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SHEPHERD, SHEEP, AND GOATS; A STUDY
IN OLD TESTAMENT CONCEPTS AND IMAGERY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. PASTORAL IMAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. . .	1
II. THE NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF FLOCKS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	7
III. THE COMBINED FLOCK AS AN IMAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE.	30
IV. THE NEW FLOCK AS AN IMAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE.	50
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63

CHAPTER I

PASTORAL IMAGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Old Testament literature is by nature an extremely detailed and complex body of material. This is due, in part, to the multiplicity of authorship, to the variations in style and subject matter, and also to the tremendous lapse of time which occurred between the writing of the first and last manuscripts. For these reasons alone it is always intriguing when one finds a certain concept or theme which can be traced through all or most of the canonical books. It is both fascinating and thought provoking because there, in the repeated use of a word, phrase, or idea, or perhaps in the practical application of a common, everyday institution or event one gets a glimpse at a facet of Israelite life and custom which is genuine and unique. At the same time, one is also given a new vantage point from which to view the God of Israel as He dwells in covenant relationship with His people. Such is the case with the concept of the flock in Old Testament literature, along with all of its attendant words, phrases, and images, both explicit and implied.

One could not engage in so much as a cursory reading of the Old Testament without becoming acutely aware of the importance which the flock had for Israel in view of its history and destiny, or in terms of its economy and national

religion. By the same token one could not help but see the vital role which the flock played as the basis and background for an entire set of images and concepts which were used to express the essence and import of the Covenant. There are, in fact, no less than sixty shepherd-flock references in the Old Testament which portray this relationship between Yahweh and Israel.¹

Consequently, it is of the utmost importance for understanding the nature and terms of the Covenant between God and Israel that any student of Biblical literature be completely familiar with the historical phenomena and the everyday type occurrences that lie behind the concepts and images used to express Israel's covenant theology. However, it would be virtually impossible to explore fully the background of even a handful of Biblical concepts in one research paper. Therefore, I have limited the scope of this paper to include only those concepts which deal with or are derived from the traditional shepherd's flock.

The total concept of the shepherd's flock includes two species of animals commonly known as sheep and goats. In this connection it also includes male and female animals, as well as the various diminutives which are applied to the smaller and younger animals; that is, to the lambs and kids. In addition to this it will also prove helpful to examine

¹Carl Graesser, Jr., The Shepherd-Flock Image In The Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, non-published STM Thesis, 1956), p. 1.

the role of the shepherd, the various types of terrain in which he might have pastured his flock, and the nature of the equipment that he would have used to lead his flock.

It has been my experience in dealing with secondary sources that most of them tend to operate with a dual set of criterion overagainst the Old Testament flocks. On the one hand, most secondary sources will freely divulge the fact that the actual flocks which grazed in Palestine during the Old Testament period were usually composed of both sheep and goats. There would, of course, be some exceptions to this, but this information agrees precisely with the Old Testament accounts. On the other hand, most secondary sources, when speaking of the flock as an image applied to the nation of Israel, generally maintain or imply that the flock is composed solely of sheep, without any goats being present.

Whether or not this position is taken advertently or inadvertently by the authors of the various secondary sources is of little importance to the overall thrust of the paper at this point. What I am asserting in this research paper is that, on the basis of the Hebrew words used, and on the basis of the applied concept of the flock in the Old Testament, Scripture maintains the exact opposite point of view; that is, that when the flock imagery is applied to the nation of Israel, then the concept of a combined flock of sheep and goats is still in force, unless it specifically states otherwise.

Throughout the body of this research paper I will be writing with a view toward the combined flock image. I am not assuming, however, that the Old Testament nowhere speaks of Israel as a flock in a separate sense. My initial assumption in that regard is that when Israel is referred to simply as a sheep or goat, or when the words or context somehow indicate that a separate flock is being thought of, then I assume that there is a specific reason for the reference to be made in that highly unusual way. Otherwise, I assume the combined status of the flock.

Of course, there are some instances where Israel is referred to only as a sheep, while in other places the nation is referred to only as a goat. There are also places where the flock can be viewed as a separate one, while in other places the meaning is not quite clear. These passages are openly acknowledged, and I will take them into consideration at a later point in great detail.

In the event that it is not quite clear, I will define what I mean by separate and combined flocks. A separate flock is one which is composed solely of sheep or goats. The two types of animals are not mixed. In a combined flock, however, both sheep and goats are present.

Another point which I will attempt to clarify has to do with the fact that many Bible commentators and authors of secondary sources think of goats in a negative or denigrated sense; that is, that the goat is a symbol for something evil or wicked. On the basis of my research I will

demonstrate how this could be the case in only a very few passages, and how the vast majority of the Old Testament references place the goat in an exceptionally good light, and on an equal par with sheep. In addition, I will show that in every instance where Israel is referred to as a goat only the positive or good sense is intended.

The problem which this paper is concerned with, therefore, has to do with the meaning of flock imagery when it is applied to the nation of Israel, especially when Israel is compared to a goat or to a mixed flock of sheep and goats. Consequently, it is my purpose: (a) to examine the nature and composition of the flocks in the Old Testament; (b) to place a new emphasis on the nature, value, and necessity of goats as members of a flock; (c) to demonstrate the fact and significance of the combined flock, especially when it becomes a phrase which refers to the people of God; (d) to establish the significance of Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel; (e) to point out the destiny of Israel in terms of the scattered and gathered flock of God; and (f) to show how the promised Messiah is portrayed as the Shepherd of God's flock.

In accomplishing my stated purpose I have organized the body of this research paper along the lines stated in the above paragraph. There may, however, be occasion on which I will digress briefly in order to establish an idea which is necessary for the understanding of the total thrust of the argument, or to further clarify a point at issue.

In documenting the evidence to support the facts presented in this paper, the Biblical quotations are all based on the English text of the Revised Standard Version Of The Bible. Whenever a reference is made to a Hebrew word, or to the Hebrew Massoretic Text, it is taken from the third edition of Rudolf Kittel's Biblia Hebraica. The research for this paper was done on the basis of both the English and the Hebrew texts, and it will occasionally be advantageous to compare the two texts for similarities and differences.

In accordance with the first point in the series of stated purposes, I will begin with an examination of the nature and composition of flocks as presented in Old Testament literature. The ultimate conclusion which I plan to arrive at is that goats were a vital part of the Old Testament flocks, and that when flock imagery is applied to the nation of Israel, to Israel's God, or to the Messiah, then the concept still contains an underlying reference to goats as well as to sheep.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF FLOCKS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The importance of establishing the shepherd's flock, as it appears throughout Old Testament literature, as being most frequently thought of in terms of a combined flock has already been asserted in the previous Chapter. It is now necessary to view that assertion on the basis of Biblical and secondary evidence, and to remove any doubt as to its validity. There are quite a number of references in the Old Testament which refer to the flock in precisely this way, and they shall be examined in turn.

The first of the flock references which is important to this study is found in Genesis 27:9,16. These verses are lodged within the larger context of the narrative of Jacob's attempt to gain his father Isaac's blessing. Here, mention is made of taking "a kid of the goats" (גְּדֵי עִזִּים) from the flock (הַצֹּאֵן). What is significant is that the word צֹאֵן is used. If the reference was simply to a flock of goats, then the phrase "kid of the goats" would have been sufficient enough to describe it. Furthermore, the word used for flock is the same word that is elsewhere used for sheep, and this forms the natural connecting link between sheep and goats.

There is an even more pronounced reference to sheep and goats being in the same flock in Genesis 30:32,35. In this

instance Jacob is bargaining with Laban for his wages, and it is agreed that Jacob may remove the spotted and speckled sheep and goats and the black lambs from Laban's flock (singular).

A continuation of this narrative occurs in Genesis 31: 12,38,41. Verse twelve mentions he-goats "that leap upon the flock" (singular), and verse forty-one refers to all of Laban's sheep and goat holdings as "your flock." Only verse thirty-eight mentions flock in the plural. Since ewes and she-goats are spoken of in this connection it would be possible to assume that two entirely separate flocks are being thought of. However, this is very unlikely because only the male counterpart of the ewe, that is, the ram, is mentioned. The male counterpart of the she-goat, which would be a he-goat or buck, is not mentioned at all. Consequently, the parallelism breaks down at the exact point where one would expect it to be the strongest.

It is much more probable to assume that the plural of flock in verse thirty-eight refers either to Laban's ownership of multiple flocks of mixed animals, or else to the ownership of more than one flock of sheep and goats by Laban and the members of his household. This latter possibility is attested to in Genesis 30:35, which speaks of the fact that Laban divided his own flock among his sons, and that there were sheep and goats in each of the divisions.

