

PASTORAL IMAGES IN THE BIBLE

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

by

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Preface

I have found that one of the most interesting things about the use of language is that the simplest, least complicated subject can be transformed into a complex, in-depth, and thoroughly captivating topic of literature. Never would I have imagined that I would read book after book and spend hours on end studying the topic of sheep, but in the process of finding information for this thesis, I have come to realize that concept of sheep and shepherds in the Bible is a deep and timeless literary text. For this reason, it is with not a little surprise, and quite a bit of pleasure that I undertake to make you, my reader, as interested in pastoral literature as I have become. I hope that I never consider any topic, animal, or person as too simple or too dull for my study.

It is not uncommon these days to hear of a book being written, or a class being taught, which uses as its theme the topic of the literary quality of the Bible. The Bible, in its varied literary genres such as the Prophetic Literature found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Wisdom Literature depicted in Ecclesiastes, and the Epistolary Literature of the New Testament books, employs many elements of interest to the modern student of English literature. Other literary forms and techniques found in the Bible include: the epic, parody, parable, proverb, satire, allegory, and the pastoral.

Leland Ryken in his book, The Literature of the Bible, provides a starting point from which to view the Bible as literature. He states: "... literature is experiential. This means that the subject matter of literature is human experience. The approach to human experience, moreover, is concrete rather than abstract." 1 In this light, then, literature is merely a product of actual human experience. The Bible presents this human experience in a concrete manner; rather than give a definition of a virtuous man, the Bible **shows** a virtuous man acting. Ryken goes on to say that, "We might say that literature does not tell about characters and actions and concepts but presents characters in action." 2

If one views the Bible from the standpoint of Ryken's guidelines, it is certainly possible to claim that the Bible contains many segments that are literary. These literary portions of the Bible leave no aspect of human nature

undiscussed. In the pages of Biblical literature, one can read about God, nature, love, social relationships, death, evil, guilt, salvation, family, life, judgment, and forgiveness. The literature of the Bible, being so comprehensive and having so many different authors, has been able to capture beautifully the complexities and polarities of human life and experience.

The Bible is a collection of diverse works, but it also has much unity of subject matter. This is seen most universally in the Bible's depiction of God's interaction with humans, and humans interaction with God and with other humans. There is also a unity of purpose which undergirds all of Bible literature -- the purpose of revealing God to people so that they might know better how to arrange their lives. ³ According to Ryken, there is one final type of unity to be found in the Bible: a unity based on allusion. ⁴ Many allusions can be referred to which reinforce Ryken's assertion. One allusion which runs throughout the entire Bible is the allusion of sheep and shepherds. The concept of sheep and shepherds had much significance to the common people of Biblical times and still hold up today as simple, down-to-earth vehicles for Biblical imagery.

As has been mentioned, the Bible uses many different literary forms and techniques for conveying its unified messages. The remainder of this thesis will be divided into four broad categories: 1. the types of literary techniques and forms found in the Bible, 2. a description of the

characteristics of sheep and shepherds, 3. how references to sheep and shepherds are used metaphorically in the Bible, and 4. a discussion of the applicability of these allusions, both in Biblical times and at the present.

Many different literary devices and forms may be discovered as one studies the Bible. As has been mentioned previously, different types of literary forms and devices are to be found in the Bible. The epic, Wisdom Literature, and pastoral literature are three which lend themselves to even deeper study than most.

Epic, for example, can be found in the story of the Exodus from Egypt to Canaan. Epic is said to be an expansive, long narrative which encompasses many important themes and values. It is possible for an epic work to sum up a whole age. 5 This historical saga is recorded in the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It records Israel's formation as a nation, describes the values and doctrines adhered to by the young Hebrew nation, and explains the history of the earliest events and beliefs of the Children of Israel. One aspect that sets this epic apart from the other epics of its time (such as those of Homer and Virgil) is that the Bible uses none of the flowery language and poetry so well-loved by Homer and his secular counterparts. The Biblical epic does, however, bear some resemblance to Virgil's The Aeneid, but unlike Virgil, the Biblical author does not extol the praises of a **human** hero, but rather gives

the praise to an everpresent, ever-watchful, and always powerful God.

