

## THE SHEPHERD

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March 22, 2006  
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Psalm 23:1 – *“The LORD is my Shepherd ...”*

Acts 20:28 – *“Take heed ... to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God ...”*

Ephesians 4:11 - The only use of the word “pastor” in the King James Version New Testament - *“pastors and teachers,”* one of the four classes of ministry, after apostles, prophets, and evangelists. This is one category, for a pastor must be *“apt (able) to teach.”*

The word is ποιμην – #4166 – poimen → poy-mane’), which means “shepherd,” a noun!

This word is used 4 times meaning a literal shepherd (Luke 2:8,15,18&20), 12 times referring to Jesus (Mt. 26:31, Mk. 14:27, John 10:2,11,12,14&16, Eph 4:11, Heb. 13:20, and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:25 & 5:4) and 3 three times in spiritual parables (Mt. 9:36&25:32 and Mk. 6:34)

Only once, translated “pastors,” is it used of Jesus’ called ministers of God’s word.

But, the verb form of this noun - ποιμαίνω – #4165 – poimaino → poy-ma’-ee-no) is also used 11 times. It is never rendered “pastor” as a verb the way we use it. 7 times it is translated “feed” (Lk. 17:7, Jn. 21:16, Acts 20:28, 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 9:7, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:2, Jude 1:12, & Rev. 7:17.) How does a shepherd feed his sheep? **His is a great task of herding them safely into lush pastures where they can graze,** not by pouring their food into a trough, or “spoon-feeding,” etc. This thought applies in most cases of the use of this verb, so that “feed” in many cases may not be complete enough to convey what was meant. This is especially true where the word applies to providing spiritual nourishment to people and the duty thereof. Four times it is rendered “rule,” when it absolutely cannot mean “feed.” (Mt. 2:6 & Rev. 2:27,12:5, &19:15) In every case except Jude 1:12, a verb meaning “herding” or “shepherding” could be, and in some cases ought to be, substituted for either rule or feed.

This verb is used this way in the following verses and applied to God-called preachers

1st Peter 5:2- Peter classes himself with the elders (πρεσβυτερος – #4245 – presbuteros → pres-boo’-ter-os) and in addressing the other elders of the churches, he commands them to “feed (shepherd or pastor) the flock of God ... taking the oversight (ἐπισκοπέω – #1983 - episcopeo → ep-ee-skop-eh’-o) thereof...”

Here he changes in mid-sentence from sheep to people, *from shepherd to overseer*, indicating that they must be the same function, the first for sheep, and the second for people who are much like sheep. At the conclusion of this exhortation he assured them, *“when the Chief Shepherd (ἀρχιποιμην – #750 - archipoimen) shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory ...”* Thus he identifies the elders’ duty as that of *shepherds* and *overseers* of God’s churches, with Jesus as their chief Shepherd. This verse is thought to be the source of the word “under-shepherd,” commonly used, not incorrectly, but not found in the Bible. Paul, in Hebrews 13:20, similarly refers to Jesus as *“that great Shepherd of the sheep.”*

It seems almost self-contradictory that some of God’s sheep have been called to be shepherds. To be a sheep and a shepherd simultaneously is one of the several paradoxes of Christian life. For such helpless docile irresponsible nature to be employed as a careful overseer is indeed an amazing feat of Divine grace. We see a good example of this in David in the Old Testament.

Acts 20:28 - Paul, addressing the Ephesian “elders” said, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers (ἐπισκοπος – #1985 - episcopos = bishops = pastors), to feed (poimaino = “shepherd” as a verb = pastor as a verb) the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* Unlike Peter, Paul substitutes “church” (ecclesia) instead of “flock,” which conveys the true meaning.

Episcopos = overseer is the word which was translated “Bishop” five times in the New Testament (Philippians 1:1, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy footnote, Titus 1:7, and Titus footnote) Php. 1:1 identifies “bishops and deacons” as church officers, 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:1 and Titus 1:7 address bishop qualifications, and the footnotes identify Timothy and Titus as the first bishops in the Ephesian and Cretian churches. Thus a “bishop” is a church pastor, a *shepherd* and an *overseer* being the same, as applied to the Lord’s local ecclesia.

John 21:16 – After his resurrection, three times Jesus questioned Peter's love for him, and after each answer gave him a command regarding His "sheep." The first time (21:15) He said, "Feed (βοσκω - #1006 – bosko → bos'-ko) my lambs." The second time (21:16) He said, "Feed (poimaino - #4165 = "shepherd") my sheep." The third time He said, "Feed (bosko) my sheep."

