

Introduction

The shepherd and his sheep are a favorite Bible metaphor to illustrate spiritual responsibilities in your relationships. The most familiar passages depict Jesus as the Shepherd faithfully performing His responsibilities in His relationship with His sheep:

{ The writer to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 13:20, calls the Lord "...that great Shepherd of the sheep..."

{ The Apostle Peter writes, in 1 Peter 2:25, "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

{ Jesus said of Himself in John 10:11 "**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."**

While these are the most familiar, there are other uses of this metaphor:

{ In Acts 20:28 the responsibility and relationship between spiritual leaders and God's congregation are described using the shepherd and sheep metaphor:

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

{ Peter uses this same metaphor in his first epistle:

1 Peter 5:2-4 "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away."

{ Not only is the family of believers considered a flock, your *own* family can be considered using this metaphor:

Psalms 107:41 "Yet He sets the poor on high, far from affliction, And makes *their* families like a flock."

= In Genesis Thirty-three and Thirty-four, Jacob is depicted as a shepherd leading his family like a flock:

Genesis 33:1 Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants.

Genesis 33:2 And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last.

Genesis 33:3 Then he crossed over before them...

Jacob set his family in order, then took a position in front of them - leading them as a shepherd would his flock. As we will see, the whole account of his meeting with Esau in Chapter Thirty-three can be understood as Jacob faithfully shepherding the flock of his family.

We will also see him, in Chapter Thirty-four, fail in his responsibilities to shepherd the flock of his family. Rather than set them in order and lead them during the crisis, he retreats from the situation and leaves them on their own - a disgrace with disastrous consequences.

The application to your life is this:

{ You might be a "shepherd" to some "flock" in the family of believers. You don't have to be a Pastor or Elder to take heed to this metaphor. It includes Bible study leaders, Deacons, Sunday School teachers, Nursery workers, Usher Crew leaders, Worship leaders - it includes *anyone* who is in *any* position of leadership and example over God's precious sheep. You don't even have to be in an office of leadership; anyone discipling someone, even casually, would be included.

{ If you think in terms of shepherding your family, every husband and wife can glean something from these chapters. You are the "shepherd" and "shepherdess" of the flock of your family.

Jacob was faithful in Chapter Thirty-three; he failed in Chapter Thirty-four. In his example you see two things:

#1 The Discipline Of Leading
Your "Flock" Like A Shepherd

#2 The Disgrace Of Leading
Your "Flock" Like A Hireling

#1 The Discipline Of Leading
Your "Flock" Like A Shepherd
(33:1-17)

In Chapter Thirty-two Jacob had planned to send his family ahead of him - putting them in harm's way. After his encounter with God, however, he takes his place in front of them - as a shepherd would before his sheep when there was the possibility of danger.

Genesis 33:1 Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. ..

The coward of Chapter Thirty-two had found courage in the Lord...Encounters with God bring boldness in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 33:1 ...So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants.
Genesis 33:2 And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last.

Some see this as favoritism - putting his beloved Rachel and her son, Joseph, last. Before you accuse Jacob of favoritism, note two things:

^ Joseph was, after all, the youngest son. Even if he and his mother weren't Jacob's favorites, they ought to have come last.

%o Sometimes tough decisions need to be made by those in charge; someone has to come first, and someone has to come last!

Genesis 33:3 Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

Genesis 33:4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Here is a picture of two brothers, between whom there were serious offenses, approaching one another to attempt a peaceful reconciliation. Jacob took the lead - it was he who had sinned against his brother initially, cheating and deceiving him. Esau receives his brother's humility and embraces him - realizing that he, too, had sinned.

Genesis 33:5 And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, "Who *are* these with you?" So he said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."

Genesis 33:6 Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down.

Genesis 33:7 And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

I would like you to note that Jacob's children obeyed him and showed respect for authority...

Genesis 33:8 Then Esau said, "What *do you mean by* all this company which I met?" And he said, "*These are* to find favor in the sight of my lord."

Genesis 33:9 But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself."

Genesis 33:10 And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me.

Genesis 33:11 "Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took *it*.

Sometimes it is wise and necessary to refuse a gift; other times it is wise and necessary to receive a gift. You refuse or receive based on the true intention and motive of the giver - insofar as you can discern it with the Lord's help.

Genesis 33:12 Then Esau said, "Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you."

Genesis 33:13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die.

Genesis 33:14 "Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

Genesis 33:15 And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you *some* of the people who *are* with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

Genesis 33:16 So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir.

Genesis 33:17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Commentators generally fault Jacob with lying in these verses, noting that he promised to follow Esau to Seir but went instead to Succoth. What are we to think?

In First Corinthians 13:7 you read that "...love believes all things..." I try to apply that to Bible characters whenever there is a doubt about their motives - believing the best rather than the worst. Let's see how this applies to Jacob.

He seems to have promised to follow Esau, then turned in another direction. Is there another possibility besides his lying?

Sure there is! Consider the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. He wrote to the Thessalonians "Therefore we wanted to come to you; even I, Paul, time and again; but Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18). You read in 2 Corinthians 12:14 "Now *for* the third time I am ready to come to you." Again, in Romans 1:13, "Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now)..."

Paul made plans and even commitments to visit Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome - but he was unable to carry them out! This may have been Jacob's experience as well. I know that it is often *my* experience...That's why it is good to say, "If the Lord wills..."

