

Jesus healed the sheep that were sick. False shepherds do not care for their suffering.

Jesus gave his own life to save the sheep. False shepherds take the life of the sheep to feed themselves.

False shepherds rule over the sheep. The true shepherd serves them.

False shepherds have no real love for the flock. They only love themselves. They are only interested in their own position and prosperity. They themselves want to become fat. They will not face danger to protect the sheep. They are not willing to lay down their lives.

A Prayer

Give us and make us shepherds like Moses who are not looking for a high position for themselves. Make us humble in heart and willing to take a low position.

Give us and make us shepherds like David who will not fear danger, but will risk our own lives to save the sheep.

Above all, give us and make us shepherds like Jesus who laid down his own life to save the sheep.

This and other writings
available from:

www.GrowthInGod.org.uk

Nov 2020

Good Shepherds



“You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally” (v 4).

The sheep were weak because the shepherds did not feed them. False shepherds have no spiritual food to give their sheep. The sheep were sick because the shepherds did not look after them. The sheep were lost because the shepherds did not search for them. Instead of being willing to serve the sheep, they wanted to rule over them.

Finally we see the result:

“So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no-one searched or looked for them” (vv 5, 6).

The sheep were scattered and became a prey to every wild animal.

False shepherds, or pastors, are the exact opposite of our good Shepherd. Jesus searched for the lost sheep till he found it. False shepherds do not care about lost sheep.

Jesus healed the sheep that were sick. False shepherds do not care for their suffering.

Jesus gave his own life to save the sheep. False shepherds take the life of the sheep to feed themselves.

False shepherds rule over the sheep. True shepherds serve them.

False shepherds have no real love for the flock. They only love themselves. They are only interested in their own position and prosperity. They themselves want to become fat. They will not face danger to protect the sheep. They are not willing to lay down their lives.

A Prayer

Give us and make us shepherds like Moses who are not looking for a high position for ourselves. Make us are humble in heart and willing to take a low position.

Give us and make us shepherds like David who will not fear danger, but will risk our own lives to save the sheep.

Above all, give us and make us shepherds like Jesus who laid down his own life to save the sheep.

Bible quotations are taken from the NIV or retranslated

mentioned earlier, in English there are two words for a man who looks after sheep – shepherd and pastor. Originally these two words had the same meaning. Now the word shepherd is normally used for a man who looks after sheep, and pastor is used for someone who leads a church. In the Bible in both Greek and Hebrew (as in many other languages), there is only one word for shepherd. So when Jesus said, “**I am the good shepherd**”, the same Greek word is used as in Eph 4:11 where it is usually translated *pastors*.

Most churches have one leader who is called the pastor (or perhaps minister, priest or vicar). However we cannot find this custom anywhere in the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the word pastor meaning a leader of a church. New Testament churches were not led by a single pastor but by a group of elders. We find that shepherds / pastors are one of five ministries given by Jesus to the whole church.

All these five ministries, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers are gifts from Jesus. No one can choose to be an apostle or a prophet. Only people chosen by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit can exercise these ministries. In the same way people cannot choose to be shepherds / pastors. Only those whom God has chosen and given the necessary ability can be true shepherds of his flock.

False Shepherds

In the Bible there were both good shepherds and bad shepherds. The same is also true today.

The prophet Ezekiel prophesied against false shepherds. Much of chapter 34 deals with the subject. Here are his words: **The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says:’”** (vv 1,2).

Ezekiel received a clear word from God for the false shepherds of his time. Firstly he spoke about what the shepherds did.

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock” (v 2).

Rather than caring for the flock, the shepherds cared for themselves. Jesus, the supreme good shepherd, gave his life for the sheep. These false shepherds did the exact opposite. They took the sheep’s lives for themselves. The sheep only existed to give their flesh to make the shepherds fat, and their wool to keep them warm. Jesus said, **“This is my flesh that is given for you,”** not “This is your flesh that is given for me!”

Then we see what the false shepherds did not do:

Introduction

The subject of shepherds occurs frequently in the Scriptures. Three of the most important people in the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses and David, were all shepherds. In the New Testament Jesus described himself as the good shepherd. Soon before his ascension to heaven, he appointed Peter to the work of a shepherd.

The word pastor occurs less frequently in the Scriptures, only once in the New Testament, and in some translations nowhere else.

