

Psalm 80

The psalmist is seeking help for his people; who are in a bad situation. He is reaching out to God to engage his mercy once again. Without realizing it; he is answering his own question. He relates to God as a good shepherd and a good farmer. The responsibilities and expectations of men in these roles should be obvious to these people.

God gives us ways to relate to him; even though he is completely different from man in his thoughts and actions. The bible is full of limited comparisons between our familiar objects and the eternal and omniscient God.

This psalm describes God in a number of settings. It describes his role with Israel as: a shepherd, as our God in heaven, as the Captain of the holy angels, and as a wine grape grower. Likewise, the children of Israel are compared to: sheep, disobedient people in trouble, and also as grapevines. The New Testament writers use parables to explain spiritual truths. A biblical parable is an earthly common activity that helps explain an unseen spiritual reality.

Read Psalm 80:1-7: God is called on to relieve the painful existence of his people Israel. Here he is referred to as the shepherd of Israel who lives between the cherub angels in heaven. What does it mean to compare God to a good shepherd? It can be helpful to look more closely at key words in the bible, to find deeper meanings. The word used here for *shepherd* is a Hebrew word (as is most of the Old Testament). It is categorized as H-7462 רָעָה *râ'âh*, *raw-aw'*; a primitive root; to tend a flock;. The original understanding of the Hebrew word for shepherd includes *being tied to, or being in charge of something*. We can shepherd a project or a student. The shepherd concept cannot refer to anything owned and managed indirectly from a distance. Unlike cattle, sheep are not driven; they are led (in this culture).

The good shepherd application is in the middle east at a time when there were mountain lions, bears and jackals and thieves. Cattle can be left alone, and checked on. Not sheep. Someone has to be there for lambing, coyotes; and to attend to the ongoing issues. There are also specialized breeds of dogs who will protect sheep as well.

We also see that the concept of the good shepherd is different from a hired hand. The hired hand looks forward to going home; and he will not put himself at risk for his duties.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a [b]hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:11-16)

Our words originally came from images and pictures that represent things. The modern Hebrew language came from an ancient *pictograph alphabet*, made of images. These ancient pictures became letters over time. The letter of the Hebrew alphabet that represents a shepherd is the letter *lamed*. The letter *lamed* looks like a crooked stick with a hook on it. The letter *lamed* in today's Hebrew alphabet is what we call a *prepositional phrase*. In other words; it is always tied to another word. For example, we might say that it is time to go *to-bed*. The word *to* is just in relation to *bed*, and must always be associated with it. All said, the earliest means to communicate about the shepherd was to draw a *shepherd's crook*. It was about the shepherd reaching out and pulling sheep to safety in himself. The concept is to draw close and manage the well-being of.

The Letter Lamed



Chart






Phonetics



The twelfth letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called "Lamed" (pronounced "lah-med") and has the sound of "l" as in "look."

In modern Hebrew, the letter Lamed can appear in three forms:

		
Book Print	Manual Print	Cursive

A shepherd's crook today looks more like this:



The shepherd's crook is a long rod, with a hook end. The hook is used to grab passing or fleeing sheep by the neck, to re-direct or stop them. It is not a tool to push sheep away. It is used to pull sheep closer to the shepherd. It can also be used to thump predators, and as

a walking stick. Ancient shepherd crooks were made from a single piece of wood. It had to be lightweight and sturdy.

To summarize, comparing God to a good shepherd is another way of saying that he is with us now. The title *Immanuel* (God with us) is like a picture of a shepherd standing with his flock; and attending to their needs. The difference between a good shepherd and other hired hands is the commitment level; and intentions. God chose David to be the King of Israel because he was with the people, as one of them. He was deeply committed to them.

' 8 Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have [a]cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. (2 Samuel 7:8-9)

Read Psalm 80:8-15: Now God is compared to a wine grape growing grower; who is intent on producing sweet wine in good production. The bible uses parables in the New and Old Testaments to teach us invisible spiritual truths by comparing them to well-known things we see. The children of Israel were very familiar with grape growing and sheep herding.

This section uses imagery to represent different truths. The farmer here is God. The children of Israel are grape vines. Early grape production came from Egypt. The children of Israel also came out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt. These verses describe a vine cutting that was taken from Egypt, and planted in Jerusalem. This is ultimately describing the exodus journey from Egypt, back to the land of Canaan. The children of Israel dominated the Canaanite peoples as Joshua was instructed by God to destroy them. These verses describe how a grape vine dominated mighty cedars (giants and powerful nations in the holy land). Eventually the children of Israel dominated the nations from the Nile to the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. This happened during the reign of King David. Later on; these huge gains in territory were all forfeited to Babylon as the children of Israel forgot about God; and were removed from their land.

