
**SHEPHERD OR ONE OF THE SHEEP: REVISITING
THE BIBLICAL METAPHOR OF THE PASTORATE**
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Abstract: This article investigates the shepherding metaphor as used throughout the biblical narrative in contrast to how that metaphor is used in the modern church. In particular, it implies that our current approach to modern church leadership may actually hinder the kind of leadership necessary in changing situations and times. By investigating Old and New Testament usages, this article demonstrates that much of the modern tendency toward expert, professionalized leadership, as exemplified by the office of *pastor*, may be out of touch with the main metaphor used to describe pastoral leadership. Suggestions are made as to how revisiting the *dangerous memories* of the biblical understanding of *shepherd* leadership can benefit the church and its leaders, toward a more holistic and integrated form of leadership that will encourage reliance on the church's one Shepherd during times of transition and difficult change.

In one of my favorite movies, *The Princess Bride*, there is a scene in which the character Vizzini exclaims for about the third time, "Inconceivable!" Recognizing that Vizzini keeps using this word for events that keep happening, one of his comrades in crime, Inigo Montoya, replies, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." I have long wondered if in the modern church, we have continued to use the word *pastor* but it does not mean what we think it means.

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Christian communities, especially local churches, have always faced opportunities and challenges resulting from societal shifts and changes. In the age of modernity,¹ the dominant default method for responding to these changes has been to defer to and rely upon expert, professional leadership. Modern churches—particularly in the west—have generally accepted this perspective under the influence of cultural perspective on leadership, which views the pastor as the expert or professional leader of the church.² More recently, questions about the modern approach to church leadership have come from a variety of arenas.

One critique is that this form of leadership actually *de-skills* the church. This lay deskilling is largely the result of an expert system designed by professionals to be operated only by persons with specialized training in the language and processes of the system.³ As a result, congregations defer to pastors for answers to the questions facing the church. So long as these answers lie within the system and the pastor's expertise, this works well enough.⁴ However, when the context changes, when the old ways no longer work, and when the world changes the rules, this expertise no longer is helpful.

¹ Modernity here is used in reference to a “rationalist” approach to understanding the world as it is in Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9.

² Alan Roxburgh, “Missional Leadership: Equipping God's People for Mission,” in *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, ed. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 194-98. This point is also made by others: John Drane, *The McDonaldization of the Church: Consumer Culture and the Church's Future* (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 101-02; Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry of the Church to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 89-93.

³ “Deskilling” is the language of Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 144.

⁴ This kind of leadership is best described as “technical leadership” by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). This is not saying that such leadership is presumptively best, only that it can work well under certain conditions and toward certain ends. Evaluation as to the legitimacy of the conditions and ends is worth consideration.

At this point, trust in the expert fails and an assumption is made that this person is to blame.⁵ This leads to a related critique that pastors are isolated by the nature of their role. It has been accepted that loneliness is a normal consequence of leadership.⁶ As Patti Simmons aptly notes:

Clergy face daunting expectations. They must fill countless roles—spiritual leader, psychologist, counselor, business manager, human resource specialist, to name a few—and those roles expand so rapidly that a sense of futility sets in as the gap between what they were prepared for in seminary and what they encounter on a daily basis steadily widens. In addition to feeling unprepared, clergy feel alone.⁷

As the church faces change (either from without or from within), churches which feel ill-prepared to handle this change expect pastors who are equally ill-prepared to “fix” problems that have no ready answers. These pastors are increasingly isolated and are often bear the brunt of congregational frustration. In short, the modern agenda has not always been helpful in understanding pastoral leadership, especially during times of intense congregational and social change.

But what if *pastor* does not mean what we have made it to mean? While the story of modernity has had much to say regarding the role of pastors as expert, professional leaders, the Gospel of God offers an alternate narrative, especially in light of adaptive situations.⁸ However, to

⁵ Giddens, 91.

⁶ John Hall and Elliot Hannah, “Pastors: Leaders of the Flock but Alone in the Crowd,” Associated Baptist Press, October 3, 2006, http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1514&Itemid=119 (accessed October 7, 2007).

⁷ Patti Simmons, “Supporting Pastoral Excellence,” in *Congregations* 29 (1) (Winter 2003): 29.

⁸ This is Mark Lau Branson’s language. See Mark Lau Branson, “Reflecting on the Gospel: On Changing Stories,” March 1, 2007, <http://www.allelon.org/articles/article.cfm?id=310> (accessed January 4, 2007).

understand this alternate narrative requires us to once again access our history and reclaim our heritage. Accessing the Christian story means that we engage in more than storytelling; we must search for meaning about how to live as responsible witnesses of God's reign.⁹ This search for meaning demands consideration of those dangerous memories¹⁰ that challenge conventional, authoritative stances—specifically that the pastor is the “ruler” of the church.¹¹ In the pages that follow, this

⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 215ff. Specifically Groome states, “Christian Vision, of course, does not provide a blueprint for life or easy answers to the problems and complexities people must face. But it tenders truths by which to make meaning, ethical principles to guide decision making, and virtues to live by; it offers images of promise and hope to sustain people and of responsibility and possibility to empower historical agency towards God's reign.... The Vision should reflect God's promises of shalom and wholeness, yet empower people in their historical responsibility to work in partnership for the realization of what God wills—peace and justice, love and freedom, wholeness and fullness of life for all.... Educators are to teach the Vision of Christian faith as something *immediate* and *historical*, in that it calls people to do God's will on earth now as if God's reign is at hand, and as something *new* and *ultimate*, in that it always calls people beyond their present horizons of praxis in faith until they finally rest in God.” Emphasis in original, Groome, 216-17. This relates to Ray Anderson's “interpretive paradigms” and “historical consciousness;” see Ray Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 26-31.

¹⁰ Groome states, “[A hermeneutic of suspicion] attempts to recognize and refuse what is destructive in texts of tradition and it searches for their ‘dangerous’ or ‘subversive’ memories, often forgotten or excluded by dominant hermeneutics.... Texts of Christian Story/Vision always have dangerous memories that call ourselves and our world into question, that can empower people in ongoing conversation and social transformation toward God's reign.” Groome, 233. This follows Metz: “definite memory breaks through the magic circle of the prevailing consciousness.... Christian faith can and must, in my opinion, be seen in this way as a subversive memory.... The criterion of its authentic Christianity is the liberating and redeeming danger with which it introduces the remembered freedom of Jesus into modern society and the forms of consciousness and praxis in that society.” Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980), 90.

¹¹ This was the pronouncement of one of the twentieth century's most noted Southern Baptist pastors, W.A. Criswell, whose influence and that of his

article investigates *dangerous memories* that apply to the dominant practice of the pastor as leader. To accomplish this task, this article investigates biblical themes surrounding the *pastor* metaphor as they relate to questions of community and communal leadership. From these findings, it is possible to describe a Christian perspective of missional leadership that informs and is informed by the praxes of leadership communities.

Two Confessions

At the outset, I confess that others have done exceptional work on metaphors for congregational leadership. Specifically, Scott Cormode's "Multi-Layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener" investigates the interplay of three important metaphors at work in the church today. More importantly, Cormode demonstrates effectively that these three metaphors are not three separate ways of leading, but rather are three interconnected means of leading within any particular context.¹² Within these three metaphors, Cormode describes three typologies of leadership: 1) the visionary CEO; 2) the pastoral care facilitator; and 3) the meaning-maker. While it might seem from the title of this article that I am focused on the first and second typologies, I am attempting something relevant to all three typologies.

While Cormode successfully and helpfully investigates the application of these metaphors, I am after something related, but different—I am after the meta-metaphor's meaning. To illustrate, note that all three typologies of leadership share a similar biblical heritage—the person whose leadership is described by these typologies is titled

"students" has arguably crossed a multiplicity of denominations. See David R. Norsworthy, "Rationalism and Reaction among Southern Baptists," in *Southern Baptists Observed: A Perspective on a Changing Denomination*, ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 88.

¹² Scott Cormode, "Multi-Layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1 (2) (Fall 2002): 69-104.

the “pastor.”¹³ This is appropriate because nearly all Christian-communities utilize this designation in reference to a singular leader or group of primary expert and professional leaders within a congregation. It is this usage of the biblical metaphor in reference to the expert designee, despite the typology of leadership she or he practices, with which I am concerned.

