



Jesus, the Shepherd

The first two chapters in the Bible deal with the beginning of the world, the creation of man, the subject of metaphysics. The third chapter deals with the fall of man. The rest of the Bible deals with the restoration of man.

All language is built upon the idea of using words, experiences, and ideas that are already known to describe what needs to be learned and understood. All of our new words are simply combinations of old words, new uses of old words, or verbal tags for new concepts.

Because man has been so closely connected with the earth, agriculture, and animal husbandry, many analogies used in the Bible are taken from farm experiences. They are life experiences with which all would have been familiar. The Bible is full of "farm words."

There is no analogy more connected to the restoration of man, than that of the sheep and the shepherd. In the twenty-third Psalm, after declaring that "The Lord is my shepherd," the Psalmist announces, "He restores my soul." When Jesus introduced himself as our Savior, he did so by comparing us to sheep, and himself as our shepherd. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (which is the missing part of much of Christianity – "they follow me"). And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand" (John 10). In this manner, the word shepherd takes on significance far beyond its original meaning. We even talk about a shepherd aircraft guiding a disabled aircraft home. A shepherd is not just a guide; a shepherd is a healing, saving guide, becoming eyes for those who cannot see.

On the first Christmas, we vividly recall that the announcement of the coming of God to earth to restore mankind through the incarnation was made to shepherds. "In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around about them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them. `Do not be afraid; for see-- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people (the church is not a nation, it is "all people" of all the world): to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:8-11).

See how the Bible describes us: "Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, **and the sheep of his pasture**" (Psalm 100:3). Without doubt, the twenty-third Psalm has become the manner in which we see ourselves connected to Christ. It is the healing, restorative, prayer of all the church. By it, we clearly visualize our rescuer and our healing, eternal relationship with him. "The Lord is my shepherd."

There are a number of shepherds in the Old Testament, which the Holy Spirit gives us as pictures of the Great Shepherd --the Good Shepherd:

Abel is the *sacrificing shepherd*; we see him shedding his blood at the hands of his own brother, Cain, which was the first human murder.

Jacob was the *toiling shepherd*, who left his father's house to live in a far country --fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau.

Joseph was the *exalted shepherd*, who was rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery, then turned out, later, to be their savior.

Moses was the *delivering shepherd*, while David was the *royal, reigning shepherd*.

It takes all these shepherds together **to give us the one picture of our Lord Jesus Christ**, the good shepherd. Each one makes a contribution to the complete picture.

Abel is the first shepherd. He was killed by his brother Cain. As a result, Cain was banished from the land and became a wanderer among the people. Yet, in his grace God preserved him from the retaliation of his enemies by putting his mark on Cain. (Genesis 4:2,8,12,14,15).

What was the experience of Christ? "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (John 1:10,11).

Here is the story: "Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us ..I will, therefore, release him.' Then they all shouted out together, 'Away with this fellow'" (Luke 23:13-18). Here is Jesus, crucified by his brethren, innocently dying. John 10:11, makes it all clear, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

So, in Abel we see the story of the antitype of Abel, the Lord Jesus. We see him dying at the jealous hands of his own brother, who then became a wanderer without a homeland, but supernaturally preserved from annihilation because God had his mark upon him as a demonstration of the power of forgiveness and grace in restoration. Not because we are good, not because Israel is good, not because Cain was good --but, because God is good.

When commenting on a peace accord between Israel and Jordan, former President Clinton mentioned that he had never forgotten the plea of his old minister that God asks us to "Pray for Israel." That does not mean we are to pray that Israel shall be able to conquer Lebanon, or Syria, or be successful in retaliations. It means, we are to pray that Israel will move from law to grace, from "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (which has never served it well), toward conciliation --toward Christ. While we have seen that the price of peace may be death, the price of war is always death. "And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn" (Zechariah 12:10). That hasn't happened yet. Do we want to be like the Middle East? No? Then, let's not adopt their ways. The entire Middle East is a picture of what things are like for people who reject Christ.

Cain was the wanderer among the people, Israel was the wanderer among the nations, we are all wanderers. Jesus said, "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). Jesus is pictured as the shepherd who "searches for the lost, wandering sheep, until he has found it" (Luke 15:3,4). That is what Jesus does for each of us --he finds us. To find ourselves, we must find him first.

