

JEHOVAH-ROHI

THE NAME

Jehovah-rohi means Jehovah my Shepherd. It is that most precious designation of Jehovah which begins the Twenty-third Psalm, where it is translated, "The Lord is my shepherd." Perhaps it is not so specifically a name of Jehovah as the other names which have been studied, but no designation of Jehovah has brought more comfort to the heart or sounded sweeter to the ears of the saints of both Old and New Testaments, ancient and modern, than this beautiful expression.

ITS INTRODUCTION IN THE SHEPHERD PSALM

As directly applied to Jehovah and in an intimate, personal sense the name Jehovah-rohi first appears in that immortal ode we call the Shepherd Psalm, known and loved of all generations to this day, and perhaps the best known of any portion of Scripture. It is the most precious jewel in that treasure house of devotion, and worship, and praise we call the Psalms. Committed to memory in childhood's early years, it has been to multitudes the comfort of life's closing years. It has dried many a tear and dissipated many fears. It forms the mold into which the faith of countless saints has been poured.

It is a psalm of David. It could not have come as appropriately out of the experience of anyone else in the Old Testament. Perhaps it was written in the latter years of Israel's great Shepherd King, the forerunner and type of that Great Shepherd of the sheep, David's greater Son. It has the ring of a full experience, of a faith sobered by trials, and a life mellowed by the passing years. He looks back upon the stormy, troubled years when his life was hunted by the inveterate enemy Saul; then through the years of warfare and rebellion, of sordid sin and sorrow; and he finds God's goodness and guiding presence through it all. Then recalling the occupation of his own childhood and youth, that of caring for his father's sheep, he can find no more beautiful and fitting analogy of Jehovah's relationship to himself than that of a shepherd to the sheep. And now after the storm and stress of the years through which Jehovah has so safely and successfully brought him, with confident faith he can look forward to the years ahead and say: "Surely

goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

MEANING AND USE OF “RO’EH”

The primary meaning of this word is to feed or lead to pasture, as a shepherd does his flock, and thus it is frequently used. The story of Joseph in Egypt opens with Joseph “feeding the flock with his brethren” (Gen. 37:2). In Egypt his brethren answer Pharaoh’s inquiry by saying: “Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers . . . thy servants have no pasture for their flocks” (Gen. 47:3, 4). “David went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem” (I Sam. 17:15).

The word is also used figuratively to indicate the relationship between prince and people: the tribes of Israel say to David: “Thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a prince over Israel” (II Sam. 5:2). Even of Cyrus, king of Persia, Jehovah says: “He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure,” with regard to Jerusalem and the Temple (Isa. 44:28). As between priest or prophet and people, Jehovah promises to give them “pastors [or shepherds] according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15). Contrast Jehovah’s condemnation of the false shepherds through Ezekiel. “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel . . . and say unto them, Thus saith Jehovah Elohim unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the sheep?” (Ezek. 34:2, 8, 10).

It is used figuratively with regard to folly and judgment. The mouth of fools is said to feed on foolishness (Prov. 15:14). The idolater in his folly is said to feed on ashes (Isa. 44:20). Ephraim with its lies and deceit “feedeth on wind,” says Hosea (12:1). Jehovah will feed the false shepherds with judgment (Ezek. 34:16).

It is further translated “companion” or “friend” expressing the idea of the intimacy of sharing

life, food, etc. It is the word for companion in Judges 11 :3 8 where Jephthah's daughter went away with her companions to bewail her fate. These were no doubt her most intimate, perhaps household, associates. It is the word for friend in Exodus 33:11 where "Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." Thus it signifies to associate with, take pleasure in, to cherish as something treasured. This is touchingly and beautifully brought out in the parable of Nathan the prophet in which he accuses David of the black crime concerning Uriah and Bath-sheba (II Sam. 12). In this parable the prophet speaks of Bath-sheba as a lamb which a poor man nourished up in his own house, which grew up with him and his children, eating of his own morsel, drinking of his own cup and was to him like a daughter.

JEHOVAH, THE SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE

It is in the name of Jehovah-rohi that this relationship finds its highest and tenderest expression, for Jehovah is the Shepherd of His people. No other name of Jehovah has the tender intimate touch of this name. The name Elohim revealed God to us as the triune Creator and Sovereign of the universe, of life, and of all nations. As Jehovah, He was seen as the eternal, self-existent God of revelation and especially as the God of His covenant people. The name El-Shaddai revealed Him as the mighty, sufficient, and satisfying One. As Adonai, He was seen as our sovereign Lord, the Master of our lives and service. Jehovah-jireh revealed Him as the One who provides the sacrificial lamb of our redemption. Jehovah-rophe revealed Him as the Healer of life's sicknesses and sorrows. In Jehovah-nissi He was seen as the standard of our victory in life's conflicts. As Jehovah-M'Kaddesh He sets His people apart for His own peculiar possession and to His holy service. As Jehovah-shalom, He is the God of our peace. And as Jehovah-tsidkenu He Himself is that righteousness to His people which alone is the basis of their justification and acceptance.

