

# The Shepherd and His Sheep

Modern sheep herding, especially in Europe and America, is very different from the way sheep were managed in bible times. While the trained sheep dog is a fixture on ranches in our world, it was not the case in the time of our Lord.

We must look to the word of God to understand the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep in order to understand our relationship to the Good Shepherd as the sheep of his flock.

When sheep were not in the pasture with the shepherd they were kept in a common pen with sheep from other flocks. They were watched over by a hired person. When the shepherd came to the pen he was allowed in by the doorkeeper.

The shepherd carried a staff or shepherd's crook which was long and had a hooked end that could be used for pulling individual sheep out of a group or to discipline a sheep that constantly went astray. They also carried a rod or some kind of defensive weapon to use as personal protection and to prevent predators from attacking the flock. In some cases they carried a sling like the one used by David in his encounter with Goliath. The shepherd used the sling to cast rocks in front of straying sheep to guide them back to the flock and to cast stones at predators.

Consider the first 4 verses of the 23rd psalm, Psalm 95:7-9, and the words of Christ from John 10. These passages show us how to understand this relationship.

Psalm 23:1-4: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Psalm 95:7-9: "For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work."

John 10 (selected verses): "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers... I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pastures... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep... But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

The shepherd knows his sheep, calls his sheep out of a common pen to his own place where he cares for them, protects them and provides them with pasture and water.

The sheep hear the shepherd's voice and come to him. They follow him as he leads them by his word to pasture and water. The sheep submit to the care and correction of the shepherd. They pass under his staff and he corrects their flaws and wounds. The sheep are not scattered by predators because they have the shepherd who will lay down his life to protect them.

Our role as the sheep of his flock is to come out of the world according to his word. We must follow him through his word as he feeds us and provides us with living water. He provides us with correction and even discipline through the provisions he has made for us. We must submit to that in order to be safe and free from defects that would work us harm. He has warned us about all the things in this world that would lead us astray. We must heed his warnings to remain safe. He has laid down his life to save us from our worst enemy, our own sin.

Blessed be the Good Shepherd.

Glenn Bollman