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THE SHEPHERD-FLOCK IMAGE  
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Old Testament Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The shepherd-flock image has played a large part in the personal piety of most Christians from the beginning of the Christian era. It has assumed an importance beyond that of many other common metaphors, largely through the 23rd Psalm, the parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18: 12; Luke 15:16), and John 10, where our Lord refers to himself as the "good shepherd."

This pastoral image is part of that rich use of simile and metaphor for which the Old Testament is noted. This richness of imagery is due to a large degree to the Semitic mode of thought, which has been described as "optical rather than logical."<sup>1</sup> The sacred writers loved to speak in words which were concrete and could be "seen." This preference can be observed in the more than sixty passages in the Old Testament where the shepherd-flock image is employed.

The importance of this picture in the Old Testament stems to a great extent from the fact that it is used to portray an important relationship, namely, that between Yahweh and his people, Israel. The present study directs itself to this specific point, asking the question, "What aspects of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel does this image portray and illuminate?" Since the image is also common in the extra-biblical

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<sup>1</sup>John Paterson, "The Book that is Alive." Religion in Life, V (1945-46), p. 584.



literature, a secondary question is also asked, "How and to what degree does the Biblical usage differ from that in the extra-biblical literature?"

The shepherd-flock image has two aspects. Any statement regarding a shepherd not only informs us about the person denoted as a shepherd, but also implies something about his flock, and vice-versa. For this reason a study dealing exhaustively with each passage in succession would become thoroughly confusing. In addition, such a chronological study reveals little more than that the image is most common in the literature of the exilic period, especially Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and the Psalms. There seems to have been no development of any particular significance.

This study therefore follows a more systematic method. We shall look at each side of the image, utilizing the pertinent material in the entire Old Testament before moving on to another side of the image. After a brief survey of the extra-biblical usage, the following chapters will deal with Yahweh as a shepherd, Israel as his flock, other leaders who are named shepherd, and finally, the Messianic shepherd.

It will be noted that this study deals largely with the primary Biblical sources rather than with secondary sources. We were able to locate but three discussions of the subject at hand of any length.<sup>2</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup>Vinzenz Kamp, "Das Hirtenmotiv im Alten Testament," Festschrift zu Kardinal Faulhaber (München: Verlage von J. Pfeiffer, 1949), pp. 7-20, Wilhelm Jost; Poimen (Gießen: Minchowsche Universitäts-Druckerei, 1939); and J. G. S. S. Thomson, "The Shepherd-Ruler Concept in the Old Testament and its Application in the New Testament," Scottish Journal of Theology, VIII (Dec., 1955), pp. 406-18. Poimen in Kittle's Wörterbuch has not yet appeared.



proved helpful largely in determining the relationship and distinctions between the Biblical and extra-biblical usage of the shepherd-flock image.

CHAPTER II

THE IMAGE OF SHEPHERD IN THE  
BIBLICAL AND EXTRA-BIBLICAL

The image and idea of a shepherd's responsibility very frequently apply the activities of these people. There is a large proportion of the people identifying the shepherd's function with the care and raising of flocks and herds, as we will see in the next chapter of shepherds and their flocks. This is the case with the shepherds of the Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, and other peoples.

The shepherd of the Bible is frequently used to describe the ruling and protecting activities of the kings and gods. This is a special application of the image as applied to kings.

The Bible uses the image of a shepherd to describe the shepherd's care of his flock of sheep or as a metaphor for the God, who is the shepherd of his people. This is indeed an excellent metaphor for the shepherd's function as a ruler and a protector, for his flock and care.

There is also a close relationship between the shepherd and the shepherd's flock, which is the shepherd's flock. This is a close relationship between the shepherd and his flock.

The shepherd's role in the Bible is very important. This is the shepherd's role in the Bible. The shepherd's role is very important in the Bible.

THE SHEPHERD'S ROLE IN THE BIBLE (London: The Bible Society, 1955, pp. 1-10)

William J. Barr, (London: The Bible Society, 1955, pp. 1-10)



## CHAPTER II

### THE IMAGE OF SHEPHERD IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The language and ideas of a people's occupations very frequently supply the metaphors of their speech. Since a large proportion of the people inhabiting the "Fertile Crescent" engaged in the care and raising of flocks and herds, it was quite natural that the image of shepherd and flock should find its way into the literature of the Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Phoenician, Israelite, and Egyptian peoples.

The metaphor of shepherd was primarily used to describe the ruling and protecting activities of the kings and gods. Gadd offers a partial explanation of this epithet as applied to kings:

The kings were accustomed to proclaim themselves "shepherds" combining the ideas of keeping sheep as an industry gainful to the God, and tending them for their own good. This is indeed an excellent term for the kingship understood as a balance and a channel between Gods and men.<sup>1</sup>

There is some debate over the various stages of development through which the shepherd metaphor passed. Jost summarizes Durr's analysis:

Das Hirtenbild wird auf die Könige übertragen. Bald wird die Hirt-König-Vorstellung von einem Ideal bestimmt. Das Ideal wird auf eine Gottheit übertragen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. G. Gadd, Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Jost, Poimen (Gieszen: Münchowsche Universitäts-Druckerei, 1939), p. 7.



On the other hand, Jeremias states:

Die sumerische Symbolik zieht, zunächst in der Gottheit den Hirten und davon abgeleitet nach dem Grundsatz Himmelsbild gleich Weltbild den König.<sup>3</sup>

Neither of these views concerning the development of the image affects its meaning. Its connotation is obvious enough from its usage.

#### Shepherd King

We meet the metaphor as an epithet for the king for the first time in a prayer of Lugal-zaggis, a Sumerian ruler. He prays:

heaven that it might never revoke the fair destiny which it had decreed for him, and that he might always be the shepherd at the head of the flock.<sup>4</sup>

Later kings and leaders followed him in ascribing their "shepherdship" to their particular gods. This is seen in the law code of Hammurabi:

Hammurabi, the shepherd, called by Enlil, . . . the devout prince . . . the shepherd of the people.

.....  
I Hammurabi, the perfect king, was not careless (or) neglectful of the black-headed (people), whom Enlil had presented to me, (and) whose shepherding Marduk had committed to me.<sup>5</sup>

The law code of Lipit-Ishtar is quite similar:

When Anu (and) Enlil had called Lipit-Ishtar . . . the wise shepherd, . . . to the princship of the land in order to establish justice in the land, . . . to bring well-being to the Sumerians and Akkadians, then I, Lipit-Ishtar, the humble shepherd of Nippur. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar was sent out by Marduk "to keep the land in order, exercise

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<sup>3</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Die Biblische Erlösererwartung (Berlin: Hochweg Verlag, 1931), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup>J. C. Gadd, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>James B. Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 165, 165, 177.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 159.



the shepherdship over the people, and sustain the cult-places."<sup>7</sup>

Assurnasirpal II prayed, "But thou, O Ishtar, . . . didst single me out . . . call me to be a shepherd of men."<sup>8</sup>

A great many other examples could be cited to show that the shepherd metaphor was used of the kings very commonly throughout Assyria and Babylonia in all types of literature. The extant Akkadian literature refers to all kings but three as shepherds.<sup>9</sup>

Although the image was used to a lesser extent in other countries, examples can be found in all periods of their literatures. The Egyptians already employed the figure in their oldest King-Hymns.<sup>10</sup> Greek literature also knows the metaphor, beginning with the time of Homer.<sup>11</sup>

The image was sometimes used not only of the king, but of any subordinate leader, such as a military leader. The Tel-el-Amarna letters include a message from Putihepa, the governor of the besieged Jerusalem:

Behold, I am not a regent (or prince).  
An officer (deputy) I am of the king my lord;  
Behold, I am a shepherd of the king.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Engnell, Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East (Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri A. B., 1943), p. 42.

<sup>8</sup>Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 239.

<sup>9</sup>Jost, loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients, 4te Auflage (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1930), p. 653. See also Hermann Grapow, "Vergleiche und andere bildliche Ausdrücke in Agyptischen," Der Alte Orient, XXI, Heft 1/2 (1920), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup>Odyssey, IV, 532; Iliad I, 263.

<sup>12</sup>J. G. S. S. Thomson, "The Shepherd-Ruler Concept in the OT and its Application in the NT," Scottish Journal of Theology, VIII (December, 1955), p. 411.