It may be clearly seen then that none of these names can mean quite the same to His people as this precious name. It is a wonderful and beautiful conception when we consider the general picture of Jehovah presented thus far in the Old Testament. He is awful and unapproachable in

His holiness. Not even Moses may see His face or look upon the fullness of His glory, for no man can see that and live (Exod. 33:20). At best Moses can endure only a passing glimpse or manifestation of it. Jehovah is sublime in His purity and glorious in majesty, whose thoughts and ways immeasurably transcend the thoughts and ways of His people (Isa. 55:8, 9). Yet the wonderful grace of Jehovah as expressed by the word shepherd is such that He can condescend to such a relationship with mortal, sinful creatures, whom He has redeemed.

The psalmist and the prophets are the first to apply this name of Jehovah. It appears first directly and personally in the Twenty-third Psalm. Everything in David's life had suggested such a relationship. On one great occasion God had said to him, "I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people" (2 Sam. 7:8), and the psalmist adds: "He chose David . . . to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart" (Ps. 78:70-72).

Thereafter this designation of Jehovah appears frequently. "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock ..." says the psalmist (80:1) . In that great chapter of comfort, Isaiah 40, of the mighty, sovereign God the prophet says: "Behold Jehovah Elohim will come with strong hand. . . . 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" (vv. 10, 11). Ezekiel also gives us a beautiful picture of this relationship in 34:11,16, where after the indignation at the false shepherds Jehovah is presented as the Shepherd who will search His sheep and seek them out. He will feed them in a good pasture and make them to lie in a good fold. He "will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick."

The Scriptures give us some intimate glimpses into the life of the shepherd and the sheep, but fortunately the preservation of this relationship to this very day enables us to better understand all that Jehovah may mean to us as Shepherd. A recent traveler in Palestine observes: "Shepherding does not change much in Palestine where wild beasts may descend still upon unprotected sheep

and suddenly destroy them. The Palestine shepherd lives night and day with his animals. He establishes a degree of intimacy with them which is touching to observe. He calls them all by their names and they, knowing his voice and hearing his only, heed. He protects the sheep from thieves and preying animals who would devour them at night, by sleeping in the opening of the often makeshift sheepfold and they, sensing his watchfulness, fear 'no evil.' He provides pasture and water even in the wilderness and the presence of enemies and they, casting all their anxiety upon him, are fed. There is a singular communion between the shepherd and his sheep which, after one has visited Palestine and observed it, makes the symbol of the good Shepherd peculiarly apt and the Twenty-third Psalm strangely moving.”

It is wonderful that Jehovah should be all this to His people. How well Jacob understood the ceaseless vigilance and constant exposure required in a shepherd! He speaks of that which was torn of beasts and that which was stolen of robbers. In the day the drought consumed him, and the frost by night, and the sleep departed from his eyes. His experience seems to him but a shadow of the loving care, the watchful protection, the strong defense of God, “the God who fed me [or shepherded me] all my life long” (Gen. 48:15). So Jehovah, as the psalmist so beautifully puts it, is the Keeper of His people-their shade upon their right hand. He does not allow the sun to smite them by day nor the moon by night. He keeps them from all evil. He who keeps His people neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121) . We are reminded of the attachment and devotion to the sheep in the risking of the shepherd’s life to protect them from perils and pitfalls, by David’s own exploits in rescuing them in single, unaided combat from the very mouth of the lion and the bear, so that the combat with a Goliath seems a small thing by comparison. The shepherd must be resourceful, resolute, strong. Jacob calls Him “the mighty God . . . the shepherd” (Gen. 49:24). And as we have seen, Isaiah says of Him: “Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand. . . . He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. He shall gently lead....” The shepherd is both strong and gentle.

Everything that the shepherd is to the sheep, Jehovah is to His people.

Patterson, *Around the Mediterranean with My Bible*, pp.142, 143.

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If there can exist such a tender intimacy between a man and sheep, how much more so between Jehovah and the spirits He has created and redeemed; and what a marvelous thing that God should offer Himself for such a relationship. He had said, "I will dwell among the children of Israel" (Exod. 29:45), and the word dwell is the word Shekinah, denoting His glorious presence. Jehovah as Shepherd offers His people the intimacy of His presence. He may be as intimately known as the shepherd is of the sheep. Poor sheep indeed are they who do not know the shepherd as they should, for his voice will not be so familiar and they will not follow. Such go easily astray. This was Israel's tragic experience, who were "the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100:3), but who became scattered and were as "sheep that have no shepherd" as the prophet foresaw in vision (I Kings 22:17). The intimacy of the shepherd is the most precious privilege and possession of the sheep, and this the Lord's people, as His sheep, should cultivate and enjoy. But it comes only by long and constant association and abiding in His presence.

Jehovah-rohi is not only the Shepherd of His people, He is my Shepherd, the Shepherd of each one of His people. As the God of the individual He was intensely personal. Not that Israel indulged in vague philosophical speculation or pantheistic dream about Jehovah, but every one of His flock and of His fold could say, "I am the Lord's and he is mine." They understood that He had each one of them in mind. Each one could say, "Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising" (Ps. 139:2). The psalm is full of personal pronouns. It is the psalm of personal experience with a personal God to whom every sheep of the fold is precious and His

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particular care. Since its experiences are common and its emotions familiar, we may claim it each one for himself.

