

Background on Shepherding

- Shepherding is one of the world's most ancient professions
 - We have historical / archeological evidence of shepherding as far back as 3000 BC
 - Biblical evidence to the beginning (Cain and Abel in Gen 4)
- Shepherding started around Asia Minor and then spread elsewhere
- Cultures around the world and throughout history have had shepherds
- Religions around the world include important references to shepherds – Judaism, Christianity, Islam... some eastern religions... even ancient Greek and Mesopotamian mythologies

Israel and Shepherds

- Adam and Eve's son Abel was a shepherd (Genesis 4)
- Abraham and Lot both shepherded flocks of sheep (Genesis 13)
- Isaac had flocks he tended (Genesis 26)
- Jacob was a shepherd (Genesis 27)
- Joseph and his brothers (Jacob's sons) were shepherds (Genesis 37)
- Jacob's descendents (the Israelites) were all shepherds, which is why they lived separately in Egypt, in Goshen (Genesis 46)
- Moses was a shepherd for 40 years in Midian, before leading the people out of Egypt (Exodus 3)
- King David was a shepherd before becoming king (1 Samuel 16-17)
- The prophet Amos was a shepherd (Amos 1:1)
- The kings of Israel were often referred to as "shepherds" (2 Samuel 5:2, Jeremiah 23:2)
- The birth of Jesus was first announced to and by shepherds (Luke 2)

The Life of a Shepherd

- The life of a shepherd was not easy or glamorous...
 - Exposed to extreme weather and the heat and cold (Genesis 31:40)
 - If the shepherd was far from his home, he slept in a light, temporary tent (Solomon 1:8, Jeremiah 35:7, Is 38:12)
 - Ate what food they found in nature: Egyptian fig, husks of the carob tree, locusts and wild honey, palm sap
 - Fought off wild animals: lions and bears (like King David with his sling), wolves, leopards (1 Samuel 17:34, Isaiah 31:4, Jeremiah 5:6)
 - Defended the sheep vs robbers and predators... and if a sheep was stolen or eaten, the shepherd could be expected to pay it back to the owner of the sheep, like when Jacob watched Laban's flock (Genesis 31:39)
 - Sometimes wealthier landowners built towers in the wilderness from which shepherds could guard their flocks, like King Uzziah did (2 Chronicles 26:10)
- Duties of a Shepherd
 - In the morning, he led his flock out of the sheepfold (usually a cave in the wilderness) (John 10:4)
 - He went in front of the flock and called to them to come, using a guttural noise that the sheep would recognize
 - He brought them to pasture areas with good green grass
 - He brought them to water, either to streams, springs, or troughs attached to wells (Genesis 29:7; 30:38; Exodus 2:16; Psalms 23:2)
 - Many times, this meant traveling for hours on foot
 - As they walked through the wilderness, he cared for the weak or young, even carrying them if needed (Isaiah 40:11, Genesis 33:13)

- After drinking, usually both shepherd and sheep would nap
- And then they'd wake up and move to a new pasture
- He watched them all day with the help of sheepdogs (Job 30:1)
- If a sheep strayed away, he searched for it until finding it (Ezekiel 34:12; Luke 15:4)
- If a sheep was sick or injured, he had to care for it (Ezekiel 34:4)
- In the evening, he brought the flock back to the sheepfold (cave) and counted them to see that none were missing, by making them pass under his shepherd's staff as they entered the enclosure (Leviticus 27:32; Ezekiel 20:37)
- Throughout the night, he watched the entrance of the sheepfold, going without sleep (John 10:3)
 - Genesis 31:40 – Jacob told Laban “sleep fled from my eyes”
- The main job of a shepherd was to make sure the sheep get food and water and don't die or wander off in the process
- Sheep are Incredibly Stupid and Helpless
 - Quote: Savvy Farm Life (website) – “Sheep are especially special and need a little help keeping out of trouble”
 - Other animals will find their own food and water, but not sheep
 - Other animals will find their way home by themselves, but not sheep
 - Other animals can defend themselves from predators, but not sheep
- Character of a Shepherd
 - A shepherd had to be attentive and watchful, day and night (Luke 2:8, Nahum 3:18)
 - A shepherd had to be tender and gentle toward the young and feeble (Isaiah 40:11, Genesis 33:13)
 - A shepherd had to be brave and courageous, willing to face down thieves and chase off wild animals (1 Samuel 17:34-35)
 - A shepherd had to be stubborn and persistent, willing to withstand the elements, stay awake, and find any lost sheep
 - A shepherd had to be loving, willing to lay his life down for the sheep, being with them, knowing them individually, defending them, and caring for them

Psalm 95:6-7 – 6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

The Lord is My Shepherd

- Psalm 23:1-6 – 1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 - Quote: Charles Spurgeon - “We have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread... but because the Lord is my shepherd.”
 - 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters
 - Sheep don't lay down very often.
 - If they're hungry, if they have bugs in their wool, if they're scared (which is usually), or if there's tension in the flock, they don't lay down...
 - A good shepherd can lead his flock in such a way that they feel peace, are satisfied, and want to lay down
 - 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
 - God knows how to refresh you and lead you after Him
 - Ezekiel 34:16 – I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak...
 - 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
 - Shepherds had 3 main tools: rod, staff, and sling
 - Sling: Like David's sling and stones

- Used to drive off enemies, startle a wandering sheep back into the fold
- Rod: Short, thick wooden club with a knob at the end
 - Used to knock out predators, beat off thieves, and also to discipline the sheep (if a sheep was constantly wandering, the shepherd would break its leg and carry it)
- Staff: Shepherd's crook, long walking stick with a hook at the end
 - Used to pull a wandering sheep back onto the trail, or pull a sheep up if it fell down a ditch
- "I will fear no evil" = It's unusual for sheep to not be afraid... unless the shepherd is there with them
 - 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- Isaiah 40:11 – 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.

He is the Good Shepherd

- Ezekiel 34:23 – I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.
- John 10:1-5 – 3 The gatekeeper 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 recognize a stranger's voice.
- John 10:11-15 – 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 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.

1 Peter 2:25 – For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

How Should We Respond to our Shepherd?

- Three thoughts and three quotes from the book *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* by W. Phillip Keller...
- 1) We Need to Surrender our Authority to Him
 - Quote: W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* – "The only One who really has a right to manage the fold of my life is not myself, but God."
- 2) We Need to Be Near to Him
 - Quote: W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* – "What Christ asks us to do as His followers is to concentrate on keeping close to Him....There is simply no substitute for this wondrous relationship with Him in a warped world."
- 3) We Need to Obey His Leading
 - Quote: W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd and His Sheep* – "It is presumption of the worst sort to claim His commitments to us, made so freely and in such generosity, while at the same time refusing to comply with His commands or wishes because of our own inherent selfish desires."