

The Shepherd and the King: Jesus' Moral Vision Against Imperial Power

Throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the character of God is also compared to that of a shepherd, and Jesus teaches us what it means to lead and have shepherd-like qualities like justice and compassion. And throughout the Bible, we have come across kings who have abused their power, and how Jesus has provided us with a counter-moral vision at the same time. This paper also discusses Norman Gottwald's concept of Israel as an "anti-imperial community" and how Jesus's teachings and morals are anti-imperial, emphasizing the marginalized and focusing on his core teachings like justice, peace, and equality. We also discuss one of the teachings of Jesus that surprises me the most by the end of the paper.

1) Yoram Hazony describes and throws light upon the ethics of shepherds and farmers and compares them to the moral structure of the Bible. He says, "The shepherd (as represented by Abel, Abraham, Moses, and other biblical heroes) is generous, independent, a ready opponent of injustice, pious, and 'exceedingly concerned to safeguard his interests and those of his family.'" (Hazony 112). This depiction highlights the shepherd's function as a moral role model who has the qualities of justice and independence. He further says that Hebrew scriptures offer moral reasoning in a way that goes beyond the command of the divine, which means that humans should be held accountable even without explicit instructions from God. "The God of Hebrew Scripture holds individuals and nations morally responsible for their actions even where they appear to have received no laws or commands from him of any kind" (Hazony 103).

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is portrayed with shepherd-like qualities like compassion by healing a leper: "Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I will; be clean.'" (Mark 1:41). This highlights how the shepherd is directly involved and cares for the marginalized. Hazony depicts the shepherd as "a ready opponent of injustice," which aligns with the actions of Jesus, as he stands up for the unfair norms made up by society and restores the leper's dignity (Hazony 112).

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount serves as moral guidance, as the shepherd leading the flock. He teaches, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). This promotes righteousness and the ultimate virtues of humility. Hazony believes that the shepherd's morals consist of helping to guide others through moral integrity and wisdom (Hazony 112).

2) Joseph abused power during the famine; he acquired the land and further made the Egyptian people his slaves in exchange for food (Genesis 47:13–26). Such domination and centralization of power do not align with the morals of the shepherd-like justice and independence. On the other hand, King David has an affair with Bathsheba, along with the orchestrated death of her husband, Uriah. This demonstrates how the kingly power is being misused.

But, in the Gospel of John, Jesus redefines power by performing an act that is traditionally reserved for servants—washing the feet of his disciples. He says, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:14–15, ESV). This act illustrated true kingship and humility and not

enslaving the needy and exerting power over them, but rather being one with them and helping them.

Another powerful example is seen in his willingness to die and suffer for others. During His crucifixion, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says during the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28, ESV). Jesus willingly offered himself, unlike the earthly kings who preserved their power at others' expense.

3) Norman Gottwald describes early Israel as an "anti-imperial community," which is characterized by egalitarian social structures also being resistance to the domination by the hierarchy. He says, "Only as the full materiality of ancient Israel is more securely grasped will we be able to make proper sense of its religion and literature" (Gottwald 1). This perspective throws light upon the socio-political context in which the religion was developed. He also says that it emphasized communal values over imperial ideologies.

Jesus' Anti-Imperial Teachings

1. The Beatitudes

In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).

This teaching contrasts imperial values by uplifting the marginalized. Jesus uplifts the poor and says that they have the kingdom of heaven and are blessed. He does not exert imperialism and believes that everyone is equal, even saying that the marginalized are more blessed.

2. Render Unto Caesar

When Caesar questioned Jesus about paying taxes, Jesus responded, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

He believes that every property on the earthly plane is God's, because of which you cannot impose a tax on it.

4) One teaching of Jesus that stood out to me and surprised me was his command to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44)

This is a distinctive approach to perceiving your enemies. Jesus asks us to love our enemies rather than hate them and pray for the people who persecute us that they find peace and harmony. This is a difficult yet very calming approach that, when applied, can make you peaceful above all the hatred in the world surrounding us

The biblical vision of God is not an abstract philosophical ideal presented through the qualities of a shepherd. These qualities are justice, compassion, and the willingness to stand out for injustice that we see. These qualities are also aligned with those of Jesus and are not just ideas but a way of life. From the misuse of power by Joseph and David when Joseph used the famine situation to his own advantage and David had an affair, Jesus contrasts these actions with his acts of humility and love. Jesus redefines both divinity and kingship. His teachings encourage contemporary readers to reconsider how justice, faithfulness, and authority are perceived.

Work Cited

Hazon, Yoram. *The philosophy of Hebrew scripture*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Gottwald, Norman K. *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.E.* Orbis Books, 1979.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Crossway Bibles, 2001.