This is my concern for two reasons. First, I am under the impression that its widespread use, or misuse, has led to an abuse of its meaning. As I am located in the Baptist world, I think of the keynote speaker at a denominational pastor’s conference who tells his listeners they are essential to the flock because without them, their flocks will wander off a cliff. Second—this is a confession of bias—despite numerous Christian statements regarding the priesthood of all believers, especially among Protestants,¹⁴ there is still a failure to recognize in our congregations the pastoral role of persons who never carry an official title nor receive ecclesial sanctioning. In most churches of which I have been a part, the leader of the elderly ladies Sunday school is often more *pastor* to her Sunday school class than anyone else in the church. As is apparent by now, I am biased toward a

¹³ Cormode, 74, 77, 88.

¹⁴ I fully acknowledge that this concept is not unique to protestant theology nor is it widely agreed upon within protestant theology as to what exactly the “priesthood of all believers” means. I find Vatican II’s statement on the integration of priesthoods into the one priesthood of Christ a helpful point of contact for Protestants and Catholics, though we must be careful not to read it through the eyes of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Roger Williams or Menno Simons. Specifically *Lumen Gentium* states: “Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men” (100), made the new people “a kingdom and priests to God the Father”(101). The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (102)... Though they differ from one another..., the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ (2*)” *Lumen Gentium*, 2-10.

congregationalist method of decision making, but will make evident that it is a modified version.

My second confession regards limitations. I am not attempting an all-encompassing assessment of authority and power from a biblical perspective. There are numerous biblical passages not considered here that do consider these issues as well. I leave those to another person's work. I am interested in how the shepherd metaphor works in relationship to conversations regarding power and leadership since it is used so widely. Clearly, I do not claim the final word on this question. I look anew at this particular metaphor with a hope toward recapturing some of those forgotten and dangerous considerations that can and should speak into congregational leadership praxis.

The Metaphor of Pastor as Shepherd

Investigating the metaphorical meaning of *pastor* is complicated by several factors. First, the New Testament metaphor developed from Old Testament concepts with ancient cultural meaning significantly obscured in contemporary usage.¹⁵ Second, New Testament scholars are equally perplexed by the function or role of pastor in relation to that of overseer or bishop and disagree concerning whether or not a pastoral office was intended by New Testament writers.¹⁶ Third, investigating the pastoral role according to New Testament themes is complicated by the fact that “pastor,” the dominant

¹⁵ Along this thought, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (1) (2002): 67-96; Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (NSBT) (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 2006), 37, 42ff; Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd* (WUNT2; Tübingen, Ger.: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 19-94.

¹⁶ See George W. Knight III, “Two Offices (Elders/Bishops and Deacons) and Two Orders of Elders (Preaching/Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders): A New Testament Study,” *Presbyterion* 11 (1) (Spring 1985):1-12; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Academic, 2002), 544; Joachim Jeremias, “poimhvn,” *TDNT* 6, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1968), 497-98.

office title for most Protestants (particularly Evangelicals), is rarely used in most English translations.¹⁷ While I do not fully resolve these thorny issues, I make suggestions concerning how particular resolutions impact the issues related to this study. Further, by investigating the terminology and meaning of the shepherd metaphor, I attempt to recapture certain theological elements regarding “pastoral” leadership that benefit churches in adaptive situations. To accomplish this purpose, I begin by exploring patterns of usage in the Old Testament.¹⁸

Old Testament Patterns of Usage

The *shepherd/shepherding* metaphor is rooted in the Old Testament. There are three primary usages of רָעָה when translated by the verbs *shepherding*, *tending*, *herding* or by the nouns *shepherd*, *shepherdess*, or *herdsman*: 1) herders of livestock; 2) YHWH as Shepherd of Israel; 3) a person or group as leaders/rulers.¹⁹ The following are brief overviews of these usages.

¹⁷ For this article, I primarily use the NASB and NRSV translations for comparison and contrast: the NASB considered conservative and the NRSV considered liberal. The NASB and the NRSV each use *pastors* only once (Eph. 4:11). The KJV uses *pastor* in place of *shepherd* nine times in the OT and once in the NT (Eph. 4:11). These OT usages are largely a misrendering of the term, and are corrected in the New King James Version, which follows the NASB and NRSV renderings.

¹⁸ Branson’s insight is helpful here: “Word counts cannot dictate theology; however, observations inform priorities and relationships.” Mark Lau Branson, *Intercultural Church Life and Adult Formation: Community, Narrative, and Transformation* (Ann Arbor, MI.: UMI Dissertation Services, 1999), 66. This follows Barr’s argument against overemphasizing word meaning at the expense of word usage. See James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), throughout, but see 233-34 for an example of his argument.

¹⁹ Generally occurs as רָעָה (verb) and רֹעֵה (m. noun), רֹעֵה (f. noun). Other similarly associated meanings derived from רָעָה include: “to pasture,” “to guide,” and “to feed.” Words often have a wide semantic range, hence, רָעָה has two other meanings linked with it: “to associate with” and “to take pleasure in” or “desire.” See Francis Brown, with S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: with an Appendix*

Herders

Simply stated, the first usage describes people who herd sheep, goats, or other livestock.²⁰ This usage occurs predominantly within the Pentateuch, and mostly in Genesis.²¹ Its usage establishes patterns of comprehension for the other two usages. Herders were responsible for the flock's wellbeing.²² This included feeding, leading to pasture, tending, and protecting.²³ Although "feeding" and "leading to pasture" appear as two separate functions, they are related. While occasionally a shepherd might feed the flock "intensively" by giving it grain, more commonly the shepherd's responsibility was to lead the flock to a variety of vegetation and water, feeding it "extensively."²⁴ Sheep and livestock could eat without assistance, when the environment allowed.²⁵

Containing the Biblical Aramaic, 2nd printing (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1975), 944-46.

²⁰ Translated as "tend," "herd," "pasture," "herdsman," "herders," "shepherd," or "shepherding:" Gen. 4:2, Gen. 13:7, 13:8, 26:20, 29:3, 37:2, 46:32, 46:34, 47:3, 48:15, also, Exod. 2:17, 2:19, Lev. 27:32, Num. 14:33. English interpreters use the nouns *herdsmen*, *shepherds*, *shepherdesses* and the verbs *herd*, *tend*, *pasture*, and *shepherd* to describe the persons and their activities.

²¹ This usage occurs in about 30% of the 86 verses when **רָעָה** is translated *shepherd*.

²² Sources consulted for this section include: Oded Borowski, *Every Living Thing: Daily Use of Animals in Ancient Israel* (Walnut Creek, CA.: AltaMira, 1998); John Galtay and Douglas L. Johnson, eds., *The World of Pastoralism: Herding in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Guilford, 1990); John David Huntzinger, *The End of Exile: A Short Commentary on the Shepherd/Sheep Metaphor in Exilic and Post-Exilic Prophetic and Synoptic Gospel Literature* (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999); Murl Dirksen, "Shepherding the Herds of the Simakiyya Villagers," <http://www.vkrp.org/studies/cultural/simakiyya-study/info/shepherding-villagers.asp> (accessed on January 26, 2007).

²³ Laniak, 53-57.

²⁴ Laniak, 51, 54.

²⁵ Jere L. Giles and Jerome Gefu, "Nomads, Ranchers, and the State: The Sociocultural Aspects of Pastoralism," in *The World of Pastoralism: Herding Systems in Comparative Perspectives*, eds. John G. Galaty and Douglas L. Johnson (New York: Guilford, 1990), 100-05.

Although the dominant understanding is that shepherds lead from “before” the flock, it is notable that both David and Amos are taken from “following the flock” (לְאַחֲרָיָם; 2 Sam. 7:8, 1 Chron. 17:7; Amos 7:15).²⁶ Shepherds moved “before,” “within,” and “behind” the flock, depending on the need.²⁷ Wherever the shepherd was in relation to the flock, two methods of maintaining flock cohesion are particularly intriguing for this study: bells worn by animals chosen because they willingly and lovingly follow the shepherd²⁸ and voice commands to keep strays from wandering.

