

JESUS NEVER WATCHED SHEEP, BUT HE IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A shepherd is the most honored secular profession of the entire Old Testament era. Sheep and shepherds are referred to in the Bible more than five hundred times. Along with tending gardens and farming, it is one of the world's oldest professions. Abel was a keeper of sheep, and he offered to God of the firstlings of the flock (Genesis 4:2). The Hebrew founding fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—were all shepherds. When Jacob's small family migrated into Egypt, they described their occupation: "*thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers*" (Genesis 47:3). David, Israel's favorite king, was first a shepherd of his father's sheep (I Samuel 16:11).

The most beloved chapter of the Bible is the Shepherd's Psalm, which compares the relationship between a man and his God to that of sheep and shepherd (Psalm 23). This figure is used often in the Old Testament (Psalm 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:12-14; Micah 5:4). God even pictured Himself as the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 100:3). Needless to say, no one could have been blamed for expecting the Messiah to come in the guise of a shepherd.

But Jesus' hand never held a shepherd's crook, so far as we know. He never counted and recounted sheep as they passed under his rod at sunset. He never crinkled His nose at the pungent sheep smell on a hot Jerusalem day, nor did he strain His eye to see if that was a wandering sheep far down the hillside. He never chased away a bear, nor took a lion by the beard, as David did when his little lambs were threatened (cf. I Samuel 17:34-35).

The Shepherd's Teaching

Still, Jesus knew about sheep, and often talked about them. He made these remarkable statements that are filled with sheepfold rhetoric:

- "*I am the door of the sheep*" (John 10:7).
- "*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture*" (10:9).
- "*I am the good Shepherd*" (10:11).
- "*The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep*" (10:11).
- "*I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine*" (10:14).
- "*As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep*" (10:15).
- "*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*" (10:16).
- "*When the Son of man shall come in his glory...before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left*" (Matthew 25:31-33).

The Shepherd's Actions

The New Testament pictures Christ as the Shepherd over His flock, the church (Matthew 25:32; 26:31; John 10:1-18; Acts 20:28; I Peter 2:25). Jesus is identified as "*the good Shepherd*" (John 1:11), "*the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*" (I Peter 2:25), "*the chief Shepherd*" (I Peter 5:4), and the "*great shepherd of the sheep*" (Hebrews 13:20). Looking at the context of these a bit closer reveals:

- The "*Good Shepherd*" died for His sheep (John 10:11,15). David risked his life for his father's sheep (I Samuel 17:34), but Jesus did more. He sacrificed His life so that the flock might go to heaven (John 10:15).
- The "*one Shepherd*" unified His sheep (John 10:16). Jews and Gentiles, all races and nationalities, economic, and educational levels are all found in the same flock.
- The "*great Shepherd*" saves and protects the sheep (John 10:9,12; James 1:21; I Peter 1:8-9). He promised to never leave (give us up, let us go, relax His hold on us) or forsake—leave us in the lurch—us (Hebrews 13:5; cf. II Timothy 4:10).
- A physician can save your life (cf. Job 2:4). A lawyer can save your fortune. A fi-

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL

Text: _____

- I. Not Given in _____, but Given in _____
 - A. The _____ of the Giver
 - B. The _____ of the Given
 - C. The _____ of the Gracious
- II. Not Given _____, but Given _____
 - A. _____ was _____
 - B. _____ was _____
- III. Not Given _____, but Given _____
 - A. _____ for _____
 - B. _____ for _____

EXALTING THE EVERLASTING

Text: _____

- I. Who is _____?
 - A. The _____
 - B. The _____
 - C. The _____
- II. What is _____?
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
- III. Anti-_____

Verse: _____
- IV. The Coming _____

Verse: _____
- V. What _____

Verse: _____
- VI. _____ Part in _____
 - A. _____
 - B. _____
- VII. _____ Part in _____
 - A. _____
 - B. _____

nancial advisor can save your business (cf. Matthew 4:8-9; Luke 12:20). A coach can save the game. An image consultant can save your reputation. But only Jesus can save your soul (Matthew 16:26; cf. Job 27:8; Psalm 49:8).

- The *Shepherd and Bishop* (I Peter 2:25) guides His sheep (Hebrews 13:20-21). He leads in the right way (John 10:4). Cattle are driven, but sheep are lead. Jesus does not drive us to heaven, or even simply point the direction to us; He goes before us, showing us the way, step by step (I Peter 2:21-22).
- The “*chief Shepherd*” will reward His sheep (I Peter 5:4). He cares for His sheep individually (John 10:3). Jesus knows your name, and even the hairs upon your head (Matthew 10:29-30).

The Shepherd’s Sheep

“...*We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture...*” (Psalm 100:3). “*For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand...*” (Psalm 95:7). It is no accident that God compared man to sheep, because the behavior of sheep and humans is similar in many ways.

