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PEN PORTRAITS FROM OLD RECORDS

W. WILCOX

3. Keepers of the Sheep

1 Chron. 4: 39, 41

Further names are given and then a short break is made in the lists, some being described especially because of what they did or for the prowess shown before their enemies. Here we have a group of men who were called princes among their families, evidently men who were acknowledged as leaders because of their abilities and accomplishments.

They are described as men who were—

1. *Foragers for Pasture.* The care they exercised over their flocks was manifested in the way they sought for new pastures where they might feed them.

In their search for such they come to the entrance of Gedor, which was a town in the extreme south-east of Judah in the hilly country. The name means 'fortified', and its position would give it some importance as it stood as one of the guardian posts on the southern boundary of the land. It combined strength with a provision of pasture in the valley at its entrance.

Every true shepherd will seek for the right place in which to feed his flocks. But in finding their pasture he must not neglect their protection, for the sheep may be so occupied with satisfying their hunger among the rich pastures and be totally unconcerned at the near-by lurking danger. He must feed them with the bread of life, but likewise must 'watch for their souls'! There are marauders near-by waiting to snatch away from the flock unwary souls. Heretical bodies are subtle and eager, ever ready to molest and harry the true sheep of the pasture, but the shepherd provides the food and protects the flock.

These men came to the east side of the valley, i.e., towards the rising sun, to that part where its beneficent rays would first penetrate and its pleasing warmth be first felt. Rising early and combining the sweet influences of the Spirit's heart, warming with the feeding upon the precious pastures of the Word of God, the believer will grow both 'in grace and in the knowledge of the truth'.

The grace without the knowledge may be sweet but shallow, while the knowledge without the grace may be deep but harsh. Let the two commingle and combine and there will be the man of maturity, the man of God who, with sweetness and wisdom will handle those for whom he cares to their great advantage. Here will be manifest the true heart of pastor, eager to care for, and apt to teach the members of his flock.

2. *Finders of Pasture. v. 40.* These shepherds were not content only to seek pasture for their sheep; they were not satisfied until they had found pasture of the right kind and quality. It was 'fat' and 'good' 'and the land was wide and quiet and peaceful'.

Herein lies a parable, the meaning of which is not difficult to find. The Christian in the exercise of his pastoral care must find that good and nourishing food which is able to build up the saints and cause them to grow. This good food should be found over an extensive area of God's Word and not confined to the narrow limits of specially favoured portions or doctrines. This fodder should be found in quiet and peaceable areas where there is freedom from the disturbing influences of wordy controversies, of doubtful interpretations and of heretical doctrines.

The Word is good and extensive, yea, as the Lord God says to His people, 'I will feed them with good pasture' (Ezek. 34:14). So the people of God will be fed today as the rich and satisfying food of the Word is spread before them by those who minister to them. Let there be the substantial food that builds healthy and strong men of God, let there be appetizing portions which wet the appetite for more, but let it ever be uncontaminated by the theories of the would-be wise men who, exalting human wisdom at the expense of spiritual knowledge, confuse the simple and prove themselves to be false leaders and indifferent shepherds.

3. *Fighters for Pasture. v. 41.* These areas had not always been peaceable. These men, whose names were recorded had come in the days of Hezekiah, had fought against and destroyed the former inhabitants and had occupied that district 'because there was pasture there for their flocks'.

The pastor will ever find that he cannot find the right pasture for his flock without effort on his part. He may have to fight

many a foe which would seek to occupy his time, dispose of his talents and absorb his powers to such an extent that he would only be able to provide indifferent pastures and unquiet fields in which to feed the flock. He will need to fight desperately to possess himself of the pastures which have become the habitation of the destructive critic, the worldly wise, and the ritualistic priest. But in possessing himself of such areas he will find the necessity of utterly destroying the 'tents and habitations' of the former inhabitants. (J. N. D's New Translation). No compromise can be made with those evil and unspiritual shepherds; no portion of the Amalekites' regalia or utensils can be employed by the true shepherd; he can but destroy them, for, to use a different metaphor, the weapons of his warfare are not carnal. Hence the exhortations so frequently given in the Pastoral Epistles urging diligence, the giving heed to sound doctrine, and the duty of becoming workmen that need not to be shamed, etc.

Earnest endeavour is called for, and diligent search must be made to possess one's self of those areas in which the 'good and fat' pastures may become the feeding-grounds of the sheep. Another thing may be noted. These shepherds did not merely bring their sheep to this region of good pasture, but, having overcome the former occupants of this city and valley, they took up their abode there, thus there was a continuity about their pasturing of their flocks.

This is a needed lesson for today. He who would feed his flocks must learn to dwell in the valley of the pastures so that those whom he would tend may continue to be fed upon that which is 'fat and good'. There is a tendency to be spasmodic in our efforts in this matter, at times providing 'fat' pasture, and at other times leaving the flock in the scant pastures of the semi-desert areas.

Here the position varies somewhat from the pictorial parable for the spiritual shepherd will need himself to feed up on the rich pastures of the Word ere he can bring the sheep to feed upon them too. It is this constant dwelling in, feeding upon, and ruminating over the precious truths of the Scriptures that will enable the spiritual pastor to feed those committed to his care.