

# THE ROLE OF A SHEPHERD IN BIBLICAL TIMES



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From the days of Abraham down to modern times, sheep have abounded in the Holy Land. The Arabs of Bible lands have largely been dependent through the centuries upon sheep for their living. The Jews of Bible times were first shepherds and then farmers, but they never abandoned entirely their shepherd life. The large number of sheep in the land can be understood when it is realized that Job had fourteen thousand sheep (Job 42:12), and that King Solomon at the Temple's dedication, sacrificed one hundred and twenty thousand sheep (I Kings 8:63).

Fat-tailed sheep the variety mostly in use. The fat tail provides reserve strength for the sheep, much like the hump does on a camel. There is energy in the tail. When the sheep is butchered, this fatty tail is quite valuable. People will buy the tail, or part of it, and use it for frying. That this variety of sheep was in use in ancient times is seen by references in the Pentateuch to the fat tail of the sheep. "Also thou shalt take of the ram the fat and the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards" (Exodus 29:22). "And the fat that covereth the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards" (Leviticus 3:9).<sup>1</sup>

## THE SHEPHERD

Youngest boy often the shepherd. The youngest boy in the family becomes shepherd of the sheep, especially when the Arab peasant is a shepherd as well as being a farmer of grain. As the older son grows up he transfers his energies from sheep raising to helping the father with sowing, plowing, and harvesting the crops, and passes on the shepherd's task to the next younger boy. And so the job is passed from older to younger until the youngest of all becomes the family shepherd.<sup>2</sup>

Such must have been the custom when Jesse raised his family of eight sons. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep" (I Samuel 16:11). David, being the youngest of eight sons, became the family shepherd. His experiences as a shepherd lad were often used to illustrate his beautiful Psalms. His Shepherd Psalm has become the classic of the ages.

The shepherd's garb. The dress of an Arab shepherd lad is a simple tunic of cotton that is girded around his body by a

leathern girdle, and his outer garment, called aba, is often of camel's hair, like that of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:4). The aba keeps the boy warm, is able to shed the rain, and at night is used as a blanket in which to wrap himself.<sup>3</sup>

The shepherd's scrip. This is a bag made of dried skin. When he leaves home to go and tend the sheep; his mother will put into it some bread, cheese, dried fruit, and probably some olives.<sup>4</sup>

It was into this bag that David placed the five smooth stones when he went to battle with the giant Goliath (I Samuel 17:40).

The shepherd's rod. It is like a policeman's club. It is often made of oak wood and has a knob on the end of it. Into this knob nails are sometimes driven so as to make a better weapon. It is very useful for protection, and no shepherd would be without it.<sup>5</sup>

It was no doubt the rod that David used in protecting his sheep from wild animals (I Samuel 17:34-36). He mentions both the rod and the staff in his Shepherd Psalm (Psalm 23:4).

The prophet Ezekiel refers to the custom of the sheep passing under the shepherd's rod for the purpose of counting or inspecting them. "I will cause you to pass under the rod" (Ezekiel 20:37). The law of Moses speaks of tithing the flock for a specific purpose at such a time. "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord" (Leviticus 27:32). To do this Jewish writers tell us that the shepherd allowed the animals to come by him as they would under the rod at a narrow entrance. The head of the rod was dipped into some coloring fluid and was allowed to come down upon every tenth one that passed by, thus marking him as the one to be given to the LORD for sacrificial purposes.<sup>6</sup>

The sceptre, which the ancient kings of the East usually had with them, had its origin in the shepherd's rod. Kings were considered to be shepherds of their people. Thus the sceptre, or rod, of the king became a symbol of protection, power and authority. Young translates Micah 7:14: "Rule thou thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine inheritance."<sup>7</sup>

The shepherd's staff. David mentions the staff along with the rod in his Shepherd Psalm (Psalm 23:4). It is a stick five or six feet long and sometimes but not always has a crook at the end

of it. It is used like Western men would use a cane or walking stick. It is useful in handling the sheep and also for protection.<sup>8</sup>

The shepherd's sling. It was a simple affair, being composed of two strings of sinew, rope, or leather, and a receptacle of leather to receive the stone. It was swung a time or two around the head and then was discharged by letting go one of the strings.<sup>9</sup>

The shepherd, in addition to using his sling against wild animals or robbers, found it very handy in directing the sheep. A stone could be dropped close to a sheep that was lagging behind and startle it into coming along with the rest of the flock. Or if one would get away in another direction, then a stone would be slung so as to drop just beyond the straying sheep, and thus bring him back. It was the shepherd's sling that young David used in slaying the giant Goliath (I Samuel 17:40–49).