A figure of speech often loses its full original meaning through long and abundant usage. This metaphor suffered the loss of much of its richness and became to a great extent an idle title among the Babylonians.<sup>13</sup> An example of such a conventional use is found in the directions for ritual prayers. "Dangerous Day. The shepherd of the great peoples shall not eat meat roasted upon coals."<sup>14</sup> At times the use of the title bordered on flattery.<sup>15</sup> Something of this may be seen in the prayer of an ill-fated Babylonian who was willing to accept help from any quarter:

May the God who rejected me help me! May the goddess who resented me have pity on me! May the shepherd, the sun of men (the king), who is like a god (be gracious to me)!<sup>16</sup>

By a natural extension of this image the shepherd staff became a symbol of the authority and power of the king. In time the long staff was replaced by a shorter staff, or scepter.<sup>17</sup> The king's staff or scepter is often mentioned in ancient near-eastern literature. Warad-Sin of Larsa prayed for "a staff to subdue the people."<sup>18</sup> A "staff which makes the loyal men walk with one step" is claimed as a divine gift to the king Ishme-Dagon.<sup>19</sup> The shepherd staff is also among the royal in-

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<sup>13</sup>Jost, loc. cit. and Vinzenz Hamp, "Das Hirtenmotiv im Alten Testament," Festschrift zu Kardinal Faulhaber, ed. by Johann Westermayr (München: Verlag von J. Pfeiffer, 1949), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup>Frankfort, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>15</sup>Hamp, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>Frankfort, op. cit., p. 309.

<sup>17</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients, 2te Auflage (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1906), p. 377.

<sup>18</sup>Gadd, loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



signia is the Etana legend.<sup>20</sup> It is in great evidence in the statuary and relief work of the ancients. In some Egyptian statues the scepter has the unmistakable curved shape of the shepherd's crook.<sup>21</sup>

#### Shepherd God

The gods were also named shepherds, though not as frequently as the kings. For example, Shamash is shepherd of the upper and lower world, both of the lesser gods and of human beings.<sup>22</sup> The metaphor was sometimes used in its richest connotations. Amon is a "Hirt, der die Kühe in der Frühe austreibt und die Hungrigen zum Futter treibt, den bedürftigen Menschen zum Brot treibt."<sup>23</sup> As in the case of the kings, however, it also became a conventional title of the Gods.

The god Dumu-zi, a shepherd, ruled 36,000 years . . . . Etana, a shepherd, he who ascended to heaven (and) who consolidated all countries became king and ruled 1,560 years . . . [266] the god Lugal-banda, a shepherd, ruled 1,200 years.<sup>24</sup>

The gods to whom the epithet was most commonly applied are Tammuz, Ishtar, and Enlil.<sup>25</sup>

Engnell has gathered a large number of epithets which were connected with both kings and gods. A number of these titles include the term shepherd.

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<sup>20</sup>Jeremias, op. cit., p. 380.

<sup>21</sup>James B. Pritchard, The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 383, Sen-Usert I, p. 389; Pepi I, p. 420; Ramses II, p. 545; Set I, pp. 556-7; the god Osiris.

<sup>22</sup>Hamp, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Grapow, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>24</sup>Pritchard, op. cit., pp. 265-66.

<sup>25</sup>Hamp, loc. cit.



King	God
shepherd of abundance Sulgi	lord of abundance and riches Marduk <sup>26</sup>
wonderful shepherd Assurasirpal	abundant shepherd Tammuz
the protector of peace, strong shepherd, tending the black-headed Esarhaddon	shepherd of the black-headed Enlil <sup>27</sup>
shepherd of righteousness Sin-idinnam	lord of righteousness Babbar
judging shepherd Nabonid	incorruptable judge Samaš
shepherd of widespread peoples Nabonid	shepherd of all heaven and earth Nabi <sup>28</sup>

The parallel use of these titles exemplifies the way in which the king was thought of as the representative of the god.

#### Shepherd Rescuer

While the shepherd image usually expressed the rule and authority of the god or king, on occasion it also indicated their rescuing and saving activity. In this sense it was applied to the rescuer who would save the peoples of the earth in critical future times.<sup>29</sup> The term was used of "Tammuz, Attis, Meldart von Tyrus, Dionysos, Hermes, Orpheus, etc."<sup>30</sup> It

<sup>26</sup>Engnell, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>29</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients, 4te Auflage, pp. 652-53.

<sup>30</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Die Biblische Erlösererwartung, p. 252.



is found in the oracles of Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt, of the one who would "gather the scattered people."<sup>31</sup>

Merodach baladan II lässt sich . . . als den von der Gottheit berufenen Erretter verherrlichen, von dem das Orakel verkündet: "Dieser ist der Hirte, der die Versprengten zusammenbringt."<sup>32</sup>

Another favorite term for the rescuer was the "good" or "true" shepherd.<sup>33</sup> In this use the image was not nearly as devoid of meaning as it often was when it was used as a mere title for god or king.

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<sup>31</sup>Joachim Jeremias, "Jesus als Weltvollender," Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie, IV Heft, (1930), 32.

<sup>32</sup>Alfred Jeremias, Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients, 4te Auflage, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup>Jost, op. cit., p. 8 and Joachim Jeremias, op. cit., p. 32.



### CHAPTER III

#### YAHWEH, THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

In common with her neighbors Israel applied the image of shepherd to her god, Yahweh. He is directly named shepherd only three times. Jacob invokes the "Shepherd, the rock of Israel" (Gen. 49:24). The psalmist cries for aid, "Oh, Shepherd of Israel, . . . stir up thy might and save us" (Ps. 80:1). He also calls Yahweh "my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1).

The image is common in simile and metaphor, however. Yahweh acts "like a shepherd" when he "gathers his people like a shepherd" (Is. 40:11). His activity is referred to as shepherding, as when Micah prays, "Shepherd thy flock as in the days of old" (7:14).

Most often the image is implied. Israel is "Yahweh's flock" (Jer. 13:17) or "his fold" (Jer. 25:31). Israel's kings and leaders are Yahweh's under-"shepherds" (Jer. 23:1-4).

Among Israel's neighbors the shepherd image was employed for gods as a title indicating their ruling power and authority. The Old Testament usage is quite similar in form, but a close examination reveals that there is often a decided difference in connotation, one that at times may be described as a new dimension. The shepherd image became a picture of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. This was a natural development, since Israel's god and shepherd was more than a king. He had bound himself to them by a covenant, and this gracious covenant was the norm which regulated their entire relationship.



Even when the Old Testament ascribes acts to Yahweh which other gods also perform, such as setting up kings, caring for the people through them, and punishing disobedience, the context indicates that the underlying relationship is that of the covenant. Because of his covenant, Yahweh shepherds his chosen flock even more graciously than they could reasonably hope for. On the other hand, he punishes those who have ignored the covenant more severely than they might expect because of their greater responsibility. Still, in the midst of chastisement, Israel can turn to its shepherd hopefully and confidently, for this shepherd is known as one who uses even punishment to draw his people back.<sup>1</sup> He has promised to be a covenant-shepherd.

Eichrodt feels that the shepherd image is especially expressive of Yahweh's goodness and  $\text{TOT}$ :

Auch das Hirtenbild zeichnet die Güte Jahves als Erfüllung der einmal von ihm begründeten Verbindung mit Israel . . . . [113] Auch im Alten Testament ist der Hirtenname, . . . vielfach zur abgegriffenen Formel geworden, die dem göttlichen Herrn des Volkes zukommt; doch bekommt die Redeweise aus starkem persönlichem Erleben heraus immer wieder frische Farben und ursprüngliche Wärme, . . . und die Erkenntnis der unvergleichlichen Größe des Israelgottes gab dem Bewusstsein, sich "Jahves Volk und Schafe seiner Weide" nennen zu dürfen, ein ganz anderes Pathos, als es im ausserisraelitischen Polytheismus erreichbar war.<sup>2</sup>

Hamp<sup>3</sup> comments that shepherd is a synonym for "king" which indicates Yahweh's absolute authority and command of Israel. He then adds:

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<sup>1</sup>Vinzenz Hamp, "Das Hirtenmotiv im Alten Testament," Festschrift zu Kardinal Faulhaber, ed. by Johann Estermayr (München: Verlag von J. Pfeiffer, 1949), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Walther Eichrodt, Theologie des Alten Testaments, Teil I, 4te Auflage (Berling: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1950), pp. 112-3.

<sup>3</sup>Hamp, op. cit., p. 18.



"Hirt" had daneben noch eine zweite, viel zartere Bedeutungsnuance, die des leitenden und fürsorgenden, hegenden und pflegenden, ja liebenden Beschützers, der wenn es gilt, mutig und kampfbereit seine Herde verteidigt. . . . denn sie steht in engster Beziehung zum Kern der alttestamentlichen Religion und Frömmigkeit, zum Bundesgedanken. Durch den Sinaibund treten Gott und Volk in die Schicksals- und Liebesgemeinschaft von Hirt und Herde ein, und wenn in der messianischen Zeit ein neuer Friedensbund geschlossen wird, dann wird auch das Hirtenverhältnis wieder neu geknüpft.<sup>4</sup>

With this basic difference in mind, we turn first to a review of the "kingly" aspect of this image in the Old Testament, and then to a study of its covenant connotations.

