

Maximising Redemption: God as the Shepherd

I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love

See Hosea 11:4

God as the Shepherd

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. (Hosea 11:3-4)

God makes many promises to personally care for his flocks, and he also rebukes us if we interfere with his ministering to others. One of the most moving passages is [Ezekiel 34](#):

I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. " 'As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? " 'Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken. " 'I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety.

(Ezekiel 34:15-25)

Another thing I particularly like about this passage is it is one of the times that God is clear that he has different kinds of flocks. For those who are looking for reconciliation rather than suppression with the other religions another useful passages includes [John 10:14-16](#) (As an aside, my parish's 2004 bible study of John simply skipped this section!)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:14-16)

Whilst on the subject of reconciliation, one of the reasons God called me to do this work in 2001 was that I was not content to think in the human historical time-lines. In fact, before being commissioned I had a debate worthy of Abraham where I challenged God that how could a soul that died a week before a missionary's arrival be less righteous than those who came after? Further, if God was a just God, how could he write off billions of souls who never heard of the bible or Jesus simply because they were born in the wrong place in the space-time continuum? The challenge I placed to God was that if he was a just God, he would recognize the righteousness of ancestors as much as he would descendants. Thus if a soul were to come to accept the reality of the biblical God of the Book of Truth and honestly seek to be in proper relationship with God, it could be said that this person's soul was the culmination of teachings of their ancestors. Thus one's ancestors as well as one's descendants could be covered by God's grace. (It was this debate that led to the "Baptism Dream" within a week, because I asked God to prove whether Jesus was transcendent over all the other masters).

Fortunately, God had already promised a trans-time reconciliation in [Ezekiel 16](#), where Jerusalem is given a right royal dressing down but at the end God promises:

Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both those **who are older** than you and those **who are younger**. I will give them to you as daughters, but not on the basis of my covenant with you. So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done, you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD.' " (Ezekiel 16:60-63)

Many people hold a reverence for their ancestors, and if there is not a retrospective grace then these souls are either without compassion (prepared to write off their ancestors) or are left with the burden of guilt that they abandoned their ancestors. Personally I can not accept that God would want such a harsh determination, especially for those who had never before had conclusive evidence that God has His consciousness and personality. There are those who have loved God, even without personally knowing Him or not fully understanding His character (nor do we still, but more has been revealed than had been before).

Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. (Jeremiah 7:4-7)

We see from God's offer and cautions in [Jeremiah 7:4-19](#), that God easily incorporates new souls, but where souls try to be deceptive and stand misuse His name, they will also be cast out like he did to the Israelites at Shiloh ([Jeremiah 7:8-19](#)) where God concludes "But am I the one they are provoking?" declares the LORD. "Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?" (Jeremiah 7:19) So in modern times where we are facing ecological disaster and the complete breakdown of society and familial structures, who are we really harming? Are we

harming God (who will continue to exist even if we wipe our existence off this very planet) or ourselves? I think it is the latter, don't you?