

The Lord Is My Shepherd

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
—*Psalm 23:1*

WHEN THE PSALMIST DA-vid wrote these inspiring words, he used a Hebrew word which has been translated Lord in many of our English Bibles. He intended this reference to apply to our Heavenly Father who is the Creator of all life, and who is the Great Shepherd of his people. The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”—Isa. 57:15

Jesus also spoke of himself as a shepherd, saying, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) Furthermore he emphasized, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.” (vs. 14) When writing his first epistle, the Apostle Peter said, “Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”—I Pet. 2:25

These scriptures have been put in proper perspective by the Apostle Paul who explained, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (I Cor. 8:6) It is thus our Heavenly Father who is the Great Shepherd. One of the evidences of his loving interest and care for us as his sheep was the gift of his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, who is a shepherd to the children of God, as well as being their Redeemer and Advocate.

Jesus referred to himself as the 'good shepherd,' and he indicated that proof of his goodness was that he would give his life for the sheep. The Heavenly Father's interest in us is manifested by his love. We read, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) He loved the entire human race, but his special interest during the present Gospel Age has been with those who are of the sheep class. They are very dear to him and no good thing will he withhold from them. Whatever of love and sympathy toward the sheep that we find manifested in Jesus, we are to attribute to our Heavenly Father. Jesus came to manifest the Father and to speak and act for him. It is written, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father." (John 14:9) One of the chief evidences of God's care for us was the provision of Jesus as our chief under-shepherd.

JESUS: A FAITHFUL SHEPHERD

Jesus is our chief under-shepherd, and he was totally devoted to the sheep of his day. The children of Israel were the Lord's sheep at the time of his First Advent, and many tended to stray from the fold, not appreciating his special interest in them. Only a remnant of them recognized the voice of the good shepherd when he spoke to them, preferring to follow the leadership of the false shepherds of that time—their religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees. Nevertheless, he did not spare himself in doing all that he could for them, and in this we see manifest the characteristics of a true shepherd.

As proof of this, we read, "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:35,36) Here is described the life that was devoted to continuous service, and which surely sapped the physical strength of our dear Lord. Yet, he did this despite the claims that he was a false shepherd and a servant of the Devil, as we read, "When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils."—Matt. 12:24

The expression, 'sheep having no shepherd' was first used by Moses concerning the Israelites when he asked God to appoint someone to take his place as leader. "Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before

them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in: that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.” (Num. 27:15- 17) Thus was Joshua appointed to be Moses’ successor, and Jesus as the antitypical Joshua had now come to be the true shepherd of the people of Israel. Although the Israelites did not recognize the voice of our Lord as their shepherd, he was nevertheless faithful to them and continued to sacrifice his time and strength in their interests.

OTHER UNDER-SHEPHERDS

Another loving arrangement of our Heavenly Father, the Chief Shepherd, is the provision he made for additional under-shepherds besides Jesus. It is recorded, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11,12) This is also true of those who are elected elders by their local ecclesias. As Jesus was a perfect example of the Chief Shepherd’s interest in and care for the sheep, so also the under-shepherds should strive to pattern themselves after him by seeking to serve the sheep patiently, lovingly, and untiringly as he did.

One of the chief characteristics of a good shepherd is his genuine interest in and concern for the sheep. Those whom the Lord can use as under-shepherds over his sheep must have this qualification. They must be willing to lay down their lives for the sheep.

A true shepherd will do all he can to gather the scattered sheep. When Jesus, the chief under-

shepherd, was smitten, the true sheep which he had gathered were temporarily scattered. The Lord would have his true shepherds gather his sheep that they may be together and rejoice together in the abundance of his love.

PRESENT DAY SHEEPFOLDS

When we see the Lord's people being brought together into sheepfolds, it is important to keep in mind the ultimate purpose to which they have been gathered. Every true gathering of the Lord's sheep is centered around the shepherd. The sheep will hear his voice and recognize the arrangements that have been made for them. Jesus is the chief under-shepherd, and is the head over the various members of his church. Each congregation of the Lord's people therefore becomes representative of the present Gospel Age church as a whole. The elders of these congregations are the under-shepherds, and thus cooperate with Jesus in caring for the best interests of his special people.

True under-shepherds care for the Lord's sheep even as the Chief Shepherd has directed. The sheep have liberty only to hearken to the voice of the Good Shepherd, to be led by him, and to feed upon the spiritual food which he has provided. False shepherds, and wolves in sheep's clothing, should not be allowed to devour the sheep, although under the guise of liberty they may make attempts to do this. The under-shepherds are also sheep, and every one in the Lord's little flock has a certain measure of responsibility toward all the other sheep. They should all endeavor as best they can to care for one another.

When the Lord's true sheep hearken to him their spiritual needs will be provided. "No good thing" will the shepherd withhold from those "that walk uprightly." (Ps. 84:11) And, he has promised, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." (Heb. 13: 5) The Chief Shepherd gives even the weakest of his sheep the comfort and encouragement they need to fight a good fight of faith as they walk in the narrow way. "He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."—II Cor. 12:9 ■