In her plea to David, Abigail was no doubt contrasting two items of his shepherd's equipment when she said, "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling" (I Samuel 25:29). The "bundle of life" is understood as either "the pouch of life," or "the bag of life," and most probably refers to the shepherd's scrip. David's enemies were to be like the stones in his sling, being that which was to be thrown away; whereas David's soul would be like the provisions in his scrip, which were to be kept and guarded by the LORD himself.<sup>10</sup>

The shepherd's flute. A dual-piped flute of reed is generally carried by the Arab shepherd. It is true that minor strains of music come from this flute, but the heart of the shepherd is stirred, and the sheep of the flock are refreshed by the invigorating music that comes from this simple instrument. There can be little question but that David used such an instrument when he was with his flock, in the same way the shepherd lads have done for centuries around Bethlehem. It is of interest to know that the word in the Arabic language which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word for "psalm" is mazmoor, which means "played on a pipe or flute."<sup>11</sup>

## FOOD AND WATER FOR THE FLOCK

Food planned for the flock. One of the principal duties at all seasons of the year is for the shepherd to plan food for his flock. In the springtime there is an abundance of green pasture, and usually the sheep are allowed to graze near to the village where the shepherd's home is located. After the grain is reaped, and the poor have had an opportunity to glean what is left for them, then the shepherd brings in his flock, and the sheep feed on certain fresh growths, or dried blades, or an occasional ear of grain that the reapers

may have left, or was overlooked by the gleaners. When this source of food is exhausted then the pasture is sought in other places. The wilderness of Judea which is located along the western side of the Jordan Valley is carpeted in the spring with a certain amount of grass and this turns into standing hay as the hot weather comes, and this becomes food for the sheep during part of the summer.<sup>12</sup>

Scripture often refers to shepherds looking for pasture for their flocks. "And they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks" (I Chronicles 4:39). The Psalmist thanks GOD for the pasturage which the LORD as Shepherd provides for His people: "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever" (Psalm 79:13).

In the late autumn or winter months, there are times when the shepherd can find no pasturage that is available for his flock, and then he must become responsible for feeding the animals himself. If the flock is small there may be times when it is stabled within the peasant house, and the family lives on a sort of mezzanine floor above it.

At such seasons of the year the shepherd must provide the food. This is what Isaiah meant when he said: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd" (Isaiah 40:11). In some sections of Syria, flocks are taken at this season to places in the mountain country, where the shepherd busies himself with the bushy trees, cutting down branches that have green leaves or tender twigs, that the sheep and goats can eat.<sup>13</sup>

Micah was probably speaking of this custom of providing food for the sheep, when he said: "Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage" (Micah 7:14).

Water provided for the flock. In selecting pasturage for the flock, it is an absolute necessity that water be provided, and that it be easy of access. Often flocks are stationed near to a stream of running water. But the sheep are apt to be afraid of drinking water that moves quickly, or that is agitated. Therefore the shepherd looks for pools of water, or provides some quiet place where they may quench their thirst. How appropriate then are the words concerning the divine Shepherd: "He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:2). But when all such watering places are dried up in the heat of summer, as is often the case in Palestine, then wells are used. Usually a large rock is placed over the mouth of the well and this must be removed, as Jacob did, before the sheep can be watered (Genesis 29:8–10). Noontide is usually the time for watering the sheep. When Jacob was at the well, he said, "Lo, it is yet high day . . . water ye the sheep" (Genesis 29:7) The matter of water supply plays an important part in locating the flock for pasturage.<sup>14</sup>

