

Focus

OPEN RANGE!

Scripture compares spiritual leadership to that of shepherds and their sheep. Though employed in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 23:1-4), this metaphor of ministry primarily refers to Jesus and His followers, for as He said, “**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**” (John 10:27, NASB). Jesus referred to Himself as the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:11, 14), while Peter called Him the *Chief Shepherd* (1 Peter 5:4).

A shepherd’s role is that of caring for the sheep, 24/7. A conscientious shepherd knew that if left unattended and unprotected, his sheep would not survive the dangers of being alone in the wilderness. Flocks needed their shepherds, for as Keller notes:

The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways . . . Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance. [1]

Of the shepherds, one author has noted that the “unsettled and dangerous life” of shepherds made them out to be “ambiguous figures.” [2] As such, the ancient shepherd may have found more in common with “the cowboy of the ‘Wild West’ than [with] the modern shepherd in a settled farming community.” [3] Such is the role of local church leadership--demanding, rigorous, and often solitary.

Pastor (Greek, *poimen*) means “shepherd.” [4] Like cowboys of the old west, church pastors are shepherds to whom the Chief Shepherd has entrusted the care of His sheep, lest they scatter about the wilderness to be stolen by rustlers or hunted down by ravenous beasts (i.e., false teachers). As Jesus’ under-shepherds, pastors are to *guard* (Acts 20:29-31), *guide* (Ephesians 4:12-14) and *graze* (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) the flock He has entrusted to their care.

But false shepherds were and are often derelict of their responsibility. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord declared:

My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray; they have turned them away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting place.

Then the Lord proceeded to note that, “**All that found them have devoured them**” (Jeremiah 50:6-7a, KJV; See Ezekiel 34:1-6.).

We note that Israel’s leaders led the sheep astray *turning them away on the mountains*, indicating that these false shepherds actually facilitated the people’s lapse into idolatry, for as

Feinberg commented: "The high hills were introduced because they were the sites where idolatries were particularly carried out under the sanction and encouragement of their rulers [i.e., their shepherds]." [5] Not only did these false prophets-shepherds lead the nation into idolatry, but also fattened themselves as they neglected to feed their sheep (Ezekiel 34:2-4). Perhaps in the Bible there is no more indicting metaphor of the contemporary pastoral vocation--where industry corrupts ministry--than that described by Ezekiel. **"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"** (1 Timothy 6:10). Because these ancient shepherds failed to *guard*, *guide*, and *graze* the Lord's flock, His sheep became prey to every carnivorous and marauding animal around—to the spiritual wolves.

Upon the occasion of his departure from them, this burden of ministry caused the Apostle Paul to warn the Ephesian elders. He said:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30).

The focus of *Guarding His Flock Ministries* is set not only against the Old Testament and its picture of shepherd leadership--which was found to be both derelict and responsible--but also upon Jesus' example as the *Good Shepherd*, and Paul's warning to the Ephesian congregation; that false teachers—wolves in sheep's clothing—would arise from within their own midst and spoil the flock. Note: Paul predicted the certain, not hypothetical, rise of wolves, the false teachers, in their midst (Compare 2 Peter 2:1.). What concerned the apostle was not the "isms" that might invade the church from *the outside*, but rather the "schisms" that like a *Trojan Horse*, would cunningly and deceptively rise in the church from *the inside*. [6]

Paul's parting words to the Ephesians accord with Jesus' warning in the *Olivet Discourse* where He told His disciples: **"See to it that no one misleads you"** (Matthew 24:4). In this sermon readers can note Jesus' concern that His followers would not be deceived (Matthew 24:5, 11, 23-24). In His other major sermon, the *Sermon on the Mount*, the Lord also warned His followers: **"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves"** (Matthew 7:15, NASB). Interestingly, this warning follows on the heels of Jesus' statement regarding the two gates; that there is a wide gate that leads to death (Presumably, that's where wolves in sheep's clothing will attempt to "drive" the sheep through.), and the narrow gate which leads to life (Presumably, that's where authentic shepherds will "lead" the sheep to.). Of the two gates, Jesus said:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Guarding His Flock Ministries will focus upon the narrow gate (See John 10:7-10.), and this being the case, discernment (guarding His flock) will occupy a central emphasis on the website. But it will not be the only one.

Shepherds are not only to *guard* their sheep, but also *guide* and *graze* them. In addition to exposing false teachers and their false teachings, we shall also attempt to edify believers during these days of apostasy when many do not know where to turn because they have been driven out of churches that "once-upon-a-time honored" God's truth, often mega-churches where leaders have morphed to become ranchers rather than shepherds, and controlling cattle barons rather than "free-grazer" cowboys (i.e., small church pastors and their congregations). To these scattered believers who remain a vital part of His flock in spite of being isolated and feeling separated for conscience's sake from churches which no longer honor and preach God's Word, this website is dedicated to provide a guarded and "open range" for them to graze.

Thus, encouragement in the faith will also be a focus of the writings offered on *guardinghisflock.com*, especially during this era Jesus called *the last days*—days of apostasy that He predicted would come upon the world and the church between His First and Second Comings (Luke 18:8; Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; 2 Peter 3:3). In the face of this apostasy, there is no more solemn or important responsibility Jesus bequeathed to pastors than, "**Tend My lambs. . . Shepherd My sheep. . . Tend My sheep**" (John 21:15-17).

So dear website visitor, if "**the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls**" should lead you to (1 Peter 2:25), even if you feel like a lonely and isolated lamb (Luke 15:3-5), go ahead and graze! We hope you will find spiritual pasture to nourish your soul.

ENDNOTES

[1] W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970) 21.

[2] Alistair V. Campbell, quoted by Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999) 397.

[3] Ibid.

[4] W.E. Vine, "Pastor," *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words: An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, by W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) II. 839.

[5] Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969) 196.

[6] Borrowed from Virgil's (70-19 B.C.) epic Latin poem, *The Aeneid*, "A 'Trojan Horse' has come to mean any trick that causes a target to invite a foe into a securely protected bastion or place . . ." The application to Satan's destructive stratagems is obvious. He is ever interested in corrupting the church from within, and if church history gives us any indication, the strategy has been quite successful. Trojan Horse can also refer to computer malware which when installed, can destroy a computer's function, rendering it useless. Perhaps such invasion finds analogy with the Bible's use of leaven ("**Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?**" 1 Corinthians 5:6). See "Trojan Horse," *Wikipedia*,

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trojan_Horse.