The narrative mentioned above gives ample testimony to the fact that Jacob kept sheep as well as goats. This is

essential when viewing the incident of the plot against Joseph, the son of Jacob, by his brothers in Genesis 37. In three different places (Genesis 37:2,12,14) it is specifically stated that the animals being kept were part of a flock (גֹּאֵז). It can be logically, linguistically, and textually assumed that sheep would have been included in this flock, and so it is rather surprising, yet very true to form, that the animal in verse thirty-one which was taken from the flock and killed, and whose blood was used to stain Joseph's clothing was a goat. This validates completely the combined flock assertion.

Two other passages which are worthy of consideration are Leviticus 1:10 and Song of Solomon 1:8. The first example pertains to the bringing of an offering to Yahweh, and it indicates that both types of animals were present in a single flock. The text reads, "If his gift for a burnt offering is from the flock (singular), from the sheep or goats, he shall offer a male without blemish." In the Song of Solomon passage the imagery at work is again that of the combined flock since it refers to "kids" being cared for by "shepherds."

The remainder of the list of passages which supports this fact is too lengthy to deal with individually, so I will simply enumerate them here. They are: Genesis 38:17, 20,23; Leviticus 3:6,12; 5:6; II Chronicles 35:7; Song of Solomon 1:8; Isaiah 5:7; and Jeremiah 50:8. All of them agree on the essential point that sheep and goats were pre-

sent in the same flock.

One additional passage which is worth mentioning is Ezekiel 34:17. In this instance the word **צֹאן** is again used for flock, but this time it is in reference to the nation of Israel. It is more than simply a matter of coincidence that sheep, rams, and he-goats are all members of this one flock. Sufficient attention will be given to this passage later. What is more important at this point is to consider the evidence from the secondary sources.

In the secondary source material a great deal of stress is placed on the fact that the word **צֹאן** is a comprehensive term which refers to both sheep and goats, as well as to the flock.¹ It is also generally held that flocks usually consisted of sheep and goats, and it was their size, not their contents, which determined the status of the owner.²

It was also common for townspeople to herd sheep, goats, and even cattle under one community shepherd.³ The only distinctly different viewpoint which I have found states that "Goats were herded with sheep in biblical days,

¹Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., c. 1968), VI, 499.

²The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible, edited by George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, c. 1962), II, 407.

³N. Levinson, The Parables: Their Background And Local Setting (Edinburgh: T. AND T. Clark, c. 1962), p. 152.

but each group remained separate, following its own bell-laden leader⁴ This fact, however, does not deny the validity of a combined flock theory. It simply emphasizes that two distinct groups of animals could be found within the same flock.

Another point which must be considered has to do with the value placed on the various types of animals in the flock. One could assume that sheep and goats could be given similar, or perhaps even equal value if they are to be identified as being members of the same flock. This is precisely what Scripture reveals as being the usual case. The references, again, are legion, and I have selected only the most significant ones for consideration here.

From a purely monetary standpoint, sheep and goats may be viewed as being of equal value in so far as they both were used as the payment for wages (Genesis 30:31-32). The author of I Samuel mentions them both as being indications of great wealth, and he relates the fact that the owner of the animals, who was a businessman in this case, had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats (I Samuel 25:2).

According to Ezekiel 27:21 lambs and goats were both used as items of trade. In this connection there is a record of an equal number of rams and he-goats being given to Jehoshaphat. The exact number stated is 7,700 of each type

⁴Roy Pinney, The Animals In The Bible (New York: Chilton Books, A Division Of Chilton Co., Publishers, c. 1964), p. 112.

of animal, and they came in the form of a payment of tribute (II Chronicles 17:11).

Sheep and goats were both considered to be edible animals (Deuteronomy 14:4); however, the flesh of sheep was not eaten as often as was the flesh of goats.⁵ I will deal with the sacrificial uses of sheep and goats in greater detail at a later point, but it is worth mentioning here that lambs and kids were both acceptable for use in the Passover Meal, albeit the lamb was used most frequently (Exodus 12:3-5).

The fiftieth chapter of Jeremiah is especially enlightening in regard to the equal application of the sheep and goat imagery to Israel because of the two verses there which employ both animals in the imagery. Verse six refers to the people of God as "lost sheep," while verse eight says that they are like "he-goats before the flock." This serves as an important example of the fact that Israel could be referred to in either of the two ways, and it adds to the plausibility that both animals were considered to be of equal value.

Likewise, it is a demonstrable fact that the shepherds gave equal consideration to both sheep and goats, and that certain legal requirements and stipulations pertained to each type of animal. Sheep are helpless animals and have absolutely no defenses of their own.⁶ By the same token, goats

⁵Ibid., pp. 108-109.

⁶Carl Graesser, Jr., The Shepherd-Flock Image In The

require special treatment at night because they are more susceptible to cold and have to be kept warmer than sheep.⁷

It is interesting to note how Jacob showed his shepherdly concern for the flock when he emphasized to Laban that neither the ewes nor the she-goats had miscarried during the twenty year period in which he cared for them (Genesis 31:38). The writer of First Isaiah also showed the concern of a dutiful shepherd when he prophesied that the lamb and the kid would both rest peacefully in the Messianic kingdom (Isaiah 11:6). Of course, the reference here is to something other than actual animals of a flock; however, the dual consideration is nonetheless important.

Several instances can also be cited from the legal framework of Israel which regulated the treatment of sheep and goats. For example, Leviticus 22:27 specifies that the young offspring of sheep and goats, and in this case of cattle also, were not to be taken away from their mothers and used as sacrificial victims until they were more than seven days old. According to another account the first born of sheep, goats, and cattle were considered to be holy. They were to be offered as sacrifice, and the owner was not to claim them as his personal property (Numbers 18:17). Another legal observance which seems to apply only to the offspring of goats, and which even today serves to regulate

Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, non-published STM Thesis, 1956), p. 25.

⁷Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 499.

the Jewish kitchen and diet,⁸ is found in Deuteronomy 14:21. The stipulation here is that "you shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk."

When the sheep and goat imagery is applied to the nations, equal consideration is again given to each animal in an entirely different sense. Yahweh, who is consumed with anger, slaughters both the sheep and the goats in judgement (Isaiah 34:6). This also makes one think of the judgement which Yahweh levels against His own flock in Ezekiel 34:17. Here, the judgement is worked out in terms of the separation of a flock which was composed of both types of animals, and it is this practice of separating sheep and goats which warrants immediate attention.

In this connection the shepherd's "rod" or "staff" (עֶזְרָא) was an essential tool. It could have been a straight staff used for the support of the shepherd, or a short staff with a knobbed end which was often studded with nails or pieces of flint. In both cases it was used to gather and count the sheep and also to defend them. Other names applied to this tool are *שׁוֹט*, *הַשֵּׁבַע*, and *שֵׁבַע*.⁹

According to the Biblical texts sheep and goats were separated for breeding purposes (Genesis 30:32,35,40), for the purpose of counting (Leviticus 27:32), and for slaughter

⁸George Foot Moore, Judaism: In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), II, 75.

⁹George A. Buttrick, IV, 102-103.

(Jeremiah 12:3). Another explanation given for the separation states that it "arises from the fact that, while sheep can safely be left in the pastures at night, goats, as the more delicate animals, must be brought under cover."¹⁰ This fact is likewise substantiated by Gerhard Friedrich.¹¹

From a purely linguistic point of view there is evidence that sheep and goats were generally thought of in equal terms, and that both types of animals were the normal components of a shepherd's flock. For example, the word רֶמֶס is used interchangeably for sheep and goats, as well as for flock and flocks, and it usually refers to sheep and goats as being in one flock.¹² Likewise, the word רֵעֵךְ can simply refer to "one of the flock," or it can specifically mean either a sheep or a goat.¹³

There are numerous words, phrases, and diminutives which are used to refer to the animals themselves. They are not always used consistently, and they frequently differ from passage to passage. It may not be possible to recognize completely all of the nuances of these various words, and it may not be possible to understand the reasons

¹⁰H. E. W. Turner, "Expounding The Parables; The Parable Of The Sheep And The Goats (Matt. 25:31-46)," Expository Times, 77 (May 1966), 244.

¹¹Supra, p. 13.

¹²Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew And English Lexicon Of The Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 838.

¹³Ibid., pp. 961-962.

behind the choices or changes in the words. One thing, however, is certain, and that is that the word צֹאן is used consistently in so far as it bears reference to a combined flock. A few select examples of this consistency should suffice.¹⁴

Genesis 30:32 צֹאן = flock; שֶׂה = sheep; עֵז = goat.

Genesis 31:12,38 צֹאן = flock; עֵמֶד = goats;

קִזְּזָה = ewes; עֵז = she-goats.

Genesis 38:17,20,23 קִזְּזֵי-עֵזִים מִן הַצֹּאן = a kid of the goats from the flock.

Leviticus 5:6 צֹאן = flock; נֶשֶׁב = lamb;

שְׂרִירַת עֵזִים = goat.