## THE SHEEPFOLD

A simple improvised sheepfold. Such is sometimes made by the shepherd when he is a distance from his home, or especially when he may be in the territory of mountains. It is a temporary affair that can be taken down easily when it comes time to move on to another location. A fence is built of tangled thorn bushes or rude bowers. This is all the protection that is needed, as the shepherds often sleep with their flocks when the weather permits. Ezekiel mentions such a sheepfold when he predicts the future of Israel: "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be" (Ezekiel 34:14).<sup>15</sup>

Sheepcotes in connection with caves. There are many caves in the Holy Land, and when one of these is available it is utilized as a sheepcote. During stormy weather, and at night, the sheep retreat into the cave, but at other times they are kept in the enclosure immediately in front of the cave's mouth. This enclosure is generally constructed of loose stones piled up in a circular wall, with thorns on the top.<sup>16</sup>

The cave into which King Saul went to rest, and David and his men were already within it, was a cavern with a fold built in connection with it. "And he came to the sheep cotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet" (1 Samuel 24:3).

More permanent sheepfolds. Such shelters are usually built by the shepherd in a valley, or else on the sunny side of a hill where there is protection from cold winds. This fold is a low building with arches in front of it, and a wall forming an outdoor enclosure, joining the building. When the weather is mild, the sheep and goats are allowed to be in the enclosure during the night, but if the weather is stormy, or the evenings are cold, then the flock is shut up in the interior part of the fold, with its protection of roof and walls. The walls of the enclosure are about three feet wide at the bottom, and become narrower at the top. They are from four to six feet high. Large stones are used in constructing the outsides of the wall, and they are also placed on the top, and then the center is filled with smaller pieces of stone, of which there is much in the land. Sharp thorn bushes are put on the top of this wall to protect the sheep from wild animals or robbers. There is a gate guarded by a watchman.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus made reference to the familiar sheepfold of Palestine when He spoke those memorable words of His: "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter [watchman] openeth." (John 10:1-3).

## HANDLING AND GATHERING THE SHEEP

Several flocks sometimes allowed to mix. More than one flock may be kept in the same fold, and often flocks are mixed while being watered at a well. For the time being, no attempt is made to separate them. Jacob saw such a mixture of flocks: "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East. And he looked, and behold, a well in the field, and lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it" (Genesis 29:1-3).<sup>18</sup>

Ability to separate the sheep. When it becomes necessary to separate several flocks of sheep, one shepherd after another will stand up and call out: "Tahhoo! Tahhoo!" or a similar call of his own choosing. The sheep lift up their heads, and after a general scramble, begin following each one his own shepherd. They are thoroughly familiar with their own shepherd's tone of voice. Strangers have often used the same call, but their attempts to get the sheep to follow them always fail.<sup>19</sup>

The words of Jesus are indeed true to Eastern shepherd life when he said: "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:4, 5).

Gathering scattered sheep. The shepherd knows how to gather sheep that have been scattered. Especially is this necessary when the sheep must be led back to the fold, or when they are to be guided to another pasture. It is accomplished by his standing in the center of his scattered sheep, and giving them the call which serves as the notes of a bugle do to an army of men. Pebbles are sent by means of his slingshot in the direction of and beyond members of the flock that fail to heed the call, in order to get their attention and then bring them back. He does not commence to lead them away until he knows they are all there.<sup>20</sup>

Ezekiel predicts that the LORD as Shepherd of Israel will one day gather His people that have been scattered, and will bring them back to their own land of Palestine.

"As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 34:12, 13).

The use of dogs. Some shepherds make use of dogs. When dogs are possessed, they are of value in handling the flock. When traveling, the shepherd usually walks ahead, and the dogs are allowed to bring up the rear. They bark furiously at any intruder among them, and therefore warn of possible danger to the flock. When the sheep are in the fold, then

the dogs become the guardians against any possible attack by an enemy. Many a foe of the sheep has been frightened away by the defiant barking of these animals.<sup>21</sup>

The patriarch Job spoke of shepherd dogs: "They that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock" (Job 30:1).

### INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHEPHERD AND SHEEP

When we learn of the intimate relationship that exists between the shepherd and his sheep, the figure of the LORD as a Shepherd of His people takes on new meaning.

Giving names to the sheep. Jesus said concerning the shepherd of his day: "He calleth his own sheep by name" (John 10:3). Today, the eastern shepherd delights to give names to certain of his sheep, and if his flock is not too large, all of his sheep may be given names. He knows them by means of certain individual characteristics. He names one: "Pure White"; another, "Striped"; another, "Black"; another, "Brown"; and still another, "Gray-eared." All this indicates the tender affection which he has for every one of his flock.<sup>22</sup>

Guidance for the sheep. The Eastern shepherd never drives his sheep as does the Western shepherd. He always leads them, often going before them. "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them" (John 10:4). This does not mean that the shepherd is always in front of his sheep. Although he may be usually in that position when traveling, he often walks by their side, and sometimes follows behind, especially if the flock is headed for the fold in the evening. From the rear he can gather any stragglers, and protect such from a sly attack from a wild animal. If the flock is a large one, the shepherd will be in front, and a heifer will follow behind.<sup>23</sup>

Isaiah speaks of the omnipresent LORD in a double relationship to His people: "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the GOD of Israel will be your rereward [rear guard]" (Isaiah 52:12).

The skill of the shepherd and personal relationship to them is clearly seen when he guides his sheep along narrow paths. The Shepherd Psalm says: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness" (Psalm 23:3). The grain fields are seldom fenced or hedged in Bible lands, and sometimes only a narrow path runs between the pasture and these fields. The sheep are forbidden to eat in the fields where crops are growing. Thus in guiding the sheep along such a path, the shepherd must not allow any of the animals to get into the forbidden area, because if he does, he must pay damages to the owner of the grain. One Syrian shepherd has been known to guide a flock of one hundred fifty sheep without any help, along such a narrow path for quite a distance, without letting a single sheep go where he was not allowed to go.<sup>24</sup>

Straying sheep restored. It is very important that sheep should not be allowed to stray away from the flock, because when by themselves they are utterly helpless. In such a condition, they become bewildered, for they have no sense at all of locality. And if they do stray away, they must be brought back.<sup>25</sup>

The Psalmist prayed the prayer: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant" (Psalm 119:176). The prophet Isaiah compared man's waywardness to that of sheep: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). David sang of his divine Shepherd: "He restoreth my soul" (Psalm 23:3, cf. John 10).

Playing with the sheep. The shepherd is so constantly with his sheep that sometimes his life with them becomes monotonous. Therefore he will occasionally play with them. He does this by pretending to run away from his sheep, and they will soon overtake him, and completely surround him, gamboling with great delight.<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes GOD's people think He forsakes them when trouble comes their way. They say: "the LORD hath forsaken me" (Isaiah 49:14). But actually their divine Shepherd says to them: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

Intimate knowledge of the sheep. The shepherd is deeply interested in every single one of his flock. Some of them may be given pet names because of incidents connected with them. They are usually counted each evening as they enter the fold, but sometimes the shepherd dispenses with the counting, for he is able to feel the absence of anyone of his sheep. With one sheep gone, something is felt to be missing from the appearance of the entire flock. One shepherd in the Lebanon district was asked if he always counted his sheep each evening. He replied in the negative, and then was asked how then he knew if all his sheep were present. This was his reply: "Master, if you were to put a cloth over my eyes, and bring me any sheep and only let me put hands on its face, I could tell in a moment if it was mine or not."<sup>27</sup>

When H. R. P. Dickson visited the desert Arabs, he witnessed an event that revealed the amazing knowledge which some of them have of their sheep. One evening, shortly after dark, an Arab shepherd began to call out one by one the names of his fifty-one mother sheep, and was able to pick out each one's lamb, and restore it to its mother to suckle. To do this in the light would be a feat for many shepherds, but this was done in complete darkness, and in the midst of the noise coming from the ewes crying for their lambs, and the lambs crying for their mothers.<sup>28</sup>

But no Oriental shepherd ever had a more intimate knowledge of his sheep than JESUS our great Shepherd has of those who belong to His flock. He once said of Himself: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep" (John 10:14).