(Under # 1006 Thayer compared synonyms poimaino and bosko. He wrote, "*ποιμαινω is the wider, βοσκω the narrower term; the former includes oversight, the latter denotes nourishment; ποιμαινω may be rendered tend, βοσκο. specifically feed.*")

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 9:7 - during Paul's strongest exhortation for churches to support pastors financially, he asked, "who feedeth (pastors = shepherds - poimaino) a flock (ποιμνη - #4167 - poimne → poym'-nay), and eateth not of the milk of the flock?"

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word pronounced raw-aw' - #07462 in Strong's Concordance – is used 173 times, translated "feed" 75 times, "shepherd" 63 times, "pastor" 8 times, "herdmen" 7 times, and various 20 other times. From this we can see that the words "pastor" or "shepherd" as found in the Old Testament when applied to people conveys essentially the same type of burden as its New Testament counterpart "poimen."

Gen. 48:15 – Jacob said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which \*fed (shepherded) me all my life long unto this day,"

Gen. 49:24 - Jacob of Joseph "... the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the \*Shepherd the stone of Israel)

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 5:2 - The tribes of Israel to David - : "The LORD said to thee, Thou shalt \*feed (shepherd) my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel."

Psalms 23:1 – David said, "The LORD is my \*Shepherd; I shall not want (suffer need!). 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 .,."

(from sheep to man in verse 3?)

We see that David was called to be both sheep and shepherd.

Psalms 78:70-72 – "He chose David ... from the sheepfolds ... He brought him to \*feed (shepherd) Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he \*fed (shepherded) them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands."

Psalms 80:1 – Asaph prays to God, "Give ear, O \*Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadeth Joseph like a flock; Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth."

Ecclesiastes 12:11 – Solomon wrote, "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one \*Shepherd."

Isaiah 61:5 – Isaiah prophesies of Gentile pastors in the coming dispensation of grace, "strangers will stand and \*feed (shepherd or pastor) your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and vinedressers."

Jeremiah 3:15 – "And I will give you \*pastors according to mine heart, which shall \*feed you with knowledge and understanding." (\*pastors and feed are the same word)

Jeremiah 23:1 – "Woe be unto the \*pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, saith the LORD."

Jeremiah 23:2 – "Therefore, thus saith the LORD God against the \*pastors that \*feed (shepherd) my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them ..." (\*pastors and feed are the same word)

Jeremiah 23:4 – "And I (God) will set up shepherds over them which shall feed (shepherd) them ..." (\*shepherds and feed are the same word)

Jeremiah 31:10 – "He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a \*shepherd doth his flock"

Jeremiah 50:6 – "My people have been lost sheep: their \*shepherds have caused them to go astray ..."

Ezekiel 34:2 "... should not the \*shepherds \*feed the flocks?" (shepherds and feed are the same word)

Ezekiel 34:5 – “They were scattered, because there is no *\*shepherd*; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field ...”

Ezekiel 34:12-14 – God promised “so will I seek out my sheep and ... I will *\*feed them in a good pasture ...*”

Ezekiel 34:23 – “I will set up one *\*shepherd over them, and he shall \*feed them, even my servant David; he shall \*feed them, and he shall be their \*shepherd.*”

Ezekiel 37:24 – “David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one *\*shepherd....*”

God found David “a man after His own heart” (Acts 13:22 referencing 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 13:14) while he was yet a shepherd boy, sometime before he was anointed to replace king Saul. (Acts 16:13).

While defending his ability to face Goliath before Saul, David first told of his victories over a lion and a bear in defense of his father’s sheep. (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17:34-35) In his youth, alone with God and Jesse’s sheep, David became “a valiant man” of faith, while unknown to others.

There David also had become adept at praising God with music as he mastered the harp to accompany his psalms. At the time of his decease he would be described as the “sweet psalmist of Israel.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 23:1)

No wonder King Jesus was prophesied by Ezekiel (34:23 and 37:24) using the name of “*his father David!*”

No wonder the new covenant was described in prophecy as “*the sure mercies of David*” (Isaiah 55:3 and Acts 13:34)

The same man who killed Goliath, before whom all the armies of Israel trembled, lamented at Abner’s treacherous assassination, “*these sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me.*” (Joab and Abishai, his nephews) (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 3:39)

During the several years after David was anointed king in Saul’s place, while Saul was continually trying to kill him, this valiant warrior had opportunity twice to kill Saul, but wisely and mercifully stated, “*the LORD forbid that I should stretch forth my hand against the LORD’S anointed.*” (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 24:6 & 26:11)

David’s 40 years as a shepherd of God’s people are a good example, but they were greatly surpassed by Jesus, Peter’s “*chief Shepherd*” and Paul’s “*great Shepherd of the sheep.*” David’s life was flawed by sin and weakness, very deeply at one point. Jesus lived his whole life without sinning. David was both sheep and shepherd. Jesus was “*brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.*” (Isaiah 53:7) He was not a sheep, though he behaved as one, and offered himself as one. He was and is the infallible and all-powerful Shepherd!