Ezekiel 34:17 צֹאן = flock; שֶׂה = sheep; אֵיִם = rams;

עֵמֶד = goats.

During the time of my research an attempt was made to establish a ratio or comparison between the number of references which clearly refer to sheep being in one flock and goats being in another, and then to compare these findings with the number of times that sheep and goats are clearly referred to as being in one flock. Since there are some passages in which the clarity is blurred, this came to be an impossible, and at best, a highly subjective task. The most accurate comparison which I could construct, and this, of course, will be subject to debate, is three flocks

¹⁴Biblia Hebraica, edited by Rudolf Kittel (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, c. 1937), passim.

of goats, as compared to two flocks of sheep, as compared to an extremely large and uncertain number of flocks composed of sheep and goats. It is interesting to note that in the five passages which refer to separate flocks, the word צאן is not used. In its place is either the word קִשְׁיָה, which means flock,¹⁵ or the word עֵדֶר, which means flock or herd.¹⁶

Two of the passages containing these words refer to single flocks of goats and are found in I Kings 20:27 and in The Song Of Solomon 4:1. The I Kings passage is in reference to a battle between Israel and the Syrians, and it compares Israel to "two little flocks of goats" (עֵזִים) (בְּשָׁנֵי קִשְׁיָה). The passage in The Song Of Solomon compares the hair of the bride to "a flock of goats" (קִשְׁיָה) (בְּעֵדֶר) moving down the slopes of Gilead."

This latter passage should also be taken in connection with the verse which follows it, and which contains the first of the "flock of sheep" references. The Song Of Solomon 4:2 compares the brides teeth to "a flock of shorn ewes" (בְּעֵדֶר הַקְּצוּבוֹת) that have come up from the washing." When verses one and two are taken together, an exact parallel to them can be found in The Song Of Solomon 6:5,6. Here, the same references are made in identical fashion.

The significance of these five passages lies not only

¹⁵Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 362.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 727.

in the fact that their number is so small, but also in the fact that the word $\gamma\lambda\zeta$ is not used. This is further evidence which supports the concept of the combined flock, and at the same time, makes one aware that separate flocks were not unheard of. In substantiating the theory of the combined flock in this way, it is now necessary to examine the characteristics, uses, and limitations of the two types of animals which made up the flock.

It is most probable that the breed of sheep which was extant in Palestine during the age of the Patriarchs and afterward was the *Ovis laticaudata*, or the so-called "broad-tailed sheep."¹⁷ These animals were particularly affectionate (II Samuel 12:3), unaggressive (Jeremiah 11:19), relatively defenseless (Micah 5:8), and in the constant need of the care and supervision of a shepherd (Numbers 27:17).¹⁸

Apparently, it was a common thing for shepherds to call their sheep by name. J. H. Bernard suggests that "Palestinian shepherds frequently have pet names for their favorite sheep, 'Long-ears,' 'White-nose,' etc."¹⁹ In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Raymond Brown quotes Bernard as suggesting that sheep would not follow a strange

¹⁷George A. Buttrick, IV, 315.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 316.

¹⁹A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Gospel According To St. John, edited by A. H. Mc Neile (Edinburgh: T. AND T. Clark, 1928), II, 350.

shepherd, but would only follow the one whom they knew.²⁰

The size of Palestinian flocks today varies from twenty to over five hundred head.²¹ This fact is not particularly significant until one views it along side of what Levinson says. "I have known flocks of as many as five or six hundred to be known individually to the shepherds."²² If these modern day statistics are used to reflect back on what conditions may have been like during the Old Testament period, then one can begin to get an idea of the intimacy in the association of the shepherd with his sheep, as well as the value which was associated with the flock.

It has already been mentioned that sheep were considered to be animals of considerable worth. They were used as items of trade (Ezekiel 27:21; II Kings 3:4), and they were frequently presented as gifts (Genesis 32:13-14; 38:17,20,23), or as tribute money (II Chronicles 17:11). Their most immediate value lay in their ability to produce wool.²³

Unlike the Western breeds of domestic sheep, there is one additional characteristic which is peculiar to the breed of sheep which was common during Biblical times.

²⁰The Gospel According To St. John (Garden City, New York: Doubleday And Co., Inc., c. 1966), I, 385.

²¹Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 499.

²²N. Levinson, p. 137.

²³Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 689.

"The Eastern sheep are milk-producing, and it is therefore necessary to bring them to a given place to milk them."²⁴

The principal food supplied by the sheep was its milk. It was exceptionally rich and usually was allowed to cool and curdle into a substance known as "leben."²⁵ Deuteronomy 32:14 mentions milk from the flock and the fat of lambs as being very special types of food. Although sheep were listed among the edible animals in Deuteronomy 14:4, and in spite of the fact that one occasionally hears reference made to fatlings, as in Isaiah 5:11, the flesh of sheep was generally not eaten except during the celebration of the Passover, or in connection with the sacrifices in which the worshiper participated in a sacrificial meal.

The only solid reference to sheep being eaten on a regular basis is in I Kings 4:22, where part of the daily provision for King Solomon's table is recorded as being one hundred sheep. This, indeed, was a rarity, and probably only a wealthy man like Solomon could have afforded such a luxury.

Interestingly enough the author of Ezekiel applies the eating of sheep in a negative sense to the shepherds who were supposed to be feeding the flock of Israel. He charges the shepherds of Israel with feeding themselves instead of the flock (Ezekiel 34:3). Presumably, the in-

²⁴N. Levinson, p. 136.

²⁵Roy Pinney, pp. 108-109.

ference is made that they were consuming the members of the flock in a figurative sense.

The importance of the sheeps' wool cannot be overstressed since it was the principal means for making clothing. Proverbs 27:26 contains a reference to clothing being provided by lambs. References to the use of tanned rams' skins can be found in Exodus 25:5; 35:7,23. Here, however, it appears to be the hide which was used for shelter, or for the construction of the Tabernacle. This is in keeping with the "tent of tanned rams' skins and goats' skins" in Exodus 26:14.

In addition to their other uses sheep played a significant role in the sacrificial system of Israel. This was an extremely complex system, and is worthy of much greater explication than can be given to it here. Consequently, only the most important points will be considered, and then only for the purpose of illustration. According to Roland de Vaux, the code of sacrifices followed in the second Temple is contained in Leviticus 1-7. The code of ritual used in the pre-exilic Temple should be sought in the Law of Holiness which is found in Leviticus 17-26.²⁶

Among the many types of offerings and sacrifices listed under the pre-exilic ritual, male lambs under one year of age could be used for peace offerings (Leviticus 23:19),

²⁶Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel. Its Life And Institutions, translated by John Mc Hugh (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Co., Inc., c. 1961), pp. 415-420.

and male sheep without blemish could be sacrificed as free-will offerings (Leviticus 22:19,27). According to Numbers 7:15-88 sheep were used in the dedication of the altar, and rams and lambs were used as sin offerings (II Chronicles 29:21-23).

Ezra 8:35 speaks of lambs being used in post-exilic sacrifices. Under the post-exilic code a sheep without blemish could be sacrificed as a burnt offering (Leviticus 1:10), a male or female sheep could serve as a peace offering (Leviticus 3:6), and a female lamb could be offered as a guilt offering (Leviticus 5:6,15).

In connection with the Passover celebration, every Israelite family had to sacrifice one young animal from the flock (Exodus 12:21).²⁷ It should be noted that the animal had to be a year old and without blemish, and that it was usually a male lamb. However, the animal could also have been a year old, male goat without blemish, as is indicated in II Chronicles 35:7.

On the basis of this rather lengthy accumulation of evidence, the fact should be apparent that sheep represented a major source of wealth and contributed to the total livelihood of the nation of Israel in so far as it was pastorally oriented. It is now my purpose to demonstrate the importance of goats by examining the role which they played in

²⁷Hans-Joachim Kraus, Worship In Israel. A Cultic History Of The Old Testament, translated by Geoffrey Buswell (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, c. 1966), p. 46.

the composition of the flock.

Any attempt to identify the exact species of goat which was prominent during the Old Testament period will include a certain amount of conjecture. It is possible to conclude, however, that "The goat of biblical Palestine was probably the Syrian or Mamber variety (*Capra hircus mambrica*), commonly black in color."²⁸ Like sheep, goats needed the care and supervision of a shepherd, especially at night when they had to be brought out of the cold, and also when they needed to be milked. The Song Of Solomon 1:8 provides an adequate picture of this type of care in that the kids are there pastured "beside the shepherds' tents."

One very significant difference between sheep and goats is that the goats were good climbers, and were quite at home on rocky soil.²⁹ Sheep, on the other hand, were not as sure-footed, and the shepherd was forced to provide a somewhat easier route for them to follow.

It has frequently been suggested that when goats were used as an image or metaphore for something, then the purpose was to deliver a sinister or negative connotation. It is a personal bias of mine that the bulk of this type of negative application comes from a misunderstanding of the reference to goats in Matthew 25:32,33. There are several

²⁸George A. Buttrick, II, 407.

