

Daily Devotional, May 4, 2020 The Lord is My Shepherd

This week I asked all of you to read Psalm 23 each day and to reflect on what the text is saying. I thought it might be helpful to offer some insight, some background into what the Jewish tradition can explain to us, as we are not sheep herders, nor have we been raised in this tradition.

Today I want to focus on the introduction: Jehovah Raah—the Hebrew interpreted as “The Lord is my Shepherd”. This all-encompassing name does not just mean “The Lord is my Shepherd” but has a more extended meaning. *Jehovah* is translated as “The Existing One” or “Lord.” It also suggests “to become known”, that is, a God who reveals Himself unceasingly. *Raah* means “shepherd” in Hebrew. A shepherd is one who feeds or leads his flock to pasture. An extended translation of this word, is “friend” or “companion.” This indicates the intimacy God desires between Himself and His people. When the two words are combined...*Jehovah Raah*...it can be translated as “The Lord is my Friend.”

When you combine the idea that the Lord is not only the One who gives you rest, refreshes you, guides you, lovingly rebukes you, shields you, grows you, and gives you a lifelong inheritance, but does all of those things while being your relentless companion and friend, is utterly amazing.

Yahweh is the name God gave Moses when he wanted to know the name of the One sending him to Pharaoh. It is actually a verb rather than a noun and means “I will be”, or sometimes “I am who I am.” Jesus was accused of making Himself equal to God because of the way He used “I am,” especially in John 8:58 where Jesus told His hearers unless they believed that before Abraham was, I am; they would not see life.

In recent years two Jewish men, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, made a commentary of the Old Testament similar to The Living Bible. It is German and is called Die Schrift (The Writing). They noticed that Exodus 3:12 uses the same verb form that is God's proper name, Yahweh, where God promises, “I will be with you.” The name of God is given two verses later at Exodus 3:14. They combined these two verses and rendered God's name as, “Ich bin der 'Ich bin da.” (I am the One Who is there [with you].)

This adds a nice personal touch of assurance for us and moves us beyond scrutinizing what seems to be an otherwise inscrutable name. In Biblical culture, knowing someone's name meant you had an accessibility to that person. Knowing a name gave the one knowing a bit of power over the one whose name is known. Was Moses asking to know God's name so he could make requests of God or expect favors of God? If that is the least bit the case, it seems God gave Moses a name which frustrates that intent. “I am Who I am, and there is nothing you can do about it, Moses. I will always be in charge and have the final say. You will not control Me.”

God is the ideal shepherd of His people. But, under Him were kings who were to shepherd God's people by setting an example and consciously leading the people in faithfulness to God and His covenants. Bad kings led people to worship the false gods of Israel's neighbors. David, the shepherd boy (and the author of this psalm), came to be idolized as the ideal good king, despite his flaws and faults in regard to his adultery with Bathsheba.

Despite that sad chapter, David was a man after God's own heart in earlier times. The image of the shepherd is fitting for us because all we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6). Sheep easily wander off without sensing the danger into which they place themselves. Sheep can provide almost nothing for themselves, so the image of God as shepherd stresses God's complete care for us and our total dependence upon God.

Inevitably, Jesus, Yahweh's own son, is the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep according to John 10. Middle Eastern shepherds put their flocks into a common walled pen at night. The shepherds know their sheep so well that they can identify their own sheep in complete darkness by feeling the bone structure in the face of each, even though they might have as many as 150 sheep in their flock. Jesus can identify each of us without touching our faces. Jesus instead touches our hearts and souls through his life and his Living Word which continues to be our source for life.

Today, consider your Shepherd, Jehovah Raah, and the loving friendship and companionship that He freely offers you, His sheep.

Prayer: Jehovah Raah, we thank you for being with us in all things, as our protector, redeemer, and friend. Help us in understanding more clearly your Word to us, and through the inspiration of your Holy Spirit may we discern how we can apply your Word to our daily lives. In your most holy name we pray, Amen.