JESUS OUR SHEPHERD

Of all the names of God in the Old Testament none is more beautifully pictured and personified in the New Testament than the name Jehovah-rohi, in the person of that glorious Shepherd of the sheep-the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the most beautiful and appealing of His parables and sayings have to do with this relationship to His redeemed. There is no more familiar and tenderer association concerning Him than that of the Shepherd going after the sheep that was lost. In no other delineation of Him do we feel more of His grace and beauty, His strength and gentleness than in that great shepherd discourse of John 10. The glorious announcement of His birth was first made to shepherds keeping watch by night over their flock, happy omen of what He was to become to men. And His last injunction to Peter before ascending to sit at the right hand of God the Father is to feed and tend His sheep.

“I am the good shepherd,” He said (John 10:11). Surely those who heard Him could not have mistaken His meaning. He was the “I am” of Isaiah 40: 11, the Lord Jehovah who was to come as a mighty One and to feed His flock like a Shepherd and gently lead them.

In Him was fulfilled the word of Ezekiel: “For thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out . . . I will deliver them ... I will feed them with good pasture .. I will cause them to lie down ... I will seek that which

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was lost, and will bring back that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick” (Ezek. 34:11-16).

His shepherd heart was melted with compassion for a people who were like sheep without a shepherd, and wrung with grief for the scattered sheep of the house of Israel, whose Shepherd He was. He would have rescued and gathered them (and will yet), but they would not. He is the

“great shepherd of the sheep” of Hebrews 13:20. And Peter reminds us that we were going astray like sheep but have returned to Him who is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (I Peter 2:25). He qualified Himself to become that good and great Shepherd by first becoming a lamb, thus entering intimately into every experience and need of the sheep. “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels: but he took on him the seed of Abraham” (Heb. 2:16). He partook of our flesh and blood (Heb. 2: 14), so that as “he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:18). He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He was tempted and tried in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He Himself learned obedience and was made perfect through sufferings (Heb. 2:10). For as a lamb, He subjected Himself willingly to the Father’s will, when “it pleased Jehovah to bruise him” and to “make his soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10), so that while all we like sheep had gone astray, Jehovah laid on Him the iniquity of us all. For He was led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:6, 7) and He bore our sins. Thus He was able and worthy to become that good Shepherd of the sheep, under which figure also He gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

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As the Shepherd He has gone on before and prepared the way, for having offered one sacrifice for sins forever He sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12), and we have boldness to enter the holy place by His blood, the new and living way He has dedicated for us (Heb. 10:19, 20). As the good and great Shepherd of the sheep He meets every need of His flock (Phil. 4:19), and there is no want to those who trust him. He leads us into the green pastures of His Word, and feeds us upon the true Bread of Life. He guides us into right paths and we are assured of His continuous presence. The Spirit of truth, He promised, will guide you into all truth (John 16:13). “I will pray the Father,” He said, “and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). For the Shepherd and the sheep are never separated. By day He gently leads, and by night He is the door of the sheep (John 10:9, 10). He protects us from the perils that beset us round about, and our perils are very real. Paul at Miletus warned the elders of the Ephesus church: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in

among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves,” explained the Shepherd Himself (Matt. 7:15). From these false teachers who exploit and destroy faith, and from the poisonous plants which the sheep may eat, and from the pitfalls of error into which they may wander, the abiding presence of the Spirit of truth will keep us.

There were not only wolves and pitfalls for the sheep. There was another significant danger from which the shepherd protected them. As he went ahead his eye was

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ever on the alert for the snakes whose sting was death, and with his staff he would crush their heads. So the great Shepherd, who has already sealed the serpent’s doom, will deliver us from falling into his power. We are safe in the protection of His table spread before us even in the presence of the enemies. He knows every one of His sheep by name. He knows the particular need of each one of us. He knows our peculiarities. He knows our weaknesses. Do we know His voice as we should? Do we trust Him and follow Him as we should? Is there the beautiful intimacy between us that there should be? Do we love the Shepherd’s presence? Can we distinguish His voice from the voice of the wolf in sheep’s clothing who comes among us to wrest and wreck our faith?

And when we are sorely tried He will lead gently on. When we are weary and wounded He will anoint our heads and heal our wounds and refresh us with tender care. As His sheep we are led by many a way. Sometimes the path is through fresh green meadows; sometimes over rough, steep, rocky paths, perhaps through dark places where the sun scarcely shines. But we are ever being led to one place. After the heat and burden of the day, He gathers us into the fold, where there is no more fear of wolf or thief and where all is sweet repose and safety. And then we know that whatever the sufferings and sorrows, the trials and terrors of the day, His goodness and lovingkindness followed us.

So the Lord Jesus, our Jehovah-rohi, will lead us into that final fold and rest “before the throne of God” where, John says, “they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon

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them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd” (Rev. 7:15-17, A.S.V.). So we “shall dwell in the house of Jehovah forever.”