Wisdom Literature is also present in the pages of the Bible. There are two main criteria a work must possess to have it be considered to be Wisdom Literature. The first characteristic is the presence of a wise man who is commenting on his observations about human life. The second element of Wisdom Literature includes the work's utilization of proverbs and other related literary devices. Two Biblical books that incorporate these two criteria are Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In both books, the narrator gives advice to young men and his followers. In Ecclesiastes, the theme is the utter foolishness of all worldly things -- wisdom, wealth, etc. The narrator, through his experience, is able to say to the young, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them --'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1, NIV). Proverbs, in much the same manner, is a collection of thoughts on many subjects which is meant to teach and to rebuke the young and the foolish.

Although much more could be said about literary forms and techniques of the Bible, from this point, the main consideration will be the use of the pastoral literature. Many of the allusions used in the Bible are pastoral in nature. Ryken defines the pastoral as "... literature in which characters are shepherds or rustics; setting is rural, and the actions are those customarily done by shepherds." 6

Pastoral works are usually concerned with reality. The shepherds in Biblical literature are idealized, humble, and usually exempt from the vices of civilized life. 7 Abel, often referred to as the first shepherd, is described as a man of spiritual integrity -- a man approved by God (Genesis 4:2). David, also a shepherd, is said to have been "a man after God's own heart" (I Samuel 13:14).

To continue the idea of shepherds as humble, yet lifted up by God, the book of Luke describes the the birth of Jesus Christ and states that the **shepherds**, fearful, but joyful, are the first people to hear of the news of this wonderful Christ-child. These poor, lowly shepherds (as we tend to think of shepherds today) seem always to be among the first humans to be blessed by God. (Note God's acceptance of Abel's offering of sheep as a sacrifice to God, and God's rejection of the sacrifice offered by Cain in Genesis 4).

The Bible carries on the pastoral imagery in its figurative use of the word "shepherd" to refer to priests, kings, God Himself, or Christ as the Good Shepherd. Psalm 78:52 reads: "Then He led forth his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock." Jeremiah continues the use of the comparison between political and spiritual leaders when he rebukes the Israelite leaders who, apparently, were allowing the children of Israel to stray from the true path of righteousness. Jeremiah asserts: "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the Lord.... "I will set shepherds over them

who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed' " (Jeremiah 23:1,4). Jesus, too, in referring to himself as the good shepherd claims that he came to seek and to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). Later in the gospels, Jesus urges his disciple, Peter, to act as a shepherd. In John 21:15-17 He pleads: "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep... Feed my sheep."

Ryken identifies three categories of pastoral literature which can be discovered in the Bible. One category found is the pastoral used as a vehicle for writing about the experience of love. The Song of Solomon employs this type of pastoral literature when the narrator praises the beauty and virtue of his beloved using images that are rural and rustic. (Song of Solomon 2:1-3; 4:1-5, 12-15; 5:12-13; 7:1-9).

Another aspect of this type of pastoral deals simply with a description of the delights of love. This can be seen in Song of Solomon 1:14,16-17; 2:3,16; 4:16; as well as other places throughout the book.

One final type of vehicle for love's experience is shown through a complaint or lament. In the Song of Solomon, the lady's "complaint over the slowness of her love to culminate in marriage..." displays pastoral characteristics.

The second category of pastoral literature employs the pastoral as a vehicle to praise the "good life." The rural images lend themselves to a view of life as peaceful and content, or as closer to perfection than any other type of life. Psalm 23 is a prime example because it employs the

image of a shepherd to characterize the care and love of God toward His creation, His sheep. This particular Psalm exalts rural life with its green pastures and still waters and also touches an instinct in its readers that longs for the simple, uncomplicated life portrayed in its verses. Unlike the idealized, romantic scene depicted in the Song of Solomon, Psalm 23 deals with rural life realistically.

The final category of pastoral literature utilizes the allegorical tradition. The allegorical tradition applies pastoral images to discuss problems and concerns found in real life. It takes complex ideas and problems and puts them into simple terms. The parable of the lost sheep is based on the allegorical tradition. Christ is trying to explain to his audience some tough concepts of the saving grace of God, and Christ wants to use a topic or example that most of the people in the crowd will understand. Therefore, Jesus compares the faithfulness of God to the faithfulness of any caring shepherd. It is a rare shepherd who will not go to find one of his valuable sheep. This parable is intended to point out that God, as the Good Shepherd, will not desert any of **His** lost sheep that are wandering helplessly outside the fold.

