

## The Good Shepherd And His Sheep

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God's people live, work and worship as sheep in our flock families. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100: 3). In Genesis, righteous workers served master shepherds, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with unmatched loyalty among hostile heathen families. Under our Good Shepherd (John 10:10-11), Christian families can share abundant life in our work, which blesses all earth's families as promised to Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:14). But now, Satan's long war - since Eden - blurs our families' "light" and "salt" work-witness to unbelievers (Matthew 5:13-16).

In the 21st Century, it is again clear that "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53: 6). Our families are subjected to daily attack from within: adultery, adolescent rebellion, deadly despair, etc.; and from without: murder, abortion, death-dealing inflation, etc. America is losing the family, the basic building block of society. We see campaigns to impose "same sex marriage." We also learn that cohabitation, "shacking up," is now at 48 percent, in a CDC sample of 12,000 women ages 15 to 44, up from 34 percent in 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Thankfully, our headlined, in-your-face depravity does not yet match that of the world which perished in the Great Flood. The death knell for Noah's generation was that "every imagination of the thoughts of [mankind's] heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). But this is cold comfort; for families are regularly savaged in our day *under the sun* due to America's worship of sex and power.

Why do bad things happen to God's people? Daniel's confessional prayer still speaks to the precarious position of Church families. He prayed in Babylon on behalf of Judah in their Captivity. "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity ... even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments" (Daniel 9: 5). So, we should not be surprised that, then as now, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (I Peter 4:17). What was the specific sin of Judah? Besides infant sacrifice, they failed to heed Isaiah, who still urges believers to "call the sabbath a delight" (58:13).

Judah was obsessed with power and sex gods, which required hideous, fiery sacrifice of infants. In America, these same gods drive the lucrative business of surgical abortions. "I gave them also statutes that were not good, ... in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb" (Ezekiel 20:25-26), *like legalized abortions*. But Ezekiel's bill of particulars also denounces Israelites for polluting God's sabbaths from the time of their wandering in the wilderness of Sinai (Ezekiel 20:16). Israelite farmers in Canaan failed to observe sabbath years as well as God's weekly sabbaths. Accordingly, Jeremiah predicts a seventy-year captivity in Babylon, "until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (II Chronicles 36:21).

Isaiah confirms the pivotal need for God's families to keep the sabbath holy (Exodus 20:8). He declares acceptance into God's house and blessings for any eunuch or even a foreigner that "that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. ... I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off" (Isaiah 56: 2-6). Our Lord Jesus had a running debate with Sabbatarian Jews whose rigid, joy-stealing traditions even banned sabbath-day healing (John 5:16), on pain of death. They had missed the whole purpose of the sabbath which "was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus denounced these hypocrites. "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" but would not lift *a finger* to move one (Matthew 23:4).

When Egypt's firstborn all died at midnight, Israel began their Exodus from Egyptian slavery. God "made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock" (Psalm 78:52). "There was not one feeble person among their tribes" (Psalm 105:37). God fed them with manna, "which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Beware of naysayers who would amend God's ten commandments!

Christ feeds “his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11). He personally cares for wee orphan lambs and sets a gentle, sabbath-studded pace for sheep who are nurturing lambs. Thus, in the early Church, those expressing “pure religion” were moved “To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction [often on Sunday], and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). Under such watchful care God’s sheep families have every reason to “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD ... [and to] Serve the LORD with gladness” (Psalm 100:1-2). And God’s people said. . . Amen!

1. <http://money.msn.com/now/post.aspx?post=5e87964e-fef1-42ff-abd5-35c2c4909552>