#### Yahweh the Shepherd-King

A number of passages link Yahweh's shepherding and kingship directly.

Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules [אֵלֹהִים] for him; . . . . He will shepherd his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms (Is. 40:10-11).

Isaiah offers another direct parallel:

Where is he who brought up out of the sea the shepherds of his flock? . . . . Who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? . . . . We have become like those over whom thou hast never ruled [אֵלֹהִים] (Is. 63:11,12,19).

Similarly Micah (2:12-13) connects the kingly power of Yahweh with his shepherding. "I will set them together like sheep in a fold." This will be accomplished when "their king [מֶלֶךְ] will pass on before them, the LORD at their head." The RSV translates Psalm 80:1-2:

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh! Stir up thy might and come to save us.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.



Thomson<sup>5</sup> points out that there is good reason to translate **יְשֻׁבֵּן עַל כְּרֻבִים** as "enthroned upon the cherubim," for the phrase is used of Yahweh's throne above the ark of the covenant from which he rules Israel (2 Kings 19:15; 1 Sam. 4:4).

Yahweh's kingly power and control is clearly seen when he punishes his erring flock. Yahweh, the shepherd, promises to come and judge between the individuals of Israel (Ez. 34:20). The entire flock as a unit is also under obligation to obey Yahweh, or his wrath will follow. Unless Israel gives Yahweh his proper glory, Yahweh's flock will go into captivity (Jer. 13:17). Yahweh is credited with scattering his own people (Jer. 25:34). Indeed, if there is any peril or disaster, it is ultimately due to the shepherd, for he exercises full control (Ps. 74:1). Yahweh promises to attend to the shepherds (kings) of Israel because they have not attended to Israel (Jer. 23:1-4; 34:10). The shepherds (rulers) of other nations will also feel the brunt of his wrath (Jer. 25:34). Yahweh rules supreme; all things are in the control of this shepherd.

#### Yahweh the Shepherd Rescuer

The shepherd image connotes much more than Yahweh's rule and control, for Yahweh rules not as other kings but according to the covenant which he has made. The specific point at issue when his activity is portrayed as shepherding is his covenant love (or wrath) rather than his lordship.

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<sup>5</sup>J. G. S. S. Thomson, "The Shepherd-Ruler Concept in the OT and its Application in the NT," Scottish Journal of Theology, VIII (December, 1955), 407.



The very passages quoted above as examples of a direct connection between ruling and shepherding (Is. 40:11; 63:11; Mi. 2:12; Ps. 80:1). primarily stress Yahweh's gracious use of his power to rescue Israel from captivity in Egypt and Babylon. These two mighty acts are always considered to be the best examples of Yahweh's covenant love in action. The fact that most of the instances in which Yahweh is named shepherd are descriptions of these two events is conclusive evidence that the shepherd image in Israel bears the primary connotation of Yahweh's covenant love.

The rescue from Egypt is described three times under this figure. Psalm 78 recounts the glorious history of Yahweh's care for Israel from Egypt to David's day. After sending the mighty wonders and plagues,

then he led forth his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety so that they were not afraid (vv. 52-53).

This shepherd-rescue was a source of ever-returning courage to suffering Israelites, a promise that more could be expected from Yahweh. Isaiah 63:7-64:12 forms a prayer of the people in captivity for such aid. Contemplating the present distress, the prophet remembers the past aid of Yahweh at the time of the exodus from Egypt.

Where is he who brought up out of the midst of the sea the shepherds of his flock? . . . like cattle that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. . . . Thou, O LORD, art our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is thy name (Is. 63:11,14,16).

Set within this context, the image clearly stresses Yahweh's gracious covenant shepherding. Psalm 77 is also the prayer of an afflicted Israelite. After describing his problem, he takes courage as he remembers Yahweh's deeds of old, his steadfast love, and his promise to be gracious. The prophet assures himself of Yahweh's imminent help, for



"Thou didst lead thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (v. 20).

It was only natural that the second exodus, from Babylon, should be described as another shepherding of Yahweh. Isaiah 40 concludes its glowing description of that exodus:

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young (v. 11).

Yahweh's instrument to deliver Israel is Cyrus, of whom Yahweh says, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose" (Is. 44:28).

The return itself is described:

They shall feed along the ways, on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water guide them (Is. 49:9-11).

Jeremiah also uses this image of the second exodus from Babylon.

Israel is a hunted sheep driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones. . . . I will restore Israel to his pasture and he shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and his desire shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead (50:17).

Yahweh remembers his covenant and once again brings Israel to the promised land.

The reunion of all Israel, scattered among the nations, comes about through the shepherding of Yahweh.

Behold I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, . . . for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born. Hear the word of the LORD, . . . "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock" (Jer. 31:9-10).

Here the father and shepherd images, which Eichrodt<sup>6</sup> considers important

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<sup>6</sup>Eichrodt, op. cit. 112-13.



covenant pictures, are parallel to one another. Micah also speaks of a reunited flock:

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture (v. 12).

Later the prophet prays,

Shepherd thy people with thy staff, the flock of thy inheritance, who dwell alone . . . let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old (7:14).

Appended to this is a reminiscence of the first great shepherding of Yahweh, "As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt I will show them marvelous things" (7:15).

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 his flock himself and give them a faithful shepherd, the messianic king.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the LORD. . . . "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings," says the LORD. "Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries . . . I will bring them back to their fold, . . . I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing . . . I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king . . . .

In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely (Jer. 23:1-6).

Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! should not shepherds feed the sheep? . . . . My sheep were scattered . . . . Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep . . . . I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered . . . . I will bring them into their own land; and I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel . . . . and I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them (Ezek. 34:2,6,11,12,13,23).



These passages are self-explanatory. We need only underline the fact that the point of the shepherd image here is not kingly power or control, though that is clear enough, but the compassion of the shepherd and his gracious rescue of the flock to whom he has bound himself by a covenant.

Zechariah offers another instructive example of the image. On the coming judgment day other nations will be destroyed, but Zion will be safe and experience peace. "On that day the LORD their God will save them, for they are the flock of his people" (9:16), that is, because they are his covenant people.

In the Psalter the shepherd-flock image is most common in the psalms ascribed to Asaph. It is significant that when appealing to Yahweh's graciousness for deliverance, the psalmist refers to Yahweh as Israel's shepherd:

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh! Stir up thy might, and come to save us! (80:1-2).

O God, why dost thou cast us off forever? Why does thy anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? (?4:1).

The arguments might be restated, "You are our shepherd, act the part, save us." "You are our shepherd, gracious and forgiving, why then this anger?" Another Asaphic psalm, 83, contains a more indirect use of the pastoral image. The psalmist complains that Israel's neighbors are plotting against her, and have made a covenant against Yahweh. He prays that Yahweh would do to them as he did to "Sebah and Zalumna, who said, 'Let us take possession for ourselves of the pastures of God,'" that is, he prays that Yahweh would shepherd and guard the land (pasture) of his



flock (Israel). The writer of Psalm 28 summarizes his plea for help with the words:

The LORD is the strength of his people, he is the saving refuge of his annointed. O save thy people, and bless thy heritage; shepherd them and carry them forever (vv. 8-9).

Since the psalms often cut through to the very core of Old Testament theology and piety, we see in them the richest meaning of the shepherd image. The shepherd alone has power enough to rescue his helpless sheep. But the psalmist appeals not only because he knows of Yahweh's power, as one might call on any powerful god. He prays confidently, assured that this shepherd will aid him. This God is not like the gods of the nations. He has entered into a gracious covenant with his flock, Israel. In these "rescue" passages the shepherd metaphor directs itself precisely to this "plus of grace" in the God of Israel.

#### Other Indications of the Covenant Basis in the Shepherd Image

There are several other marks of Yahweh's covenant love and care which are mentioned by means of this image. Jacob is the first individual who is recorded as referring to Yahweh as a shepherd. He speaks of the general care which Yahweh has given him and continues:

The God who has shepherded me all my life long to this day . . . .  
bless the lads; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth (Gen. 48:15-16).