Jacob is seen as the toiling shepherd. You remember that he became a servant to Uncle Laban in order to buy his bride. In Genesis 27:43, Jacob left his home to go into a "far country." While in that far country, Jacob fell in love with Rachel, and asked for her hand in marriage. "I'd like to marry your daughter." A contract was written up for Jacob to become a servant to Laban for seven years, then the two could marry (Genesis 29:20). Unfortunately, the contract did not specify which daughter, and at the end of seven years Laban presented Jacob with Leah, whom he did not love, so he worked for another seven years in order to marry Rachel. Now, don't get hung up on "buying brides." That is an entirely different sermon subject. Rachel and Leah had no choice. Leah wasn't even wanted; no one ever stops to think about how she felt. In the case of Christ, the bride actually does have a choice. It's not a "deal with Dad behind her back." In the case of Christ and the church, the Bride gets to speak for herself. She gets to say yes! It is her decision alone. May it be enough to say, we only want to preach the Bible, not the Middle East culture in which it takes place. We think much of that culture is wrong. We haven't been ordained to preach David, or Jacob, or Abraham; we have been ordained to preach Christ.

Our own Lord, also left his father's house, to go into a far country --a far world, our world. Here he became a servant. "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7).

The bride that Christ came to woo and rescue was the church. "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). It cost Christ much more than 14 years to redeem the church. "You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Joseph was the exalted shepherd. Joseph married a Gentile bride --an Egyptian. I like that! He was also hated by his brothers, sold for twenty (rather than thirty) pieces of silver, potentially put to death, and banished to a far country, Egypt (the same country where Joseph and Mary took Jesus to escape the decree of Herod to kill all the baby boys). He was eventually exalted to the throne of Egypt. Later, when there was a drought in Israel, his brothers were saved only because of Joseph's good will in opening the granaries of Egypt to them. Joseph became the savior shepherd, when he invited his brothers to a land of full granaries when there was a drought in their own land (Genesis 45:9-11). You don't go hungry with Jesus.

Because of who he was, he could do something about the trouble they were in. So, it is with Jesus the good shepherd. It is because the good shepherd is God that he is able to say, "I am the door; by me if anyone enter in, he shall be saved, and go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

Moses was the delivering shepherd. He too, married a Gentile bride, Zipporah. I like that! For forty years Moses tended the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro (Exodus 3:1). We like to say Moses went to school in Egypt for 40 years, tended sheep for 40 years, and led the people of God for 40 years. The first time Moses tried to free his brethren they rejected him, saying "Who made you to be judge over us" (Exodus 2:11-14). The second time he

was successful. Likewise, the first time Jesus came to free his brethren they rejected him, the second time they will listen, "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in your hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6). "And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back because I have compassion upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off; for I am the Lord their God, and will hear them" (Zec. 10:6).

The last shepherd is David, the royal shepherd. David married a Gentile bride, Abigail. I like that! I only point out all these Gentile wives to show how these shepherds are a picture of the great shepherd whose gentile bride is the Church. Yes, it is "God so loved the whole world." David was the king shepherd. He was anointed king (1 Samuel 16), rejected by his own, and forced to flee for his very life to the Philistines where he married Abigail. Saul, the reigning king tried to kill him --throwing a javelin and twice missing (1 Samuel 18:11). David returned after the death of King Saul, to be accepted and acclaimed by his own nation.

Many attempts were also made on the life of Jesus, beginning with the decree of King Herod to kill all the boy babies. When David was rejected, Saul ruled in David's rightful place. So, also, with Christ, another rules in his place --the Prince of the power of the air; the ruler of darkness; the god of this world. The sign above Jesus' head when he was crucified said, "King of the Jews." The sign when he comes the second time will read, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." We love to sing these words in Handel's Messiah! "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one" (Zechariah 14:9).

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever" (Isaiah 9:6,7). Yet, no one needs to wait, "King of my life I crown thee now, thine shall the glory be."

Jesus is far greater than all of these shepherds who make only a partial picture of the "good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep." His sheep "follow Him". --So, follow. Want to be safe? Then follow Jesus. So, we "searched the Scriptures" (John 5:39) --what did we find? Jesus! We found Jesus.

Yes, it is our beloved prayer:

Psalm 23

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff --they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole long life."