

NSBT NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

# Shepherds after My own Heart

Pastoral traditions  
and leadership in the Bible



Timothy S. Laniak

Series Editor: D. A. Carson

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Affectionately dedicated to Wayne Goodwin,  
a mentor and friend who has inspired countless 'shepherds'  
to reflect theologically on the nature of ministry.

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 20

*Series editor: D. A. Carson*

## Shepherds after my own heart

PASTORAL TRADITIONS AND  
LEADERSHIP IN THE BIBLE

*Timothy S. Laniak*



APOLLOS

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## Series preface

*New Studies in Biblical Theology* is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

Some books give insight at multiple levels. This is one of them. Entirely in line with the goals of NSBT, Dr Laniak develops a biblical theology of 'shepherd' imagery throughout the Bible. This entails careful listening to a large number of remarkably disparate texts, with the aim of understanding how shepherd imagery functions in each book and corpus of the Bible. Then it demands a careful attempt to delineate how such imagery develops over time. Even the slightest acquaintance with the Bible calls to mind numerous passages (e.g. the beloved Psalm 23) and themes: in the Old Testament, God is the shepherd, the king is the shepherd, religious leaders are shepherds. Carefully adjusted, shepherd imagery is used to describe both good and bad shepherds – see, for instance, Ezekiel 34. All of us remember

that John's Gospel portrays Jesus as 'the good shepherd' – and inevitably that raises questions about the nature of the imagery that feeds into this assertion. But pastors are shepherds: that is what 'pastor' means. What bearing does the Bible's extensive choice of such imagery have on how we think of church life?

So at one level, this biblical theology develops one line of 'messianic' development, and pushes for a nuanced but holistic reading of shepherd imagery as it develops across the canon of Scripture. But there are enriching and humbling practical entailments: so extensive is this imagery in the domain of Christian leadership that it contributes a great deal to what Christians ought to understand about leadership itself, and how they will practise it. That is no small matter: it is part of faithfulness to Jesus Christ, who alone is the chief shepherd, not only commanding his undershepherds, but demonstrating in his own life and death and resurrection what Christian leaders are privileged, and morally obligated, to become.

*D. A. Carson  
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

## Author's preface

It is with profound gratitude that I recall the individuals and organizations who contributed to this project. Through their generous sabbatical policy the trustees of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary relieved me of teaching responsibilities for a full academic year. The presidential round-tables of Gordon-Conwell's Center for the Development of Evangelical Leadership provided the early inspiration for this work. My thanks go also to the trustees of the American Schools of Oriental Research who granted me the 2003–04 Annual Professorship at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research in Jerusalem.

The Albright environment was rich in resources, both material and human. Albright fellows Benjamin Saidel and Eveline van der Steen were especially helpful in my journey into the world of pastoralism. Generous with his time and contacts, AIAR director Sy Gitin helped me make the most of my precious research time. Thanks to Shalom Paul for the opportunity to research at the Hebrew University as a visiting professor. A word of appreciation goes to Joan Westenholz who took time out of her busy work at the Bible Lands Museum to discuss shepherd imagery in the ancient world. The nearby Ecole Biblique – known to its users as the best biblical studies library in the world – was an archaeological adventure of its own. My most illuminating experiences came, however, during field work among the Bedouin in Jordan, Israel and Sinai. My life has been immeasurably enriched by the stories of these remarkable people, stories made accessible by translator and friend Sate Massadeh.

Returning to Gordon-Conwell, I enjoyed immensely helpful interaction with faculty, students and ministry colleagues for the following year. I treasure the thoughtful feedback I received from GCTS faculty members Wayne Goodwin, Sid Bradley, Bob Cooley, Gary Pratico, Bill Murray, Steve Klipowicz, Bob Mayer, Jim White, Rod Cooper, Rick Lints and Sean McDonough. Among the many other thoughtful leaders who gave important suggestions, I must thank John Shuler,

Bob Thompson, Tamara Park, Steve Withrow, Russ Rosser, Dean Faulkner, Misty Mowrey and George Davis. For close reading and careful criticism, I am especially indebted to Dave Baer, a scholar and leader (and my personal 'editor for life'), and Bob Hubbard, a biblical theologian who has modelled for so many of us scholarship in the service of the church.

