

MEDITATION ON LOST SHEEP

Psalm 119:176

I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

In this verse, the Psalmist compares himself to a lost sheep and this imagery is so prevalent in God's word, it is certainly worthy of meditation. Can we learn by examining the behavior of sheep the reasons we sometimes go astray?

Sheep have unique social behavior with a strong flocking instinct. Even when grazing, they will constantly monitor each other and tend to stay in close proximity. They seem to be aware of their defenseless condition and find security in numbers. So, what causes a sheep to go astray?

On occasion a particular sheep may become restless and discontented. It will seek greener pasture and often wander into brambles, becoming entangled. Sometimes the lure of a more luscious patch of grass will result in a treacherous fall; or, that enticing patch of green may, in reality, contain life-threatening poisonous plants. A lone sheep is in great danger. God's people must also guard against a restless, discontented spirit. We may become weary in warfare, tired of the testing, and disenchanted with the drudgery. Like that restless sheep, we may leave our place of protection and wander into danger.

Sheep also seek comfort. When a sheep is free from fear and tension and hunger, it may look for a comfortable, hallowed-out spot in which to lie down. Danger lurks there however, particularly if the sheep is well-fed because it can easily become "cast." A cast sheep is one that has turned over on its back and cannot right itself. God's people are too comfortable and as statistics show, most are over-fed. We enjoy our comfort and tend to avoid any stress-producing situation. We easily become complacent and even slothful, willfully neglecting the brethren and even breaking communion with our God. Seeking our own comfort puts us in grave danger.

Another reason for sheep to go astray is told us in **Jeremiah 50:6**

My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray,
A shepherd for hire, lacking the heart of a true shepherd, will have weak, frail and neglected sheep. A vulnerable sheep is soon a dead sheep. God's people can easily be led astray by false shepherds. That is why we are cautioned to "try the spirits," especially in these latter days. So many sheep are this day in danger, following a false shepherd.

A stubborn sheep, not willing to be rescued, will die; but the Psalmist desires life. He recognizes the perils he faces and understands his own inability to find his way back. He knows, as does that lost sheep, that his only hope of rescue lies with the true Shepherd; the one who seeks and saves that which is lost.