Although such a blessing might be the wish of any father, it should be remembered that this was no less than the promise of the covenant which Jacob's shepherd made with the patriarchs. In blessing Joseph, Jacob again refers to Yahweh as "shepherd" (Gen. 49:24). The text is difficult



and the exact meaning elusive. But the context speaks of the power of Yahweh, and the beneficent use to which he will put that power in caring for Joseph.

Psalm 23 refers to Yahweh's day by day care as shepherding. There is no doubt here as to the character of the shepherd. He is the gracious covenant god who has  $\text{טֹרֵן}$  and  $\text{לִט}$  for his sheep. He supplies every need of his people. This he does not out of the necessity of having a people to serve him, but for his name's sake. Hosea indicates that Yahweh would prefer to give this protection to Israel, yet he cannot. Israel has stubbornly rejected Yahweh and must pay the consequences. "Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?" (4:16).

Throughout the Old Testament Yahweh is depicted as one who takes a special delight in aiding the oppressed and needy. The shepherd image is particularly apt in expressing this. When he rescues Israel, he will "bear the lambs in his arms and gently lead those who are with young" (Is. 40:11). He also promises.

I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy (Ezek. 34:16).

He who leads them back to Israel is  $\text{יְהוָה רַחֵם}$ , "he who has pity on them" (Is. 49:10). After they have returned, the "first-born of the poor will feed and the needy will lie down in safety" (Is 14:30).

Jeremiah may also have employed this image to show Yahweh's care for the needy.

I will gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the women with child and her who is in travail . . . I will lead them back. I will make them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they will not stumble (31:8-9).



Even if this is not specifically a pastoral picture, the thought is closely related to what the shepherd simile indicates, for the following verse states, "He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd."

### The Gifts of the Shepherd

Since sheep are virtually helpless and have many needs, the shepherd must toil tirelessly to give adequate care to his flock. This varied activity presented excellent opportunities to portray the many gifts which Yahweh presented to Israel according to the gracious terms of his covenant.

The recovery of the promised land is indicated by the pasture which the flock of Israel will receive from Yahweh. This includes Ephraim and Carmel (Jer. 50:19), Bashan and Gilead (Micah 7:14; Jer. 50:19), Philistia (Zeph. 2:6-7; 3:13), and the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 34:14).

Though sheep live in many dangers, under the care of a good shepherd they lead a perfectly peaceful, secure, and fearless life. Israel is promised that she will dwell securely as a flock when Yahweh rescues her and returns her to the promised land.

I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods (Ezek. 34:25).<sup>7</sup>

In addition, Israel will know no fear.

I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD (Jer. 23:4).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Note also Micah 5:4 and Jer. 23:6.

<sup>8</sup>Note also Zeph. 3:13.



The writer of Psalm 23 paints the care of Yahweh as such that the only "enemies" he need fear are the goodness and mercy of Yahweh which "pursue" him (v. 6).

Israel will not only have her basic needs supplied, she will be prosperous. During their return,

They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them (Is. 49:11).

When they have returned they will "no longer be consumed with hunger" (Ezek. 34:29). All Israel's "desire will be filled" (Jer. 50-19), in the "fat pasture" of the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 34:14).

Yahweh will reunite Israel and Judah and will "set them together like sheep in a fold" (Mi. 2:12). Then they will have but one shepherd (king) (Ezek. 37:24). Jeremiah predicts a large population, "I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply" (23:4). Micah may have intended the same when he proclaimed, "I will set them together like the flock of Bozrah" (Mi. 2:12). The picture is used elsewhere in Scripture of Yahweh who "makes their families like flocks" (Ps. 107:41).

Yahweh's loving care for his flock is also shown by the gift of leaders or shepherds to lead the flock. Joshua was anointed in answer to Moses' prayer for a leader that "the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). The tribes of Israel reminded David of Yahweh's call to rule, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel" (2 Sam. 5:2). After a devastating description of Israel's faithlessness, Jeremiah calls them to repentance and promises them better guidance in the future,







## CHAPTER IV

### ISRAEL, THE FLOCK OF YAHWEH

A shepherd must have a flock, and so it was natural for Israel to be pictured as the flock of its shepherd, Yahweh. Since he was a covenant-shepherd, the image of flock bears covenant connotations. This image was also quite apt to express the covenant relationship because the relationship of a flock to its shepherd is unique, one which it holds with no other person.

Israel is but once specifically named "Yahweh's flock" (Jer. 13:17). "His flock" and "my flock" are frequent terms, however. A more stylized phrase is also used, "the flock of my pasture" (Jer. 23:1, etc.) Some<sup>1</sup> suspect a scribal error in Psalm 95:7, "We are the people of his pasture and the flock of his hand." In any case the sense is clear, Israel holds a privileged position in Yahweh's eyes. The covenant relationship is also explicit in Micah's phrase, "the flock of your inheritance," which is reminiscent of the many instances in which Israel is called "Yahweh's inheritance" (Ps. 78:71, etc.).

It is significant that the pastoral image almost always depicts the relationship between Yahweh and the flock, rather than between Yahweh and an individual. Perhaps this is already in the very idea of a shepherd, who normally has more than one sheep to care for. Still this

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<sup>1</sup>W. O. E. Oesterley, The Psalms Volume II (London: S. P. C. K., 1939), p. 421 and Arthur Weiser, "Die Psalmen Zweiter Teil," Das Alte Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950), p. 413.



usage displays a fact deeply imbedded in Old Testament thinking. Yahweh's promises came to the community. The individual Israelite derives his confidence in Yahweh as a member of that elect community, the flock whom Yahweh shepherds.

To be sure, Yahweh does deal with individual sheep, but almost always as one within the framework of the greater whole, the flock. There are three notable exceptions. Jacob twice (Gen. 48:15; 49:24) speaks of Yahweh as his shepherd, though, it should be noted, there was not as yet a full flock for Yahweh to shepherd, and Psalm 23.

Psalm 28 gives a good example of the collective thinking which is inherent in the flock image. The psalmist laments his condition in the first five verses in the first person. Yet when he uses the pastoral image in the last verse, to call upon the God who will surely deliver him, he refers to Yahweh as the one who shepherds a flock, Israel. "O save thy people, and bless thy heritage; shepherd them, and carry them forever" (v. 9).

#### The Flock of Israel is Helpless

Sheep are above all else helpless. They have absolutely no defense of their own against danger. This note of helplessness is present, explicitly or implicitly, in every use of the flock figure. This meaning is basic; all other implications in the metaphor stem from this.

The helplessness of the sheep occasioned those phrases scattered throughout Old Testament literature which employ the image of a sheep to indicate a dire misfortune or impending doom which the sheep is powerless to avert.



But I was like a gentle lamb, led to the slaughter (Jer. 11:19).

Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter (Jer. 12:3).

I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and he-goats (Jer. 51:40).

Become the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter (Zech. 11:4,7).

Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter (Is. 53:7).

Thou hast made us like sheep for slaughter . . . . Nay, for thy sake we are slain all the day long, and accounted as sheep for slaughter (Ps. 44:11,22).

Because a flock is so very defenseless, this picture provided an excellent method of portraying Israel's misfortunes and her helplessness to avert them. Israel was first of all at the mercy of her own shepherds, the kings and leaders of Israel. Ezekiel sarcastically asks the shepherds why they fed themselves at the expense of the flock rather than feeding the flock (34:2-6). Zechariah speaks of the useless shepherd who devours the flesh of the fat ones' of the flock (11:15).

The scattering of the flock into exile is the fault of the kings who have not tended to the tending of the flock.

For the shepherds are stupid, and do not inquire of the LORD; therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered (Jer. 23:2).

. . . the shepherds who care for my people; you have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them (Jer. 23:2).

Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are afflicted for want of a [good] shepherd (Zech. 10:3).

So they were scattered, because there was no [good] shepherd (Ezek. 34:5).

There is little the sheep can do. Their shepherds have not cared for them, so they are helplessly scattered.



The apostasy of Israel to the worship of Baalim is also the fault of the negligent shepherds. Jeremiah implores backsliding Israel to return to Yahweh, and implies that this defection was due to bad shepherding by promising, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you with knowledge and understanding" (3:15). Later he specifically fixes the blame:

My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains; from mountain to hill they have gone, they have forgotten their fold (50:6).

David affords another instance where the flock is powerless to ward off the misfortune which the king brings. He had sinned by taking a census, but the punishment, a plague, afflicts the entire populace. He then prays, "Lo I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but the sheep, what have they done?" (2 Sam. 24:17). As the shepherd goes, so go the sheep.

Secondly, the flock of Israel is defenseless against foreign kings. Jeremiah gives us the most savage use of the pastoral image in the Old Testament:

Israel is a hunted sheep, driven away by lions. First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, has gnawed his bones (50:17).