My research assistant Nicole Minford deserves praise for moving the manuscript through its various iterations to a more uniform state. (Who would have thought the NIV-UK had so many differences?) For managing the ever-expanding bibliography on this project I am eternally grateful for the diligent and patient support of GCTS librarians Bob Mayer and Freeman Barton. (I promise to stick to my book quota from now on!)

While these readers, supporters and countless others helped me decide what to include in the manuscript, one person was most helpful in *removing* material. Jamie Henderson accepted the challenge to reduce the book by 10% when my own efforts to cut led only to polishing. NSBT series editor Don Carson and Philip Duce at IVP were most gracious and patient as they moved me to the required word limit. I appreciate their work in keeping biblical theology alive for the church in this series.

A final recognition is reserved for my wife, Maureen, a shepherdess to many who might otherwise lose their way, including our 'kids', Aaron, Jesse and Adrienne.

*Timothy S. Laniak*

## Foreword

Looking back over fifty years of ministry, I celebrate the high points through rejoicing and the low points as times of special formation and instruction. Alfred Sloan, Peter Drucker, Robert Greenleaf and Warren Bennis were the role models for understanding leadership theory and practice. The very nature of ministry was forged through corporate and business influence; an influence that was limited in its awareness of themes inherent in biblical texts that demonstrate what it means to lead in the Kingdom of God. Persons called to ministry in the twenty-first century now have in Professor Tim Laniak's *Shepherds After My Own Heart* a scholarly study of the biblical metaphor that most often conceptualizes leadership.

Dr. Laniak served as the biblical theologian on the program staff of The Center for the Development of Evangelical Leadership, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. In this role he directed seminary presidents in their consideration of the truths resident in Jeremiah 3:15. Calling, character, competency and community became the watchwords for the development of an understanding of leadership that was rooted in an identity – shepherd leadership. Roundtable participants have now responded to Professor Laniak's exegetical study.

Ian Chapman, Chancellor of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, says, 'I appreciated the way your exegetical work brought new insights and deeper understandings to the pastoral role. The concept of a shepherd may have little meaning to some in an urban culture but the clarity of your work overcomes that limitation. I found myself wishing that your book had been written years ago; it would have been of great help to me personally and professionally.'

Jackson W. Carroll, Williams Professor Emeritus of Religion and Society, Duke University Divinity School and one of the President's Roundtable Presenters, states regarding the exegesis of the texts that draw on shepherd themes, 'Laniak paints a picture of the pastor's shepherd leadership, reflecting God's and Jesus' shepherding, as a set

## SHEPHERDS AFTER MY OWN HEART

of tasks that include, among others, oversight, protection, provision, care and guidance of the flock entrusted to the shepherd. Those pastors who make the effort to read this study with care will be richly rewarded.'

Byron Klaus, President of The Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, comments, 'Dr. Laniak provides a significant resource for all who will dare believe that biblical texts on leadership are more than curious commentary on ancient leadership case studies, but serve as foundation and authoritative sources to guide the DNA of leadership for the church in the twenty-first century.'

The church expects effective ministry and pastoral leadership. The work of the ministry is finding more and more people having to exercise leadership within the life of the congregation. This book provides the biblical foundations for understanding God's gift to the church – 'I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.' Indeed, Laniak's study of shepherd imagery is his gift to all who are called to lead.

*Robert E. Cooley, President Emeritus  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*



# Introduction

At a time when books on leadership are being published at a dizzying pace, one wonders if the Bible has anything to say about it. While the Bible does say a lot about the topic, there has been no survey like the one you are about to read. One of the primary metaphors by which biblical authors conceptualized leadership is shepherding. This is quite consistent throughout Old and New Testaments. Yet no exegetical resource orients the culturally removed contemporary 'pastor' to this wealth of material. It is my hope that the following journey through Scripture will prompt rich reflection on the nature of the pastor's identity as God's undershepherd.<sup>1</sup>

Translating the term 'shepherd' is problematic, though not for lack of English vocabulary. We use the term 'pastor' – an anglicized form of the Latin/French word for shepherd – but it has no appreciable metaphorical significance. For most modern readers in the industrialized, urbanized West there is little first-hand familiarity with the cultural realities that inform the *meaning* of the metaphor. The familiarity we may think we have comes from idyllic scenes that have made their way into our imaginations through museum paintings or simple Sunday school stories.