From whatever position the shepherd chose to guide the flock, it is clear that his or her presence comforted the flock as they grazed and slept because of the shepherd’s care. Shepherds tended and protected the flock. Tending meant caring for the lame and sick.²⁹ Shepherds likewise used the staff and other weapons to protect the flock from predators and thieves.³⁰

Socioculturally, various cultures reviled shepherds, making their occupation far from being a noble

²⁶ Laniak contends that these mean “driving” in each instance. Laniak, 54; see also Huntzinger, 59, n. 10. However, the location of the herder is not clear in the biblical text. He contrasts this with “leading” which he contends is done from the front; again unclear in the biblical text. It is more likely that the shepherd or herder led through presence within the flock (perhaps more toward the back of the flock) and hence could better see and call to a straying animal. Leading from the “front” would make this more difficult. A particularly striking anthropological study of the Bedouin demonstrates that in some instances the sheep followed the shepherd’s donkey, while the shepherd walked behind the sheep. See Dirksen, “Shepherding the Herds.” Photographic evidence from the Bedouin and other shepherding peoples show the shepherd in the midst of the flock and rarely in the front. See also Shalom M. Paul, *Amos* (Herm.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 247-48, 249.

²⁷ Laniak contends that sheep followed the shepherd, but occasionally were led (“driven”) from behind to prevent grazing in agricultural fields. Laniak, 54, n. 40; also Huntzinger, 59.

²⁸ Dirksen notes the Bedouin use bells in this manner. Dirksen, “Shepherding the Herds.”

²⁹ Huntzinger, 59; Borowski, 49; Harold Taylor, *Applied Theology 2: Tend My Sheep* 19 (SPCKISG; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

³⁰ Borowski, 49; Laniak, 56.

profession. Hence, when Joseph's family joins him in Egypt, they are warned that shepherds are "abhorrent" or "loathsome" to Egyptians (Gen. 46:34). Eventually, even in Israel, herding becomes a despised trade, associated with dishonesty and ruthlessness. This pattern persists into the New Testament.³¹

YHWH as Israel's Shepherd

A second usage of shepherd imagery in the Old Testament references YHWH as Israel's Shepherd.³² This

³¹ Huntzinger's research indicates that much of the social status change for shepherds in pre-exilic Israel occurred "when land and livestock holdings came under the control of a small number of wealthy owners." This promoted a professional class of hired laborers who managed the sheep. These laborers were purported to have sold animals to travelers in order to supplement their income while claiming the missing animals were killed by wild animals or stolen by thieves. Over time, this and other similar biases created a general disdain for shepherds. Since shepherds were presumed dishonest, religious and social leaders limited the civil and religious rights of shepherds including prohibiting them from testifying in trials, barring their participation in temple rituals, and encouraging a general prejudice against the profession. As a result, Huntzinger states: "The use of shepherd imagery to refer to Israel's leadership may be understood as exotic. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all the biblical writers who made use of the shepherd/sheep imagery had expert knowledge of shepherds or sheep.... [I]t is to be expected that *care was exercised in the use of the vocabulary and images drawn from this field in the service of the metaphor.* The use of the terms related to sheep farming in the prophetic and synoptic literature simply attests to the significance of the imagery in the shared culture of the people." Huntzinger, 66-69, quote from 68-69 (emphasis in original).

³² This usage occurs in about 20% of the verses where רעה is translated *shepherd*. See: Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Psalms 23; 28:9; 74:1; 77: 20; 78:52-55; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; Isa. 40:10-11; 49:9-13; Jer. 23:2; 31:10; 50:19; Ezek. 34:31; Micah 2:12-13; 4:6-8; 7:14-15. Chae, 25. The Israelites were not the first to use *shepherd* in reference to deity; it was common terminology for surrounding cultures. See Huntzinger, 69-78; Laniak, 59-58-61, 67-69, 72-74. Huntzinger's observation is important here: "The description of God as a shepherd and the people as sheep is just one of many figures found in the OT. The fact that a variety of figures are used to depict God and people in Scripture indicates the complex nature of the divine/human relationship and the fact that not any one figure exhaustively describes it.... Biblical metaphor is...an effort to say something meaningful about him in view of the knowledge and experience possessed by the community. A meaningful reference to God need not be unrevisable or exhaustive in its description of

usage first occurs in the Patriarch narratives where YHWH is shepherd to Jacob and his clan (Gen. 48:15, 49:24).³³ It occurs in the Psalms, notably in Psalm 23, but also carrying the images in others (e.g., Psalms 28, 80, and 121).³⁴ During the monarchical narratives, YHWH is established as Israel's Shepherd and the monarch as YHWH's under-shepherd.³⁵

However, shepherd imagery is decidedly used of YHWH throughout the exodus and exilic narratives³⁶—the two most liminal periods of Old Testament history.³⁷ Hence, the metaphor's use regarding God occurs at particular “times of upheaval and dislocation among the people.”³⁸ In the exodus narratives, YHWH is the prime shepherd while in the exilic narratives, YHWH and his Davidic appointee are co-shepherds.³⁹ Ezekiel and Zechariah develop the description of this appointee in the context of an eschatological view of God's redemptive activity.⁴⁰ This usage becomes associated with Messiah in the prophetic tradition.⁴¹

him. In fact, the variety of metaphors used for describing God in Scripture argues for a realistic perspective of God in that not any one image is regarded as adequate in itself to speak of him. When God is depicted as a shepherd rather than as some other kind of worker in certain texts it is because this particular metaphorical depiction is meaningful” Huntzinger, 89.

³³ Chae, 25-26; Huntzinger, 78.

³⁴ Huntzinger, 80-81.

³⁵ Chae, 26-27. See also Laniak, 108-14.

³⁶ Chae, 26.

³⁷ J. Jeremiah states: “It is to be noted that the references are spread evenly over the whole of the O.T. It is true that in Exodus-Deuteronomy shepherd terms are used in the exodus stories (‘to lead,’ ‘to guide,’ ‘to go before,’), but in general it is hard to determine whether there is any conscious feeling for the shepherd metaphor. More commonly, and with details which show how vital the concept is, the figure of speech is found in the Psalter and in the consoling prophecy of the Exile.” Jeremiah, *TDNT* 6: 487. I am indebted to Chae for this citation; Chae, 26.

³⁸ Huntzinger, 81.

³⁹ Chae, 26.

⁴⁰ Chae, 38-94. Chae states: “One of the key outcomes of YHWH's eschatological shepherding will be the renewed obedience of the flock to YHWH's laws and decrees. To secure this, YHWH will set up one shepherd

These narratives make apparent that “YHWH as shepherd” is a central theme to understanding God’s leadership, rule, and care for God’s people. Notably, YHWH is only identified with a singular “flock” and never the plural “flocks.” As Israel’s Shepherd, YHWH’s presence is in midst of the flock, before the flock, and behind the flock as necessary.⁴² That YHWH is Israel’s Shepherd ruler, provider, and caretaker makes Israel’s rejection of YHWH more shocking (1 Sam. 8:4-22).⁴³ God’s dire warnings against earthly rulers create a context by which to compare the good rule of YHWH with the evil rule of the hirelings.⁴⁴ Ultimately, YHWH removes these Jewish rulers and rules through gentile kings.⁴⁵ Throughout, YHWH is shepherd and keeper of the flock, determining their rebuke and redemption.

Human Leadership

The third Old Testament usage of *shepherd* references the earthly rulers of Israel, both political and religious.⁴⁶

like David over the restored people. This is the consequence of the restorative act of YHWH, the true shepherd of Israel.” Chae, 92.

⁴¹ Huntzinger, 82.

⁴² All three positions are demonstrated in the exodus narrative. As the people journeyed, they followed YHWH’s pillar of cloud/fire that went before them (Ex. 13:21-22). When the Israelites are pursued by Pharaoh’s army, YHWH’s pillar of cloud/fire is positioned behind Israel, between them and the Egyptians in a defensive posture (Ex. 14:19-20, 24). In the evenings and the Sabbath the tabernacle (the place of YHWH’s presence) is placed in the middle of the camp with all the tribes surrounding it (Ex. 40:34-38; Num. 2: 2ff.).