The difference between the shepherd and the hireling. Concerning the hireling, JESUS said: "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" (John 10:13). When the flock is small, the shepherd handles his sheep without any help, but if the flock becomes too large, then it becomes necessary for him to hire someone to help him with the sheep. One man can usually handle from fifty to one hundred sheep, but when he has more than one hundred, he usually seeks a helper. The hireling does not usually have the personal interest in the sheep that the shepherd has, and so cannot always be trusted to defend the flock in the way the shepherd himself would do.<sup>29</sup>

"He that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep" (John 10:12).

### CARING FOR THE SHEEP IN SPECIAL TIMES OF NEED

The love of the shepherd for his sheep is best seen when times of special need call forth unusual acts of care for members of the flock.

Crossing a stream of water. This process is most interesting. The shepherd leads the way into the water and across the stream. Those favored sheep who always keep hard by the shepherd, plunge boldly into the water, and are soon across. Others of the flock enter the stream with hesitation and alarm. Not being close to their guide, they may miss the fording place and be carried down the river a distance, but will probably be able to clamber ashore. The little lambs may be driven into the water by the dogs, and they are heard to bleat pitifully as they leap and plunge. Some manage to get across, but if one is swept away, then the shepherd leaps quickly into the stream and rescues it, carrying it in his bosom to the shore. When they all arrive over the stream, the lambs will gambol about with joy, and the sheep will gather around their shepherd as if to express their thankfulness to him.<sup>30</sup>

Our divine Shepherd has a word of encouragement for all His sheep who must pass through streams of affliction: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isaiah 43:2).

Special care of baby lambs, and sheep with young ones. When lambing time comes, the shepherd must take great care of his flock. The task is made more difficult because it so often becomes necessary to move to a new location to find pasturage. The sheep that are soon to become mothers, as well as those with their young ones, must be kept close to the shepherd while in transit. Little helpless lambs that cannot

keep up with the rest of the flock are carried in the bosom of his undergarment, the girdle turning it into a pocket.<sup>31</sup>

Isaiah pictures this activity in his famous passage: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

Care of sick or wounded sheep. The shepherd is always on the lookout for members of his flock that need personal attention. Sometimes a lamb suffers from the rays of the sun, or its body may have been badly scratched by some thornbush. The most common remedy he uses with these sheep is olive oil, a supply of which he carries in a ram's horn.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps David was thinking of such an experience when he wrote of the LORD, "Thou anointest my head with oil" (Psalm 23:5).

Watching sheep at night. In weather that permits, the shepherds often keep their flocks in the open country. One group of shepherds provided simple sleeping places for themselves by placing "a number of oblong circles of stones, inside of which rushes were collected for bedding, according to the Bedouin fashion in the desert. These simple beds were arranged in a circle, and sticks and roots were collected at the center for a fire."<sup>33</sup>

With this arrangement they were able to keep watch over their sheep by night. It was in such a way as this that the Bethlehem shepherds took turns watching and sleeping on the hills outside Bethlehem, when the angels visited them announcing the Saviour's birth. "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). When Jacob cared for Laban's sheep, he spent many a night in the out-of-doors, looking after the flock. "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Genesis 31:40).

Protection of sheep from robbers and wild animals. The sheep need to be guarded against robbers not only when they are in the open country, but also when they are in the fold. The bandits of Palestine are not apt to pick locks, but some of them may manage to climb up over the wall, and get into the fold, where they cut the throats of as many of the animals as possible and then sling them over the wall to others of their band, and all of them attempt to escape without being caught.<sup>34</sup>

JESUS described just such operations: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). The shepherd must be on guard constantly for such an emergency, and must be ready for quick action to protect his rights in the flock.



The wild animals of Palestine today include wolves, panthers, hyenas, and jackals. The lion has not lived in the land since the days of the Crusaders. The last bear was killed over half a century ago. David as a shepherd had experienced the coming of a lion and of a bear against his flock, and by the LORD's help, he was able to slay both of them (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Amos tells of a shepherd attempting to rescue one of the flock from the lion's mouth: "As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear" (Amos 3:12).