Jesus presents this parable to the crowd and receives a response first on the literal level since the crowd can understand the shepherd's desire to retrieve a sheep that has been lost. Once the crowd has made this connection, Jesus can take the parable to a new, deeper spiritual level when He

states: "Even so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, uses this parable to drive home His point that He has been sent to seek and to save the "lost sheep" and then to bring these sheep safely into the fold, Heaven. Christ has not been sent to earth merely to sit and to watch the "sheep" that are already in the fold.

Perhaps the greatest example of an allegorical pastoral image is found in John 10:1-8. In this passage, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. He details a shepherd's care for his sheep, and this account serves as an allegory for God's protection of His creation, His people. These verses distinguish between true and false shepherds and stresses the intimacy which should be felt between the sheep and their shepherd. By contrasting the good with the bad, Christ presents Himself as the one, true, and trustworthy leader for His people.

The Biblical authors make wide use of pastoral allusions. Ryken's statement that literature is experiential is certainly true of the Bible. ⁸ The literature of the Old testament is a reflection of the hebrew society which it chronicles. The New Testament, in the same way, provides examples from the daily lives of the first Christians, Romans, Greeks, and other neighboring cultures. The use of pastoral comparisons arise from the earliest records of the Israelites because the early Hebrews seem to have been a

nomadic people who raised flocks and herds of cattle. Many of the heroes of Hebraic history are known to have been shepherds. Jacob, Joseph and his eleven patriarchal brothers, Saul (who would become Israel's first king), David (the poet-king), Abraham and his nephew Lot, Samson, and even Moses are recognized as having been shepherds at one point in their lives.

The Scriptures' earliest audiences will have readily comprehended the natures and actions of sheep and shepherds. To modern readers, however, it is necessary to study the characteristics of both sheep and shepherds to be able to grasp the full meaning of the pastoral allusions in the Bible.

Most people in Biblical times, for instance, could describe sheep as clean, docile, affectionate, and harmless animals which are easily domesticated. These people would know, too, that sheep suffer from a lack of initiative that causes the creatures to be easily lost or led astray. The Bible regards sheep as greatly inferior in status and value to a human being. This sense of the sheep's inferiority stems partly from the fact that sheep are so dependent on their shepherd that a whole flock will be helpless without the human leader. Phillip Keller states that "Sheep... require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care." 9 Keller uses the Twenty-third Psalm as a point of departure for an indepth look at sheep.

Malone

David, in Psalm 23:2, comments, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." Keller explains the process of making sheep lie down by presenting four conditions that must be met before sheep will lie down to rest. 10

1. Sheep will not lie down until all fear is gone. In other words, all strange or unknown animals must be chased away from the flock, no storms present, or any other hint of physical danger present to worry them.
2. They will not lie down if there is another sheep with whom they have a conflict. This is to say that two rams who feel a need to fight with one another will not lie down next to each other; an old ewe will ensure that a young ewe does not try to encroach upon her space; there can be absolutely **no** friction in the flock.
3. Sheep cannot lie down to rest if they are being tormented by any type of fly, parasite, or other insect.
4. Sheep cannot rest well if they are hungry.

Apparently, for a flock to be able to rest, the sheep must be absolutely free from fear, tension, aggravation, and hunger. Keller follows these four conditions with the comment: "[Sheep] have little or no means of self-defense. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to run" from any danger or irritation. 11 He continues, "In the course of time, I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured the sheep as to see me in the field. The presence of their master... put them at their ease as nothing else could do..." 12

Psalm 23:2b asserts "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Since sheep's bodies are composed of nearly seventy percent water, the water they drink becomes necessary in maintaining normal body metabolism, strengthening cells, and

Malone

determining the strength, vitality, and general well-being of the sheep. Thirsty sheep become restless to the point of becoming ill and will drink anything, even dirty, parasite-ridden water to quench their thirst. 13

An interesting thing can happen to some sheep. Keller devotes a poignant passage of his book to describing a "cast" sheep; this is a sheep which is lying on its back with the feet in the air, unable to turn himself back over. Sheep are top-heavy; therefore, a sheep lying on its back will not have the balance to get back onto his feet. The sheep will lie thrashing and kicking until it dies, unless help arrives quickly. Sheep can die in the short space of a few hours if the temperatures are extremely high. On the other hand, sheep can survive for several days in this helpless condition if the temperatures are cooler. A shepherd must be alert to this distressing problem. He continually finds and must constantly be searching for cast sheep. 14 One simple way to find a cast sheep is to look up into the sky for any signs of circling buzzards who are waiting for the death of their prey. The only hope for this helpless sheep is that the shepherd can find it, set it back on its feet, and hold the sheep upright until balance and blood flow are restored.