The two English words shepherd and pastor originally had the same meaning, a man who looks after sheep. Hebrew has only one word roeh (רֹעֶה) for shepherd and Greek has the one word ποιμήν (poimen). Translating these words as pastor occasionally and shepherd everywhere else has led to confusion and misunderstanding.

Let us look at the subject of shepherds or pastors in the Bible and see what we can learn.

Egypt

Firstly we turn to chapter 46 of the book of Genesis. At this time Joseph was the prime minister of Egypt. His father Jacob and his brothers, who were all shepherds, had just arrived from Canaan to live in Egypt. In the last verse of this chapter we read that **“every shepherd is detestable to the Egyptians”**. Why was this?

At that time Egypt was the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world. It was like America now. Many of its people were educated and lived in good houses. Shepherds were different. They travelled from place to place and lived in tents. Most of them were illiterate and probably they were dirty and smelly. They may have spoken a different language from the Egyptians. In some parts of the world shepherds are like this today. So it is not surprising that the Egyptians despised and disliked shepherds.

Moses

Moses was not brought up in a shepherd family. As a baby he was hidden in the rushes beside the river Nile in Egypt to save him from death. A princess found him and took him to the palace where he was brought up as a prince. Later, when his life was again in danger he fled to the land of Midian. There he married the daughter of a priest named Jethro, and in Exodus 3:1 we read that Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. It is very easy to read this sentence and totally miss its significance.

Moses had been a prince in Egypt. He had spent his youth in the luxury and comfort of the palace. Now he was doing the job that the Egyptians most despised. He had come down from the highest position to the lowest. He had become a shepherd, and as a shepherd he did not even have his own sheep. He was not even keeping his father's sheep. He was only keeping the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro. To keep your own father's sheep would have been more acceptable, but to work for and depend on your father-in-law, especially in eastern culture, would have been a big humiliation. He continued in this humble task for 40 years.

God took Moses from this lowly position and gave him the greatest work that anyone did before the coming of Jesus Christ. Moses led the people of Israelite out of Egypt and formed them into a nation. He also wrote the first five books of the Bible, in a sense the foundation of three great world religions. Possibly he has had more influence on world history than anyone except the greater shepherd who was to come.

David

David was the most famous king of Israel. Even today millions of people throughout the world have taken his name and are called David. In his early life he was a shepherd. When he stood before Saul, the king of Israel, to talk about his plan to fight Goliath, he talked about his experiences as a shepherd. These are his words: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:34–37).

From David's words we can see various things about his character.

Firstly he had courage. He was ready to face and fight a lion and a bear and then a giant who was much larger and stronger than himself.

Secondly he had a deep faith and trust in God. Only by the power of God could he fight wild animals and giants and not lose his life.

Thirdly he loved and cared for his sheep. Most shepherds would probably run away if they saw a lion or a bear coming. They would not risk their own lives to save their sheep. David was different. Rather than running away he even pursued the lion and attacked it to save his sheep.

God took David from the sheepfold and made him king over the land and people of Israel. Just as he had cared for and loved his sheep, he cared for and

loved the people of God. There have been few kings in the history of the world who have cared for their people like David did.

Jesus

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

He went on to describe the character and behaviour of a good shepherd. His words must have reminded his hearers of David. He said: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (John 10:11-13).

Jesus was like David. He loved his sheep and he was willing to lay down his life for them. He said, "Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). David had the courage to face and fight with wild animals to save his sheep. Jesus faced Satan and all the powers of darkness. David had faith in the power of God to give him victory over Goliath. Jesus also had faith that God would give him victory over death and Satan.

Jesus was also like Moses. Moses began life as a prince in the palace in Egypt. Later he humbled himself and did work which everyone in Egypt despised. In a similar but greater way, Jesus left his father's throne in heaven to take a human body. He lived the simple life of a workman. He held no special position among his people. He ended his life dying the despised death of a criminal, nailed naked to a stake. Just as God exalted Moses to be a great leader of his people, so God exalted Jesus to the highest place in the heaven, at his own right hand.

Ministries

Was Jesus the only shepherd in the New Testament, or were there other shepherds besides him? After his resurrection he passed this ministry on to Peter. Three times with slight variation in the wording he said to him, "Feed my sheep".

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he described shepherds as gifts that Jesus gave to the church. Paul's words were as follows: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. ... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds and teachers" (Eph 4:8,11).

In most English Bible translations, and in some other European languages, the word *pastors* is used instead of the word *shepherds*. As I