

September 4, 2016

Who is Your God?

"If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you." Genesis 15:26

The people of Israel were, as Scripture often describes them, a stiff-necked and rebellious people. No matter how well God provided for them they still rejected his direction. Among the most telling of these events is, I think, their rebellion at Marah. God has crushed the Egyptians through ten horrifying plagues and freed his people from years of slavery. Under the leadership of Moses they have journeyed to the Red Sea where in a mighty display of his power, God obliterates the Egyptian army.

Three days after that great victory they begin to grumble and complain because they have no water. When they arrive at the springs at Marah they find the water bitter and probably poisonous. Through God's direction Moses throws a piece of wood into the water and it is miraculously purified, and then God warns his people to listen and pay attention to his commands and directions because he is Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals.

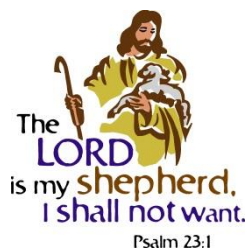


Over and over again throughout their history the people of Israel rejected God and rebelled against his commandments, and over and over again God would forgive them and offer them healing.

Another such event finds Israel heading toward their final crossing into Canaan, the promised land. They become impatient and frustrated and begin to grumble and complain about everything including the food that God has provided them every day for forty years. God's response is to send poisonous snakes among them and many are bitten and die. When they cry out to Moses God commands him to hang a bronze snake on a pole and to carry it through the camp. Anyone who looks at the snake is healed because God is the God who heals.

Like the Israelites, you and I often reject God and rebel against his direction and like them we suffer for our disobedience. The God who healed Israel so often is still the God who heals us when we turn to him; he is still our Jehovah Rapha.

In John 10:1-18 Jesus tells his disciples that he is "*...the good shepherd...*" The idea that God, and his Son, are our shepherds is a common metaphor in Scripture. In one of the most well known passages in the Bible, David writes, "*The Lord is my Shepherd...*" (Psalm 23) In Hebrew the beginning of this psalm is Jehovah Rohi, God is my shepherd.



To the Jewish people who originally received these writings the references to a "good shepherd" called up a common scene with which they could easily identify. It's a lot harder for us to draw on the same image since most of us have little or no experience with shepherds or sheep. In that time however, shepherds were a common sight in every community. Most people kept a few sheep to use for clothing and food and many of God's greatest leaders, including David and Moses, had experience as shepherds. In his book, **They Smell Like Sheep**, Dr.

Lynn Anderson describes how good shepherds functioned in those times and even in some places still do today.

Watching from a hillside in Israel early one morning, Anderson observes a number of young shepherds heading out of a small community leading a large flock of sheep. As they came to places where the trail they followed divided one of the shepherds would head off in a new direction and as they did so they would sound a unique call. As soon as their sheep heard that call they would separate from the rest of the flock and follow their shepherd up the trail. No yelling, no barking dogs, just sheep following their shepherd.

That kind of relationship is exactly what God has always wanted with his people. He longed for Israel to follow him and to keep his commandments. He longed to be their shepherd and so often they rejected him. In the same way Jesus wants to be our "good shepherd"; he wants us to know him so well that we would follow him wherever he leads. He wants to be our Jehovah Rohi, our "good shepherd" and he wants to be Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals us.