One experienced Syrian shepherd is reported to have followed a hyena to his lair and compelled the animal to give up his prey. He won his victory over the wild beast by himself howling in characteristic fashion, striking on rocks with his heavy staff, and flinging deadly stones with his slingshot. The sheep was then carried in his arms back to the fold.<sup>35</sup>

The faithful shepherd must be willing to risk his life for the sake of the flock, and perhaps give his life for them. As our Good Shepherd JESUS not only risked his life for us, He actually gave Himself on our behalf. He said: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Seeking and finding lost sheep. Being responsible for anything that happens to one of his flock, the Eastern shepherd will spend hours if necessary in traversing the wilderness or mountainside, in search of a sheep that has strayed away and is lost. After weary hours of hunting for it, it will usually be found in some waterless hollow in the wilderness, or in some desolate mountain ravine. The exhausted creature will be borne home on the shoulders of the sturdy shepherd.<sup>36</sup>

And what happens then is best described by the parable of JESUS: "And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke 15:6).

## SHEEP PRODUCTS

Sheep in Palestine and vicinity have always been valuable because of the important products that are derived from them.

**Wool.** Wool has been a valuable product in Bible lands. In ancient times most of the clothing which the Israelites wore was made of wool. The large outer garment or mantle was usually woolen. The shearing months in Palestine are May and June.<sup>37</sup>

The sheep are washed before they are sheared. Solomon's Song speaks of "sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing" (Song of Solomon 4:2). The color of the wool varies somewhat according to the color of the animal shorn, but white wool is considered to be the most valuable. The prophet compares sins forgiven with the whiteness of wool (Isaiah 1:18).

**"Sheepskins.** From ancient times to modern days it has often been customary for pastoral people to make for themselves coats out of the skins of the sheep with wool still adhering to the skins. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells of the persecuted heroes of faith, saying of some of them that they "wandered about in sheepskins" (Hebrews 11:37). The skin of sheep was at times tanned and then used as leather, but the skin of the goats was superior to that of sheep for this purpose.<sup>38</sup>

**Sheep for meat or sacrificial purposes.** Sheep were often eaten when meat was desired. For the ordinary person, meat was not on the daily menu, but was only used on special occasions of rejoicing, as when a feast was prepared, a wedding supper, or when a guest of honor was being entertained. The animal was usually cooked as soon as it was killed, and then was often boiled, although sometimes it was roasted.<sup>39</sup>

The sheep was used in Bible times more than any other animal for sacrificial purposes. A young male lamb was used in most cases as a thanksgiving offering, as atonement for transgression, or as redemption of a more valuable animal.

The offering of the Passover Lamb was the most important religious act of the year. This lamb had to be a male, which was selected after minute examination, in order that it be free from any blemish, and it was to be a first year lamb. It was killed on the fourteenth of the month Abib (after the Babylonian captivity Nisan, about the equivalent of our April), and the blood was sprinkled with hyssop.

In Egypt the blood was sprinkled on the lintels and doorposts of the houses, but in Canaan it was sprinkled on the altar. The meat was roasted with fire, rather than boiled, and not a bone was broken, as was customary when it was boiled. It was eaten by the entire household in the spirit of haste, as if a journey was being started. Anything left of it was burned with fire, and not left over for the next day.<sup>40</sup>

The Feast of the Passover was the most important of all the Jewish annual feasts, and formed the background for the Christian ordinance of the LORD's Supper (cf. Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5 ff.; Matthew 26:17–29).

**Milk.** Milk from the sheep is especially rich, and in the Orient is considered to be of more value than that of the cattle. Milk is seldom drunk in its fresh condition, but rather is made into "leben," or into cheese. Buttermilk is also much used.