⁴³ Laniak writes: “Israel received its desired king, but only on the condition that it understand his role as derivative from and dependent upon the rule of YHWH, the flock’s true Owner. Kings, beginning with Saul, were to be measured in term of their responsiveness to the words of that Owner, words mediated regularly through his messengers the prophets.” Laniak, 102.

⁴⁴ See particularly Ezek. 34 and Zec. 10-11.

⁴⁵ Interestingly, Cyrus, King of Persia, is called *shepherd*, one of the only times Gentile rulers are referenced thusly. Chae states that, “the case of Cyrus may characterize YHWH’s free and sovereign exercise of his shepherd rulership.” Chae, 25, n.34.

⁴⁶ This usage occurs nearly half of the times when רעה is translated *shepherd*. See regarding Israelite rulers: Num. 27:17; 1 Sam. 21:8; 2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7-8; 1

Although implied regarding Moses and later Joshua,⁴⁷ this practice becomes normative in the Davidic narrative.⁴⁸ Those who ruled after David would likewise be associated as under-shepherd-kings, but with the caveat of being measured against David, the “man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 13:22, NASB). Those who act in faithfulness to YHWH are associated with good shepherds; those who act unfaithfully with wicked shepherds.⁴⁹ However, it is notable that nowhere in the Old Testament are ruling Jewish kings called “shepherd.”⁵⁰

By Ezekiel and Zechariah’s day, political and religious leaders had co-opted the “shepherd” with disregard for YHWH’s rule. Throughout the prophets, rulers who called themselves shepherds are decried as faithless, wicked, and thieving, caring for themselves rather than the flock under their care (see Ezek. 34:1-10; Zec. 10:3; 11:4-17).⁵¹ Zechariah’s oracle is particularly damning as he considers them hirelings, who run when the flock needs them the most.⁵² Exilic usages of the shepherd metaphor in relation to earthly rulers express the very worst of those who use, abuse, and abandon the flock. In the end, YHWH determines to destroy these and to

Kings 2:17; Ps 78:70-72; Isa. 56:11; Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 22:22; 23:1-4; 25:34-36; 50:6; Ezek. 34:2-10; Zech. 10:3; 11:5-8. See regarding Gentile rulers: Isa. 44:28; Jer. 6:3; 12:10; 25:34-36; 49:19; 50:44; Nah. 3:18. Chae, 25. See also, Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 56 (New York: Brill, 1994).

⁴⁷ Laniak, 77-93.

⁴⁸ Huntzinger, 78-80. Huntzinger notes that David was “shepherd-king of the people. God is the owner of the flock, but David is given charge of the flock. This delegation of power is distinctive to the image of shepherd-king in Israel and underscores the fact that God is ultimately shepherd of his people.” Huntzinger, 79. Further, he cites 2 Sam. 7:5-10 as support for David’s role as under-shepherd. Huntzinger, 80. See also Laniak, 248-49.

⁴⁹ Huntzinger, 80.

⁵⁰ Chae, 26; John D. Turner, “The History of Religions: Background of John 10,” in *The Shepherd Discourses of John 10 and Its Context*, eds. Johannes Beutler, SJ and Robert T. Fortna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38.

⁵¹ Laniak, 151-53, 162-68.

⁵² Laniak, 167-68.

establish God's final shepherd in the Davidic Messiah.⁵³ This shepherd will be present with God's people, leading them in faithfulness to God's rule, and caring for God's flock by restoring to them "shalom."⁵⁴

This recalls an important pneumatological perspective: in the Old Testament, YHWH's pleasure and approval are associated with the resting of God's Spirit upon God's own servants: Joseph, Moses, the judges, David, the prophets, etc. The terms "Spirit of God" and "Spirit of YHWH" are associated with those who are faithful under-shepherds, fulfilling God's own desires. In Ezekiel, YHWH's removal of glory from the temple and ultimately from God's people represents YHWH's rejection of the cultic and political leadership of the day that had so destructively led Judah away from following God.⁵⁵ Those who serve faithfully (albeit imperfectly) are associated with God's presence in the Spirit.⁵⁶ Those who serve unfaithfully are associated with the Spirit's absence.⁵⁷ Thus, the coming of YHWH's Messianic shepherd will have God's Spirit residing upon him (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1-2, Micah 5:4) as foreshadowing for the outpouring of YHWH's Spirit on all God's people (Num. 11:29; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 37,⁵⁸ 39:29; Joel 2:28-29; Zech. 12:10).

Summary Thoughts on Old Testament Shepherding Imagery

Leadership and authority associated with the shepherd metaphor in the Old Testament ultimately reside with YHWH. The use of this image in the Old Testament is particularly prominent during seasons of adaptive/discontinuous change as evidenced by its

⁵³ Chae, 93-94.

⁵⁴ Chae, 93-94.

⁵⁵ Duguid, 124, 131.

⁵⁶ Laniak, 248. Note also Num. 11:24-30—God sends the Spirit upon the 70 elders.

⁵⁷ Note the dichotomy of Saul and David (1 Sam. 11:6; 1 Sam. 16:14; 1 Sam. 16:13; Psalm 51:11).

⁵⁸ Duguid, 104-05.

dominant usage in the exodus and exilic narratives. The establishment of human authorities is a response to human frailties and is viewed by YHWH as rejection of God's own rule. While God grants this human request for a king, the metaphor of shepherd is applied here with an under-shepherd application, as YHWH is owner and final authority over the flock. Ironically, while herders have become socially despised by the time of the Old Testament's close, the leaders of Israel are despised by YHWH.

Despite later co-opting of the term *shepherd* by political and religious leaders, all human authority is ultimately determined as legitimate or illegitimate based on its faithfulness in relation to God with the Holy Spirit as indicator of God's presence and approval. This seems to reflect that in the context of herding, shepherds sometimes choose other sheep to help steer the herd (the Bedouin "bell" sheep), sheep which are chosen based on their love for and loyalty to the shepherd and obedience to God's voiced commands (Law).⁵⁹ Otherwise, human leaders as shepherds overwhelmingly are perceived as faithless, resulting in YHWH's determination to destroy the faithless shepherds and to establish a final Davidic Shepherd whose reign will be faithful and unending. This Shepherd will usher in a new era as expressed by the Spirit's residing in and on God's people.

New Testament Patterns of Usage

By the New Testament, shepherd imagery is widely accepted as part of the continuing heritage of the Jewish people. Particularly, Ezekiel and Zechariah's eschatological vision of the one Promised shepherd in the line of David has formed messianic expectations.⁶⁰ In the

⁵⁹ See note 18 above.

⁶⁰ At the OT's close, the Davidic shepherd image is just coming into focus. During the intertestamental period, this image is influenced by Greek conquest (particularly the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes), a brief Maccabean revolt, and the eventual Roman domination. Interest in the one Davidic shepherd/messiah wanes with the advent of the Greek rule of Alexander and grows with the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty, which "revived messianism,

New Testament, *shepherd* is the general translation of the noun ποιμήν and the act of *shepherding* or *tending* is a translation of the verb ποιμαίνω.⁶¹ Ποιμήν and ποιμαίνω are semantically used in a variety of ways.⁶² I pursue these usages in a moment, but first a word about the New Testament linguistic context.

First, ποιμήν is used literally of herders only in the birth narrative of Luke 2. Otherwise, it occurs as simile in numerous places: crowds who are lost “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34), of Christ as a shepherd who separates the “sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32),⁶³ Jesus the “Good Shepherd” of John 10.⁶⁴

spawned by the Maccabean revolt (163 B.C.)” Chae, 160-72, quote from 95. Ultimately, with the failed Maccabean revolt and the Roman conquest, many Jewish apocalyptic communities embraced a militaristic view of independence under the renewed Davidic kingdom. Laniak, 171-72. See also, Huntzinger, 158-71.

⁶¹ ποιμαίνω is infrequently translated *rule*, as I discuss later. The word more commonly translated *rule* in ecclesial contexts is ποίσημι. See Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* 42 (WBC; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 251.