Shepherding has a figurative meaning in certain contemporary religious settings where it has been 'applied' in reductionist ways. Some groups have used it to emphasize strict accountability. Many denominations use the language of 'pastoral care' exclusively to refer to ministry among the sick and needy. Such associations have their relative merits, but they are not anchored in or controlled by the cultural realities and texts of the biblical world. In contrast to such restricted and distorted images, the Bible promotes robust, comprehensive shepherd leadership, characterized as much by the judicious use of authority as by sympathetic expressions of compassion.

<sup>1</sup> Though the shepherd metaphor is a standard point of departure in the field of 'pastoral theology' (e.g. Oden 1983 and Tidball 1997), it is not typically accompanied by rigorous exegesis of the texts that reflect pastoral traditions.

The apostle Paul assumed shepherds were among the Lord's gifts to the church: 'It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors [shepherds] and teachers' (Eph. 4:11).<sup>2</sup> The pastoral role was central to the ongoing life of local churches in the Christian movement, just as it is today. Still, the biblical background of this pastoral language, especially in the Old Testament, has been largely unexplored.

The title of this book comes from Jeremiah, one of several prophets who frequently applied the shepherd designation to Israel's leaders. Through Jeremiah God promises, 'I will give you *shepherds after my own heart*, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding' (Jer. 3:15). On the eve of the destruction of ancient Israel, the prophet was painfully aware that God's chosen people had been misled by self-serving shepherd leaders. They were abused and abandoned not just by their kings, but also by their prophets and priests. The promise in this verse summarizes much of what will surface throughout our investigation. It illustrates what we will call a 'divine preference for human agency'. The God of Scripture chooses regularly to engage humans in the tasks of leadership. Appointment by God implies calling, stewardship and accountability.

This short promise also speaks of a capacity to care for God's flock with self-sacrificing diligence and compassion. It is not just 'heart', however, but '*after my own heart*' that matters. A good shepherd is one who sees what the Owner sees and does what the Owner does. He is a follower *before* he is a leader. He is a leader *because* he is a follower. The shepherds whom God judges in the Bible are those who forget that the people in their care are not their own.

Finally, the promised shepherds are those who will lead 'with knowledge and understanding'. A shepherd needs God's heart, but also a sharp, godly mind. The challenges of leadership require deep reservoirs of discernment and wisdom. This kind of 'knowledge and understanding' comes, in part, from an awareness of the mission and destiny of this flock. Shepherd leaders are anchored theologically in the historic journey of God's people in their various wildernesses.

Shepherd leaders in the Old Testament are understood as a part of the wilderness drama of God's people. Jeremiah, like Isaiah and Ezekiel, finds in the ancient Sinai desert a symbolic setting for the

<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are taken from the NIV-UK unless otherwise noted.

divine Shepherd's work of provision, protection and guidance. To the exiled community those prophetic voices predict a second exodus in their exilic wilderness, a new covenant and a renewed community. These prophetic anticipations form the background for the ministry of the 'good shepherd' in the Gospels. How Jesus is represented in the Gospels and what he expected of his disciples emerge poignantly from this background. The disciples were sent as shepherds to feed his sheep. They were also sent out as sheep among wolves. They were called to lead God's people as pilgrim tent-dwellers, living on the margins of settled society, to their eternal home. If we are to understand the scope of these related traditions, we need first to engage the discipline of biblical theology.

### An exercise in biblical theology

The discipline of biblical theology represents an effort to describe the major themes and concerns of biblical authors at a level beyond a single text. In a sense, it is exegetical theology. We are giving the ancient authors 'voice' about the topics of greatest concern to them, to hear them, in so far as it is possible, as they were heard in their world, and within the context of their literary creations.

It might help to think of this book as a sequence of conversations. Imagine sitting with Ezekiel and trying to understand why he used the image of shepherd to describe good and bad leadership. In the course of the conversation we come to appreciate his historical setting and the people to whom he wrote. Naturally we take into consideration the overall structure of his book and where, how and why the particular issue of leadership comes to its surface.

