

FOR THE JEW SEARCHING FOR REALITY

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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He came back from his search totally heart broken. His 12 year old son had run away from home. He was the pastor of a large church in South Carolina. Sitting down upon his couch, depressed and angry, he cried out to God saying, ‘You don’t know how I feel! Your Son has never left you!’

A Voice came to him saying, ‘Yes I do. My Son Israel has run away from Me.’ And with that, a love for the Jewish people was planted deep within him and began to grow. Open your hearts my people, to the Living God.

In ancient Israel, as the winter night fell, all the sheep of a town were driven into the sheepfold. The sheepfold was square in shape and made of four stone walls with no roof. The walls were about nine feet high and four feet across. On top of the walls lay thorn bushes and branches all the way around to keep out the wild animals.

There was only one entrance in and out of the sheepfold where a gate or door was bolted from the inside at night. The guardian (or keeper) would sleep on the inside by the door. This way, both thieves and wild animals were stopped from stealing and killing the sheep. The sheep were protected and secure in the sheepfold during the cold darkness of the night.

When morning came, the shepherds would present themselves to the guardian, asking him to open the door that they might come in and call to their flock. The guardian would open the door and the shepherds would enter and call out to a few of their choice sheep by name. With thousands of sheep and many different flocks in the sheepfold, it was an amazing sight to see the different flocks begin to untangle themselves from one another and follow their own shepherd. By calling the names of a number of his sheep, all of a shepherd’s flock would hear his voice and follow him as he left the sheepfold to lead and guide his flock to lush pasture.

Once there, the sheep would graze under the watchful eye of the good shepherd. They were safe with him for he would fight off wild animals and robbers, placing his life in the balance. And if one of the sheep should stray, he would leave the flock in search of it, find it, and reunite it with the rest of the flock.

Shepherds were highly regarded in ancient times, for the sheep were both a means of clothing and food. The Hebrew word for shepherd comes from the verb which means ‘to graze, to feed, to pasture, to nourish, to tend.’ The noun shepherd means, ‘one who leads and guides, protects, provides and feeds.’ The honorific title of Shepherd King is a very ancient one used to describe both Sargon of Akkad and Hamurabi.<sup>1</sup> Kings and rulers were said to be legitimate if they fed and protected their people.

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<sup>1</sup> Sargon, 2300 BCE. Hamurabi, 1700 BCE.

## *The Shepherd of Israel*

The LORD God was seen as The Shepherd of Israel, the One who fed and protected His People. When Father Jacob was on his death bed, he called for the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob desired to bless them before he died and Scripture records:

‘And he blessed Joseph, saying, “The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, *The God who has been my Shepherd from my birth to this day*—The Angel (Messenger) who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.”’<sup>2</sup>

Our Father Jacob *knew* the LORD as the One who watched over him to protect him. God guided and provided for him in a very real and tangible way. The LORD is seen as ever watching over Israel: ‘*See, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!*’<sup>3</sup>

The attribute of tending for, feeding, guiding and protecting is seen in all the great prophets and kings of Israel. Moses, the great servant of God, got practical experience in being a shepherd. There is an old midrash about Moses.<sup>4</sup> One day he was tending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro and a lamb strayed. Moses left the flock and looked and looked for it. Finally he found it by a stream drinking water. Moses said, ‘I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary,’ whereupon he placed the lamb upon his shoulders and began to take it back to the flock. The Heavenly Voice said, ‘Because you had compassion in leading the flock of a man, you will certainly shepherd My Flock Israel.’

The point of the story being, that the heart of Moses would have to be one of compassion and tenderness toward the sheep, before God would allow him to lead another flock called Israel. Open your hearts my people, to the Living God.

King David was also a shepherd, tending the sheep of his father Jesse. Why was David the greatest King the world has ever seen? Because the LORD had shepherded **him**:

*‘The LORD is my Shepherd; I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me to water in places of repose; He renews my life; He guides me in right paths as befits His Name. Though I walk in a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me.’*<sup>5</sup>

When David approached King Saul to ask for permission to fight the giant Goliath, he spoke of his past ventures of *protecting* his sheep:

‘And David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth. And when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard and struck and killed it.

Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, see-

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<sup>2</sup> Gen. 48:15-16.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 121:4.

<sup>4</sup> *Exodus Rabba, Shemot II-2.*

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 23:1-4.

ing he has defied the Armies of the Living God.”<sup>6</sup>

David was a true shepherd. One who would not run in the face of danger to his sheep, whether they were real animals or the People of Israel. Not many would lay their own life on the line to fight a bear or a lion for sheep. And who in all of Israel was willing to place his life on the line to fight Goliath? David was very special. We know that he had a heart after or like God’s.<sup>7</sup> And because of that, the Lord raised him up to be the great King of Israel. David would be a picture of King Messiah’s heart for His People:

‘He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds. From following the ewes that had young, He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His People, and Israel His Inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.’<sup>8</sup>

These men serve as *pictures* of what the Messiah of Israel would be like. The Lord God speaks of a time when His servant David will be a shepherd for all of Israel (the phrase, ‘His servant David’ after David has been dead is a ‘concealed’ way of indicating the Messiah):

‘My servant David shall be king over them; there shall be one shepherd for all of them. They shall follow My rules and faithfully obey My laws.’<sup>9</sup>

## ***Wicked Shepherds***

There were times in the history of Israel when our leaders were not true shepherds. The LORD hurls His Wrath upon them through the Prophet Ezekiel when He states:

‘Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them,

“Shepherds!, the Lord GOD says this: Trouble for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shepherds ought to feed their flock, yet you have fed on milk, you have dressed yourselves in wool, you have sacrificed the fattest sheep, *but failed to feed the flock.*

*You have failed to make weak sheep strong, or to care for the sick ones or bandage the wounded ones. You have failed to bring back strays or look for the lost. On the contrary, you have ruled them cruelly and violently.’<sup>10</sup>*

*‘I mean to raise up one shepherd; My servant David, and to put him in charge of them and he will pasture them; he will pasture them and be their shepherd. I, the LORD, will be their God and My servant David shall be their ruler. I, the LORD, have spoken.’*

*‘...no more will they have to bear the insults of other nations. And men will learn that I, their God, am with them and that they, the House of Israel, are My People - it is the LORD God who speaks. And you, My sheep, are the flock I shall pasture, and I am your God, it is the LORD God who speaks.’<sup>11</sup>*

Wicked shepherds care not for the flock, but only for themselves. Even at the expense of the flock. They

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<sup>6</sup> 1st Sam. 17:34-36.

<sup>7</sup> 1st Sam. 13:14; 16:7.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 78:70-72.

<sup>9</sup> Ezekiel 37:24.

<sup>10</sup> Ezk. 34:2-4.

<sup>11</sup> Ezk. 34:23-24, 29-31.

aren't concerned about their life or their safety. When they would see danger, they would run and not defend the sheep.

## ***King Messiah: The Shepherd of Israel***

Open your hearts my people, to the Living God. Enter into what *He* has for you today. Much controversy has surrounded Yeshua the Nazarene. The Jewish book of Yohanan (John) records Yeshua as saying that He is the Door of the Sheepfold, the Good Shepherd, and the One who would give the sheep Eternal Life. Open your hearts my people to your Messiah Yeshua.

'I am the Door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have Life, and that they may have it more abundantly.'<sup>12</sup>

Yeshua is saying that He is the Way into God's Sheepfold. The *only* Way. Belief in Him is belief in the God of Israel. Our Rabbis declare that the Children of Israel believed in God, *as* they believed in Moses. 'Anyone who believes in the faithful shepherd (Moses) is as if he believed in God.'<sup>13</sup> This only makes sense, for if Moses was God's shepherd for Israel, then belief in Moses was affirming God's shepherd.

Anyone who believes in Yeshua as King Messiah, believes in the God of Israel who sent Him. Anyone who does not believe in Yeshua, despises what the God of Israel has done, in sending the Shepherd like David.

Moses was indeed faithful in God's House, but Yeshua is the Builder of the House.<sup>14</sup> If you trust in Moses, trust in Yeshua, for Yeshua is like Moses.<sup>15</sup> Yeshua speaks of giving the sheep Life. He is talking about laying His own life down, that *He* might receive our just punishment; death. But this Shepherd chose not to run when faced with danger.