Ezekiel depicts the wonderful future time as one when the flock will no longer be a prey to the nations (34:28).

The weaker of the flock are at the mercy of the stronger of the flock, that is, the kings and ruling classes in Israel. "You push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad" (34:22). It is possible that this same group may be included in Ezekiel's promise that Yahweh will make a "covenant of



peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely" (34:25).

Finally, the flock is also defenseless against the wrath of her true shepherd, Yahweh. Yahweh can punish the flock by sending them into captivity (Jer. 13:17), and later even claims responsibility for the scattering of Israel:

He who scattered Israel will gather him and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock (Jer. 31:10).

Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them (Jer. 23:3).

Yahweh is like a lion who will "roar from on high . . . . he will roar mightily against his fold" (Jer. 25:30). When Israel is in the midst of misfortune the psalmist can only cry, "Why does thy anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?" (74:1).

Since it is clear that the flock is defenseless and needs a shepherd in time of danger, it is a dire predicament to be without a shepherd. This plight is noted on several occasions. Moses who was soon to leave the scene as Israel's leader prayed that Yahweh would furnish another leader that "the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). Ahab's death was foretold in what seems to us a rather left-handed manner, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd" (1 Kings 22:17). Shepherdlessness is specifically noted as the cause of misfortune:

Therefore the people wander like sheep, they are afflicted for want of a [good] shepherd (Zech. 10:3).

I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die, what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and let those that are left devour the flesh of one another (Zech. 11:9).



So they were scattered because there was no [good] shepherd.  
And they became food for all the wild beasts (Ezek. 34:6).

Your shepherds are asleep, O King of Assyria, your nobles slumber,  
your people are scattered on the mountains with none to gather  
them (Nahum 3:18).

It deserves stressing that when an Old Testament writer thought of sheep he was thinking of a helpless creature, whose life was at the mercy of all it met, and whose only defense was a loving shepherd to care for it. It is well to keep this in mind whenever the pastoral image is encountered. This fact sheds light not only on what the writer would say when he refers to a flock, but also when he refers to a shepherd. It is all too easy for the western urban reader, trained to value "independence" as a virtue, to underestimate this fundamental stratum of Old Testament theology. Israel and mankind is weak and frail, totally helpless by herself. This accent is never far in the background when the shepherd-flock image is employed.

#### The Flock of Israel is Dependent on Yahweh

The dependence of the sheep on the shepherd is a second aspect of the flock image. It derives directly from the helplessness of the flock, for the sheep are so helpless that they must of necessity trust the shepherd. These twin accents of helplessness and dependence, inherent in the flock figure, make this image a deft and expressive picture for the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Israel never forgot that Yahweh had chosen them as a helpless slave nation in Egypt. Their response was to be complete dependence on Yahweh.

This note is clearly displayed in Psalm 23. The sheep may be totally exhausted, he may have to walk in dark death-shadows, he has enemies on all sides, yet he feels no want. He depends on the good shepherd, Yahweh.



Jacob acknowledges this same dependence when he refers to Yahweh as the God who "shepherded me all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. 48:15-16), and then prays that the blessings of this dependable God fall upon his posterity.

The entire list of blessings mentioned above<sup>2</sup> are also viewed with an attitude of dependence. The flock of Israel could never have hoped to obtain them by her own power. They are gifts to a flock which must depend on her shepherd to do his work well.

The same note lies at the surface of all the passages in which Yahweh is hailed as the rescuing shepherd of Israel.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah makes much of the fact that all flesh is grass (Is. 40:6-8). Yet he confidently proclaims that Israel can trust in her Shepherd to rescue them from exile (40:11).

The note of dependence in the pastoral image is most clearly seen in the prayers for rescue:

Shepherd thy people with thy staff, the flock of thy inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest (Micah 7:14).

Hear the voice of my supplication as I cry to thee for help. . . . The LORD is the strength of his people, . . . O save thy people and bless thy heritage; shepherd them, and carry them forever (Ps. 28:1,8,9).

Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! . . . Stir up thy might and come to save us (Ps. 80:1-2).

Help us, O God of our salvation, deliver us and forgive our sins, for thy name's sake! . . . According to thy great power preserve those doomed to die! . . . Then we thy people, the flock of thy pasture, will give thanks to thee forever (Ps. 79:9,11,13).

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<sup>2</sup>Supra, pp. 21-23.

<sup>3</sup>Supra, pp. 14-19.



Why does thy anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?  
 . . . . Have regard for thy covenant . . . . let not the down-  
 trodden be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise thy name  
 (Ps. 74:1, 20-21).

When the psalmists are thoroughly conscious of their utter dependence on Yahweh, the pastoral image comes quickly to their lips.

These psalms illustrate the fact that Israel's dependence is also a confident dependence and trust. Israel was not only forced to depend upon Yahweh because there was no other one to help, but they also depended upon him because they knew he had made a covenant and was dependable. There was no need to employ magic in an attempt to control the god's actions.<sup>4</sup> It was enough to remind him of his promise.

There was little logical hope for Israel in the Babylonian exile. Another nation might read such a hopeless fate as evidence that their particular god had been overpowered by other heavenly beings and so turn to another God, but not Israel. Yahweh had rescued them from Egypt because of the oath which he swore to their forefathers and would rescue them again because of that same promise. Israel was not only dependent upon their shepherd, they were confidently dependent because their shepherd was as dependable as his covenant promise.

#### The Flock of Israel owes Obedience to Yahweh

Because sheep are so helpless and dependent on the shepherd, they must obey him or suffer the consequences. Here again the flock image is apt to portray another aspect of the covenant, Israel's duty to obey Yahweh in all things.

Isaiah 53:6 sums up the transgressions of Israel, "All we like sheep

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<sup>4</sup>Hamp, op. cit., pp. 19-20.



have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Psalm 119:176 uses the same image of an erring sheep, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant."

Disobedience results in dire consequences. The whole flock of Israel must give Yahweh his due, or the shepherd will punish his own flock.

Give glory to the LORD your God . . . . if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride! . . . because the LORD's flock has been taken captive (Jer. 13:17).

Hosea indicates that Yahweh has little choice in punishing disobedience. When Israel rejects her shepherd, he can no longer remain with her to be her protector.

you play the harlot, O Israel, . . . . Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn; can the LORD now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone (4:15-17).

Although the responsibility for the scattering of Israel is more often laid at the doorstep of the shepherds who have neglected their duties, Israel shares the guilt.

My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray, turning them away on the mountains; . . . they have forgotten their fold. All who have found them have devoured them, and their enemies have said, "We are not guilty, for they have sinned against the LORD, their true pasture" (Jer. 50:6-7).

This passage is unique in picturing Yahweh as the pasture of the flock.

Psalm 95 calls the flock to the worship that is due their creator and shepherd:

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would hearken to his voice, harden not your hearts (vv. 6-8).

There is a significant progression of thought here. Israel owes Yahweh her praise not only because he is their creator, but also because he has



specifically chosen her as his covenant flock. Psalm 100 contains much the same thought, "Serve the LORD with gladness! . . . . It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (vv. 2-3).

It may be debated whether Psalm 44 actually carries the image of Israel as Yahweh's flock, though the word "scatter" may indicate that the full image is here intended. In any case, the covenant obedience is very evident. "Thou hast made us like sheep for slaughter, and has scattered us among the nations" (v. 11). The psalmist is at a loss to explain this disaster, however. He knows of no disobedience that would have brought it about. "All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten thee, or been false to thy covenant" (v. 17). Still, the flock will remain obedient, to the very death, if need be. "For thy sake we are slain all the day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter" (v. 22).

The shepherd of Israel expects that the stronger individuals of the flock, the nobles and rulers, will not take advantage of the weak.

I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will shepherd them justly. Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep. . . . between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder and thrust at all the weak with your horns (Ezek. 34:16, 17, 21, 22).

The flock as a whole, and each individual within it, owes the shepherd his obedience.

#### Distinctions within the Flock

It was noted earlier that Yahweh's shepherd relationship is almost always with the entire flock, rather than with an individual. There are certain distinctions, however, which are made within the flock. The



shepherd has a sharp eye for those who need special care. Yahweh carries the lambs in his arms, and leads those who are with young carefully (Is. 40:11). On the other hand, the wicked shepherds do not give this special care to the needy, the weak, the sick, the crippled, and the straying (Ezek. 34:4; Zech. 11:15). This situation will be rectified when Yahweh, the good Shepherd, comes to care for each according to his need (Ezek. 34:16). At that time even the poorest of the flock will lie down to pasture safely (Is. 14:30).