⁶² ποιμήν (noun) occurs eighteen times in the NT (Matt.-3, Mark-2, Luke-4, John-6, Eph.-1, Heb.-1, 1 Peter-1). ποιμαίνω (verb) occurs eleven times in the NT (Matt.-1, Luke-1, John-1, Acts-1, 1 Cor.-1, 1 Peter-1, Jude-1, Rev.-4). Sakae Kubo, *A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Beginner's Guide for the Translation of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975). Because of errors in Kubo (for instance, Kubo lists thirteen occurrences of ποιμήν in Matt.; should be three), I carefully cross-checked with Bauer's *Greek-English Lexicon*, confirming number and usage. In these introductory paragraphs on NT usages of ποιμήν and ποιμαίνω, I draw insights extensively from Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. rev., eds. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 683-84; also of ἀρχιποίμην, Bauer, 113.

⁶³ Luke uses ποιμαίνω when Jesus speaks in simile of a servant “tending the sheep” (Luke 17:7, NRSV) before coming in to serve the tables. Similarly, Paul uses ποιμαίνω while discussing his right to earn a living: “Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who **tends** a flock and does not get any of its milk?” (1 Cor. 9:7, NRSV; emphasis added). Otherwise, ποιμαίνω occurs referencing church leadership.

⁶⁴ Allegorical shepherd imagery also occurs in the parable of the lost sheep: “So he told them this parable: ‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it

Likewise, Matthew and Mark recognize Jesus as Zechariah's stricken shepherd and the disciples as a scattered flock (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Zech. 13:7).⁶⁵

A second usage is figurative of church leadership. Interestingly, this usage only occurs four times in the noun form.⁶⁶ Three times it refers to Christ as "shepherd" of the church—twice in emphasized fashion ("great Shepherd of the flock," Heb. 13:20; "Chief Shepherd," 1 Peter 5:4).⁶⁷ The fourth usage is in Ephesians 4:11 where it is usually translated *pastor* in reference to church leaders.⁶⁸

In this same figurative context regarding church leadership, the verb ποιμαίνω is used equally for human leadership in the church and Christ's leadership over the church. Regarding human leadership, ποιμαίνω is translated as "tend"⁶⁹ and "shepherd."⁷⁰ Regarding Christ's leadership, ποιμαίνω occurs in two books: Matthew 2:6⁷¹ and Revelation. The Revelation usages are

on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:3-7, NRSV; cf. Matt. 18:12-13). Note: ποιμήν and ποιμαίνω are not used in this context.

⁶⁵ Matthew likewise cites Micah 5:2 referencing the ruler who comes from Bethlehem "to shepherd [ποιμαίνω] my people Israel" (Matt. 2:6, NRSV).

⁶⁶ Including ἀρχιποίμην (1 Peter 5:4).

⁶⁷ Heb. 13:20: "τὸν ποιμένα τῶν προβάτων τὸν μέγαν." The third reference is in 1 Peter 2:25 where Christ is described as the "shepherd and guardian of your souls" (NRSV): "τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν." Note: Jesus addresses his followers as his "little flock" in Luke 12:32.

⁶⁸ ποιμένας (nom. masc. pl.) is listed as one of Christ's gifts (with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers) to the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13; NRSV).

⁶⁹ John 21:1 in NRSV, NASB; 1 Peter 5:2 in NASB.

⁷⁰ Acts 20:28 in NRSV, NASB; 1 Peter 5:2 in NRSV.

⁷¹ ποιμαίνω here is a Greek translation of רָעָה (רָעָה). An alternate translation here is "rule" (NRSV). Garland notes that Matthew conflates Micah 5:2 and 2 Sam. 5:2 (1 Chron. 11:2) which "contains God's promise to David, 'you shall shepherd my people Israel' (see 9:36; 10:6; 15:24)." David

interesting because three of the four usages referencing Christ are exclusively translated “rule.”⁷² Ποιμαίνω is never translated by the NRSV nor the NASB as “rule” for non-Christ persons in the New Testament.⁷³

Other New Testament images develop around shepherding imagery that use neither ποιμήν nor ποιμαίνω, but clearly reference these concepts. These images and semantic patterns reflect Old Testament influences and themes that continue to inform New Testament conceptualizations. Three similar patterns of usages occur: sheep herders, Jesus–YHWH incarnate as Davidic/Messianic Shepherd, and under-shepherd roles.

Sheep Herders

As stated above, Luke’s Gospel is the only New Testament document recording the presence of shepherds (Luke 2). New Testament scholarship confirms continuation of Old Testament beliefs that herders are scoundrels and thieves.⁷⁴ This may have been in part because of their transient nature.⁷⁵ As important, the shepherds’ occupation kept them from ceremonial cleanliness. It is ironic that those keeping the flocks for the cult sacrifice were themselves unable to participate in such sacrifice. That these are recipients of the nativity announcement has widely been regarded as expressing God’s inclination toward society’s outcasts.⁷⁶

E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroads, 1993), 29.

⁷² Rev 2:27; 12:5; and 19:15 (NRSV, NASB). Translated *shepherd* only in Rev. 7:17 (NRSV, NASB).

⁷³ ἀρχή normally references human rulers; usage #3 in Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 112. Likewise, see ἄρχων (Bauer, 113-14) and the verb ἄρχω (Bauer, 113). Also, see note 51 regarding ποιότητα.

⁷⁴ Huntzinger, 66-69.

⁷⁵ As Turner suggests: “one may consider the shepherd as a *liminal* figure, oscillating between two worlds, between the isolation of the wilderness and the hustle and bustle of the settled communities” Turner, 40; emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ See William Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1978), 149; William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (DSBS; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 22-23;

Jesus—YHWH Incarnate as Davidic/Messianic Shepherd

As described above, Ezekiel and Zechariah, among others, proclaimed an eschatological hope for Israel's redemption through a promised messianic shepherd from David's line. Within this context, Jesus—YHWH incarnate—enters history. It is the central Christian position that Jesus is the God/Man, fully divine and fully human—God in flesh. Turner's observation of the liminal nature of shepherding makes shepherd an apt metaphor for Jesus as the "mediator between the divine sphere and the luxurious, seductive sphere of civilised existence."⁷⁷ Further, this theological position is formed by Jesus' claims to be God. Jesus' declaration to be the Good Shepherd of Israel is one of those claims, identifying himself as YHWH, Shepherd of Israel.

It should be no surprise that Jesus associated himself with the weak, meek, and socially outcast. The metaphorical use of shepherd plays into this construct. As the shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep (Matt. 18:12-13; Luke 15:3-7), Jesus clarifies that his mission is to "seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10, NRSV; cf. Matt. 15:24; 18:11-13).⁷⁸ Thus, Jesus recaptures the Old Testament shepherd imagery and reshapes it in light of religious collusion with the powers and principalities of Rome.⁷⁹ The gospels clearly identify Jesus as the promised shepherd and focus the imagery on Jesus as YHWH's eschatological messiah, while reclaiming the metaphor from militaristic overtones.⁸⁰

Malcolm O. Tolbert, "Luke," *Luke-John 9* (BBC; Nashville, TN.: Broadman, 1970), 29. Contra: Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1994), 213-14.

⁷⁷ Turner, 40.

⁷⁸ As Huntzinger reminds, this is not the only image Jesus and his followers employ to describe Jesus' ministry. Huntzinger, 172-74.

⁷⁹ Huntzinger, 172-78.

⁸⁰ Particularly during the intertestamental period. See Chae, 159, 169. See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC2; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 261.

One other note before investigating specific usages: just as the Old Testament messages link the eschatological Shepherd with the Holy Spirit, the New Testament also emphasizes the link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The two Gospel birth narratives both record the Spirit's involvement in Jesus' conception (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35). The Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism along with the heavenly voice of affirmation (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32; cf. Matt. 12:18; Is. 42:1). John the Baptizer portrays Jesus as one who will immerse his followers into the Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Further, Jesus promises the coming of the Spirit upon his followers at his return to the Father (Mark 13:11; Luke 11:13; 12:12; John 14:25-27; 16:7-15; John 20:22; Acts 1:8). The presence of the Spirit in Jesus further identifies him as the promised shepherd of YHWH's flock. That Jesus promised—and provided—the Spirit's presence in all of his flock speaks to important realities for his flock's ability to hear and respond to his abiding presence with significant implications for under-shepherds.