'I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His Life for the sheep.'<sup>16</sup>

Yeshua died that you might have Eternal Life. His love for you is so tender and sweet. He is the One that Moses knew, and so carried the lamb across his shoulders. He desires to take you to the Flock of God. Open your heart...

His death for you was spoken of by the Prophets.<sup>17</sup> And yet Yeshua said,

'No one takes it (my Life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment I have received from My Father.'

Yeshua has Eternal Life for you, for Yeshua **is** Eternal Life. In speaking to His Father, Yeshua said;

'This is Eternal Life, that they may know You, the Only True God, and Yeshua the Messiah, whom You have sent.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John 10:9-10.

<sup>13</sup> *Mekilta: Beshalah*, section 6, pp. 114-115. H.S. Horovitz, ed. Berlin, 1931. Ref: Ex. 14:31.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 3:1-4:16.

<sup>15</sup> John 5:39-47.

<sup>16</sup> John 10:11.

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22, Zech. 12:9f.

Yeshua wants you to know that He is the Good Shepherd who not only has taken your punishment upon Himself, but knows you by name. Yeshua is tenderly calling you, for He desires for you to follow Him to green pastures. Places in God, where you will be nourished.

‘My sheep hear My Voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I shall give them Eternal Life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My Hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s Hand. I and My Father are One.’<sup>19</sup>

The Great Shepherd of the Flock of God is calling you, calling you out from among the other sheep that are not His. Yeshua reflects the Heart of Papa-God for you. Yeshua wants to reveal Papa-God’s love to you, just the way King David spoke of our God in the 23rd Psalm.

‘The Lord is **my** Shepherd, I lack no good thing. He makes me to lie down in green pastures...He restores my soul.’

Many of our People believe that Yeshua was a good man, a righteous man. Some even go so far as to say that he was a prophet. But what man ever declared equality with God? (I and My Father are One). And what man ever spoke of giving his followers Eternal Life? Either Yeshua is the Good Shepherd, spoken of by Jacob, Moses, David, Ezekiel and many others, or He is *meshuga!*<sup>20</sup>

Even in Yeshua’s day, there were those who said that He was demon possessed:

‘There was a division again among the Judeans because of these sayings. And many of them said, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”’<sup>21</sup>

In response to Yeshua being demon possessed, a Jew in the crowd spoke of Yeshua opening the eyes of the blind which He had done in the previous chapter.<sup>22</sup> Opening the eyes of one born blind was no small matter. And legend had it that *only the Messiah* could open the eyes of one born blind.

These works or miracles that Yeshua performed were designed by God to get the attention of the people and display His compassion. That they might make a decision about who Yeshua was. In referring to these works, Yeshua tells two Jews to tell Yohanan the Immerser, what God was doing through Him:

‘And when Yohanan had heard in prison about the works of Messiah, he sent two of his students and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”’

Yeshua answered and said to them, “Go and tell Yohanan the things which you hear and see: “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Great News (about the Kingdom of Heaven) preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”’<sup>23</sup>

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of six signs that the Messiah will perform when He comes. He will give sight to the blind (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5), make the lame to walk (Is. 35:6; 61:1), cleanse lepers (Is. 61:1), open the

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<sup>18</sup> John 17:3.

<sup>19</sup> John 10:27-30.

<sup>20</sup> *Meshuga* means crazy, insane or not quite all there.

<sup>21</sup> John 10:19-21.

<sup>22</sup> John 9:1-41.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 11:2-6.

ears of the deaf (Is. 29:18; 35:5), raise the dead (implied in Isaiah 11:1-2), and bring Great News to the afflicted or poor (Is. 61:1-2).<sup>24</sup> Since Yeshua did all these many, many times over, the answer was clear: Yohanan the Immerser need look no further; the Messiah was Yeshua.

Open your hearts my people, to our Messiah Yeshua. He desires with a deep longing to show you the Way of Life. He wants to be your Shepherd, in this life and the next. He has taken your punishment upon Himself. When you stand before God, His Blood will cause the wrath of God to leap over you. Contact me and I'll lead you to the Shepherd King of Israel. I love you my people.

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<sup>24</sup> David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (P.O. Box 1313, Clarksville, MD 21029: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), p. 42.