**Rams' horns.** The horns of the rams are considered to be of great value. In many Western lands, growers of sheep have endeavored to develop a hornless breed, but in the East the horns are thought of as an important part of the animal. The ram's horn has been used chiefly as a vessel in which liquids have been carried. For carrying purposes a wooden plug is driven into the large end of the horn so

as to close it, and sometimes it is covered with raw hide to hold it in place. The small part of the pointed end of the horn is cut off, and the opening closed with a stopper. The ram's horn was used in Bible times to carry oil.<sup>41</sup>

Samuel was told to take his horn of oil and anoint David to be the future king (1 Samuel 16:1). Solomon was anointed king by the oil in the horn of Zadok the priest (1 Kings 1:39). Reference has already been made to the shepherd's use of oil with his sheep, and this was carried in a ram's horn.

The ram's horn was also made into a trumpet and has been called by the Jews, Shofar. The Mosaic Law called for the sounding of rams' horns at certain times. Each year of Jubilee was ushered in by the blowing of these horns. "Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land" (Leviticus 25:9).

In connection with the Feast of Trumpets there was to be "a day of blowing the trumpets" (Numbers 29:1). The most famous use of the rams' horns was in connection with the encircling and destruction of the city of Jericho by Joshua's army. "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns; and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets" (Joshua 6:4). The trumpets were also used as signals to gather the people (Jeremiah 4:5).

The ram's horn trumpet measures about eighteen inches long and is in one piece. It is made from the left horn of the fat-tailed sheep, which is "not spiral but flattish, curved backwards, and forming nearly a circle, the point passing under the ear. This structure, added to the large size of the horn, adapts it well for its purpose. In order to bring it to the proper shape, the horn is softened by heat (i.e. hot water) and then modeled into the very form which was used by the Jewish priests."<sup>42</sup>

## GOATS

Care of goats—leadership ability. There are many goats being cared for by Bible land shepherds. A shepherd looks after them much as he would care for a flock of sheep. Sometimes the goats belong to one flock along with the sheep, and in this case:

It is usually a he-goat that is the special leader of the whole (Jeremiah 50:8; Proverbs 30:31), walking before it as gravely as a sexton before the white flock of a church choir. It is from this custom that Isaiah speaks of kings as "the he-goats of the earth" (Isaiah 14:9, Margin), a name applied to them by Zechariah also (Zechariah 10:3), and to Alexander the Great by Daniel, who describes him as a he-goat from the west, with

a notable horn between his eyes (Daniel 8:5): a fitting symbol of his irresistible power at the head of the Macedonian army.<sup>43</sup>

How goats differ from sheep. Most of the Palestinian and Syrian sheep are white, whereas most of the goats are black. The goats like the slopes of the rocky mountains, whereas the sheep prefer the plains or mountain valleys. The goats are especially fond of young leaves of trees, but the sheep would rather have grass.

Goats will feed during all the day without the heat of summer affecting them; but when the sunshine is hot, the sheep will lie down under a tree, or in the shade of a rock, or in a rude shelter prepared by the shepherd for that purpose. Song of Solomon makes mention of this rest time for the sheep: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon" (Song of Solomon 1:7). The goats are bolder, more venturesome, more playful, more apt to clamber to dangerous places, more apt to break into the grainfields, more headstrong, more vigorous, and more difficult to control than are the sheep.<sup>44</sup>

Separating goats from sheep. At certain times it becomes necessary to separate the goats from the sheep, although they may be cared for by the same shepherd that cares for the sheep. They do not graze well together, and so it frequently becomes necessary to keep them apart from the sheep while they are grazing. Dr. John A. Broadus, when visiting Palestine, reported seeing a shepherd leading his flock of white sheep and black goats all mingled together. When he turned into a valley, having led them across the Plain of Sharon, he turned around and faced his flock: "When a sheep came up, he tapped it with his long staff on the right side of the head, and it quickly moved off to his right; a goat he tapped on the other side, and it went to his left."<sup>45</sup>

This is the picture the Saviour had in mind when he spoke the solemn words: "And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:32-33).

Use of goat's milk. The milk derived from goats is especially excellent and rich. Most of the "leben" used today and in Bible times is made from goat's milk. Buttermilk and cheese are also utilized as milk products. The book of Proverbs speaks of the importance of goat's milk to the Hebrew people: "Thou shalt have goat's milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens" (Proverbs 27:27).