The presence of other 'voices' complicates the conversation. Ezekiel reflects upon the ancient wilderness traditions of Moses and the royal traditions of David, but also upon the more recent prophetic indictments of Jeremiah. Listening to Ezekiel means listening through him (or with him) to these other voices. Ezekiel will in turn be quoted by later biblical writers who utilize his contributions to shepherd leadership for their own literary and theological purposes. Biblical theology places a premium on the discernible tone and texture of each of these individual voices. We discover a choral masterpiece, with common themes that are sung throughout at different times, in disparate ways, by numerous participants. The trained ear will recognize the theme whenever it appears, but will also discern the individuality and contribution of each voice.

Biblical theology engages an interest both in the individual emphases of various authors in their own settings, and in the common themes or traditions<sup>3</sup> that course through the Scriptures. In our case, we are tracing the development of a tradition – an evolving canonical conversation – about the topic of shepherd leadership. Any theme in the Bible will naturally interact with others. The challenge in a study like this is to contain the investigation. In one source, for example, shepherd imagery is embedded in royal traditions. In another it is attached to second exodus traditions. In the Gospels it may play a role in presenting Jesus as a new Moses, a new David, or both. It is important to ask why each author used the shepherd image and how it was related to these traditions, but we will constantly negotiate how much space to give to the answers. While this may create some frustration, to treat our topic as though it were unrelated to these others would do injustice to the developing conversation.

Imagine the great themes of the Bible as rivers, many of which begin in the lofty heights of the Pentateuch. A particular river sometimes comes into full view as rushing rapids. At other times it moves in secret through subterranean passages. Wherever the water flows there is movement and sound, but at the more remote depths it requires keener powers of observation and better tools to locate it. The evidence of a given river at regular intervals 'above ground' makes the discovery of the intervening segments below more likely. The thesis of this present work is that a discernible pastoral 'stream of tradition' flows through Scripture. This tradition provides a broader context for understanding the nature of leaders in the covenant community, and for understanding the nature of that community as the flock of the divine Shepherd.

Most of the Bible's pastoral imagery is embedded in two traditions. These might be thought of as the springs or fountainheads of the watercourses we will trace. The first is the exodus/wilderness complex. Looking back on this time in Israel's history, inspired writers saw YHWH<sup>4</sup> revealing himself as protector, provider and guide, the ultimate Shepherd of his flock. In this setting Moses functioned as God's undershepherd. When Israel subsequently requests a king,

<sup>3</sup> 'Tradition' is a better term than 'theme' for this kind of inquiry because it appreciates, alongside the literary interest, a sense of history. We are investigating a way of reflecting about leadership and community life that took place at key moments in the history of salvation. The pastoral theology that evolves is the dynamic product of both the history and the reflection.

<sup>4</sup> YHWH (pronounced 'Yahweh') is a transliteration of the consonants used in the divine name.

another major tradition emerges that is associated with the shepherd king David and his dynasty. Many messianic promises are situated in this latter stream. These two traditions provide prototypes for the leaders who follow.<sup>5</sup> Moses and David are prototypical leaders. More importantly, YHWH reveals himself as the true Shepherd Ruler of Israel.

After investigating these two springs, we will follow the river where it leads.<sup>6</sup> Four prophets in the Old Testament make sustained use of pastoral imagery: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah. Each in his own way recalls the exodus and/or wilderness. Each reflects on the Davidic covenant, emphasizing pastoral motifs in the process. In turn, each propels the river forward, adding new energy and dimensions to the images, creating expectation for a second exodus and a unique shepherd king.

The next section traces the river through the four Gospels, again a mix of ancient deposits with new emphases and revelations. Each in their own way, the Gospels depict a shepherd who has come to lead God's flock in the promised new kingdom. Mark focuses on the shepherd of the second exodus. Matthew reveals the compassionate Davidic shepherd. Luke presents the seeking and saving shepherd. John describes the self-sacrificing shepherd.