Whether Jacob lied or not cannot be determined. But he was disciplined as a good shepherd, leading the flocks God had given him! You see three disciplines of a good shepherd in these verses:

f1 A Good Shepherd Or Shepherdess Precedes The Flock

Genesis 33:3 "Then he crossed over before them..."

Jacob took the lead. They followed in the path he had established.

You must take the lead of your "flock," whether at Church or at home, to be a good shepherd. How do you do that? Jacob "crossed over..." You should take the *cross* of Jesus Christ over into all that you say and do! Be the example God is calling you to be; precede those given to you to care for.

f2 A Good Shepherd's Or Shepherdesses Priority Is The Flock

Genesis 33:13 But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children *are* weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing *are* with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die.

Genesis 33:14 "Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant. I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir."

Jacob's first priority was the care of his flocks, *not* arriving at his destination. He was aware of each of them, of their needs and of their limitations. He preferred them over himself.

Your priority ought to be the care of your "flock," whether at Church or at home. You show that it is by being aware of them, of their needs and of their limitations - preferring them over yourself. This requires personal involvement and sacrifice...

*f*3 A Good Shepherd Or Shepherdess Protects The Flock

Genesis 33:15 And Esau said, "Now let me leave with you *some* of the people who *are* with me." But he said, "What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord."

Jacob would protect his own flocks. Not only that, he would protect them from the influence of these other men. Just because they were Esau's men didn't guarantee their faith or their faithfulness.

You must protect your "flock" from the pervading influences of our evil society. Even within the Church you must protect them from the influence of those whom you are not fully convinced of!

= Jacob was faithful as a shepherd to his flocks - both the livestock and his family. After he settled down in Shechem, however, his faithfulness changed to failure.

#2 The Disgrace Of Leading Your "Flock" Like A Hireling (33:18 - 34:31)

A "hireling" is a shepherd who works for wages and has no particular love for the flock. Jacob's care for his flock in Chapter Thirty-four is more like that of a hireling than a good shepherd - and it is a disgrace.

Genesis 33:17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, built himself a house, and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

Genesis 33:18 Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city.

Genesis 33:19 And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.

Jacob settles down and makes himself comfortable among unbelievers. He invested in their property - something that neither Abraham nor Isaac had done. True, Abraham had bought a piece of land - but it was a funeral plot and was a testimony to his faith in the future resurrection. You will see in Chapter Thirty-five that it was God's will for Jacob to go back to Bethel - *not* to settle in Shechem.

Genesis 33:20 Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.

Jacob maintained the outward form of worship. But, again, in Genesis 35:1 you read, "Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and

make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

In settling down Jacob lost the discipline of preceding his flock into the things of God. Instead he set for them the example of seeking the things of this world - which his daughter, Dinah, immediately involves herself in.

Genesis 34:1 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land.

We talked about good shepherding involving protection. Dinah should *not* have had fellowship with the daughters of the land! She was perhaps fourteen or fifteen years old at the time - a teenager! Jacob and Leah's permissive, rather than protective, parenting put her in harm's way. They did not consider the strength of the influences of her friends.

^ Choose your children's companions...

%o Chaperone your children...

Genesis 34:2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.

Genesis 34:3 His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman.

Genesis 34:4 So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

Genesis 34:5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came.

Genesis 34:6 Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him.

Genesis 34:7 And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.

Genesis 34:8 But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife.

Genesis 34:9 "And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves.

Genesis 34:10 "So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it."

Hamor's offer might seem honorable, but it was not. He had seduced and committed fornication with Dinah; now he was offering to seduce and commit *spiritual* fornication with the whole family!

Genesis 34:11 Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give.

Genesis 34:12 "Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife."

Genesis 34:13 But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister.

Jacob was strangely silent. His oldest sons were only in their early twenties, yet he let them take the lead. He retreated, acting as a hireling rather than a shepherd.

We've seen how Jacob didn't precede or protect his flock, the way a shepherd should. He must not have seen the priority, either, of taking the lead. Perhaps living in the world had dulled him spiritually...

The events that are described in the remaining verses are some of the darkest in all of Scripture...

Genesis 34:14 And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that *would be* a reproach to us.

Genesis 34:15 "But on this *condition* we will consent to you: If you will become as we *are*, if every male of you is circumcised,

Genesis 34:16 "then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people.

Genesis 34:17 "But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone."

Genesis 34:18 And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor's son.

Genesis 34:19 So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob's daughter. He *was* more honorable than all the household of his father.

Genesis 34:20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying:

Genesis 34:21 "These men *are* at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land *is* large enough for them. Let us take their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters.

Genesis 34:22 "Only on this *condition* will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they *are* circumcised.

Genesis 34:23 "*Will* not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs *be* ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us."

Genesis 34:24 And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

Genesis 34:25 Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.

Genesis 34:26 And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out.

Genesis 34:27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled.

Genesis 34:28 They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what *was* in the city and what *was* in the field,

Genesis 34:29 and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that *was* in the houses.

Genesis 34:30 Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I *am* few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I."

Genesis 34:31 But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

= We pointed out how Jacob failed in preceding the flock, in protecting the flock, and in putting a priority on the flock. He acted more like a hireling, retreating from danger.

In our own family or Church family we must examine ourselves according to these same simple principles:

f Are you preceding your "flock?"

f Are you protecting your "flock?"

f Is your "flock" your priority?

Conclusion

Jesus said, in John 10:13-14, "The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own."

Jesus is indeed the good and great Shepherd - "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."