

THE SHEPHERD'S ROD COMFORTS, CORRECTS, INSTRUCTS, PROTECTS.

By Jack Albright ©

Psalms 23:4c "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

We would not feel comfortable if a man carrying a long-handled-club stalked us everywhere we went. However, from a sheep's perspective, seeing two simple wooden instruments, a rod and a staff, in the hands of a skilled shepherd could often mean the difference between life and death. The following description and usage of the rod will clarify why it was a source of comfort for the sheep.

When a shepherd's son was old enough to help care for the sheep, the boy would go into the woods, select a sapling, and dig it from the ground. This was carved and whittled down slowly and accurately. The enlarged base where the trunk joined the root was shaped into a smooth rounded head of hard wood.

The sapling was shaped to fit the owner's hand perfectly. Then he spent hours and days of practice throwing the rod with accuracy and speed. Once the shepherd mastered the skills of using the rod, it became his most powerful weapon of defense for himself and the sheep. A shepherd was never without his rod and staff and the sheep quickly learned that they represented his power, authority, and defense. They also served as extensions of his arm and hand.

When God called Moses to go to the Pharaoh of Egypt and demand that he free God's people, "The rod of God," became the proof of God's power invested in Moses. (Exodus 7:9,17) The rod represented God's word and authority that came through Moses.

For us today, God's word, the Bible, the Sword of the Spirit, is our "Rod of the Lord." God's authority, power, discipline, guidance, defense and comfort is based on the Bible.

The shepherd also used the rod to discipline unruly sheep. W. Philip Keller says, "If the shepherd saw a sheep wandering away on its own, or approaching poisonous weeds, or getting too close to danger of one sort or another, the club would go whistling through the air to send the wayward animal scurrying back to the bunch."

The rod was also used to count and examine sheep, (Exodus 20:37). From time to time the shepherd would stand at the gate and stop each sheep as it left the pen. Each sheep was identified and counted. He used the rod to part their wool to intimately examine their skin, the cleanliness of the fleece and the condition of their whole body. Special attention would be given to the sheep that had "gone astray" to be certain it had not been wounded or diseased. Medical attention was given when needed. The sheep could not "pull the wool over the shepherd's eyes."

We need not try to pull the wool over God's eyes when we have strayed away from God's flock and refuse to come when the shepherd calls us together as members of his family. God wants to examine our soul for wounds and apply the healing balm of cleansing and forgiveness.

Perhaps the most comforting aspect of the shepherd's rod was that it was an instrument of protection for himself and his sheep when they were in danger. He could drive off predators like wolves, coyotes and stray dogs. He would often beat the bushes to scare off snakes or other creatures that could frighten or harm the sheep.

Christians live in such a spiritually contaminated jungle that we should seek and welcome the constant guidance, healing and protection of our Great Shepherd.

God comforts when he declares his ownership; provides our physical and spiritual needs; personally directs our journey and protects us from harm.