

God's Preserving Love

Key Verses: *"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."*
—John 10:14,15

Selected Scripture:
John 10:1-15

AS BROUGHT TO OUR attention in an earlier lesson, the Heavenly Father is the Great Shepherd over all his creation, and has appointed his only begotten Son, Christ Jesus, to be a leader and guide of his sheep. In John's Gospel account, Jesus is presented in many ways: as the light of the world; a feeder of the hungry; a giver of the water of life; a healer of disease and supplier of human needs; the opener of blind eyes to understanding;

and now as the "good shepherd."

In the opening verses of our lesson, Jesus addresses the Pharisees by way of a parable, referring to one who would enter by a designated "door" into God's sheepfold. "He that entereth in by the door," he continues, "is the shepherd of the sheep." (John 10:1,2) Jesus is referring to himself in these verses as the "shepherd of the sheep," as pointed out later in our Key Verse. He gained this position by keeping perfectly God's divine laws, including all the terms of Israel's Law Covenant, which he was under, having been "made of a woman, made under the law."—Gal. 4:4

On account of Jesus' faithfulness, a way of approach to God was established. During the present Gospel Age, we come to him by repenting from sin, turning toward

righteousness, accepting the merit of Christ to cover our Adamic imperfections, and by making a full consecration of ourselves to do his will. This is the same process by which, at the present time, all prospective members of the Lord's flock may be counted as part of God's sheepfold. A key element to this is the humble appreciation of Christ Jesus as our Redeemer. He "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:5,6) By faithfully carrying out this vitally important purpose in God's plan, the Lord not only would become the "good shepherd," but would also be given sheep to nurture, develop, and protect.

These wonderful arrangements of the Father's plan are based on his cardinal attribute of love. The Scriptures give the assurance that "God is love. . . . And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. . . . and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (I John 4:8,16) Through the Heavenly Father's love, he "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (II Tim. 1:9) To this John adds, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins."—I John 4:10

In a further declaration of the preserving power of God's love, we recall these words of Jesus: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." (John 15:9,10) Let us constantly be reminded that to "abide" in God's love, we must follow his instructions to the best of our ability, realizing that "his commandments are not grievous." Thus, we can say in confidence concerning our Heavenly Father, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."—Isa. 26:3, *English Standard Version* ■