²⁹Roy Pinney, p. 111.

instances in the Old Testament where goats and sheep alike are judged and condemned (Isaiah 5:17; 34:6; Ezekiel 34:17), but there are no references which single out the goat by itself and label it as a sinister or second-rate animal. All of the evidence points to the exact opposite. If this were not the case, and if goats were somehow considered to be inferior, or perhaps even unclean animals, then they surely would not have been useable as animals for sacrifice or for human consumption. The fact remains, however, that they held a very prominent position in the sacrificial rituals of Israel, and also supplied one of the major sources of food. A more thorough examination of the dietary and sacrificial uses of goats will be given later, but something must first be said about two other possible ways in which goats could have acquired such a bad press.

The first possibility has to do with the grazing habits of goats which differ from those of sheep in so far as sheep chew off the grass only part way down the shoot, whereas goats bite it off at the roots. It has been suggested that this could support the application of goat imagery in the negative sense since goats were responsible for consuming, to the point of destruction, so much of the pasture land.

Although this fact about the grazing habits of goats is verifiable, I am of the opinion that it does not serve as the basis for negative attitudes or applications in Scripture since the Old Testament nowhere refers to it.

The only hint which one gets that any compensation was made for this lies in the fact that some flocks contained more sheep than goats (I Samuel 25:2). This, however, stands in stark contrast to one modern day census which revealed that in 1920 the figure given for the number of goats in Palestine in the area west of the Jordan was 325,512, while the number of sheep in that same area was listed at 205,967.³⁰ In this case, goats outnumbered sheep by almost 120,000.

The only other possible source for the negative use of the imagery could come from the word **שְׂעִיר**. This is a word frequently used for he-goat, buck, hairy one, and she-goat. It is related in form to **שַׁעַר** which means hair, and to its derivative **שָׂעַר** which means to bristle with horror. The connection is first made by the fact that goats are naturally hairy animals. The bad or negative connection is made in one of the less frequent uses of **שְׂעִיר** which means satyr; that is, a demon with a he-goat's form or feet. This creature is referred to as inhabiting desolate ruins (Isaiah 34:14), and it is also a name used for idols (II Chronicles 11:15 and Leviticus 17:7).³¹ It must be recognized, however, that the application of the word goat in this sense is definitely a limited one, and I do not think that it in any way overshadows all of the positive applications or the numerous implications of value which are given

³⁰Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 486.

³¹Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 972.

to goats.

As was the case with the wool and the hides of sheep, the hair and the hides of goats were also used to make clothing and tents. Exodus 25:5; 26:14; 35:7; and 36:19 all speak of goats' hides being used in the construction of the Tabernacle. Although the Hebrew word **קִבֵּיר**, which the RSV translates as pillow, is uncertain, this item also was made out of goats' hair. It has been suggested that it was either a quilt, or perhaps a fly net.³² In addition, goats' horns were often used as trumpets, and their hides were used in the construction of water bags as well as musical instruments.

Goats were a recognized form of wealth, and the size of the flocks indicated the owner's status in the community. Even the young kids were considered to be animals of value, and this can be seen from the fact that Judah was able to "purchase" the pleasure of sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, for the price of one kid (Genesis 30:43; 38:17).

The milk of goats as well as their flesh was quite commonly used as food. In fact, goats were essential for the diets of shepherds as well as for the majority of the Israelite people. The principal source of milk was the goats,³³ and the flesh of "the goat was more frequently

³²Ibid., p. 460.

³³George A. Buttrick, II, 407.

used for food than sheep, even though its meat was drier.³⁴ Kids were taken from the flock and were prepared as "a savory food" (Genesis 27:9,16), and the ideal conditions referred to in Proverbs 27:27 were partially characterized by the fact that there would be enough goats' milk to feed a man, his household, and his maidens. One scholar has proposed that "the average Hebrew family could have lived almost entirely on a single goat's products."³⁵

As has already been mentioned goats were considered a worthy substitute for lambs in the Passover Meal. One need only examine the evidence in Exodus 12:3-5 and II Chronicles 35:7 to substantiate this. Goats also played a significant part in the sacrifices of Israel in both the pre-exilic and post-exilic cultus. A goat without blemish was an acceptable burnt offering or free-will offering (Leviticus 1:10; 22:19), a male or female goat could be used as a peace offering (Leviticus 3:12; 17:23), a female goat could be sacrificed as a guilt offering (Leviticus 5:6), and a male goat without blemish could be offered as a sin offering (Leviticus 4:23). Goats, too, were used as sacrificial victims in the dedication of the altar (Numbers 7:15-88).

The greatest position of prominence which goats held in the sacrificial system, however, was in connection with the Day of Atonement. On this day the congregation was

³⁴Roy Pinney, p. 111.

³⁵Ibid., p. 112.

assembled at the place of worship, and a bull was offered as a sin offering for the priest. Afterward, two goats were brought forward, and lots were cast to determine which one would be for Yahweh and which one for Azazel. The goat for Yahweh was sacrificed as a sin offering, but the goat for Azazel remained alive to carry away the sins of the people. It is this latter animal which was called the scapegoat. Roland de Vaux points out that by means of the laying on of hands the scapegoat was loaded down with the sins of the people, and was regarded as being defiled and unworthy to be sacrificed.³⁶ The scapegoat was then led out into the wilderness carrying the burden of transgressions.

In view of the precise and meaningful nature of Israel's sacrificial practices I find it highly significant that goats were chosen for this annual, sin-atonement sacrifice. This was a custom that was vitally essential to Israel's faith, and one which bore untold significance for the people. This serves to heighten the importance which the goat had in Israelite life, since it was this type of animal which was chosen to be "sent out" on the Day of Atonement to carry away sins.

The majority of the evidence presented in this chapter has been assembled to demonstrate the characteristics, the value, and the necessity of both sheep and goats in Israelite

³⁶Roland de Vaux, p. 416.

flocks. It has also been my purpose to enhance the theory of the combined flock as a valid presupposition when dealing with Old Testament flock imagery, and to assert the particular value and significance of keeping goats in a flock, and finally to lay the ground work for viewing the flock imagery, as it is applied to the nation of Israel, in terms of the combined flock. It is this latter subject which I shall explicate in greater detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE COMBINED FLOCK AS AN IMAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Flock imagery, as it is applied to Israel, is stated most often in terms of "Yahweh's flock," or "His fold."¹ However, frequent reference is also made of Israel as a sheep, lamb, or goat, and in all of these references one can detect varying levels of meaning. Without the aid of any explicit chronological framework there appears to be a progression in Old Testament thought from Israel as the dependent, obedient possession of God, to Israel, and especially its leaders, as the rebellious nation, to Israel as the separated, judged, condemned, and scattered people of God, and finally to Israel as the refined, gathered, and once again dependent and obedient people of God. This series of events was by no means a one time occurrence. Rather, it was repeated time and time again throughout the course of Israel's history. This progression is nowhere more pronounced than in the application of the imagery of the flock to Israel as God's flock.

One of the most obvious places to find the nation of Israel referred to as a sheep or lamb is in the Psalms. Here, the worshipping community, and the nation as a whole,

¹Carl Graesser, Jr., The Shepherd-Flock Image In The Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, non-published STM Thesis, 1956), p. 11.

is frequently called "the sheep of God's hand" (Psalm 95:7) or "the sheep of God's pasture" (Psalm 74:1; 100:3). This imagery brings out the idea of dependence upon God, and it shows Israel as living in the proper relationship to God. There is also a picture presented in I Chronicles 11:2 where a leader of Israel guides and guards God's possession in an acceptable fashion. In this case it was David who, even during the reign of Saul, "led out and brought in Israel."

As pleasant and appealing as this imagery might be, conditions did not remain this way for very long. The leaders of Israel became corrupt and self-indulgent shepherds (Jeremiah 50:6), and the sheep of Israel went astray (Isaiah 53:6). Under these circumstances God appointed prophets to confront His sheep and His under-shepherds with their mis-deeds in an attempt to turn them back to their previous relationship of dependence upon Him. All attempts along this line failed, however, and it became necessary for Yahweh to confront His sheep in a totally different manner.

This new approach, which was likewise brought about through the prophets, was one of confrontation, judgement, and condemnation. The sentence and punishment is viewed most dramatically in terms of Israel as being "scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd" (I Kings 22:17; II Chronicles 18:16; Psalm 44:11,22; Jeremiah 50:6, 17; Zechariah 10:2-3). However, all was not as hopelessly lost as it might have seemed, for the God of Israel revealed

His purpose in scattering His sheep in Zecariah 13:7-9. Here, the sheep are scattered so that a remnant may be refined and tested, and it is this remnant of animals from the flock that will again become the people of God.