The Synoptics

The Synoptic Gospels most commonly use the shepherding motif referring to Jesus as the promised Davidic shepherd of the prophets. In Matthew 9:35-38 and Mark 6:34, Jesus is moved to compassion because he sees the people are “harassed and helpless” (Matt. 9:36) like “sheep without a shepherd.” David E. Garland comments on the desperate missional nature of the situation, remarking that “if Israel, who was supposed to be a light to the nations, is lost, as Jesus divulges in 10:6 (see 15:24), how great must be the darkness for the nations?”⁸¹ This “shepherdless” image recalls Ezekiel 34 and Zechariah 9-11 where the prophets describe the abandoned and plundered flock awaiting “YHWH—the ultimate shepherd of Israel—[who] promises to come and shepherd his flock by himself, thereby seeking the lost,

⁸¹ Garland, 109.

healing the sick, and strengthening the weak.”⁸² Demonstrating Jesus as YHWH incarnate (the promised shepherd), Matthew 9:35-36 presents the exact picture presented in Ezekiel 34:16.⁸³ To an uncared for and untended flock, Jesus intervenes and becomes their shepherd (Luke 12:32).⁸⁴

The Synoptic Gospels identify Jesus as a shepherd seeking his lost sheep (Matt. 10:6, 16; 15:24).⁸⁵ Exilic themes of being lost and wandering are brought into relation with the shepherd who provides rest (Matt. 11:28; cf. Psalm 23:1-3a). Jesus fulfills his role as shepherd by restoring the flock to a place of wholeness. In so doing, he identifies himself as YHWH in flesh,⁸⁶ putting himself further at odds with the religious leaders who viewed him as an idolater and heretic. That Jesus was Messiah is undoubted in Matthew’s perspective as he attributes to Jesus the prophecy of one who would “rule” (ποιμαίνω) coming from Bethlehem (Matt. 2:6; cf. Micah 5:2; 2 Sam. 5:2).

Jesus utilized the shepherd imagery in Matthew 25, describing himself as the eschatological shepherd-judge who separates the sheep from the goats,⁸⁷ dispensing justice to the good and the evil.⁸⁸ Here Jesus associates with the poor, weak, and least as their king and defender.⁸⁹ However, the shepherd king is also the

⁸² Chae, 209.

⁸³ Chae, 209.

⁸⁴ France, 265; William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974) 225-26; Chae, 208-12. Specifically with regard to Jesus as healer (bringer of “shalom”) see Chae, 279-326.

⁸⁵ Chae, 212-19. Garland demonstrates that while the primary mission at this moment in Matthew is to the “lost sheep of Israel,” mission to the Gentiles is “anticipated everywhere in the Gospel ([10:18] 24:14; 26:13; 28:19)” Garland, 112.

⁸⁶ Per Chae: “By assuming YHWH’s role, Jesus gathers YHWH’s flock as promised in the OT Davidic Shepherd tradition.” Chae, 218. Jesus thereby claims in action and word an OT role reserved for YHWH.

⁸⁷ Garland, 242.

⁸⁸ Chae, 219-32; Laniak, 191-92.

⁸⁹ Huntzinger, 233; Laniak, 192.

stricken king (Matt. 26:30-35; Mark 14: 26-31). Before he judges, Jesus must die and the flock be scattered. Then, he is raised as everlasting ruler and shepherd judge who gathers his community.⁹⁰ Appropriating Zechariah's prophecies, Jesus demonstrates that he is the promised shepherd, not only in strength, but also in weakness, giving his life for his flock.⁹¹

John 10

In John 10, Jesus gives an extended illustration of his divine mission through the metaphor of the Good Shepherd.⁹² He recounts the contrast between the Good Shepherd and hirelings and wicked shepherds (Ezek. 34; Zech. 9-11).⁹³ By giving his life, Jesus demonstrates the depth of his devotion as the flock's shepherd.⁹⁴ Contrastingly, the thieves and wicked shepherds use the flock for their own purposes—a commentary on the religio-political context of Jesus' day.⁹⁵

In addition to emphasizing his intention to die for his flock, Jesus emphasizes his knowledge of the flock and their mutual knowledge of him.⁹⁶ The flock hears his voice and knows it, responding to his calling. They know him because he gives his life for them according to the

⁹⁰ Chae, 327-71.

⁹¹ Laniak, 179-81; Chae, 327-71. Chae demonstrates that the resurrection of Christ is the reversal of Zechariah prophecy regarding scattering. Jesus the resurrected Shepherd gathers and sends as divine Lord over all nations, that YHWH's promise to Abraham might be fulfilled. Chae, 347-59.

⁹² Laniak suggests a more appropriate title might be the "Model Shepherd." In addition to semantic rationale (particularly the usage of "καλός"), Laniak notes that Jesus is calling his followers to live a life that reflects his own, even to the point of death. Laniak, 211-12.

⁹³ Laniak, 210.

⁹⁴ Notice that Jesus is identified not only as shepherd (ποιμήν) but also as sacrificial lamb (ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ θεοῦ; John 1: 29, 35, cf. Rev. 7:17). This reversal occurs only in John's writing. Laniak, 218-20.

⁹⁵ Laniak, 213.

⁹⁶ Laniak, 216-18; Turner, 41-43; John Painter, "Tradition, History and Interpretation in John 10," in *The Shepherd Discourses of John 10 and Its Context*, eds. Johannes Beutler, SJ and Robert T. Fortna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 65.

Father's will. His devotion and love are manifested in this act, unlike the hireling who runs from danger.⁹⁷ In a final missional note, Jesus explains that the Good Shepherd expands the flock, adding to his fold those outside (i.e., Gentiles).⁹⁸

The gospels utilize shepherding imagery in a variety of ways, most frequently portraying Jesus as the shepherd of the flock, fulfilling Ezekiel and Zechariah's prophecies.⁹⁹ Jesus' self-proclamation to be shepherd is indicative of his claim to be YHWH incarnate.¹⁰⁰ These understandings influenced Peter and others in their later writings.¹⁰¹

General Epistles

While the shepherd image is not the only, nor even the primary, metaphor used in 1 Peter,¹⁰² 1 Peter is one of three places outside the Gospels where the image occurs in reference to Jesus. Written during a time of intense persecution, 1 Peter reminds its readers of Jesus, their suffering shepherd, as a means of comfort in their own suffering.¹⁰³ As "aliens" and "strangers" (1:1; 2:11), these followers are like "wandering sheep" (2:25),¹⁰⁴ in the

⁹⁷ Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Herm.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 48. As a result of his resurrection, those entrusted to his care are unable to be snatched away.

⁹⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John 36* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 171; Haenchen, 48-49. Contra: Painter, 65-66.

⁹⁹ See, Troy W. Martin, *Metaphor and Composition in 1 Peter* 131 (SBLDS; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992), 258-60.

¹⁰⁰ See Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Herm.; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 204.

¹⁰¹ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* 49 (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 151.

¹⁰² Troy Martin notes that the theme of diaspora is the "controlling metaphor" of 1 Peter and as such, recalls the Exodus and Exilic wanderings. Martin, 144-61. See also, Laniak, 226-29.

¹⁰³ Laniak, 229-31; John H. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* 37b (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), throughout, but especially 520-39.

¹⁰⁴ Elliot states this image is a conflation of Is. 53:6 and Ezek. 34:4-11, 16. Elliot, *1 Peter*, 537-38.

presence of the devouring lion—the Devil (5:8), metaphors used in literary contexts where Jesus is identified as shepherd of the flock (2:25, 5:4).¹⁰⁵ As shepherd, Jesus leads the wanderers, protecting them from being devoured in a threatening and dangerous (liminal) world.¹⁰⁶ Jesus' primacy as shepherd is amplified in 1 Peter by the modifier ἀρχι- (also in Hebrews by *mevgan*).¹⁰⁷ Whatever role others have *within* the flock, their role exists under Jesus' rule *over* the flock.¹⁰⁸

Revelation

Finally, in Revelation John returns to the metaphor of shepherd to describe Jesus. In a construct unique to John, Jesus is described as the lamb who is the shepherd (Rev. 7:17).¹⁰⁹ This “lamb” has “shepherded” a flock from every people (“ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους”; Rev. 7:9) to his throne fulfilling the missional work of bringing “others” into his flock (cf. John 10:16). In this particular shepherd motif, Jesus is a loving, guiding shepherd who cares for those who have suffered and been martyred for following the lamb (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:14-16; cf. 1 Peter 2:19-25; 5:10-11). However, in the remaining usages of ποιμαίνω the lamb “rules” over the nations as judge and king against a “preying” enemy (Rev. 2:27 (cf. Psalm 2:9); 12:5; 19:15).¹¹⁰ Amplifying this image, Christ rules with an iron rod, an Old Testament symbol of absolute power found

¹⁰⁵ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 229-34.