A number of passages use the term "ram" to indicate those of the group who have power, the aristocracy and ruling class. The lexicon of Brown, Driver, Briggs lists this usage under a separate heading, III

רָמִים.

. . . the rams of Moab, trembling siezes them (Ex. 15:15).

You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams. . . . (Ezek. 39:18).

the chief men [rams] of the nation he had taken away (Ezek. 17:13; 2 Kings 24:15).

There are a number of instances in which the word רָמִים appears to be so intended, though it is spelled with scriptio defectiva, רָמִ (Ezek. 30:13, 31:14, 32:21; Job 41:17). This orthography is also known in the Ugaritic material.<sup>5</sup> The image of the ram is only used once in the framework of the fuller pastoral picture, "As for you, my flock, thus says the LORD god, Behold I judge between sheep and sheep, rams and he-goats" (Ezek. 34:17).

<sup>5</sup>Eduard Meyer, "Untersuchungen zur phönikischen Religion," Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, XLIX (1931), 3.



The term, רֹמֵשׁ, he-goat, is also used to indicate those who are in a position of power. It occurs parallel to "rams" (Ezek. 36:17), to "kings of the earth" (Is. 44:9), and to "shepherds" (Zech. 10:3).

### SHEPHERD AS A TYPE OF KING IN THE BIBLE

#### Shepherd Kings

The shepherd image was not only applied to the relationship between Israel and Israel, but was employed to describe the relationship between people and their leaders, especially the primary leader, the king.

It was already used of those who led Israel before the establishment of the monarchy. Moses promised that Israel would follow him as their shepherd (Ex. 34:23). In the latter literature Moses himself is named as the shepherd of Israel's flock (Is. 63:10). The psalmist named both Moses and Aaron as shepherds of Israel (Ps. 77:23). In 2 Samuel 7:7 Nathan refers to the judges as those who Israel "remained to shepherd the people of Israel."

The first use of the metaphor to indicate a king is recorded in connection with the coronation of David. The tribes of Israel greeted David, "The LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel'" (2 Sam. 5:4). Nathan himself gave the propriety of using such a metaphor of David. "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people, Israel" (2 Sam. 7:8). The psalmist echoed these words,

<sup>1</sup> Here רֹמֵשׁ should be corrected to read רֹמֵשׁ with the parallel statement in 2 Chron. 17:13.



## CHAPTER V

### SHEPHERD AS A TERM TO DENOTE HUMAN LEADERS

#### Shepherd Rulers

The shepherd image not only applied to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, but was employed to denote the relationship between people and their leaders, especially the primary leader, the king.

It was already used of those who led Israel before the establishment of the monarchy. Moses prayed that Yahweh would replace him so that Israel would not "be as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). In the later literature Moses himself is named as the shepherd of Yahweh's flock (Is. 63:11). The psalmist views both Moses and Aaron as under-shepherds of Yahweh (77:21). In 2 Samuel 7:7 Nathan refers to the judges as those whom Yahweh "commanded to shepherd the people of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

The first use of the metaphor to indicate a king is recorded in connection with the coronation of David. The tribes of Israel remind David, "The LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel'" (2 Sam. 5:2). Yahweh himself saw the propriety of using such a metaphor of David. "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people, Israel" (2 Sam. 7:8). The psalmist echoes these words,

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<sup>1</sup>Here שרטי should be corrected to read שפטי with the parallel statement in 1 Chron. 17:13.



He chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the ewes that had young he brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob his people, of Israel his inheritance (78:70-71).

David himself referred to Israel as his flock during the plague which Yahweh sent. "I have sinned, but these sheep, what have they done?" (2 Sam. 24:17). It may be noted that the LXX, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Old Latin versions read, "I, the shepherd, have sinned," following more closely the possibilities of the 1 Chronicles 21:17 account,

יָצַדְתִּי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ־יִשְׂרָאֵל

יָצַדְתִּי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְאֶת־אֶרֶץ־יִשְׂרָאֵל

The historical corpus offers another example of this metaphor.

Ahab's death is foretold by Micaiah ben-Imlah,

I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and the LORD said, "These have no master; let each return to his home in peace" (1 Kings 22:17).

The prophetic literature uses the metaphor quite often. The plural, shepherds, is usually employed however. This term refers not only to the individual kings, but also to the powerful ruling group about him, the nobility and aristocracy. Ezekiel scathingly denounces the leaders of Israel for the better part of chapter 34. The singular, shepherd, occurs but once. "So they were scattered because there was no [good] shepherd" (v. 5), that is, there was no king at the head of the shepherding group in Israel who faithfully carried out the duties of his office. Elsewhere in this chapter, the whole group which wielded power in Israel, the shepherds, are denounced.

Jeremiah often censures these same shepherds of Israel, whom he holds primarily responsible for Israel's exile. There can be little doubt that he thinks primarily of the ruling leaders of Israel in this term. Chapters 21 and 22 are a careful indictment of all the kings of Israel, with the exception of Josiah. In 22:22 he announces the coming punishment,



punning, "The wind will shepherd all your shepherds." 23:1-6 continues the indictment under the shepherd metaphor, announcing better shepherds to come, including the great future king, the righteous Branch for David:

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! . . . . You have scattered my flock, . . . . I will gather the remnant of my flock . . . . I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, . . . . I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely (vv. 1-5).

Jeremiah's denunciation also included all three responsible groups in Israel, prophets, kings and ruling class, and priests.

The priests did not say, "Where is the LORD?" Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit (2:8).

The kings and leaders of other nations are referred to as shepherds by Jeremiah.

Wail, you shepherds, and cry, and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come . . . . Hark, the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock! for the LORD is despoiling their pasture! (25:34, 36).

Even Jerusalem is one who has a "beautiful flock" under her care (Jer. 13:20). She was the cultural, political, and religious center of the land, and no doubt the towns about her followed her leadership.

Isaiah uses the pastoral image of Cyrus,

"He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose;" saying of Jerusalem, "She shall be built," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid," (44:28).

The thought here is not only of Cyrus as king, but more specifically, as the great rescuer in the future age.

#### Shepherd Prophets

There is reasonable doubt as to whether prophets (or priests) are ever specifically referred to in the shepherd image. Jeremiah blames the



shepherds for Israel's Baalism. They have turned Israel "away on the mountains, from mountain to hill they have gone, they have forgotten their fold" (50:6-7). Although the prophets and priest might be included here, it should be remembered that the king held the ultimate power and responsibility in such matters. His personal piety affected the populace profoundly. The estimate which the books of Kings and Chronicles place upon the reign of each king is not only based upon his "civil" but also his "religious" acts and attitudes.

Jeremiah appears to refer to his own activities as shepherding. When his enemies taunt him that his prophecies do not come to pass, Jeremiah cries, "I have not hastened after you  $\text{וְלֹאֶיךָ־אָרַדְתִּי}$ , nor have I desired the day of disaster" (17:16). The majority of commentators read  $\text{וְלֹאֶיךָ־אָרַדְתִּי}$ , preceded by  $\text{וְ}$ ,<sup>2</sup>  $\text{וְ}$ ,<sup>3</sup> or  $\text{וְ}$ ,<sup>4</sup> in place of  $\text{וְלֹאֶיךָ־אָרַדְתִּי}$ , following the example of a number of the versions, Aquila, Symmachus, and Syriac. They support this change with the arguments that this gives a smoother parallelism, and that Jeremiah is quite consistent in his use of the shepherd image to indicate kings elsewhere. In addition to this, the construction of a participle used substantively is rather awkward, if not "unverständlich."<sup>5</sup> It seems best to read the clauses as parallel to one another, "I have not pressed you for the sake of evil,

<sup>2</sup>J. P. Hyatt, "Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, and Jeremiah," The Interpreters Bible, Vol. V (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 957.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Volz, "Jeremia," Kommentar zum Alten Testament, X (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), p. 186.

<sup>4</sup>Wilhelm Rudolph, "Jeremia," Handbuch zum Alten Testament, XII (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr, 1947), p. 100.

<sup>5</sup>Volz, op. cit. 186.



nor have I desired the day of disaster."

Isaiah offers another disputed passage dealing with prophets and shepherds:

His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber. The dogs have a mighty appetite; they never have enough. And they are shepherds, they do not have understanding; they have all turned to their own way (56:10-11).