Because of His divine love and grace Yahweh proclaimed that He would rescue a portion of His sheep (Amos 3:12), that He would gather them together for His own possession (Micah 2:12), and that He would feed them and care for them as a shepherd who carries the young lambs and gently leads the pregnant ewes of his flock (Isaiah 40:11). Thus, we have come full circle. Whereas the obedient sheep who repeatedly strayed from the fold, and who became disobedient by turning their obedience into self-determination, were judged, condemned, and scattered, the ones who remained alive and faithful were gathered by Yahweh and returned to their former state of obedience and dependence upon Him.

A much abbreviated form of the relationships and actions of Yahweh and His flock is found in the few references to Israel as a goat. I Kings 20:27 is an account of one of Israel's battles against the Syrians. It occurred during a "period of obedience" in which Israel stood in a dependent relationship with God, and it resulted in a tremendous victory over the Syrians. Interestingly enough, when the nations positioned themselves against each other, Israel was compared to "two little flocks of goats." As a bare minimum, this imagery suggests an attitude of complete trust and confidence in God, the Shepherd, on the part of Israel, His

flock. In another instance, goat imagery suggests that Israel did not continue in a state of dependence upon God, and that the nation did go its own way in so far as goats are named among the animals which were judged in Ezekiel 34:17-22.

Jeremiah 50:8, a somewhat vague reference, mentions "he-goats" that go before the flock. If this is in reference to Israel, as it seems to be, then it is significant that the nation, or perhaps the remnant, is compared to a he-goat as a leader of the flock. Part of the significance lies in the fact that the leaders of the flock were the first to experience pitfalls and rocky ground, scorpions and vipers, and whatever forms of danger that might befall the flock while it was on the move.

By the same token, however, the he-goats before the flock would be the first ones to get a glimpse of the pasture where they would spend the night, the first to get the scent of water, and the first to experience its cooling, life-sustaining effects, as well as the first to experience the pleasant shade of the hillside or oasis. During the course of the day's journey they would not have had to breathe the dust which the entire flock raised along the trail, and at night they would have been able to drink before the waters of the pool or stream became muddy and fouled. In other words, it was these animals which experienced the real graciousness of the shepherd, the best and most prominent position in the flock, and they were the first to ex-

perience the refreshment and rest at the end of the day. This brings to mind the words of Psalm 23, and it becomes increasingly more possible for these words to be cast in the mouth of a goat as well as in the mouth of a sheep.

It must be maintained, however, that sheep and goats were of equal worth, and that the shepherd would not have placed more value on the he-goats than he did on the other members of the flock. In fact, it seems most likely that when it came time for a separation and a judgement, those animals which had experienced so much goodness would suffer an even greater punishment if they went astray than would the remainder of the flock. This would especially be true if those animals were responsible for leading astray other sheep or goats in the flock, and this is precisely the way Yahweh treats the false leaders of Israel when it comes time for Him to reckon with them on the basis of their deeds.

If it is the remnant of Israel which is referred to in Jeremiah 50:8, then it can also be maintained that Israel, as a remnant of he-goats, will be restored to a position of prominence as members of the flock of God. This, again, is an outgrowth of divine love and grace. It should be noted, however, that the Old Testament does not specifically refer to goats being restored to the flock after the exile except in this one place. Yet, neither does it specifically refer to them as being scattered with the flock in judgement (Ezekiel 34:21-22). It merely states that the flock, as in Ezekiel 34:17, will undergo judgement, and that the judge-

ment will be between sheep, rams, and goats, and that the flock will be saved by Yahweh (Ezekiel 34:22).

It is clear from the use of the word **רֶעֹם** in 34:22 that the flock is still a combined one with both sheep and goats present after the judgement. Therefore, when considering the remnant, or post-exilic flock, as a reference to Israel it is of no purpose to attempt to view it as being composed of only one type of animal. Rather, the combined flock, as an image of God's people, is of a dual nature, and it is to the combined flock references which I now turn.

The same pattern which was evident in the separate references to sheep and goats is present in the references to the combined flock. The fact that Israel is the flock of God is implied in the description of Yahweh as the Shepherd of Israel (Hosea 4:16), but there are also numerous explicit references to this which take on a variety of forms.

In a variety of expressions Israel is "Yahweh's flock," "the flock of His pasture," "the sheep of His pasture," "the sheep of His hand," "the sheep of thy (God's) possession," "my (God's) sheep." The implication of the metaphore is that Israel is God's possession and that it can yield itself with full confidence to the guidance, provision, and help of its Shepherd.²

The passages which make reference to Israel as a flock are not confined solely to the Psalms (80:1; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13), but can also be found in abundance in the writings of the prophets. Isaiah 63:11 calls the leaders of Israel

²Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoggrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eedrmans Publishing Co., c. 1968), VI, 500.

"the shepherds of his flock." However, it is not often that צֹאֵן is used in the prophetic writings in a purely neutral sense. Rather, it is used in connection with the flock that is either under divine judgement or divine grace.

Jeremiah 25:34-37 portrays Israel as a scattered flock and its former shepherds as lamenting in ashes. In Ezekiel 20:37-38 the flock passes under the shepherd's rod, and those rebellious ones are purged out of it. A very striking turn of events is recorded in Ezekiel 36:37-38 where Yahweh says that He will let the flock of Israel increase like the flock at Jerusalem so that they, that is, the animals, can all be sacrificed. This judgement reaches its apex in one of the doom oracles of Zechariah where the flock of God is doomed to slaughter and the worthless shepherds are cursed (11:4,7-9,17).

And yet, Israel is not completely forsaken, nor is the flock totally lost. The flock of Israel is still God's possession, and He promises to save it (Zechariah 9:16). The flock which was scattered will be gathered again by its owner (Jeremiah 31:10), a remnant of the flock will be gathered out of the countries into which it was scattered (Jeremiah 23:3-4), and it will be cared for like the precious flock that it is (Zechariah 3:13). When the gathering takes place, new shepherds will be put in charge over the flock (Jeremiah 31:4), God Himself will shepherd and feed His own flock (Micah 5:4; 7:14), and He will set over the entire flock "one who is like my servant David" (Ezekiel

34:24). In this way God again makes clear that His relationship with Israel is not terminated, and that He continues to shepherd His flock out of love and grace.

The flock imagery of the Old Testament, in all of its many facets and applications, emphasizes one basic thing; the nature and responsibilities of the Covenant between God and His people. The fact that this emphasis is worked out in terms of sheep, goats, and the combined flock must be maintained because that is what Scripture maintains. Any light which these images can shed on our understanding of the covenant relationship is invaluable, but those same images would be devalued if they were pressed for significance very far beyond this point.

The Covenant which God made with His chosen people began in His choice of and Covenant with Abraham as it is spelled out in Genesis 12:1-3 and 17:1-21. It is essential to understand the terms of this Covenant as being based on God's choice and not on Abraham's merit. It was centered around an agreement of mutual responsibility, that is, around a set of mutual promises with their accompanying sign, and it was further enhanced by the dutiful and dependent relationship of a servant upon his sovereign God. When the descendants of Abraham were enslaved in Egypt, this Covenant agreement was not forgotten (Exodus 2:24). The complete and utter dependence of Israel upon its God was heightened and stretched almost to the breaking point during that period of bondage. But God reiterated His Coven-

ant (Exodus 6:2-9), released Israel, chose that nation as His own people, and ratified His Covenant with them once again (Exodus 23:20-33).

Because the covenant relationship cannot be seen from any point of view except that of complete dependence upon God on the part of Israel, and the overwhelming gracefulness which God showed to His people, and also because of the close familiarity which Israelite people had with the shepherd and his flock, it is easy to see how the combined flock came to be used as a significant symbol for the covenant relationship. Sheep and goats alike were thoroughly dependent upon the shepherd for their total existence. This goes beyond the fact that they required food, shelter, and protection. Sheep and goats required a leader in order to get to the right place at the right time, a husbandman who assisted them in producing their most significant fruits (wool, milk, and offspring), and a loving caring master who went after them time and again when they went astray and brought them back to the fold. This is the picture of the Covenant which combined flock imagery paints, and it leads to a consideration of the central figure in that relationship, the Shepherd.

The shepherd images, as applied to the God of Israel, are found mainly in the Psalms ascribed to Asaph,³ and in the Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and

³Carl Graesser, Jr., p. 18.

Micah. However, references to this imagery can also be found in several of the other Old Testament books, and one such example of this is Genesis 49:24. This whole chapter contains a list of prophecies concerning the sons of Israel, and verse twenty-four depicts Joseph as having been made strong and steadfast "by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel)." The thought has also been expressed that,

The application of the shepherd image to Yahweh is embedded in the living piety of Israel. . . . In Exodus-Deuteronomy shepherd terms are used in the Exodus stories, but in general it is hard to determine whether there is any conscious feeling for the shepherd metaphor.⁴

Numerous references in the Psalms portray Yahweh as a shepherd, or as "the shepherd of his people" (Psalm 28:9; 77:20; 78:52). The most familiar one to modern day readers of the Old Testament is Psalm 23:1,2,4. In all of these passages the qualities of the shepherd which are stressed most emphatically are leadership and graciousness. As Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 80:1), however, Yahweh did more than lead His people. He was more than a good provider for His flock, and He was much more than a hireling.