Another interesting characteristic of sheep is that they are creatures of habit. They will follow the same paths until these paths turn into gullies; sheep will eat the grass in certain places until the ground starts to erode; they will pollute their pastures until the fields are

absolutely covered with parasites and disease. The only way to keep the sheep from causing this type of destruction is for the flock to have a shepherd who constantly keeps his animals on the move.

The Bible is written with the idea that its audience has some knowledge of these characteristics of sheep. Sheep in Biblical times represented the main livelihood of pastoral peoples and provided their owners with food to eat (I Samuel 14:32), milk to drink (Isaiah 7:21-22), wool for the weaving of cloth (Leviticus 13:47-48), rough clothing (Hebrews 11:37), and even coverings for tents (Exodus 26:14). Sheep were used as a means of exchange (II Kings 3:4) and were central to the Hebraic system of sacrifices. Sheep were used for different types of sacrifices: burnt offerings (Leviticus 1:10), sin offerings (Leviticus 4:32), guilt offerings (Leviticus 5:15), and peace offerings (Leviticus 22:21). It is little wonder, then, that allusions to sheep are so common in the Bible.

Knowing the nature of sheep and realizing what a challenge it is to keep sheep healthy and comfortable, the job of a shepherd becomes one of complex duties, total commitment, and often personal sacrifice on the part of the shepherd. Shepherding is a widespread occupation in Biblical accounts and some of the Bible's greatest men are shepherds. A shepherd has many cares and duties, some of which include:

- a. protecting the sheep from robbers and wild beasts (Genesis 31:39; Exodus 22:13; Isaiah 31:40),

Malone

- b. constantly finding good places to pasture and water the flock (Psalm 23:2),
- c. contending with other shepherds for these pasturelands and watering places (Genesis 26:17-22; Exodus 2:17),
- d. caring for sick sheep -- sparing mother ewes from excessive walking and carrying baby lambs too young to walk (Genesis 33:13; Isaiah 40:11; Luke 15:4-7), and
- e. knowing each sheep by name (John 10:3). 15

The shepherd is also responsible to the sheep owner to make restitution for any lost or dead sheep, unless the shepherd can plead circumstances beyond his control. The Bible stresses that a shepherd must be a man of much integrity and character since the welfare of the sheep should always be uppermost in his mind. The shepherd should derive joy from seeing his charges contented, well-fed, and flourishing under his care. Since shepherding is his life, he must apply all of his strength and intelligence to giving the sheep shelter from storms, protection from outside dangers -- such as thieves and wild animals, and access to ample food and water. The shepherd is also responsible to make and apply salves, ointments, or other remedies on the sheep to aid in ridding them of parasites or disease. Due to the fact that that darkness does not always bring safety and rest to the animals, a shepherd must be alert both day and night, ready to run to the aid of his sheep.

Although there are many trials and concerns for the Biblical shepherd, there are also times of great joy involved for their efforts. The shepherd who provides well for his flock has the satisfaction of being able to view his sheep a

well-fed, healthy, and valuable creatures. In addition to the pride of knowing that they have done a commendable job, Biblical shepherds are also entitled to great periods of feasting and merriment during shearing time (Genesis 38:12; I Samuel 25:2,36). Due to the fact that shepherding requires many lonely days and months when the shepherd is alone with his sheep, these feasting days were times of sharing and conversation with other shepherds. I Samuel 17:40 points out that much delight was found in these conversations and musings. Despite the loneliness that he must have felt, one can picture David sitting in the quiet pastures conjuring up some of his most long-lasting and vivid impressions as he lovingly guarded his flocks. David later transforms these thoughts into psalms such as the beautiful Twenty-third Psalm.

Knowing that most people during ancient times had such an intimate knowledge of sheep and shepherds, it is little wonder that the writers of the Bible felt confident to make so many allusions to the pastoral images described here. This knowledge of the pastoral carries through until the time of Christ and the New Testament writers. Even the most simple rustic could make the comparison of a good shepherd to a protective and loving God.