Prophets are apparently referred to here, as indicated by the common term

נָבִיִּים, and חֹזֵי חָזוֹן, "dreaming," a pun on חֹזֵי חָזוֹן, commonly used of prophets. Most commentators do not feel that the shepherds mentioned are to be identified as the same group mentioned previously, the prophets. Some<sup>6</sup> delete חֹזֵי חָזוֹן as a gloss. Others<sup>7</sup> assume that Isaiah now refers to another group, the rulers and civic leaders, because this is the regular meaning elsewhere, and because there are two pictures here, the (shepherd?) dogs and the shepherds. Still others<sup>8</sup> take the mediating view that the scope of the message broadens to include all the leaders of the nation generally. There is certainly nothing which compellingly indicates that the prophet is speaking only of rulers under the metaphor of shepherd. Isaiah is probably speaking either of prophets, or of all the leaders of the nation who had the responsibility of watching over the flock.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Marti, "Das Buch Jesaja," Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament, X (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1900), p. 366 and Bernhard Duhn, "Jesaja," Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), p. 385.

<sup>7</sup>G. W. Wade, "The Book of the Prophet Isaiah," Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1929), p. 360.

<sup>8</sup>August Pieper, Jesias II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1919), pp. 471-2 and Franz Dellitsch, The Prophecies of Isaiah Volume II, Translated by J. Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877), pp. 367-8.



## Shepherd Military Leaders

Military leaders are also named shepherds. Jeremiah foretells the siege of Jerusalem, "Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her. [Zion] They shall pitch their tents around her, they shall pasture, each in his place." (6:3). The picture is quite apt, as the milling host of an army must have borne not a little resemblance to a large flock of sheep. The "pasturing" may refer to the destruction of the countryside, for the verb  $\text{שָׁדַד}$  is used of the feeding or eating of the sheep. Since sheep are noted for cropping the grass to the ground, it may have the extended meaning, "feeding bare," or "devastating."<sup>9</sup> This is also the case in Micah where the prophet speaks of the coming days when Israel will dwell safely. Should any enemy come "We will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight princes of men" (5:5). These military leaders will "shepherd," that is, devastate,<sup>10</sup> the attacking country.

Foreign military leaders are also called shepherds. Jeremiah has such men in mind when he refers to the shepherds who have destroyed Yahweh's vineyard (12:10). In return for such attacks on Israel, Yahweh will come up against Edom and Babylon as a lion against a sheepfold, asking "what shepherd can stand before me?" (Jer. 49:19; 50:44). Nahum speaks of those who have the responsibility of defending the populace:

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<sup>9</sup>This may be the meaning of Jer. 2:16, "The men of Memphis and Tahpanes have fed bare the crown of your head," though  $\text{שָׁדַד}$  is commonly read for  $\text{שָׁדַד}$ , "Shave the crown of your head."

<sup>10</sup>Paul Haupt would accent  $\text{שָׁדַד}$  as  $\text{שָׁדַד}$ , from the verb  $\text{שָׁדַד}$ . "break," or "smite." See "Critical Notes on Micah," American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature, XXVI, 4 (July, 1910), 236-7.



Your shepherds are asleep, O king of Assyria; your nobles slumber, your people are scattered on the mountains with none to gather them (3:18).

The title shepherd therefore, exhibits a very diversified use in the Old Testament. It is used for leaders of all types: a lawgiver, judges, kings, the nobility, a city, military leaders, and it seems, prophets.

### The Responsibility of the Shepherds

The king as leader has no divine right to rule as he pleases. Yahweh rules and cares for his flock through the king. He is therefore in reality an undershepherd, responsible to Yahweh, the true shepherd of the flock, from whom he has received his commission.

The responsibility of the shepherd is seen clearly in his appointment by Yahweh. When Israel "made kings, but not by" Yahweh (Hos. 8:4), Yahweh is displeased. Furthermore, when Yahweh appoints a shepherd, he gives him a specific task. David is Yahweh's servant, taken from his flocks and commanded to be a shepherd of Israel, a prince over Yahweh's people (2 Sam. 5:2, 7:7). Yahweh also aided David in this task. "I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you" (2 Sam. 7:9). He had also aided that earlier shepherd of his flock, Moses, when he "caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses" (Is. 63:12).

Yahweh is by no means limited in his choice of shepherds to Israelites. He can choose whomever he wishes to shepherd for him. Even the king of a foreign nation may be charged to perform a certain task.

Who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose;" saying of Jerusalem, "She shall be built," and of the temple; "Your foundation shall be laid" (Is. 44:28).



Yahweh also promises his aid to Cyrus, "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze, and cut assunder the bars of iron" (Is. 45:2). All this Yahweh does for that nation to whom he has bound himself by a covenant, and for his name's sake.

For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other . . . . I gird you, though you do not know me, then men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Is. 45:1-6).

Yahweh is lord of all. Unlike the gods of other nations, who usually are limited to their own countries and peoples, Yahweh cares for his flock through whomever he wishes.

The shepherd's responsibility to Yahweh is also shown by the punishment he brings upon shepherds who are unfaithful to their tasks. Yahweh censures the shepherds for not "attending to" his flocks and promises to "attend to" them (Jer. 23:2-3). The wind will shepherd these shepherds (Jer. 22:22). Ezekiel also accuses the shepherds of causing the scattering of Israel, and proclaims for Yahweh.

Behold, I am against the shepherds and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves (34:9).

The punishment of the shepherd may even extend to the flock, as it did when Yahweh sent a plague because of David's pride (2 Sam. 24:17). The city of Jerusalem has misled her flock, the towns of Judah, and must also feel the wrath of Yahweh.

Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock? . . . . because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. . . . I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen (Jer. 13:20, 25, 26).

The leaders of Israel are not the only ones to come under the wrath of Yahweh. The kings of other nations, some of which have oppressed



Israel, are also answerable to Yahweh.

Behold, evil is going forth from nation to nation, and a great tempest is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth . . . . Hark, the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock. For Yahweh is despoiling their pasture and the peaceful folks are devastated (Jer. 25:32, 36-37).

My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the he-goats; for the LORD of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah (Zech. 10:3).

All kings and nations are responsible to Yahweh and must bow before his anger.

The proper manner of discharging the shepherd's responsibility is exemplified in David. He was a shepherd after Yahweh's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), just as the shepherds whom Yahweh promised to send to the future Israel (Jer. 3:15). David led the flock "with upright heart" and "with skillful hands" (Ps. 78-72). In time of Israel's need, he prayed in their behalf (2 Sam. 24:17). In close connection with several shepherd passages, Jeremiah praises Josiah as a good king, who "judged the cause of the poor and needy" (22:16) and "executed justice and righteousness" (22:15).

On the other hand, Josiah's son, Shallum, acted with unrighteousness and injustice (Jer. 22:13). This type of shepherding, or more accurately, lack of it, destroyed, scattered, and drove away the sheep (Jer. 23:1-2). These evil shepherds transgressed against Yahweh (Jer. 2:8), leading the flock astray into idolatry and Baalism (Jer. 13:27, 50:6-7), so that the flock is called a "lost flock" (Jer. 50:6). Isaiah censures the shepherds who have no knowledge, yet have very strong appetites and turn "to their own way, each to his own gain, one and all" (56:10-11).

Ezekiel paints a heartless picture of the shepherds and sums up all their mis-shepherding in an extended indictment:



No shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts. . . . my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with none to search or seek for them (Ezek. 34:2-6).

One wonders whether any other way remained in which they could have been disobedient to their divine directive to serve as undershepherds. They consistently served themselves rather than Yahweh.

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

1. The monarch is appointed by Yahweh, and his reign is instituted 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 restores Judah and Israel.

It should be noted that this is not only a description of the day of the David to come, but also of the historical David, the first to be named shepherd. He was specifically chosen by Yahweh, brought Judah and Israel together, put down the enemies of Israel, and insured the people's safety. It was, therefore, natural to call the Messianic shepherd not only because he is a king and his preceding activity is reminiscent of a shepherd, but also because he is another David who was the first and best shepherd of Israel's shepherds.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE MESSIANIC SHEPHERD

Micah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah

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.

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.

It should be noted that this is not only a description of the work of the David to come, but also of the historical David, the first to be named shepherd. He was specifically chosen by Yahweh, brought Israel and Judah together, put down the enemies of Israel, and insured the people's safety. It was, therefore, natural to call the Messiah shepherd not only because he is a king and his rescuing activity is reminiscent of a shepherd, but also because he is another David who was the first and most glorious of Israel's shepherds.



Micah proclaims:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, . . . then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD, his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth (5:2-4).

This king comes "for Yahweh" and rules through the might and power of Yahweh. He comes from Bethlehem, the city of David. Then the people can dwell secure, for this king's power reaches to the ends of the earth. There is real peace and freedom from worry of enemies. Should an enemy, such as the Assyrians, rise, he will quickly and easily be dispatched by the princes or shepherds (v. 5). At this time "the rest of his brethren Judah will return to the people of Israel (v. 3) and be reunited.