As Shepherd of Israel, Yahweh was the sole owner of His flock. He was the only one upon whom His sheep and goats were to depend. It was Yahweh alone who provided care and guidance (Psalm 23); it was Yahweh alone who possessed the shepherd's staff (Ezekiel 20:37-38); and it was Yahweh alone

⁴Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 487.

who eventually separated and scattered His own flock so that He could later gather and reclaim the remnant of that flock (Jeremiah 31:10). Since these factors are all of equal importance each one must be considered individually.

The fact that Yahweh was the sole owner of the flock of Israel cannot be contested. This was established in the Covenant agreement, and it is substantiated every time the pronoun "my," or "my own" is used in reference to the flock (Ezekiel 34:17; Jeremiah 23:2; and many others), and whenever the pronoun "His" is used in connection with the flock (Isaiah 40:11; Psalm 78:52; and many others). The importance of this complete ownership lies in the fact that only Yahweh could hold the shepherd's staff, and He was the only one who could legitimately separate, scatter, and gather His flock. For anyone else to do this it was the vilest of sins, since it was tantamount to an overthrow of Yahweh, and would result in woe heaped upon woe for the person or persons who overstepped their bounds. Since Yahweh was the owner of the flock He could delegate the responsibilities of leadership to under-shepherds. However, if the under-shepherds did not carry out their responsibilities, or if they forsook the flock, then they would be held accountable for the loss (Ezekiel 34:1-10).

The concept of the shepherd's staff is a vital one for understanding fully the implications made when referring to Yahweh as Shepherd of Israel. The fact that He possessed this staff is substantiated by Ezekiel 20:37 where Yahweh

addresses His flock and says, "I will make you pass under the rod. . . ." The Hebrew word used for this instrument is עֶבֶד. It has a variety of meanings which range from "rod" and "staff," to "club" and "scepter."⁵ Evidently, it was a common article used for smiting or beating, and it is frequently used in a figurative sense of Yahweh's chastisement on a national level (Isaiah 10:24; 30:31), as well as on an individual level (Job 9:34; 21:9; 37:13; Psalm 89:36).⁶ In this connection it came to symbolize divine judgement and punishment.

It is particularly interesting to note the significance of עֶבֶד in the sense of scepter (Numbers 24:17). Here, this same type of shepherd's staff becomes a mark of authority, and it is, therefore, not at all difficult to understand how "shepherd (became) a synonym for 'king' which indicates Yahweh's absolute authority and command of Israel."⁷ In addition to this it has also been suggested that,

The title "shepherd" is also related to the office of kingship. . . . The term was applied to Yahweh throughout the Old Testament period, and was particularly appropriate for expressing the personal relationship between God and his Covenant people.⁸

⁵Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew And English Lexicon Of The Old Testament (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 986-987.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Carl Graesser, Jr., p. 12. Taken from Vinz Hamp, "Das Hirtenmotiv in Alten Testament," Festschrift zu Kardinal Faulhaber (München: Verlage von J. Pfeiffer, 1949).

⁸The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible, edited by

In a slightly different connection, but still within the context of God's authoritative relationship over Israel, the word **שֵׁבֶט** can also mean "tribe." It is used especially of the twelve tribes of Israel, and sometimes as a subdivision of one of the tribes (Genesis 49:16-28; Deuteronomy 33:5).⁹

What is implied in the staff imagery, then, is that Yahweh was not only in a position to count the members of His flock (Leviticus 27:32) and to protect them (Psalm 23:4), but that He was also able to separate, punish, and destroy His flock (Psalm 2:9; Ezekiel 20:37-38; Zechariah 11:7-9), and to make it an object of His wrath because of the broken Covenant. It is now essential to determine precisely who it was that did the separating, scattering, and punishing.

A number of passages mention the shepherds (plural) of Israel as scattering the flock of God (Jeremiah 23:1-4; 50:6). These shepherds were the leaders of Israel; primarily the kings, but also the religious leaders, and the otherwise influential personages of the nation, who were not faithful to Yahweh, and who led His people away from Him. These under-shepherds were, in a sense, guilty of sedition, anarchy, rebellion, and false-teaching on a Covenant

George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, c. 1962), II, 416.

⁹Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 987.

level. They "scattered" God's flock in the sense that they took it out from under the control and influence of the Shepherd-Owner.

The scattering which they did, however, does not refer to the Exile. Only Yahweh could scatter in that sense because that event involved separation, judgement, and punishment under the terms of the Covenant, and only the one who held the Shepherd's staff was capable of that type of scattering. The relationship between what Yahweh did and what His under-shepherds did must be viewed from the vantage point which indicates that it was the scattering of the under-shepherds that set the stage for, and eventually led up to, the scattering done by Yahweh. In essence, it is a cause and effect relationship.

The fact that it was Yahweh alone who scattered His flock in judgement is convincingly attested to by the Old Testament Prophets. Jeremiah makes the point that the scattering of the flock resulted as God's act of punishment (12:3). Ezekiel and Zechariah both concur on this matter (Ezekiel 20:37-38; 34:5-6; Zechariah 10:2-3' 13:7-9). In this connection, an examination of the destiny of the flock of Israel needs to be made, but before this is undertaken, something needs to be said about the shepherd-flock imagery as it is applied to the "nations", and to individuals who were not in the covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah offer the most extended use of shepherd-flock imagery as it is applied to

Gentiles, foreigners, and sinners in the Old Testament. In an oracle concerning Babylon, Isaiah depicts "every man" as being like shepherdless sheep on the Day of Yahweh (13:14). In another place he says that "The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of Yahweh when he smites with his rod (30:31). In Jeremiah 12:3 the prophet implores Yahweh to pull out the wicked "like sheep for the slaughter." In this case, the wicked could be foreigners as well as Israelite transgressors, but in Jeremiah 25:34-38 the shepherds who wail and cry are the leaders of the "nations" against whom Yahweh has vented His "fierce anger." Finally, in Jeremiah 51:34-40 a judgement is leveled against Babylon, and Yahweh declares that He will "bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and he-goats."

All of these passages have one thing in common; God's judgement. There is an even more explicit reference in the Psalms to fools who, "Like sheep . . . are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd" (Psalm 49:14). One could begin to think that on the basis of this evidence, the shepherd-flock imagery as applied to the nations meant nothing but punishment and doom. However, there are two remaining references which show something entirely different. They show that God, in His wisdom and universal majesty, is able to manipulate and to use for His own purposes the rulers of foreign nations.

The first of these examples occurs in Isaiah 44:28. Here, it is said of Cyrus the Persian that "He is my shep-

herd, and he shall fulfill all my purposes; say of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'" The second is found in Daniel 8:5,8,21. In this instance, a he-goat is used as a symbol for the king of Greece, and he will be instrumental in connection with "the time of the end" (Daniel 8:17).

In both of these cases, a foreign power is employed by God for the accomplishment of His express purposes. The ability and power of Yahweh to control the nations of the world and their leaders is of the highest significance when considering the destiny of the Old Israel and the birth of the New. At the time of the Exile, Israel was "scattered to the nations" in judgement, and when God's time came, the remnant of Israel was again gathered from the nations. Therefore, within the context of God's Covenant agreement with Israel, it must be made perfectly clear that even during the time of judgement and punishment, God did not destine His flock to a region where He did not rule, nor did He consign His flock to shepherds over whom He had no control. With this fact firmly in place, I will proceed to a discussion of the destiny of the flock of Israel.

There is a fairly sizeable number of people and important personages in the Old Testament who either were shepherds, or who were compared with shepherds. Since the destiny of any flock depends upon who the shepherds are and what they are like, as well as upon whether or not the sheep and goats follow them, it will be helpful to list and con-

sider the shepherds in the Old Testament.

Prior to the age of the patriarchs, one very significant person who was a shepherd was Abel, the son of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:2). Among other things this indicates that, almost as far back as Israel went to relate its relationship to God in meaningful terms, shepherds played a prominent role. It is not unusual, therefore, that the individuals with whom God later established His Covenant were also shepherds. So were many of their contemporaries. For example, Abraham and Lot were wealthy shepherds (Genesis 12:16; 13:15), and so were Jacob and Laban (Genesis 30:42), as well as Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:2).

