM WITH APPROPRIATE FOOD

He feeds them with tender, green grass.

Ps 23:1-2

1 *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.*

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters. (NIV)*

He feeds them with knowledge and understanding Jer 3:15

And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. (NKJ)

Feeds with finest of wheat. Ps 81:16

But you would be fed with the finest of wheat; with honey from the rock I would satisfy you." (NIV)

HE WATERS AND REFRESHES THEM REGULARLY AND CONSISTENTLY. PSA 23:2-3

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,*

3 *he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (NIV)*

Drinking water is necessary to sustain life. It is also a very refreshing experience. Shepherds should not only supply water to enable the sheep to survive, they should also ensure that their sheep receive regular refreshing that causes restoration of the soul. Sheep need regular times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

HE PROVIDES EXCELLENT LEADERSHIP

The sustenance and safety of a sheep depend greatly on the ability of its shepherd to lead it to the right places. In an arid land, such as one often finds in the Middle East, it requires an experienced shepherd to read the signs and know where water is available at a given time.

HE SACRIFICES HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP

Shepherds according to God's heart, willingly sacrifice their own lives for the good of the sheep in their care. The true shepherd is a servant who is "not his own," but has been purchased at great cost. His life is no longer his own. It is firstly surrendered to his master and secondly sacrificed for the sheep.

HE PROTECTS THEM WITH HIS LIFE

He is zealous and fearless to protect them, as David, with the lion and the bear.

1 Sam 17:34-35

34 *But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep his father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock,*

35 *I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it. (NKJ)*

He Lives To Tend, Visit, Care For, Preserve, Strengthen The Flock

HE RULES WELL

The Greek word for shepherd, (poimen) also means ruler and is often used for kings and other rulers. A true shepherd is therefore also a skilful ruler over,

HIS HOUSEHOLD

1 Tim 3:4-5

4 *one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence*

5 *(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);*

HIS PERSONAL LIFE

1 Tim 4:15-16

15 *Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.*

16 *Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (NKJ)*

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

1 Tim 5:17-18

17 *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine.*

18 *For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer is worthy of his wages." (NKJ)*

God will speak against the foolish shepherds. Zech 11: 15.

THE MARKS OF A FOOLISH SHEPHERD:-

He is uncaring.

Deserts the flock

Destroys and scatters the sheep. Jer 12:10.

Leads the people astray. Jer 50:6.

Does not visit those that are cut off and perishing.

Does not seek the young ones that are straying.

Does not heal the broken or wounded.

Does not feed the ones too weak to stray.

Eats the flesh of the fat. (Is enriched through priestly offerings)

He tears their claws to pieces. (destroys their ability to resist him)

Feeds and clothes himself without caring for the sheep.

God's judgement upon them V.17.

God speaks Woe (sorrow, anguish, distress, and grief) to them.

He prophesies sword wounds on their arm and right eye.

Their arm shall be withered up.

Their right eye will be utterly blinded.

God will judge the nations

One day Jesus the Chief Shepherd will return, gather His whole flock into one fold, and divide the sheep from the goats.

Matt 25:31-34

- 31 *When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.*
- 32 *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*
- 33 *He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*
- 34 *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'*

This is known as the judgement of the nations, when the Chief Shepherd will divide the "sheep nations from the goat nations." It is a judgement concerning the fate of those nations at the time of Christ's return. He will determine the nations who will live on earth during the earthly reign of Messiah.

The judge will be, "The Son of man, in all His glory."

He will be accompanied by a host of angelic beings.

He will sit on a judgement throne on earth.

All nations will be gathered before Him.

He will separate the sheep nations to His right. The goat nations will go to His left.

The basis of judgement will be "How each nation treated His brethren." V.40.

His brethren are the Jews and Christians. (children of Abraham)

The sheep nations will enter the Kingdom Age under Messiah's rule.

The goat nations will be banished from His presence forever.

His throne will be in Jerusalem, the city of David. Zech 14:16.

His rule will be over all the nations that remain on earth.

The saints will rule with Him. Rev 11:15.

His reign will be eternal. Dan 7:14.

THE RULE OF THE ETERNAL SHEPHERD

Jer 23:4-6

- 4 *I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD.*
- 5 *"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgement and righteousness in the earth.*
- 6 *In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (NKJ)*

In the eternal kingdom reign of Messiah God will set up a structure of authority through which to reign over the kingdom of this world. The various persons appointed will rule with the heart of a shepherd.

Jesus, The Messiah, Will Reign As King Of Kings And Lord Of Lords. Rev 11:15.

David will reign under Him, Vice regent to the throne. Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:24-28; Hosea 3:4,5.

The twelve apostles will rule. Matt 19:28; Luke 22:29,30.

Resurrected saints will reign. Dan 4:3, 7:18, 22, 27. Psa 149:4-9.

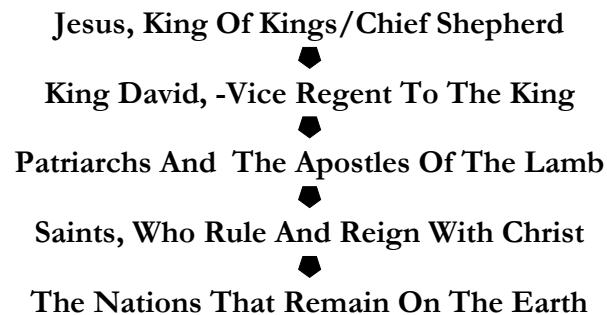
Jer 23:4.

- 4 *I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking," says the LORD.*
5. *The Lord shall be called Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness.*
6. *He will be the righteous judge of all the earth.*

His kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom.

The resurrected saints who reign with Christ. (Rev 5:9,10) under Messiah, King David, and the twelve apostles of the lamb, will rule as shepherds. (Jer 23:4) From this fact we may see how important it is for leaders to develop their shepherding attitudes and skills, for this will be their eternal function.

The chain of command will be,



Acts 2:36

- 36 *Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (NIV)*

Rev 11:15

- 15 *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (NIV)*

Rev 5:10

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Rev 22:4-5

- 4 *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*
- 5 *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. (NIV)*