Ezekiel proclaims that Yahweh himself will shepherd his people, rescuing them from their dispersion (34:13). He continues,

And I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall shepherd them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them (34:23-24).

Yahweh keeps his covenant and becomes once again their God. He also keeps his covenant with David and appoints another David to the royal throne. It is characteristic of Old Testament Messianic prophecy that one may question which of the actions mentioned in the chapter will be done by Yahweh himself, and which he will perform through the agency of his servant. The reunion of the two kingdoms is undoubtedly to be seen in the promise of "one" shepherd, as it is explicitly indicated in the same phrase in Ezekiel 37:22, 24.

And I will make them one nation in the land, upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. . . . My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd.



Yahweh also promises a covenant of peace, banishing the wild beasts, the enemies of Israel, that the flock may "dwell securely" (34:25).

Jeremiah promises shepherds in the future who will have knowledge and understanding, knowing Yahweh's will and ruling according to it (3:15). Like David, these shepherds are men who are "after my own heart" (3:15; 1 Sam. 13:14). In 23:1-4, Jeremiah denounces the contemporary rulers of Judah, promising that Israel will be rescued and given better shepherds. He then continues,

I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called, "The LORD is our righteousness" (vv. 5-6).

The pastoral image is not contained in these verses except perhaps in the phrase, "dwell securely," but verses 1-6 are undoubtedly to be read as a unit. Here we see the same marks of the shepherd-Messiah. A Davidic successor is appointed by Yahweh to rule and give peace to a reunited Judah and Israel.

#### Psalm 2

Psalm 2:9 may contain another Messianic use of the shepherd image.

Yahweh's decree states,

ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.  $\text{דָּבַרְתִּי}$  with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

The verb,  $\text{דָּבַרְתִּי}$ , is derived from  $\text{דָּבַר}$ , "to break," "to destroy."

This reading is followed by the Targum and Symmachus. However, the LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, Hieronymos and all the New Testament citations (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15) read  $\text{דָּבַרְתִּי}$ , "shepherd them with an iron rod." The shepherd's rod was used as a defensive weapon against the enemies of the



flock,<sup>1</sup> and so is fitting to indicate the king's punitive action against foreign nations. The picture of a king destroying or breaking the nations with an iron scepter is not quite as appropriate, though it parallels the following verb more directly. The sense of the passage is not materially affected by a change of the Massoretic reading. In either case the verse speaks of the universal rule of the ideal Messiah-king.

#### Zechariah

The shepherd-flock image forms the framework of Zechariah 11:4-16 and 13:7-9, "the most enigmatic prophecy in the Hebrew Bible."<sup>2</sup> None of the host of suggested interpretations is compellingly convincing in all details. It is not clear whether, or how much of, the prophecy deals with specific historical events. It speaks largely in general terms and almost seems to supply a "pattern" for many events in Yahweh's relationship to Israel from Egyptian to Christian times.

A brief interpretation is offered here. Israel is at the mercy of other nations, unpitied by her own kings (shepherds) (vv. 4-5). Yahweh comes to rescue and shepherd them. His two staffs, "Grace" and "Union," symbolize his covenant promises for protection from external enemies and from internal strife (v. 7). Yahweh quickly disposes of the foreign kings (shepherds) who have oppressed Israel and consigns their peoples to destruction (vv. 6, 8). Israel, however, despises her shepherd and values

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<sup>1</sup> E. Power, "The Shepherd's Two Rods in Modern Palestine and in some Passages of the Old Testament," Biblica, IX (1928), p. 435.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Driver, quoted by Eli Cashdan, "The Twelve Prophets," The Soncino Books of the Bible, edited by A. Cohen (Bournemouth, Hants.: The Soncino Press, 1948), p. 314.



him as nothing (vv. 9, 12). Yahweh, therefore, removes his covenant care, within and without (vv. 10, 11, 14). The flock is now at the mercy of a foolish and selfish shepherd (vv. 15, 16).

Zechariah 13:7 is certainly a direct prophecy of the Messianic shepherd, the agent of Yahweh who is stricken by the sword. This introduces the trials of the last times through which few survive. Yahweh again sets up his covenant with these few who have been tried. Yahweh says, "It is my people," and the flock responds, "Yahweh is my God" (13:9).

No matter how the details are interpreted, the general image carries the same basic meanings we have noted before. Yahweh is the covenant shepherd who rescues his flock. When rejected, the sheep feel his wrath and the removal of his care. His greatest gift to the flock is the Messianic shepherd who cares for the sheep in the great day of the renewal of the covenant. The flock is helpless at the hands of their shepherds, whether good or evil. They are dependent for all prosperity upon Yahweh, and they are sure to feel his wrath for disobedience. The leaders of Israel and other nations are shepherds, responsible to Yahweh. They are to feed the flock, not fatten themselves. When they mistreat his flock, they incur the wrath of Yahweh.

Israel's best king, Yahweh's greatest agent, is the Messianic shepherd. He eventually brings the perfect peace of the flock. A completely new note in the shepherd image is the striking or suffering of the Messianic shepherd, a fusion of the shepherd and suffering servant pictures. The evaluation of the shepherd at 30 pieces of silver is also a new note. No where else in the Old Testament is it ever implied under the shepherd image that the Messiah would be "despised and rejected" by Israel.



## CHAPTER VII

### Concluding Summary

We have attempted to show in this study that Israel filled the shepherd-flock image, which they held in common with all the nations in the "Fertile Crescent," with the concept of their covenant relationship with Yahweh.

In the extra-biblical usage the image was employed to denote the gods, the kings, the agents of the king and lesser leaders, and in a special sense, the ideal king who would gather together all nations in the "Endzeit." In form the pastoral image in the Old Testament parallels much of the extra-biblical usage. In meaning, however, it differs as much as the covenant faith which was revealed to Israel differed from the faith of other nations.

This covenant was necessary for Israel because they were sinful and frail, impotent either to merit Yahweh's love or to protect themselves from other nations. Yahweh recognized their helplessness, graciously entering into a covenant with them in which he promised to be their god and care for them that they might serve him. Of course, their privileged position brought with it a greater responsibility to serve him or be punished for their disobedience. Each of these points is contained in the shepherd-flock image as it is used in the Old Testament.

In his covenant relationship Yahweh was much like a shepherd who had complete power and control over Israel. He used the power to shepherd them



graciously or to punish them, as the situation necessitated. He went to great lengths to insure the well-being of his flock, showering them with many gifts. He rescued his flock from Egypt and Babylon, and promised to send his special agent, the Messianic shepherd, in whose age the flock would dwell securely in perfect peace.

In their covenant relationship Israel was much like a flock of sheep, utterly helpless and at the mercy of their enemies and shepherds. Their only hope lay in dependence upon their chief shepherd, whom they could trust confidently because he had covenanted with them to be a gracious shepherd. Israel also owed obedience to this shepherd and was scattered when they ignored him and went their own way.

In order to care properly for his flock, Yahweh had appointed many under-shepherds, the kings and leaders of Israel. They ruled with the authority of the chief-shepherd. Yet they were not to use this position for their own gain, for they were responsible for the care of the flock. If they were not faithful, they would be punished by the chief-shepherd and lose their flock.

It was inevitable that this arrangement could not completely fulfil all the covenant promises of Yahweh for these shepherds were human and sinful. Yahweh himself would have to take his place at the head of the flock. This he promised to do through the perfect David who was to come. Through this Shepherd of shepherds Israel and Judah would be rescued, reunited, and find the perfect pastoral peace and security which Yahweh had promised. Then the covenant would be fully and finally fulfilled and the golden goal of shepherd and sheep would be realized.

One of the most striking differences between the Biblical and extra-



biblical usage is the note of covenant confidence which accompanies this metaphor. It is not only a poetic picture, but it also expresses a solid fact. Whatever else may be said, this much is sure; Yahweh can be depended on, for both weal and woe. Stubborn disobedience will certainly bring punishment. Yet Yahweh will inevitably come to rescue his flock.

The psalmist cries for help, but before he finishes he praises the shepherd who is sure to bring aid (Ps. 28). The temple lies in shambles, the people are in captivity a thousand miles from their land, and the royal dynasty is brought low. But the prophet blithely proclaims that rescue is coming (Is. 40:11) and that the Davidic shepherd will rule the entire world and bring Israel peace (Ez. 34:25). All of this is only a matter of time, no matter what the situation appears to be. The flock's shepherd, Yahweh, had made a covenant.



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