¹⁰⁶ This recalls the YHWH shepherd metaphor of the Old Testament. Martin, *Metaphor*, 263. Michaels associates ποιμήν and ἐπίσκοπος under the shepherding motif. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 151-52.

¹⁰⁷ In Heb. 13:20 Jesus is the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (τὸν ποιμένα τῶν προβάτων τὸν μέγαν). In 5:4, Peter uses the unique construct ἀρχιποιμήν in referencing Jesus as the Chief Shepherd indicating his primacy as owner of the flock as well as his role as keeper. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 329.

¹⁰⁸ The Hebrew's writer uses shepherd only in 13:20, but as Bruce states, “it is a title which comprehends the other roles which are assigned to Him.” Frederick F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, ninth printing (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 410-11.

¹⁰⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, reprint (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 175-76.

¹¹⁰ Mounce, 176, n. 32.

in all three New Testament contexts where ποιμαίνω is thusly used.¹¹¹ It bears repeating that ποιμαίνω is never used in the New Testament as “rule” referring to human governance (ecclesial or otherwise).

Shepherd Elders in the Church

A third usage of the shepherd motif relates to Christ's *under-shepherds*. This usage is rare, yet it is the most common title for the lead office (*pastor*) in the Protestant church. The following four contexts demonstrate this usage.

John 21:15ff.

At the conclusion of John's Gospel, Jesus reinstates and commissions Peter using shepherding imagery.¹¹² John 21:15-17 contains three distinct commands given in response to Peter's declaration of love: “feed my lambs,” “tend my lambs,” “feed my sheep.”¹¹³ The imagery here is clear: Jesus, the Good and Chief Shepherd, charges Peter to care for those for whom Jesus has cared. Often lost here is that Jesus does not relinquish ownership of the flock nor does he offer Peter unlimited control of the flock.¹¹⁴ Also, Jesus does not give Peter authority to “rule” over the flock, but to “feed” and “tend” the flock from within it.¹¹⁵ Feeding and tending are matters of care and love not domination and power.¹¹⁶ Further, Jesus'

¹¹¹ Mounce states that ruling with an iron rod in this context “means to destroy rather than to govern in a stern fashion. The shepherd not only leads his flock to pasture but defends the sheep from marauding beasts. His rod is a weapon of retaliation. The Messiah's rod is a rod of iron; that is, it is strong and unyielding in its mission of judgment,” 347.

¹¹² Haenchen, *John* 2, 226.

¹¹³ John 21:15, “βόσκει τὰ ἀρνία μου.” John 21:16, “ποιμαίνε τὰ πρόβατά μου.” John 21:17, “βόσκει τὰ πρόβατά μου.”

¹¹⁴ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (xiii-xxi)* 29A, 21st printing (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 1115-17. See also Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2004), 596.

¹¹⁵ Köstenberger, 1116.

¹¹⁶ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21* 25B (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 336.

charge to Peter does not imply Jesus' absence, which would ignore the pneumatologically mediated presence of Christ in his followers (Acts 2). Rather, caring for others is Peter's demonstration of love for his Shepherd.¹¹⁷ Recall the image of the Bedouin bell sheep chosen to keep flock cohesion because of their love for the shepherd in their midst. Peter's role is to follow his shepherd, hearing the voice of Jesus and then passionately clanging his bell so that the flock might likewise follow the Shepherd. This devotion is Peter's witness to God's reign and Christ's "divine mission."¹¹⁸ Such devotion would be necessary in the days between Jesus' ascension and the anticipated coming of the promised Spirit, when these Jewish believers would experience significant discontinuous change that required a new adaptive manner of obedience to God.

Acts 20:28-31

In Luke's account of Paul's journeys, Paul's usage of the shepherd imagery is unusual as he rarely references this image in his writings. Consistent with biblical narrative, Paul emphasizes that the flock is God's, purchased with divine blood.¹¹⁹ A peculiarity in this passage is reference to the selection of these leaders by the Holy Spirit. This reference suggests communal recognition of the Spirit's rule over the congregation and the leaders' sensitivity to the Spirit's presence.¹²⁰

Referencing the activity of the "elders" (20:17) who are "overseers" (20:28) of the flock which they "shepherd" (20:28; NRSV, NASB), Paul draws together

¹¹⁷ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 222.

¹¹⁸ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 337. D. Moody Smith Jr. notes that Jesus' questioning of Peter was a test of Peter's loyalty, perhaps for Peter's sake. D. Moody Smith Jr., *John 4* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999), 396-97.

¹¹⁹ Frederick F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 392-93; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (NC; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1996), 272-73. Beverly Roberts Gaveneta, *Acts 5* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 287-88.

¹²⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts 26* (NAC; Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 426-27. See also, Bruce, *Acts*, 392; Gaveneta, *Acts*, 287-88.

all three of the dominant terms used to describe ecclesial leadership.¹²¹ This passage seems to equate the three roles in the congregation, causing some to question whether three distinct offices existed in the New Testament church.¹²² Despite differing terminology, the same expectation of meekness, gentleness, and love apply to leaders throughout the New Testament. The use of the plural (common in Luke) indicates a plurality of leadership, avoiding “individualism, monarchical authoritarianism or simple economic necessity turn[ing] the pastoral role into a ‘one-man show’....”¹²³

Paul’s charge to “keep watch over yourself” as well as over “the flock” indicates a commonality between shepherding elders and the flock. They cannot claim authoritative superiority, since they also need watching, presumably by the other shepherding elders.¹²⁴ Finally, it is significant that Paul’s charge comes to the Ephesian leaders at a time of liminality. Paul’s departure with no expected return, the imminent presence of “savage wolves,” attempts at distorting the truth—these point to immense difficulties and change. The shepherding elders are responsible for guiding the flock through these difficult times. Fittingly, Paul’s final words are “remembering the words of Jesus.” A fellow sheep in Christ’s flock, Paul sounded the way to following Jesus’ call (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6).

Ephesians 4:11

Significantly, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is the only other place where he uses ποιμήν. Paul views the placement of “pastors” (along with apostles, prophets,

¹²¹ πρεσβυτέρους (vs. 17, noun translated as “elders”); ἐπισκόπους (vs. 28, noun translated as “overseers,” later “bishop”); ποιμαίνειν (vs. 28, verb translated as “shepherd”).

¹²² Perhaps “pastor,” “elder,” and “overseer” are different perspectives on the same church leadership role. William J. Larkin, *Acts* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 298.

¹²³ Larkin, *Acts*, 297.

¹²⁴ Larkins, 297; Polhill, *Acts*, 426.

evangelists, and teachers¹²⁵) into the Ephesians' context as Christ's gifts to his church (Eph. 4:11). Christ utilizes individuals from within the community to empower the flock for the community's work (Eph. 4:12).¹²⁶ The question of office is much debated; however, Hoehner is adamant that these describe "function with no hint of reference to an office."¹²⁷ There is further indication that this usage signifies an overlap in meaning between elder, overseer, and pastor without design toward authoritarian rule.¹²⁸ Like the Acts 20 passage, a plurality of leadership is assumed with equal accesses to God's grace afforded to all the community.¹²⁹

1 Peter 5:1-4

In 1 Peter 5:1-4, the author utilizes several important constructions that aid understanding for the role of pastoral persons.¹³⁰ First is the unique use of ἀχιποίμενος

¹²⁵ Much has been written regarding the association of ποιμὴν and διδάσκαλος. I side with Lincoln who sees these as two roles in the congregation with closely related functions. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250. Also Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 545.

¹²⁶ Simpson rightly contends that Christ has not left the church orphaned, but rules over his church guiding its way by his design. E. K. Simpson, "Ephesians," in *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, tenth printing (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 94.