The final two chapters consider the reflections of Peter in his first epistle and of John in the book of Revelation. Although one might have assumed that this 'pastoral theology' would lead us to the 'pastoral epistles',<sup>7</sup> it takes us, instead, to these eschatological letters that emphasize the marginalization of the community. In these two books Christians are understood still to be in exile. Here leaders are challenged to follow the divine Shepherd who became their sacrificial lamb. In Revelation it becomes clear that following the Shepherd Lamb entails dying for him.

This investigation is balanced in some intentional ways. It gives proportionate weight to both Testaments as it searches for continuity among these themes. What is foundational is valued, as well as what is cumulative. Our approach also balances interest in both cultural

<sup>5</sup> The notion of prototypes is discussed in the first introductory chapter. This bears certain similarities to the theological category of typology.

<sup>6</sup> The Bible has much more to say about Moses and the wilderness or David and the Messiah than we will discuss. Our interest will rest upon those passages where shepherd imagery is significant.

<sup>7</sup> Although Paul is quite 'pastoral' in his ministry, engages second exodus theology at times (W. D. Davies 1997) and refers to church leaders as shepherds occasionally, pastoral imagery is not a central, organizing rubric in the Pauline corpus.



background and literary context. Research on shepherd passages has often been focused exclusively on pastoral realities *or* on textual traditions (including extrabiblical parallels). Good biblical theology, like good exegesis, respects context – Old and New, cultural and literary – when attempting to discern meaning.

The convergence of interests in both the natural and textual worlds is necessary especially when the topic is a metaphor. Figures of speech typically generate their force and meaning through culturally informed associations. For this reason I provide an introductory chapter on the work of shepherds before investigating any texts. Yet metaphors are figures of *speech*, and they must be analysed as strategic rhetorical devices. Consequently, a separate introductory chapter surveys the use of pastoral language for shepherd rulers in extrabiblical texts. This provides background for understanding how such imagery was used in official documents throughout the ancient world.

### Critical paths for reading

This book will likely appeal to two different kinds of readers. Consequently two 'critical paths' should be considered. The *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series will obviously engage those interested in biblical theology as an academic discipline. For these readers everything is included. There are three introductory chapters for conceptual, cultural and extrabiblical backgrounds, two foundational chapters on biblical 'prototypes' and ten chapters devoted to the contributions of different biblical authors. Interaction with biblical terminology is in the original languages when appropriate and, with secondary sources, noted throughout. All of the chapters have an ample supply of cross references and footnotes so that the 'academic' reader can follow comments to their sources for further research.

A second kind of reader is the thoughtful pastor who wants to consider biblical perspectives on leadership. For many, pastoral ministry involves an almost constant identity crisis. The following survey provides some historical and theological anchors that should be helpful. Several pastors read through the manuscript and made important suggestions to enhance its usefulness. They also recommend a strategy for their peers. First of all, decide what level of interest you have regarding the introductory chapters. This background is appropriate for the ensuing discussion, but you may not

have sufficient interest in it, at least not at the beginning. Perhaps these chapters can be skimmed for the purpose of getting started with the biblical passages as soon as possible. When you do move into these passages you will still find dense prose with italicized original language words, and footnotes with references to collateral research. Throughout the book you may need to skim at times with an eye towards the main points. Consider especially the introductions and concluding summary statements in each chapter, and hang on till the end. Those who have 'stuck with it' say that it is worth the effort of getting acquainted with these various biblical sources. One described its cumulative effect as being like a tide. Each wave will move you a little, and by the end you will find yourself surprisingly far up the shore.

In light of the current interest in leadership, and in the face of our culture's tendency to package concepts in tidy boxes, one might expect this to be a contribution to a new model called 'shepherd leadership'. Principles will surface in this study, and these will be highlighted in the 'Concluding observations and reflections'. However, pastors who have read this work have described a different benefit, a more subtle but profound change in their sense of *identity*. This might be the product of a fresh connection to the historic plan of God with his people. It might be a sense of awe at being called to serve behind the Great Shepherd. For some it is a renewed regard for their vocation as a robust and significant calling. The shepherd image is about perspective as much as praxis. These are the kinds of effects (and affects) a metaphor should have. Rather than providing twelve 'steps' to shepherd leadership, here are twelve successive invitations to reconsider leadership from within the prism of pastoral imagery. The mounting force of the metaphor should make some lasting impressions.