



AND the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,² Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?³ Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock.⁴ The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.⁵ And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.⁶ My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.⁷ Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD;⁸ As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock;⁹ Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD;¹⁰ Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them. (Ezekiel 34:1-10)

This hymn is not included in the 1940 Hymnal but does appear in 'Hymns Ancient and Modern' of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer hymnal addendum of 1939 as hymn # 258. It is authored by the prolific hymn writer and notable theologian, Horatius Bonar (Free Church of Scotland) in 1843. He was a friend of the memorable Robert Murray M'Cheyne. The tune, LEBANON, is by the German musician, John Zundel of Stuttgart. The tune does not bear the simplicity of most hymns, but the lyrics are heavy with Scriptural meaning.

I was a Wandering Sheep

I was a wand'ring sheep,
I did not love the fold;
I did not love my Shepherd's voice,
I would not be controlled.
I was a wayward child,
I did not love my home;
I did not love my Father's voice,
I loved afar to roam.

The Shepherd sought his sheep,
the Father sought his child;
they followed me o'er vale and hill,
o'er deserts waste and wild:
they found me nigh to death,
famished and faint and lone;
they bound me with the bands of love,
they saved the wand'ring one.

Jesus my Shepherd is;
'twas he that loved my soul,
'twas he that washed me in his blood,
'twas he that made me whole;
'twas he that sought the lost,
that found the wand'ring sheep,
'twas he that brought me to the fold,
'tis he that still doth keep.

I was a wand'ring sheep,
I would not be controlled;
but now I love my Shepherd's voice,
I love, I love the fold.
I was a wayward child,
I once preferred to roam;
but now I love my Father's voice,
I love, I love his home.

1 I was a wand'ring sheep, I did not love the fold; I did not love my Shepherd's voice, I would not be controlled. I was a wayward child, I did not love my home; I did not love my Father's voice, I loved afar to roam. These words should ring a crystal bell in the memories of us all. We were all wandering sheep before we were made to join the flock of the Good Shepherd. His prepared fold became our protected cantonment to which we resorted when the flock was gathered from the far fields and mountain heights. Before Christ became our Shepherd, we had no shepherd other than self-will and the dark Prince of the Air. As a rebellious son who rejects the authority of his father, we rejected the Voice of the Holy Spirit until that Voice more forcefully called our name.

2 The Shepherd sought his sheep, the Father sought his child; they followed me o'er vale and hill, o'er deserts waste and wild: they found me nigh to death, famished and faint and lone; they bound me with the bands of love, they saved the wand'ring one. The Lord knows His own even if His own do not yet know the Lord. He seeks them out from dark and sinful places where they roam in an unknown hunger and thirst. The poisoned weeds of the world look appetizing to the sinner, but the fare bears

no nutrition – only a wasting away of the soul. But the Lord, who knew you before the worlds were made, will not abandon the search for His errant lamb. He will range the rocky cliffs and sun-burned sands until, exhausted, we surrender to His authority and beckon. His over-flowing Love convicts our hearts and finds an echo of its own in the deep chambers of our hearts. It is this cord of Love that draws us ever nearer to Him. *Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.* (Psalm 42:7)

3 Jesus my Shepherd is; 'twas he that loved my soul, 'twas he that washed me in his blood, 'twas he that made me whole; 'twas he that sought the lost, that found the wand'ring sheep, 'twas he that brought me to the fold, 'tis he that still doth keep. Knew you not that there are many and diverse shepherds abroad in the earth – greed, lust, pride, avarice, unnatural hunger and thirst; but there is only One Good Shepherd – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not 'a' good shepherd, but rather 'THE' Good Shepherd. *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* (John 10:11) Jesus never healed a suffering sinner without making him completely whole. He practiced spiritual triage by first forgiving a badly soiled soul and then healing a twisted and tormented body. Our most egregious hurt is our sin – next comes the pains of the body. Just as the returning Prodigal Son, we were caked with filth and dirt, but He embraced our odorous bosoms and covered us with the finest Robe of the Realm purchased at the high cost of His divine blood. That which He enfolds, He does keep and does not lose.

4 I was a wand'ring sheep, I would not be controlled; but now I love my Shepherd's voice, I love, I love the fold. I was a wayward child, I once preferred to roam; but now I love my Father's voice, I love, I love his home. Wandering sheep that are recovered by the Shepherd are not found without the gate of the fold – they are discovered in mundane places of desolation and want. They must first become a part of His flock. Then they will, in due course be led to the fold for safe keeping after feeding on the green pastures of the Lord. I would like to include an explanation of the difference in a flock and fold that I discovered in the writings of F. F. Bruce:

I found this brilliant passage in an article by the late FF Bruce¹ recalling a powerful teaching from EH Broadbent. The article by Bruce was addressing the things that went wrong with the Jerusalem church, one of which was legalism. So many of us look to the Jerusalem Church as the model we wish to emulate, but many things went wrong with that church. There are far more healthy examples in the NT than the mother of all churches.

I wanted to pass on to you this important lesson about sheep in a flock vs sheep in a fold: Many years ago I (F.F.Bruce) heard E.H.Broadbent speak on the fold and the flock in John 10. He pointed out that the sheep in the fold are kept together by the surrounding walls while the sheep of a flock are kept together by the shepherd. Moreover, the number of sheep that any fold can contain is limited, while there was nothing to hinder the sheep which the good Shepherd led out of the fold having their number increased by the adherence of those 'other sheep' that had never belonged to the original fold. But, he went on, developing the parable, some of the sheep argued that in spite of the care and devotion of their Shepherd, they would feel safer if they had walls around them, and so they started to build some. But, said Mr. Broadbent, 'sheep are not good builders.' Some of the walls they built were effective enough in a way, but so restricted that they shut most of the flock out; there were other walls, on the contrary, which were comprehensive enough, but so badly constructed that they let several wolves in too, with predictable consequences. The moral is that the people of Christ need no walls to keep them

¹ Prof. FF Bruce, The Church of Jerusalem, *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal* 4 (April 1964): pp. 5-1

together. We may learn valuable lessons from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but Nehemiah's wall is not a model for churches to follow.

We simply must let the Great Shepherd lead us and stop building walls. Bruce went on to apply this to the Jerusalem church as it grew more zealous for the law.

The Jerusalem church, however, as time went on became increasingly concerned with ways and means of keeping the wrong type out. It was not so in the beginning, then the presence of God's holiness among the believers was so manifest that 'none of the rest dared join them' Acts 5:13. There is a certain plausibility about the affirmation that 'separation from evil is God's principle of unity', but it is not really so; God's principle of unity is positive, not negative; it is the principle of unity in Christ; and separation from evil is a corollary of the principle, not the principle itself.

Bruce concluded with this poem from William Barclay to summarize how ugly the fold can get...

We are God's chosen few,
All others will be damned,
There is no room in heaven for you:
We can't have heaven crammed

May we not be found in such a way. Follow Jesus outside of the camp

(Heb 13:13)