From the time when God first established His Covenant with the Israelite patriarchs, and for as long as that relationship existed between Him and His people, God continued to provide His flock with shepherds. The greatest of all of those shepherds of Israel was Moses. Prior to the time that God called him into His service Moses shepherded the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro (Exodus 3:1). Essential to the conditions of his call was the fact that Moses was to become the shepherd of God's people, going before Pharaoh and "bringing forth" the sons of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

The man, Joshua, who succeeded Moses was likewise thought of in terms of a shepherd (Numbers 27:17), and so were the Judges who came after him (I Chronicles 17:6). It was a very natural transition, therefore, for Israel to

think of its kings and leaders in their ruling capacities as "shepherding the people." David, who actually had been a shepherd (I Samuel 16:11), shepherded the people of Israel (II Samuel 5:2; I Chronicles 11:2). The Old Testament kings were never specifically called "shepherds of Israel," since this term was reserved for God only.¹⁰ Rather, the leaders were referred to in a general way as "shepherds," or else they were referred to as having been given the task of "shepherding the flock" (Jeremiah 3:15).

Interestingly enough, one of the prophets had been a shepherd before he became the mouth-piece of God. Amos had been "among the shepherds of Tekoa" (Amos 1:1), and the Lord "took him from following the flock" (Amos 7:15). Also, the prophet Zechariah was given the command to "Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter" (Zechariah 11:4).

During the pre-Exilic and post-Exilic periods the most significant shepherds for Israel were its kings and influential leaders. They were the ones whom God had made responsible for the care and guidance of His flock, and they were to set the proper precedents and to conform to the stipulations set forth in the Covenant. Nevertheless, they did not fulfill their covenant responsibilities, and instead of maintaining a united flock under the One Shepherd, they led the people astray, and the flock was scattered. It is for this reason that the under-shepherds of Israel were

¹⁰Kittel and Friedrich, VI, 488.

judged and condemned (Jeremiah 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:1-10). Consequently, scattered Israel became a flock under judgement, and that judgement resulted in the flock being scattered upon the mountains (Jeremiah 50:6,8).

When talking about the judging and scattering of the flock of Israel, it must be remembered that God was compelled to do this on two different occasions. The first occasion was at the time of the Exile, when the scattering which took place came in the form of the Babylonian Captivity. When the Captivity ended, He gathered His flock (Jeremiah 23:3-4; 31:10) and returned it to its former place in Palestine. It can never be stressed enough that it was God who gathered His flock, and that He desired to reconstruct His Covenant with His people again. It is important because the return from Exile did not mark the end of Israel's rebellion, nor of God's need to exercise judgement and punishment. Just as Israel had been scattered once, so would Israel be scattered again. And, even as God had gathered a remnant from Babylon, so would He also gather a remnant from the nations.

The conditions which led up to the second scattering, as well as to the way in which God chose to gather the remnant a second time, are stated most appropriately in Kittel, and this statement should serve well as an introduction to the next chapter where I will discuss the "new flock" as an image of God's people.

After the return from exile bad shepherds ruled who

provoked the wrath of Yahweh, Zech. 10:3; 11:4-17. He summons the sword: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against my fellow. . . . Smite the shepherd, so that the sheep scatter," Zech. 13:7. This divine judgement is the beginning of the purification from which the people of God moves on as a remnant into the time of salvation, v. 8f. The shepherd whom the sword smites was originally the worthless shepherd of 11:15 ff.; in the present context, he can only be the one "whom they pierced" (12:10) and whose death ushered in the time of salvation (13:1-6). Thus at the end of the Old Testament shepherd sayings there stands an intimation of the shepherd who suffers death according to God's will and who thereby brings about the decisive turn.¹¹

¹¹Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW FLOCK AS AN IMAGE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Israel, as the flock of God, was destined to live under the Covenant. Whether or not it lived under judgement and condemnation or peace and prosperity depended upon whether or not it fulfilled its covenant obligations. In spite of the fact that God had continually shown His love and grace toward His people, they stubbornly rebelled against His will and refused to follow Him. Because of their desires and demands for independence, God punished His flock by scattering it among the nations. And yet, He did not forsake His flock. He did not allow the scattering to last forever. Rather, it was His purpose to gather together the remnant of His flock and to shape it into a "new flock" according to the terms of the Covenant.

This new flock would be brought into existence only through a very long and tedious process. A portion of this process can be described in the following terms.

Yahweh remains faithful to that act by freely deciding to effect a new exodus, this time from Babylon (Ezekiel 20:32-44). . . . The new exodus will lead from all the nations where Israel has been scattered to the "wilderness of the peoples" (a symbolic name corresponding to the wilderness of Sinai) and a severe judgement in which Yahweh as Judge and Shepherd will make a division among the sheep.¹

¹Ralph Klein, "Yahweh Faithful And Free--A Study In Ezekiel," Concordia Theological Monthly, 42 (September 1971), 495.

Just as it was God's purpose to scatter His flock in judgement, so also it was His purpose to gather and restore His flock in mercy. Jeremiah 31:10 declares that the one who scattered Israel is the same one who will gather it together. Yahweh is pictured as the "Restorer of Israel" in Jeremiah 50:19, and in Amos 3:12 His is seen as a "Rescuer." In this connection it will be helpful to consider Ezekiel 34:1-31 in some detail in order to gain an adequate understanding of how the new flock was to be brought into existence.

Chapter thirty-four can be easily divided into four main sections. Verses one to ten are an indictment against the leaders of Israel who were unfaithful shepherds. Verses eleven to sixteen contain Yahweh's promises to shepherd His own flock. Verses seventeen to twenty-four are addressed to the old flock and are an indictment against it. Verses twenty-five to thirty-one contain the terms of the new Covenant which Yahweh will establish with His new flock. Thus, the new flock is brought into existence by means of a judgement and purge of the flock of Israel. Nothing "new" is created. Rather, the remnant of the old is refined and made to prosper. What is most significant is the fact that Yahweh promised to set one shepherd over His flock, who will be like His servant David (34:23). The fact that there will be only one shepherd implies that there will be a single flock²

²G. A. Cooke, A Critical And Exegetical Commentary

and the fact that he will be like David implies that he will be a faithful king, and that God will establish His Covenant through him.

It is interesting to see how this chapter, with its judgement and separation of the flock of Israel and the old shepherds, as well as its promises of a new flock and new shepherds under a new Covenant, fits into its larger context. One scholar described what is taking place as,

A new age (which) is about to dawn: punishment will be followed by recovery; Yahweh's purpose is to bring back Israel to its ancient home, and there to create a nation, outwardly and inwardly renewed, which shall devote itself wholly to His service. Thus (a) in place of the greedy shepherds of the past, Yahweh Himself will feed His flock, gathered and safe in their native land, 34:1-16; (b) the country will be transformed, made fertile and fully populated, 36:8-15; (c) the reassembled nation will be purified in heart and spirit, 36:16-38; (d) Israel, as good as dead, will rise to new life, 37:1-14; (e) the old divisions of the kingdoms will vanish, and a David will rule over a united nation, in the midst of which Yahweh's sanctuary will be set for evermore, 37:15-28.³

The new flock which was to come out of the remnant was to be brought into a covenant relationship with God and was to be thoroughly dependent upon Him for its existence. According to Ezekiel 34:25-31, the flock was to "dwell securely" in what had formerly been a place of danger, and God would make His flock, and the places around His hill, a "blessing" (34:25-26). Beyond this newly acquired security, Israel would know that Yahweh was the Lord (34:27), that He

On The Book Of Ezekiel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), II, 377.

³Ibid., p. 372.

was with them, and that they were His people (34:30).

Verse thirty-one concludes the Covenant with the words, "And you are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God." Since the Hebrew text employs the word צֶמֶד, it is argued here that this word should be translated as "flock," not as "sheep," because the judgement which takes place in verses seventeen to twenty-one is not a judgement of sheep alone, but a judgement of a flock that is composed of sheep and goats. Likewise, in verse twenty-two it is stated that Yahweh will save His "flock." Hence, the Covenant which He makes, beginning with verse twenty-five, is between Himself and a combined flock.

The new flock, therefore, which has emerged from the old one should not be thought of as being made up solely of sheep. The animals are exactly the same, the Covenant is essentially the same, and the relationship continues to be one of dependence upon Yahweh on the part of His flock. The only thing that has changed is the introduction of the one, Davidic-type shepherd. This, apparently, is a reference to the Messiah who would be a descendant of David, and who would rule Israel like a king and lead God's new flock like a shepherd.

The question now arises, "Is this the only reference in the Old Testament which employs shepherd imagery in connection with the Messiah, or are there other passages which refer to Him in the same way?" Furthermore, "What is the

significance of viewing the Messiah as Shepherd?" In attempting to answer these questions it is necessary to turn again to the Prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah.

The two most detailed and extended uses of the shepherd-flock image, Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Ezekiel 34 bear much the same message. The flock, Israel, is scattered, because her shepherds, the rulers, have not been ruling properly. But Yahweh promises to gather the flock Himself, and give them a faithful shepherd, the messianic king.⁴

Since the Ezekiel chapter has already been discussed, I will turn to Jeremiah 23:1-6 for comparison.