Lockyer, in a book explaining the nature of some of the Bible's most common occupations, gives examples of four ways in which the Biblical writers compared God to a shepherd:

Malone

- a. to describe God's care for His people (Psalms 23:1; 77:20; 78:52-53; 80:1; Jeremiah 33:3; Ezekiel 34:14-29; and Micah 7:14),
- b. to show God lifting up His staff against the foes of Israel (Isaiah 10:1,24),
- c. to depict God gathering His sheep, no matter where they are (John 4:29; 10:16; Luke 23:42), and
- d. to allude to the practice of counting sheep one-by-one as they entered into the fold (Jeremiah 33:13; John 10:2-5).

As time progresses, the leaders of countries, as well as the spiritual leaders of the people, come to be associated with the occupation of shepherding. According to Lockyer, "Scripture earnestly stresses the serious responsibility of human leaders to those who follow them." 16 In Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 23:1-4, and Jeremiah 25:32-38, some serious denunciations are found of those "shepherds" who, instead of being selfless, devoted, and concerned for the welfare of their flocks, are leading the "sheep", the people, astray. These shepherds feed themselves without worrying about feeding their sheep. They will kill or scattered their charges if it will increase their own riches. These shepherds have completely disregarded their duty to provide for the physical and spiritual welfare of the public; therefore, Ezekiel warns that God will regather His sheep, judge the shepherds, and appoint **one**, true shepherd. This reference to a lone shepherd refers not only to the eventual reunification of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, but also looks forward to the coming of Christ, the Good Shepherd.

In the New Testament, the Church is compared to a flock of sheep. The Church has a head, a shepherd, who is Christ. There are also appointed leaders, or under-shepherds, who are expected to exhibit some common characteristics: courage (I Samuel 17:34; Isaiah 31:4; Amos 3:12), a sense of responsibility (Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:6), love and patience (Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:4), competence in the calling (Proverbs 27:23), joy in the work and self-denial (I Peter 5:2-3), order (Jeremiah 33:13; John 10:3), humility (Ezekiel 34:4; I Peter 5:3), and judgment (Ezekiel 34:17; Matthew 25:32). 17 Shepherding of this type is necessary to the maintenance of the Church.

Jesus alludes to Himself as a shepherd in John 10:2-5, 7-16. He also states that He is the gate, or the door, through which the sheep will enter. In addition, Jesus promises that He has enough loyalty and commitment to the flock to lay down his very life for his sheep. Jesus contrasts Himself to the leaders who have come before Him who would flee when they spotted trouble and would scatter the sheep rather than gather them.

In verse seven, Jesus makes reference to an old shepherding custom. It seems that shepherds would literally serve as the door to the sheepfold. At night, the shepherd would gather His sheep into a half-circle around him, get them all settled down to rest, and then would lie across the the threshold of the fold. The shepherd's presence at the door served both to keep the sheep in and to keep any

intruders **out**. Therefore, when Jesus states, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.", He is saying that He will protect any sheep that remain in His fold, and he will prevent any danger from coming to the flock. Thus, Jesus literally "lays down His life" for his sheep.

The utilization of sheep and shepherds in the Bible is broad and complex. The validity of this imagery in Biblical times is fairly easy to discern, but in our fast-paced, urban, industrialized society, it may be somewhat more difficult to understand the symbolism without some study of the characteristics of sheep and shepherding.

From the time of the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden, people all over the world have been engaged in the occupation of raising cattle. Men have needed to be self-sufficient; therefore, they have had to raise their own food, make their own clothes, and find something of material value with which to trade for the things they could not raise or make. Knowing that nearly every family in the Biblical days would come into some contact with sheep or other cattle, the Biblical authors seem to have been on familiar ground with pastoral imagery. The timeless quality of the Bible's literature stems from the fact that the Biblical authors were able to find such well-known objects as sheep to illustrate the nature of God's relationship to man. Sheep continue to be a major source of food and income in Christ's time, so He is able to continue the metaphor of God as shepherd, men as

sheep. Laodicea, a large, wealthy, and prominent city in the early years after the birth of Christ, is recorded to have raised and profitted handsomely from the sale of the wool of a rare type of black sheep. The city is said to have become so proud of its distinguished wool that Christ rebukes her for her lack of commitment to the spiritual shepherd, God.

