

FOLLOW THE LEADER The Life of a Disciple

Every leader has a follower(s); without which, a cause dies off. But, God needs no follower(s), of course. He is Eternal, with all truths about life fixed in Himself, forever. He changeth not!

Because God is good (all the time) - plus the fact that man is dead in his trespasses and sins, God goes looking for followers, calling them to seek the coming kingdom, first.

God's all-seeing eye finds Abraham and said, "**I will make you a great nation**" (Gen 12:2). Abraham believed becoming the father of the faithful (Rom 4). Later on, Isaac and Jacob followed in their father's call and the nation of Israel was born and developed.

Like God's plan, Israel was on-going; always on the move. Their first grand leader, during the desert wondering, was the faithful Moses. Close behind was Joshua, who actually took Israel into the Promised Land. From there, a king was chosen; previewing that mankind needs a Sovereign Leader. David pictured the Person of King Jesus in dedication of heart.

Thus, we see a **pattern**, **motif** and a **syndrome** explained in the New Covenant revealing **who**, **how** and **why** God took out a people for Himself.

1. First, it was Israel: "**The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm brought He them out of it,**" Acts 13:17.
2. Next, Gentiles: "**Simeon (Peter) hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name,**" Acts 15:14.
3. Finally, Israel and Gentiles are joined as one. "**After this (after Israel rejected Jesus as the Christ, initiating the Gentile age) I will return, and again build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the LORD, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the LORD who doeth all these things,**" Acts 15:16-17.

But, the discourse of James in Acts 15, at least two important points must be seen: 1) A **Jew is one inwardly** (Rom. 2:29); and, 2) Acts 15 speaks of a **Spiritual renewal**; one that began at the **1st Advent** of Jesus. But, the full fulfillment of

the passage - that of the physical and material renewal for Israel as a nation - comes at the end of the *Gentile age*, just before the **Second Advent** of Jesus.

TERMS FOR FOLLOWERS

God's people were called Israelites until ratification of the New Covenant. Since then, they are known by many names (Christians, disciples, ambassadors, et al). But, the first title that comes to mind is: **SHEEP!**

Nothing presents a picture of "**Following the Leader**" better than a flock of sheep. Although not dumb, sheep do need much care; especially, at lambing time.

Then, after a lamb is born, time becomes critical. A lamb just might not make it unless the mother's milk gets in the lamb's stomach within a few hours.

Sometimes, a mother ewe won't take her baby until she is forced. It isn't unusual for a mother to abandon her baby. So, to save all the lambs, help is needed.

Then, off to pasturing where Sheep need help not to overeat or ingest unhealthy plants. That's why there's a Shepherd.

Sheep are dependent and harmless. However, their strongest characteristic is flocking, instinctively. Sheep are the best example of following the leader. But, sometimes, flocking is for their good and, other times, following the leader turns out to be harmful.

Sometimes, sheep get into stressful situations that result in death. For example, a flock of 1000 sheep might lose 15 head when a predator chases them. While, the wolf or pack of dogs may kill just one or two; the rest die because they follow the leader over a canyon drop, killing many.

Some sheep will lie down in a ditch to escape the predator. They pile on top of one another causing those on the bottom to suffocate.

I have raised sheep. I have gone to sheep classes. I have attended many sheep shearings. I have Border Collie dogs that control the sheep. I know about sheep; at least, the Ovine animal.

Yet, I must admit that my learning about spiritual sheep is ongoing. I hear of and, often see, new ways that spiritual sheep succumb to a death-ending relationship between them and their Shepherd. Some fail to follow the Shepherd while, others love to mix it up with the world and run with the pack - both are fatal.

The prominent thing about sheep, whether an actual animal or in the spiritual sense, is that they follow the leader. And, **following** is the main indicator of a **sheep/Shepherd** relationship when we come to discipleship. Jesus said it this way: "**The sheep follow; for they know his voice,**" John 10:4.

Throughout the Bible, sheep are descriptive of God's people. We read of sheep who follow and, as mentioned, of sheep who don't. "My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused to go astray," Jeremiah recorded in 50:6.

But, the 23rd Psalm beautifully describes how the **Shepherd's** care extends **calm and safety of green pastures and still waters to sheep that follow**. Where Jesus takes His sheep, there is a restoring of the soul that occurs.

One glorious teaching for all of mankind is that the heavenly **Shepherd** cares. Brother Braden gave our church Isaiah 53 to memorize, recently. I am so glad to know that, "**All we like sheep have gone astray,**" we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all (53:6). He cared when I didn't. Praise His name!

Jesus loved the **sheep-term**, using it often. He instructed His church to "**go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**" (Mt. 10:6), saying to them that it wasn't going to be easy. "**Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves,**" Matthew 10:16.

John, the Beloved writes of the implementation of the **sheep/shepherd** relationship. In 'Parabolic length,' we find a beautiful lesson of harmony between the **Leader** and His following sheep. "**And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice,**" (Jn 10:4).

In His discourse on the "**Judgment of the Nations**" (Mt 25:32), Jesus presents the sheep analogy once again, applying it to His return.

This time, it seems that our LORD speaks of nations that have been kind to His sheep. That is, people of all national and ethnic backgrounds, over the ages, who were helpful to His sheep; not causing them any harm. "**And, before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:**"

It may be that Jesus is speaking of all those of national and ethnic backgrounds who have been saved by the act of His sheep going into the world and preaching the gospel.

In the King's own words, "**Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it (gave drink & food) unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it UNTO ME**" (Mt 25:40).

While, I firmly believe the kingdom shall be inherited by the Bride of Christ, the church in the New Covenant; I also am persuaded that the faithful of the Old Testament are included in the same promise.

But, here, in Matthew 25:34, it appears that an inheritance also awaits those outside a New Testament Church. Jesus thinks so highly of those who assist His sheep, He calls them: "**Sheep Nations.**" And, it seems He is happy to do so.

While this passage must allow liberty of interpretation, certainly, all the saved will be living in the Kingdom; either, at His coming or, after the millennium reign.

The Sheep nations are not unlike the earlier explanation of the "**Foolish Virgins**" of Matthew 25. The position of the Bride was lost for the virgins. And here, it seems that those in the Sheep Nations never had that position. Yet, the Son of Man appreciated their kindness toward His sheep and rewards them for it.

If we consider the people inside the nations as saved; then, we may also come to understand that the virgins were, as well. The message is inheriting the Kingdom; not, being saved from eternal damnation.

Furthermore, in Matthew 25, salvation is a prerequisite for virgins waiting for the Bridegroom. Lost people don't even attend services, much less wait for the LORD to come.

In the parable, the foolish virgins were not ready at the time the Bridegroom arrived. Scrambling to get some oil in order to be ready before His arrival, the foolish ones failed to be where they were suppose to be when the Bridegroom came.

Jesus is, of course, explained by many appellatives. He is "**that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the Covenant, (that wants to) make you perfect in every good work to do his will,**" Hebrews 13:20,21.

He is also called a **sheep**. "**He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth,**" Isaiah 53:7, 8.

Disciples are described by more than one word, too. Our mission is many fold. We are to lead and shepherd others into the way of truth; which is in the Church that Jesus established. And, we are to be **SHEEP** in attitude and purpose - productive, living creatures that love to give up all that they have just to follow truth that the Shepherd leads us into; even to the point of dying (to the present world) for His honor and glory.

Sheep Baptists have experienced both. Any church history will reveal that God's people followed (without change) the **Leader**. They had to in order to fulfill Matter 16:18: "**Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her.**"

You see, without followers, any cause shall fail.