Some of us sheep are called (and gifted) by God’s Holy Spirit to be made shepherds after Jesus’ example to oversee his flocks.

Others have their primary burden toward the “lost sheep” as defined below. In this God called evangelists share the burden of the “great shepherd.” God has said, “*All souls are mine*” (Ezekiel 18:4) though they be estranged from Him, and is “*not willing that any should perish.*” (2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9) Jesus lamented over the Jews who rejected Him, saying, “*How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate: ...*” (Luke 13:34-35) We who are saved “*were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.*” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:25) With Jesus we should long for the return of others, and lament their loss when they have not come.

Matthew 9:36 “*When he saw the multitudes he was moved with compassion upon them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*” (repeated in Mark 6:34)

Luke 15:4-7 “*What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*”

The pastor's burden shared with the chief shepherd is more than this, as we find in John 10:11-18 "*the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep ... I lay down my life for the sheep ...*"

There is little to compare with a burden that would cause a man to follow the example of his Savior in giving his life for the welfare of the sheep of God. Some men have given their lives in death for exactly this, but many more have given up their lives in service to serve God by shepherding His sheep. These are the pastors who are worthy of the title.

We can imagine forfeiting our lives and all else we possess for the lives of our precious little children, but to love people that much with whom we have no carnal ties is the result of a **supernaturally imparted gift**.

God's people are not sheep, but in many ways they resemble them. Their innermost nature has been remade into that which is much like sheep. Their outer nature retains the sinful nature of fallen man. Thus these sheep can easily revert to the behavior of wicked men.

Unregenerated human beings are not sheep, and in most cases they resemble wild and predatory animals more than docile and dependent sheep. God's grace is able to subdue them and change their innermost nature into that of one of His sheep. Thus is the shepherd's love often expressed for these "*lost sheep*" who have "*gone astray*" and have not "*returned to the Shepherd (poimen) and Bishop (episcopos = overseer) of (their) souls.*" (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:25) (John 3:16, Mt. 18:12 → "leave the 99", Lk 13:34 → "gather her brood", etc.)

A shepherd feeds a flock by "leading them into green pastures." He is obligated to show them the lush pastures in the word of truth so that they may forage within that range. He does them no favor by pampering them and teaching them thereby to be lazy. Special care must be reserved for the young, feeble and sick, not the able bodied.

Those who stray from this range he must use his staff and sometimes his rod to get back to the fold. The rod implies a degree of coercion when necessary. In the mouth of the pastor these are words of reproof and rebuke which are not always painless either to him or the stray sheep! Preaching only to those who gather behind four walls neglects this important, but sometimes very difficult, aspect of a shepherd's duty.

He must teach God's sheep to drink daily from the pure still waters of God's Holy Spirit. Without this water the lush pastures would do them little good. It seems easy for God's sheep to forget their way to these waters. Show them again, and again, and again ...

He also guards a flock by continual watching. He needs to detect clever wolves and other predators long before they reach the sheepfold. **He is a watchman.** When God called Jeremiah the prophet he told him, "*I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.*" Jeremiah was never placed in any position of worldly authority, as this verse might be misinterpreted. Rather, he was raised **above** them in the sense of a watchman who continually warned them, using words alone in his attempts to renovate the nations and kingdoms.

The chief shepherd has the power to destroy the predator, as David did the bear, the lion, and the Philistine giant. In this day of grace he does not generally choose to do so. Certainly the pastors He appoints have no such destroying force, but they must be ready to stand toe to toe with such threats when necessary. The pastor's main force is to warn the flock early and frequently, and to set the example of facing and resisting all evil threats with nothing but truth and faith in God's grace of deliverance.

A mature sheep of God will learn to look past the pastor to the chief shepherd. Rarely will he or she need special attention from the pastor. *It is the task of every good pastor to cultivate this ability.* The more mature sheep in the flock the more attention their pastor can give to young and weak Christians and to the multitudes of "lost sheep" who abound everywhere.

Recommended reading: [A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23](#) by Philip Keller