

Why Keep Sheep?

When we consider the offering of lambs in the Old Testament, we do not think much about shepherds. We usually focus our attention on parallels between the sacrificial system and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We make application to our personal lives stressing a sacrificial attitude of service to God.

On the other hand, when we consider passages about shepherds and shepherding, we do not talk much about alters and sacrifices. We tend to focus on the helplessness of the sheep and their needs. We also consider the role of the shepherd as one who leads, provides, and protects.

These thoughts and applications are both proper uses of scripture.

We often marvel that the shepherd *knows* his sheep, each one. This close relationship demands careful attention on the part of the shepherd.

The shepherd spends time with his sheep providing care and assistance. He recognizes and wards off potential trouble before it can become a serious threat. He spends his time away from the sheep in search of good pasture and clean water.

When a sheep wanders off, the shepherd leaves the flock to search for the lost sheep. The good shepherd cares deeply for his sheep.

Why Keep Sheep?

Have you ever thought about the connection between the shepherd and the sacrifice?

It would be easier if we simply considered the shepherd as a dealer in wool. Every season he would shear his sheep and sell the wool in order to make a living. However, this would leave an incomplete picture.

A shepherd eats his sheep. He also takes the best of his sheep to offer as a sacrifice to God. During the life of Jesus shepherds would sell some of their sheep to provide sacrificial lambs for those who had traveled long distances to the Passover.

Cattle are not named like sheep. A cow is sold or slaughtered. It has value, but it is a cow. A sheep is sold or slaughtered or sacrificed and it has a name and is known by the shepherd.

Why keep sheep?

Before Jesus began his ministry, he went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Upon being baptized, the Spirit of God descended visibly, and remained on Jesus.

John had been given this sign by God that *the one on whom the Spirit descends and remains; this one is the Son of God.* (John 1:29-33)

The next day John was with two of his disciples and he saw Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:34-35)

"Lamb of God" is not a title or a name. It indicates a relationship. Jesus was the lamb that belonged to God; God's lamb.

It is not a stretch to consider that God was not only the Shepherd for King David and all believers who find strength and comfort in the 23rd Psalm. God was also the Shepherd of Jesus of Nazareth.

There was a year in history that was different from any other. That year, at the Passover a most unique sacrifice was made. That sacrifice was the only lamb of the Great Shepherd. God took his lamb in whom he was so pleased, and he presented his lamb as a sacrifice, not for himself, but for the sins of the world. His lamb was not a dumb wooly animal, but his own son who was committed to the will of the Father. His lamb did not go to the 'alter of sacrifice' unknowingly or unwillingly. His lamb yielded himself to the Great Shepherd. The Great Shepherd then sacrificed his only Lamb as the Perfect and Supreme sacrifice for the sin of all mankind for all ages.

It is amazing to think that The Shepherd is still in the sheep business. But that was the real reason for his sacrifice. He sacrificed his beloved Lamb for all those who were lost. The Great Shepherd loved the sheep so much that he left his one precious lamb . . . for the ninety-nine.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
John 3:16

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