The fruitful hill is Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. That is where Abram offered Isaac as a sacrifice to God. The stones might represent the hard hearts and Canaanites who were removed from the land of Canaan. The wine presses are the crushing forces on our lives that put pressure on us. You do not know what is in a grape until you pierce it and crush it.

What do we do when we are crushed or pierced? We either curse and turn on each other; or we seek God when we are in trouble. We could compare **our *whine*** to a grapes wine. What comes out of us when we get stepped on? Do we strike back and push back; or are we full of love? The next time you face bad tidings take a personal inventory. Are you trying to deflect, and blame someone else? Are you trying to put them in their place? Or have you learned to just act in love; and let God handle the accounting and stamp collecting?

Any worthwhile wine grape growing enterprise will require a significant investment of hours for tillage, planting, weeding, pruning, pest control and harvesting. It will also require fertilizer, ongoing irrigation, and protection from rodents and all of the wild animals who would love to graze on the vineyard. Any good farmer expects a lot of work to bring in a harvest. In return a good volume of sweet wine is expected; otherwise it is a waste of precious time and money.

Domesticated grape varieties are known largely for their flavor and sugar content. A wild grape is extremely small, bitter, and inedible. The idea here is that our natural state is useless to God. God is looking to experience our sweet hearts. Jesus only offered blessings and forgiveness as he bled. Likewise, we need to realize that there is nothing in this world worth attacking each other. It only makes us more bitter. Our life and future is in Christ. We are not really being physically crushed like a wine grape. Our yield is to praise God, regardless of the circumstances. This is called *the sacrifice of praise*.

For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. 12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might [c]sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. 13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. 14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, [d]giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. (Hebrews 13:11-16)

We are like grape vines; which are not planted from seeds. Our faith is taken from other believers, who we have connected with. Christianity that is real has to be cultivated and comes from others who have gone before us in the faith. A cutting from another faithful

plant is required to establish a new grape vine. God allows the circumstances of life to bring forth what we are hiding in our hearts.

How do we improve our own wine? When you delay at a changing stoplight, a person will honk their horn and curse you. That person may be frustrated by their schedule or just be an unhappy person. Likewise, we get bad news every day. Do we curse the evil tidings, or do we trust that God will work it out? One of the biggest transformations that I have undergone in the last 8-10 years is how I handle unwelcomed news. In the past, I would be so laser-focused on my daily checklist of duties, that I would take insensitive blocking actions by others as a personal issue. *“How could they leave this mess after all of my efforts to get things ready?”* One of my negative phrases that I grumbled was that *I was picking up everybody’s dirty diapers*. My reaction and venom was far worse than the reality. That was **my whine**/wine. Now, I hold my reaction a little longer. I find that the anticipated fallout does not ever equal my anticipated effect.

Jesus came to share some sweet wine; but we killed him, and stuffed vinegar on a sponge, and jammed it in his mouth. Our wine was compared in the scripture to the bitterness of gall (from the gall bladder) . This really has helped me re-think bad news. It is an opportunity to see what God will do for me this time. I also see clearly that God expects me to deal directly with the issue right away.

As the story goes (elsewhere in scripture), God is the vineyard owner who sent his son to collect the harvest and experience some sweet wine. The early workers (prophets) were killed and turned away. The owner’s son came himself to obtain the proceeds from the harvest; and he was killed. God kicked everybody off of his property. Israel left their land for 70 years during the Babylonian captivity. Likewise, it happened again. Israel is the only country to be lost and then become re-settled 2,000 years later. We serve a God who believes in second and third chances to get it right.

Isaiah 5 is very similar; and it may have provided inspiration for this psalm.

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard [a]On a very fruitful hill. 2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also [b]made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. 3 “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. 4 What more could have been done to My

vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? 5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. (Isaiah 5:1-5)

Read Psalm 80:16-19: It's humbling to ask for help when we do not deserve it. Have you ever misread a situation and harmed others in the process? How do you ask for forgiveness; after smearing them?

The children of Israel and Judah abandoned God. He acted as their supernatural caretaker. He cultivated and trained them; and gave them every advantage.

Then what's the advantage of being a Jew? Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision? 2 Yes, there are great benefits! First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God. 3 True, some of them were unfaithful; but just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? 4 Of course not! Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. As the Scriptures say about him, "You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court." (Romans 3:1-4)

This is what the Lord says— the Holy One of Israel and your Creator: "Do you question what I do for my children? Do you give me orders about the work of my hands? 12 I am the one who made the earth and created people to live on it. With my hands I stretched out the heavens. All the stars are at my command. (Isaiah 45:11-12)

It is in our nature to question everything relating to our happiness. It is not in our nature to keep on track to follow God. It is like transporting a criminal in a Sheriff's bus. Like the criminal, our flesh is always looking to escape from our masters. Man harms himself and he harms his neighbors if he can do so with impunity. We have to be handled like a child or a sheep.