

Bible occupations-Shepherd

This year the camp theme is Bible occupations. There are hundreds of occupations mentioned in the Bible. We'll look at some of the more obvious and maybe one or two you may not have thought of.

There are many lessons we can draw from them, Christ himself used them in teaching. We can learn the importance of work; the main reason why we have to work in the first place (Gen 3:19) and, most importantly, how (using these occupations as a teaching aid) they can show us the way of salvation.

THE SHEPHERD

General info (for background knowledge)

Sheep were much valued in bible times. They provided wool, meat and milk. Even the sheep's horns-were used – to make special trumpets (Lev-25:9) or as containers for oil. The occupation of the Eastern shepherd, as described in the Bible, was attended with much hardship and even danger. He was exposed to the extremes of heat and cold (Gen 31:40) his food frequently consisted of the precarious supplies afforded by nature, such as the fruit of the 'sycamore' or Egyptian fig, (Amos 7:14) the husks of the carob tree (Luke 15:16) and sometimes the locusts and wild honey which supported John the Baptist (Mat 3:4), he had to encounter the attacks of wild beasts, such as wolves and panthers, nor was he free from the risks of robbers or predatory gangs (Gen 31:39)

Sheep and goats

In Bible times, the shepherd looked after the sheep and the goats together in the same flock. Goats gave a lot of milk, and some of it was used to make a kind of yoghurt. Goats hair was used to make a coarse cloth used for covering tents and rough clothes, whilst goat skin leather was used to make water bottles.

The shepherd often looked after the sheep and goats belonging to everyone in his village. After the rain had fallen in winter, there was plenty of grass near the village for the flocks and herds to graze on, and when the grain had been cut at harvest, the sheep and goats grazed on the stubble left behind.

New pasture

But when the hot summer sun had dried the grass, the shepherd had to lead the flocks further away -to find pasture (1 Chron 4:39-40) he also had to find a well where he could draw water for the sheep and goats to drink.

The shepherd also had to guard his flock from the wild animals that roamed the country (1 Sam 17:34-36). Lions, bears, jackals and hyena were all looking for animals such as sheep to eat. The routine of the shepherd's duties appears to have been as follows: in the morning he led his flock from the fold (John 10:4) which he did by going before them and calling to them, as is still usual in the East (sheep in the east follow the shepherd rather than being driven by him); arrived at the pasture, he watched the flock and should any sheep stray, he had to search for it until he found it (Ezekiel 34:12, Luke 15:4); he supplied them with water, either at a running stream or at troughs attached to wells; at evening he brought them back to the fold, and counted them to see that none of them were missing, by passing them 'under the rod' as they entered into the door of the enclosure checking each sheep as it passed, by a motion of the hand; and finally he watched the entrance of the fold acting as a porter.

The shepherd's occupation therefore required great watchfulness, particularly by night (Luke 2:8, Nahum 3:18). It also required tenderness toward the young and feeble (Isaiah 40:11).

Shepherds tools

To meet these various foes the shepherd's equipment consisted of the following articles: a mantle, made probably of sheep skin with the fleece on, which he turned inside out in cold weather. The shepherd carried a heavy club spiked with sharp stones to beat off animals (Psalm 23.4) He also had a leather sling for throwing stones at wild animals.

The shepherd had a staff about two metres long. He used this as a walking stick in rough country, as a weapon against his foes and to control his sheep (Ez 20.37-38). Sometimes his rod had a hook, or crook, at one end to control his sheep.

The shepherd also had a leather bag, called a srip, to carry his food. Some shepherds had a little reed pipe to play while they were watching the sheep and the goats. If the shepherd was a distance from his home, he was provided with a light tent, which was easily assembled and taken down.

Shelter

At night the shepherd had to find a safe place to shelter his sheep (Luke 2:8). Often he would take his sheep to a cave, and sleep in the doorway to prevent wild animals from entering (John 10:7). Sometimes, if there was no cave, he had to make a rough stockade from stones or brushwood. In the village, there would sometimes be a stone sheepfold, with a little shelter for the guarding shepherd. The shepherd spent a lot of time alone with his sheep, and learned to know them all by name (John 10:14). He knew which sheep belonged to which family, and could return them to their owners.

Sheep shearing

At the end of the summer the sheep would be sheared. When the sheep-shearing was finished, they celebrated with a feast, and plenty of eating- and drinking (1 Sam 25). Jesus described a shepherd looking for his lost sheep in Luke 15.3-7. There is also a fine description of the shepherd's job in Psalm 23.

Key Bible passages and people

John 10:1-14 The Good Shepherd, key verse 11

Luke 15:1-7 The parable of the lost sheep

Matthew 25:31-33 The sheep and the goats

Isaiah 53.6 We all like sheep have gone astray.

Amos

David (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

Jacob

Suggested application

Example by C.H. Spurgeon

When a shepherd has at last overtaken his poor, silly, wandering sheep, he does not straightway fall to scolding or beating it for having cost him so much toil and trouble. No; but he observes that it is very weary, that it had torn itself among thorns, and cut itself among jagged rocks, and therefore he first tenderly sees to its wounds, and then bears it back to the fold in his own arms. Poor trembling sinner, the Gospel has at length laid hold upon you; you cannot longer run in the paths of sin, grace has stopped your mad career, and made you tremble at the guilt of sin. You are afraid of Jesus, for you know how sorely you have grieved him; you fear that he will chide you severely, and perhaps spurn you from his presence. Oh think not so of the Good Shepherd! He is already gazing on your bleeding wounds, and preparing to bind them up; he will soon take compassion on your weakness, and bear you in his arms. Trust to him, poor sinner, just as the poor sheep trusts the shepherd. A man is more precious than a sheep, Jesus is more tender than the most careful shepherd. To coming sinners he is gentle indeed. When the prodigal returned all ragged, and filthy, his loving father did not put him in quarantine till he had been cleansed and purified, but there and then fell upon his

neck and kissed him, without so much as giving him one upbraiding word. He came from the swine trough to his parent's arms. That welcome prodigal is the type of such sinners as you are. You too shall have all kisses and no frowns; all love and no wrath; all kindness and no severity. Oh! If you knew the Saviour, you would not delay. Now, now, poor heavy laden sinner, trust the Lord Jesus and live. He has never treated one lost sheep with harshness, and he cannot change, and will therefore deal as generously with you as he has done with others. Whether thou wilt trust him or no- I will- I do. Poor sinner, may the Holy Spirit lead thee to look to Jesus and live.

Sheep and goats

"And he shall separate then one from another" Matt 25:32 Jesus Christ will be the divider on that dread day (The last Judgement). How he will separate them, no one can tell, except that it will be as a shepherd divided his sheep from the goats. Not one goat shall be left among the sheep, nor one sheep with the goats. The division will be very close and personal; they will not be separated into nations, nor even into families; but each individual will be allotted his or her proper place among the sheep or goats.

There will be only two companies, one on the right hand of the Judge, and the other on his left. The Lord Jesus Christ "Shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing"; and all who will be summoned before his dread tribunal will be either alive from the dead, or still dead in trespasses and sins. There will be no middle company in that day, as in God's sight there is no third class even now. All our names are either in the Lamb's Book of Life or in the Judge's Book of Death.