

Why Keep Sheep?

When we consider the offering of lambs in the Old Testament, we probably do not think much about shepherds. We usually focus on some aspect of sacrifice and make application to Jesus or to Christians. On the other hand, when we consider passages about shepherds and shepherding, we probably do not think much about alters and sacrifices. We tend to focus on the vulnerability of sheep and the role of the shepherd as applied to our relationship with God. All of this is fine; it accords with scripture.

Isn't it amazing that the shepherd *knows* his sheep, each one? That 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 time of Jesus some shepherds would sell some of their sheep to provide sacrificial lambs for those who had traveled long distances to the Passover.

A cow is sold or slaughtered. It has value, but it is a cow. A sheep is sold or slaughtered or sacrificed but it has a name and is known by its shepherd.

Why keep sheep?

When Jesus was baptized by John, the Spirit of God visibly descended and remained on Him. It was a sign from God: ***The one on whom the Spirit descends and remains; this one is the Son of God.*** (John 1:29-33) God then announced Jesus as His son, in whom He was well-pleased. (Matthew 3:17)

The next day John was with two of his disciples and he saw Jesus and said, ***“Look! 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.

Not only was God the Shepherd for King David but also for Jesus of Nazareth.

There was a year in history that was different from all other years. That year, at the Jewish Passover, a most unique sacrifice was offered: 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 His guilt, but for the sins of the world. His Lamb was not a dumb wooly animal, but his own son who was devoted to the will of the Father. His Lamb did not go to the ‘alter of sacrifice’ unwillingly, but yielded Himself to the Great Shepherd. In that way the Great Shepherd offered his only Lamb as the Perfect and Supreme sacrifice for 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...in search of the ninety-nine who were lost.

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.

Mark Stinnett