- Sheep require, more than any other livestock, endless attention. Christ must show endless care for us (Matthew 28:20; John 10:16,29; II Timothy 4:16-17; Hebrews 13:5-6).
- Both have poor sense of direction and get lost easily (Isaiah 53:6; I Peter 2:25). The Shepherd feeds and lead us.
- Both are nearsighted (II Peter 1:9).
- Both must have another to supply their needs (Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:3; John 14:6; 15:7).
- Both need protection from danger (Hebrews 13:5-6; John 10:11-18; I Corinthians 10:13; James 1:13-15). Sheep have no defensive teeth or claws, cannot quickly flee, or have other means of protection (like a skunk’s smell or snake’s poison).
- Both are easily frightened (Matthew 1:20; 10:28; 28:5). There is a reason the phrase “fear not” is found 63 times in the Bible.
- Both can be stubborn (Hebrews 3:8,15; 4:7).
- Both are “marked.” Shepherds cut marks into their sheep’s ear which allow them to be identified at a distance (similar to branding a cow). This signified ownership. In the Old Testament, if a slave chose to be a lifetime member of a Jewish family, his ear was pierced with an awl against a doorpost (Exodus 21:6). We have “sold” ourselves to the Lord and bear His mark on our souls (II Corinthians 4:10; Galatians 6:17).

We can agree with the boy who misquoted, but understood—Psalm 23:1: “*The Lord is my shepherd, he is all I want.*”

-Allen Webster

THE SONG BOOK

This book, simply titled in most Bibles as “The Book of Psalm,” is, without question or doubt, the longest book in the Bible. Its 150 chapters, 2,401 verses, and 43,743 words are unmatched in Divine writ. But with that prominence is the fact that it is possibly the most often quoted book of the Old Testament. Its pages are immersed in praise and adoration to the Most High, as well as with timeless wisdom beneficial for all of man. However, the Book of Psalms is one arranged in stark difference to any other book. It is quite commonly known that not all of the Biblical books are arranged chronologically correct in its modern form, but it is widely assumed that the material comprising each individual book is. This though is not the case with a few books, one of which is the Book of Psalms. Rather than having been written in a single period of time by one individual, this book was written by many men over a span of hundreds of years. And wherein it is impossible to determine some authors it then is difficult to arrange the psalms chronologically.

This lack of order, though, does not diminish its authenticity or inspiration in the least. It still is a divine book from God in which wisdom and glory is revealed, thus it should be revered as a book of the Book. Among many others, it was Jesus Christ who quoted from the psalms numerous times therefore giving credence to their authenticity.

While David is credited with a good majority of the psalms (over half) others believed to have written one or more are Asaph, the sons of Korah, Moses, Solomon, Ethen, and Heman. Additionally there are almost fifty that cannot be confidently ascribed to anyone (Taylor). Likewise, just as numerous and scattered as their authors are the specific settings and themes of the psalms. In general the book is a collection of praises extended unto God, but each has its own reason and purpose. It is from these different purposes that man enjoys such a benefit as seeing the qualities of God’s nature set forth. Dunn summed up the psalm’s inspired qualities attributed to God as:

“The Lord is our judge and defence (7:8-10); the refuge of the poor (14:6); rock, fortress, strength, and high tower (18:2); redeemer (19:14); the King of Glory (24:10); “my light and my salvation” (27:1); shield (28:7); “my hiding place” (32:7); “a God full of compassion” (86:15); and “our dwelling place in all generations” (90:1).”

These words, though, do not simply relate who God used to be to the people of antiquity; but they tell us who He is and continues to be toward all mankind. That is the treasure of the psalms as set forth by its theme.

Though, as stated, the Book of Psalms is not necessarily arranged chronologically, it does have structure and order. The book of 150 chapters is commonly divided into five sections (books), each corresponding internally. Dunn, again, in his Know Your Bible gave an excellent portrayal of these sections as follows:

- Book I (Psalms 1-41) – Corresponds with Genesis. With the exception of four, all were written by David. Subject: Man, his state of blessedness, fall, and recovery (8:4; 10:18).
- Book II (Psalms 42:72) – Corresponds with Exodus. Includes eighteen written by David. Subject: The nation of Israel, her ruin (42-49); description of the reign of the righteous king in Psalm 72.
- Book III (Psalms 73-89) – Corresponds with Leviticus. It centers in time of Hezekiah. Subject: The sanctuary, referred to in nearly every psalm of this book.
- Book IV – Corresponds with Numbers. Contains two psalms of David (101-103) and other psalms in the time of exile. Subject: The earth, Psalm 90 was written by Moses during the wilderness wanderings.
- Book V – Corresponds with Deuteronomy. Contains fifteen of David’s psalms. This section may have been compiled in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra. Subject: The word of God (107:20). This is the theme of Psalm 119, the greatest Psalm.

With this general understanding of the Book of Psalms, attention is now turned to the grandest theme that appears in the psalms: Christ. The Lord is mentioned more in the psalms than any other Old Testament book, and He is referred to in many different ways. Wilkinson and Boa list many of His portrayals as such: rejected as King by the nations, King of Glory, Protector and Deliverer, ruler in His kingdom, provider of salvation, King-Priest, glorified by God, enthroned, Intercessor, betrayed by a close friend, obedient unto death, made little lower than angels, resurrected, the Creator, the Chief Cornerstone, and eternal. All which He was, He still is.

The Book of Psalms shall forever be a wonder to all who will study it. Its appreciation for God is revealed on every page is the same as all mankind should have. Just as the heavens, so do these psalms declare the glory of God.