The various elements which make up the Jeremiah passage are remarkably similar to, although a good deal shorter than, Ezekiel 34. Verses one to two contain an indictment against Israel's shepherds for having scattered the flock. Verse three is God's promise that He will gather the remnant of His flock from the nations. Verse four is a proclamation that God will set new shepherds over His flock. Verses five and six contain the prophecy that a Davidic king shall be raised up who will save Judah and Israel. In this instance the figures of shepherd and king are fused together to form the "righteous Branch" of which David is both ancestor and prototype. The trademarks of this shepherd-king will be wisdom, justice, righteousness, security, and salvation.

There are only a few elements which vary between the

⁴Carl Graesser, Jr., The Shepherd-Flock Image In The Old Testament (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, non-published STM Thesis, 1956), p. 17.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel passages. Whereas Jeremiah speaks of the new shepherds (plural) who will be set up in verse four, Ezekiel states in verse twenty-three that only one shepherd will lead the flock. Whereas the flock is indicted and judged in Ezekiel 34:17-24, no such indictment occurs in Jeremiah 23. Although both passages contain promises made by Yahweh, only the Ezekiel passage puts them in the specific form of a Covenant. In the Jeremiah pericope these promises occur in the form of prophecy.

A third passage which employs shepherd imagery in reference to the Messiah is Micah 5:2-4. In this prophecy the Messiah is portrayed as one who will come from Bethlehem to rule Israel. The most significant part of the statement comes in verse four which says, "And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." In the references to Bethlehem, ruler, and feeder of the flock, the Davidic prototype, as well as the figure of the king, and the role of the shepherd are all centered in one individual, the Messiah.

In this regard it will be helpful to point to an observation made by Carl Graesser, Jr. It is his valued opinion that,

The Israelites pictured both their rescuing God and their kings as shepherds. It was a natural step to apply the same title to the great messianic king. In his ministry the thoughts of rescue and kingship would reach their fullest meaning. Micah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah employ the pastoral image in proclaiming the work of this coming king.

Graesser furthermore points out that,

It is significant that each of these prophets includes these four points in their description:

- (1) The shepherd is appointed by Yahweh, and his reign is initiated and sustained by Yahweh's power.
- (2) He comes from the Davidic line.
- (3) He rescues the scattered flock and causes them to "dwell securely."
- (4) He reunites Judah and Israel.⁵

For all practical purposes the fact that shepherd imagery is applied to the promised Messiah is indisputable. In fact, one Biblical scholar has gone so far as to suggest that "in the time of impending disaster 'shepherd' still occurs as a title for the ruler, but only for the future messianic son of David."⁶

The significance of the new flock as an image of God's people lies in the fact that it grew out of the remnant of the old flock, was tested and refined under God's judgement, was placed into a renewed covenant relationship with God, and lived on to be lead by the promised Messiah. It is the Shepherd-Messiah that forms the vital connecting link between the Old Testament and the New. He becomes the one upon whom the hopes and promises of Israel are based. For without Him, there is no promise and no shepherd; without a shepherd, the flock is scattered and there is no hope.

How strange it is, how awesome, remarkable, and divinely unfathomable that the Hope of Israel, the Messianic

⁵Ibid., p. 46.

⁶Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., c. 1968), VI, 488.

Shepherd of the combined flock of God should appear, not in the form of a mighty shepherd as one would expect, but as a lowly animal from the flock. Who can understand the wisdom of the Most High God, or who can penetrate His reasoning? Only the Prophet Isaiah, in a moment of prophetic vision and ecstasy seems to have been able to capture the full impact of God's plan for His flock. In one sweeping portrait of words and images he declares,

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and
afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53:4-7).

The picture that he constructs is more like a mirror than a painting because it reflects the scattered state of the flock, the unrelenting love of the Shepherd of Israel for His flock, and the incarnated oneness and sameness of the Shepherd-Lamb who gave His life that the flock might be gathered.

The words of the Prophet remind one so much of the ceremony on the Day of Atonement which centered around the goat for Azazel, and the way in which that perfect specimen became sin and atoned for the sins of the people. At the same time it calls to mind the essence of God's Covenant with His

people, with special emphasis on their total dependence upon Him. But above all, Isaiah's words point to the fact that the animals of God's flock, by nature, go astray, and that God as the Shepherd with His Messiah as the Lamb, by nature, gather those who have been scattered and restore the unity of the flock, even at the cost of a holy and precious life.

It is this Shepherd-Messiah, this perfect, blameless, sacrificial Lamb, who forms the bridge between the two Covenants of God. He is the leader of the remnant and the embodiment of the reconstructed flock. He is the clearest example of the miracle of God's grace, and it is only through the Shepherd who became a Sheep that the flock of God is again led by one Shepherd "like my servant David." Through Him the remnant has been restored and the Covenant renewed.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been my purpose in this study to examine the shepherd-flock imagery of the Old Testament and to relate it to the covenant theology of Israel by investigating the various underlying concepts and applications and by exploring the different levels of meaning of that imagery. My primary thesis has been that a complete understanding of the shepherd-flock imagery depends upon a good, working knowledge of the composition of Old Testament flocks, and upon a true appreciation of the fact that goats as well as sheep were vital parts of those flocks. In addition, it has been necessary to investigate the role which the shepherd played as leader and guardian of his flock, and also the relationship which existed between him and his flock. It is only by cultivating a background of this nature that one ultimately becomes capable of understanding the application of the shepherd-flock imagery to Israel and Yahweh, as well as to the remnant and the Messiah. It was to this end that I structured my research and presentation.

At this point I am convinced that the flocks of the Old Testament were most frequently of a combined nature, that the positive aspects of goats are stressed almost everywhere throughout that enormous body of literature, and that goats played a tremendously significant role in the composition of the flocks as well as in the lives of the

Israelite people. The multiplicity of facts and evidence which have been marshalled together to substantiate and verify these points and assertions stand as a testimony and as a proof that when the imagery of the flock in the Old Testament is applied to the Israelite nation, to God, or to the Messiah, then the reality of the combined flock is a concept which remains totally in force unless the text specifically states to the contrary.

It goes without saying that there are certainly exceptions to the combined flocks where clear reference is made to separate flocks of sheep or goats. Nowhere have I maintained, nor does Scripture maintain, that separate flocks did not exist. What I maintain, and what the Old Testament verifies is that the practice of keeping separate flocks was the exception and not the rule.

What seems to me to be the most important reasons for emphasizing the combined nature of the flock, other than the fact that this is what Scripture emphasizes, are, first of all, that it underlines the idea that the animals of the flock were not all the same, but even though they were different types and had different assets and liabilities, they were regarded as equals. When this thought is applied to the people in the flock of God it serves to demonstrate how God allows His people to maintain their personal identities and attributes, while He does not value any of them above or below the others.

Secondly, the necessity of a combined flock indicates

that those who are to benefit from the products of the flock require both types of animals to be present in order for them to benefit fully. This requirement is likewise true for those who are to benefit from the flock of God. Since God's people are to be a blessing for all nations according to the terms of both the Old and New Covenants (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:19-20), then the corporate unity and the full effectiveness of the flock must be maintained.

Thirdly, it is of the utmost importance to know that all of the animals of the combined flock were equally dependent upon the shepherd, although they undoubtedly were so for slightly different reasons. By the same token, the members of the flock of God must view themselves as being totally and equally dependent upon Him, no matter what the reason.

Finally, it was to the remnant of the combined flock, or perhaps I should say to the combined remnant of the combined flock, that God gave His promise of a Shepherd-Messiah. The new flock of God which grew out of that remnant and which is led by the Shepherd-Lamb must likewise view itself as being made up of sheep and goats, because it was to sheep and goats that the Messiah was sent.

This concludes my study of the concepts and imagery of shepherd, sheep, and goats in the Old Testament, but this by no means exhausts all of the possible areas of research. For one to stop here and to say that the task is completed would be like someone laying the foundation for a house and

calling it complete without bothering to build the superstructure on top of it. The use and application of shepherd-flock imagery does not end with the Old Testament, but rather, it continues to appear again and again in many different forms in the Intertestamental Literature, in the writings and sayings of the Rabbis, and also in the New Testament.

It is my personal opinion that many of the later writers who were familiar with pastoral scenes in their own day and age also went back to the material which had been written before their time and borrowed from it those images, concepts and metaphores in which they encountered meaning and relevant symbolism. For many of them like Jesus, or John, or the writer of the Book of Enoch, the Old Testament concepts of shepherd, sheep, and goats formed the groundwork upon which they built their words of prophecy and instruction. On the basis of this research paper, the groundwork has also been laid for additional investigation and research into the application of the shepherd-flock imagery in the Intertestamental and New Testament literature.

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