Use of the meat of kids. The meat of an adult male goat is of course rather tough, and so not ordinarily used. The female goats are seldom killed because they are needed

to increase the flock. Thus it is the meat of the young male kid that is largely used in Bible lands. In Old Testament times, when visitors were entertained, often a kid was made ready for the meal (cf. Judges 6:19). The prevalence of the flesh of kids in CHRIST's day is brought out by the reference of the Prodigal's brother. "And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (Luke 15:29).

There is sarcasm in this reproof, for the kid was of less value at a banquet than would have been a lamb, and considerably inferior to the fattened calf, which was killed and served on only special occasions to do honor to a very special guest. The brother was objecting to the father serving the fattened calf at the banquet honoring the return of the Prodigal, whereas he as the elder brother had not been given even a kid to make merry with his friends.<sup>46</sup>

Use of goats' hair and goats' skin. The hair of the goat was considered to be of great value to the Hebrew people. When the materials were brought for the construction of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, only the finest and the costliest that could be obtained were accepted; and goats' hair was included in the list of materials the children of Israel offered unto the LORD (See Exodus 35:23). Tabernacle curtains were made of goats' hair (Exodus 26:7). The tents

of the Bedouin Arabs are made of goats' hair, just as were similar dwellings in Old and New Testament times. Goats' skins have been used widely in Bible lands for leather, and are considered to be better for this purpose than the skin of sheep. This leather is used in making the Oriental "bottle" for carrying or storing water or other liquids.

Use of goats for sacrifices. The Levitical Code often allowed the Hebrews a choice of a sheep or of a goat for the offering. "If his offering be of the flocks, namely, of the sheep, or of the goats, for a burnt sacrifice" (Leviticus 1:10). On the Day of Atonement, it was required that a goat be sacrificed by the high priest, and that another goat should be "the scapegoat." "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:22). Moses had ordered that the scapegoat should be taken out into the wilderness and turned loose. But in order to prevent its return to Jerusalem, it became customary to lead the creature to the height of a mountain, where it was pushed over and would be certainly killed.<sup>47</sup>

This was the symbol of the forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of CHRIST. Although John the Baptist spoke of JESUS as the Lamb of GOD, he may have had in mind also the picture of the scapegoat when he said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).



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This article has numerous photographs accompanying it that illustrate Bible-land shepherd life.
3. Loc. cit.
4. G. Robinson Lees, Village Life in Palestine, p. 164.
5. CE. George M. Mackie, Bible Manners and Customs, p. 31.
6. James Neil, Everyday Life in the Holy Land, pp. 33, 34.
7. See "Scepter," The People's Bible Encyclopedia, p. 981.
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9. "The Sling," The People's Bible Encyclopedia, p. 85.
10. Mackie, op. cit., p. 33.
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12. Ibid., pp. 736–746.
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21. Thomson, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 593; also Wood, op. cit., p. 158.
22. Rihbany, op. cit., p. 299.
23. Ibid., pp. 299, 300.
24. Ibid., pp. 301, 302.
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27. Mackie, op. cit., p. 35.
28. H. R. P. Dickson, The Arab of the Desert, pp. 403, 404.
29. Geikie, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 219.
30. Thomson, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 25, 26.
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32. Whiting, op. cit., p. 753.
33. H. B. Tristram, The Land of Israel, p. 638.
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35. Rihbany, op. cit., pp. 307, 308.
36. Geikie, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 228.
37. Mackie, op. cit., p. 36.
38. Wood, op. cit., p. 172.
39. Ibid., pp. 163, 164.
40. Ibid., pp. 177, 178.
41. Ibid., pp. 172, 173.
42. Ibid., pp. 174, 175.
43. Geikie, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 232.
44. Geikie, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 224, 225; also Edwin W. Rice, Orientalisms in Bible Lands, p. 167.
45. John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Vol. I, An American Commentary on the New Testament), p. 509, footnote 1. (Philadelphia: American Baptist publication Society, 1886.)
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47. Geikie, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 130, 131.