An author can paint a beautiful picture by drawing a comparison between sheep and humans. Like sheep, humans can be docile and affectionate, or restless and prone to disrupt the flock. In the same way that sheep cannot allow themselves to rest until they are completely free from fear, irritation, friction with other sheep, and hunger, humans tend to find themselves unable to rest either spiritually or ppsychologically when they are plagued by: a) fears about their jobs, hobbies, evil from without -- such as the physical or mental abuse of another person, the fear of death, or even the fear of Satan and his evil forces; b) friction or minor irritations such as nagging illnesses, car problems, traffic jams, bad weather, lack of desired luxuries, in other words, like sheep, the little "flies" that get inside their heads and drive them to distraction; c) friction with other human beings, whether the friction be a conflict of interests with a co-worker or arguments with a spouse, annoyances caused by parents, in-laws, children neighbors or bosses; and d) physical needs which may range from constant hunger to complete over-indulgence, drug addictions to unceasing pain caused by an injury or illness,

or having the feeling of being "cast" on one's back without any hope of having the capability of being righted without help.

Human beings, in the same way as sheep, can respond to the comfort of knowing that there is a shepherd, or a God, who can set them on their feet again. David records his relief at being able to think of a God who would not allow His flock to be in want. This true shepherd will be able to lead His sheep beside still, clean waters; He will be able to find fertile, green pastures that will provide the needed food for His sheep. God, as shepherd, is able to lead men in paths of righteousness and to keep His flock from causing the paths to become deeply-rutted, eroded, and parasite-ridden. He provides a smoother, healthier path for any sheep that is willing to follow Him, and He will even be gracious in restoring a wandering sheep and retrieving that sheep from his poor judgment. Just as a shepherd sometimes has to lead his sheep through dark valleys to be able to reach the tablelands at the top of the mountain, God, too, will sometimes take these dark passages. The sheep simply have to remember their Shepherd's ability to lead them to the tablelands that are prepared for them. In the same way that sheep count on their shepherd to be a true guide, the person who trusts in God can expect the love and devotion of a worthy leader.

Malone

Human beings have other qualities which are similar to those of sheep. Most people, like most sheep, are followers. They will plod along with the crowd so long as the rest seem to know where they are going. If a person sees a whole crowd of terrified people running away from unseen danger, that person will more-than-likely run, too. People can also become creatures of habit who will continue to use the same old paths simply because they know where the paths lead. People will stop to drink out of muddy, polluted waterholes fearing that there is no clean, running water up ahead. It is human nature to stand at the fence of the pasture, with chin resting on the rails of the fence, looking over at the neighboring land **knowing** that the grass is greener there.

Like sheep, people seem to long for someone who will take care of them, love them, and protect them. Even the most independent and stubborn person has moments when he or she needs some "shepherding." The Bible does a beautiful job of taking a simple pastoral image and continuing it throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The pastoral literature of the Bible culminates in the picture of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who stands at the door of the fold counting each sheep as it passes by Him making sure that no sheep is missing. He settles them down for the night, making sure that each sheep is free from irritation, fear, and hunger. He comforts the sheep by calling each one by name, and every sheep recognizes his voice. Should one sheep be lost, Jesus diligently searches for His "cast" treasure,

Malone

sets it on its feet again, and balances it until it can stand on its own. Then, as night closes in, Jesus lies down on the threshold to literally serve as the gate which will keep the sheep in, the enemies out. This image has been comforting people for countless centuries. Each man, woman, or child who believes in Christ as the true Shepherd has David's assurance which is stated boldly at the conclusion of the Twenty-third Psalm: "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

FOOTNOTES

1. Leland Ryken, The Literature of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974).
2. Ryken, p. 13.
3. Ryken, p. 15.
4. Ryken, p. 16.
5. Ryken, p. 81
6. Ryken, p. 233.
7. Ryken, p. 233.
8. Ryken, p. 13.
9. Phillip Keller, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23. (Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970).
10. Keller, p. 35.
11. Keller, p. 36.
12. Keller, p. 37.
13. Keller, p. 50.
14. Keller, pp. 60-61.
15. Herbert Lockyer, All The Trades and Occupations of the Bible. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969).
16. Lockyer, pp. 201-202.
17. George A. Buttrick, The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. (Abingdon Press, Vol. 4, 1981), pp. 315-316.

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