¹²⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 250-51, 252. Contra: William B. Klein, "Ephesians," in *Ephesians ~ Philemon 12* (EBC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 118-19.

¹²⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 251; PHEME PERKINS, *Ephesians 10* (ANTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1997), 100.

¹²⁹ "The New Testament affords no hint of a priestly caste, 'commanding all the approaches of the soul to Him', usurpers of the title they clutch at; but the universal priesthood of believers, each occupying his proper place in the body of Christ, has its clear authorization. In the theocracy of grace there is in fact no laity." Simpson, "Ephesians," 95. See also David E. Garland, "A Life Worthy of the Calling: Unity and Holiness Ephesians 4:1-24," *Review and Expositor* 76(4) (Fall 1979): 523.

¹³⁰ Notice the similar commingling of terms as in Act 20:28 with "elder," "overseer" (oversight), and "shepherd" (tend) used inter-relatedly. Laniak, *Shepherds*, 232-33; Elliot, *1 Peter*, 822; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 302-04. It is impossible to read this passage and not recall John 21:15-18. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 282; Elliot, *1 Peter*, 823; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 304.

in the context of instructing the under-shepherds.¹³¹ Referring to the elders as his “fellow elders,”¹³² Peter notes from a position of mutuality that they are all accountable to Christ for care of Christ’s flock. Never are persons with pastoral responsibilities given freedom to do as they wish (cf. Ezek. 34; Zech. 9-11).¹³³ They are entrusted with the task of following the Chief Shepherd and leading the others to do likewise.¹³⁴

Second, this passage reflects a κύριος-ποιμὴν dichotomy. In a recitation of the words of Jesus (Matt. 20:25ff.; Mark 10:42; Luke 22:24-27; cf. Ezek. 34:4), Peter reminds the elders that they are to “tend” God’s flock, leading by example, not “lording” over them.¹³⁵ Shepherd elders care, not by harsh demanding/driving leadership, but by example because there is only one Lord (κύριος), the Chief Shepherd—Jesus.¹³⁶

Third, Peter notes that these elders are “among” (NRSV, NASB) the flock (“οὐν ἐν ὑμῖν” vs. 1; “τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν” v. 2).¹³⁷ Peter reminds elders and non-elders that shepherd elders are also sheep embedded in Christ’s flock.¹³⁸ While their calling gives them responsibility

¹³¹ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 329.

¹³² I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* 17 (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 160-61; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 176.

¹³³ Elliot rejects a formalized understanding of offices in this context. “The elders do not occupy positions in a hierarchialized organizational structure, of which there is no hint in 1 Peter. It is thus inappropriate and anachronistic to speak of them as ‘officials’ or ‘office-holders.’” Elliot, *1 Peter*, 815.

¹³⁴ Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 180-82.

¹³⁵ This is part of a series used to describe Godly leadership, each offset by μη; or μηδε; and ἀλλὰ: “not under compulsion, but willingly...not for sordid gain, but eagerly...” (NRSV) “not as lording...but be examples” (NASB). Laniak, *Shepherds*, 233; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 163; Elliot, *1 Peter*, 832; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 326-27; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 178-80.

¹³⁶ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 234; Martin, *Metaphor*, 260-61; Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 180-81. Achtemeier notes that Jesus’ life is the “supreme instance of one who provided the example for Christian conduct....” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 328.

¹³⁷ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 283.

¹³⁸ Laniak, *Shepherds*, 234, n. 43; Jobes, *1 Peter*, 308. Achtemeier states: “Christians are not the subjects of the elders, as is the case in the secular

within the context, it is so because they are embedded within the flock.¹³⁹ Again, the Bedouin bell sheep are exemplary: shepherd elders lead by example from within the flock as they passionately follow the Chief Shepherd, with their lives “clanging” for others to follow as well.¹⁴⁰ This is especially important during times of adaptation, difficult and changing times of opposition, when the desire to renounce the gospel of God is most appealing. For Peter’s readers, persecution most certainly would have tempted many to abandon following Jesus. Living among a marginal people in the context of social change, shepherd elders were to live lives that inspired the flock to hear and follow Christ despite the pain such devotion would require.

Summary Thoughts on New Testament Shepherding Imagery

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament utilizes shepherding imagery in two primary ways: Jesus as the Great Chief Shepherd of his people and of under-shepherds who serve Christ’s flock through the Spirit’s prompting. Jesus’ claim to be the shepherd of God’s people is a claim to be God incarnate. The presence of the Spirit in his life and work and his promise to send the Spirit to his followers seals his claim. For followers of Christ, the Spirit leads the congregation to recognize some as guides for the flock. These shepherd elders oversee the flock’s well-being, understanding that they serve at the Spirit’s will within a specific embedded context.

These shepherd elders lead by their exemplary lives, following the Great Shepherd and inviting others to join them in witnessing God’s activity in the world. Shepherd

realm with leaders and subjects, but rather all Christians belong to God, and so the presbyters must carry out their duties as servants of God, not as lords of the Christians under their care. Arrogance toward other Christians and arbitrary exercise of power have no place in the leadership of the church....” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 329.

¹³⁹ Elliot, *1 Peter*, 831.

¹⁴⁰ “Elders are therefore to exercise their authority by showing through their conduct how Christians are to live their own lives.” Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 328.

elders serve mutually with others, each set aside by a congregation who recognize the Spirit's consecration of these individuals. Regarding the question of office, it seems that New Testament writers did not intend an office when speaking of *pastors*. There is also no sense that shepherd elders functioned in perpetuity, which is more similar to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood than the New Testament priesthood of all believers over whom Christ is the High Priest. Rather than establishing a hierarchical, rigid structure, Christ in his Spirit rules the church with fluidity.

Implications of Biblical Imagery

From this investigation into the biblical imagery, several important implications emerge for our understanding of the metaphor and its practical application to the life of God's people. First, God reserves sole claim as shepherd of God's people. Only one "rules" the church—Jesus Christ, through the presence of the Spirit, on behalf of the Father. While God utilizes "under-shepherds," it is always with the caveat that they answer to God for their role. Second, the Old Testament and New Testament both emphasize the Spirit's presence in the lives of leaders. The New Testament amplifies this idea by the Spirit's presence in all believers, thus assigning under-shepherds as guides for helping God's people discern the Spirit's promptings. This notion does not ignore the guidelines of the New Testament (particularly Paul) that church leaders be filled with the Spirit. Rather it illustrates that they must have a unique, even an uncommonly special sensitivity to the Spirit that makes them more able to guide the flock to hear and follow the Shepherd and to participate in his work.

Third, for pastoral leaders, this means empowering others to hear and respond to God's promptings as they move onto God's agenda and become witnesses of God's missional activity in the world. This requires helping the church to discover, empower, and release other shepherd elders. Finally, pastoral leaders must be embedded

participants in the congregation. These primarily lead by example. Shepherd elders are sheep in the flock helping others follow the shepherd. This responsibility becomes particularly important when the “old ways” no longer seem to fit the new experiences. The flock must seek the Shepherd more earnestly to be certain that it is his voice they are hearing (John 10:3, 5, 16) and not just purveyors of passing new trends or comfortable old patterns.

This reconsideration of the biblical metaphor of shepherd drives the church toward new considerations related to structure and roles. As this occurs, it is increasingly important that the church redefine those structures and roles accordingly, reinterpreting the metaphors which describe the church’s leadership. As it does, the church will find itself being drawn into a greater dynamic relation with the God it seeks to emulate. It is within this relationship that answers to the church’s challenges become apparent as God reveals them to God’s people.

For pastoral persons, this will create enormous change in how they fulfill their calling. It will mean understanding the word *pastor* to mean something different from what they have previously understood it to mean. It will likely require sacrificing old paradigms and comfortable seats of authority. However, in return pastoral persons may find that their once lonely vocation is now a wonderfully interconnected and dynamically relational calling *within* a people of whom they are a part. Pastoral leaders are not permitted to avoid the challenges of change. Instead we are encouraged to hear the voice of our Shepherd and to joyfully chase after him, our bells clanging away that others might find him as well.

Inconceivable? I think not. .