

Sheep, Fish, Grass, Flowers and Waters

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In the symbolic and figurative language of the Bible, words like sheep, fish, grass, flowers, and waters are used as a reference to characteristics found in the human race. Therefore, when the word “sheep” is used in a prophecy or parable, it can refer to the human trait of “following a crowd” just as sheep follow a shepherd. This can be seen when people follow the latest fashions and societal trends, or believe the claims of “authorities” on religious, political, scientific, medical, and self-help matters. If the information coming from these authorities is incorrect, or misleading, it can cause damage to everyone who follows it. The next scripture refers to mankind being misled due to the influence of an unseen “religious leader” (Jn. 8:42-44; Rev. 12:9),

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way... (Isa.53:6a; cf. Ps. 119:176; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise stated).

On the other hand, the characteristic of sheep following a shepherd can be applied positively when people emulate the example of a good leader,

I (Christ) am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11; cf. 10:12, 14; Ed. note in parenthesis).

With this in mind, when the word “sheep” is used in prophecies, parables, or metaphorically, it is often referring to people in either a positive or negative sense. The following scripture describes God’s punishment of ancient Israel due to their rebellious conduct,

You have given us up like sheep intended for food, and have scattered us among the nations (Ps. 44:11; cf. 44:22; 74:1; emphasis added).

In a prophecy about Christ’s coming to earth as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, he is compared to a sheep because he did not revile his accusers when he was brought before the Sanhedrin,

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and **as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth** (Isa. 53:7; cf. Mt. 26:59-63; emphasis added).

God states that a time will come when all sheep are judged based on their treatment of each other. Obviously, this is not speaking about literal sheep. Instead, it is a prophecy foretelling the future judgment of mankind based on how they treated one another during their lifetime,

And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, **I shall judge between sheep and sheep...** (Eze. 34:17a; emphasis added).

The next scripture describes sheep that are abusive to the extent that they scatter many who are then left unprotected. The scattered sheep are pictured as being saved by God, while the abusive sheep are judged,

Therefore thus says the Lord God to them: ‘Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns,

and scattered them abroad,²² therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I **will judge between sheep and sheep** (Eze. 34:20-22; emphasis added).

According to Jesus Christ, there are sheep that don't belong to him. Instead, they are of a different fold that eventually killed him (Jn. 8:37, 40). Therefore, Satan has his own flock and they do his bidding,

But you (Jewish religious leaders) do not believe, because **you are not my sheep** (Jn. 10:26; cf. Jn. 8:44; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Although the word "sheep" is often used metaphorically of mankind, it can be applied to angels who sin because Almighty God is not willing that any perish (2Pet. 3:9). Therefore, the next parable cannot exclude the possibility that the lost sheep is a reference to a "fallen angel",

So he (Christ) spoke this parable to them (Pharisees and scribes), saying: ⁴What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? (Lk. 15:3-4; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Just as sheep prefer to stay together in a flock and follow a shepherd, or leader, "fish" instinctively aggregate in a "school" for protection,

When schooling fish stop to feed, they break ranks and become shoals. Shoals are more vulnerable to predator attack (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shoaling_and_schooling).

In the sense that mankind prefers to aggregate and follow where the majority is going, for better or for worse, God applies the word "fish" or "fishes". The prophet Habakkuk compared mankind following the wrong direction with fish being caught in a net,

Why do You make men like fish of the sea, like creeping things that have no ruler over them? ¹⁵They take up all of them with a hook, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their dragnet ... (Hab. 1:14-15a; cf. Eccl. 9:12a; emphasis added).

The fishermen mentioned by Habakkuk were not satisfied with just one catch of fish. Instead, their goal was to continue slaying nations without pity. Therefore, the fishermen in this example represented the fallen host who deceive mankind (Rev. 12:9),

Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity? (Hab. 1:17).

The ancient nation of Israel is compared to a school of fish that has gone in the wrong direction. In order to correct the error of their ways, God prophesied that he would send many fishermen to gather them up,

Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says the Lord, and they shall fish them... (Jer. 16:16; Ed. note in parenthesis).

This prophecy in the book of Jeremiah foretold Christ's directive to his disciples who were to begin the process of teaching God's truth to many "fish",

And he said to them, 'Follow me, and **I will make you fishers of men.**' (Mt. 4:19; emphasis added)

Sadly today, many people use the symbol of a fish, "Ichthys", to identify themselves as

Christians when in reality it is a pagan fertility symbol,

Ichthys was the offspring of the ancient sea goddess Atargatis, and was known in various mythic systems as Tirgata, Aphrodite, Pelagia, or Delphine. The word also meant “womb” and “dolphin” in some languages. It was associated in these pagan worship systems with “The Great Mother” and “womb” and therefore a fertility symbol (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ichthys).

Just as there are good fisherman and bad fishermen, so there are good fish and bad fish. In the next prophecy, those in the fallen host are compared to fish caught up in their leader’s scales. God described their leader as both a sea monster, representing Satan, and the king of Egypt. Therefore, figurative language is being used because neither the king of Egypt or Satan is covered in fish scales,

Speak and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, O great monster (SHD 8577; dragon, sea or river monster, serpent; cf. Rev. 12:9) who lies in the midst of his rivers, who has said, ‘My river is my own; I have made it for myself (cf. Dan. 4:29-30).’ **4**But I (God) **will put hooks in your jaws, and cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales**; I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, and **all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales**. **5**I will leave you in the *wilderness* (another word associated with the realm of the fallen host), you and all the fish of your rivers; you shall fall on the open field; You shall not be picked up or gathered (cf. Isa. 14:19-20). I have given you as food to the beasts of the field and to the birds of the heavens (Eze. 29:3-5; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Jesus Christ performed two miracles in which five thousand and then four thousand people were fed. The five thousand were fed by five loaves of bread and two fish while the four thousand were fed by seven loaves and a few small fish (Mt. 14:17-19; 15:34-36). One of the lessons was to teach that Christ has been delegated by his heavenly Father to increase the number of fish so these fish can then feed others, “spiritually speaking”, by correctly teaching the truth that was provided by the “bread of life”, Jesus Christ (Jn. 6:48-50),

How then shall they call on Him (Almighty God) in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher (a fish chosen for this responsibility, *figuratively speaking*)? **15** And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!’ (Rom. 10:14-15; cf. Mt. 4:19; Ed. notes in parentheses)

This same scenario is pictured by God’s servant Job who knew that fish could symbolically represent mankind because he described some fish explaining that God creates and sustains all life forms,

But now ask the **beasts*, and they will teach you; and the ***birds of the air*, and they will tell you; **8** Or speak to the ****earth*, and it will teach you; and **the fish of the sea will explain to you**. **9** Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this, **10** In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? (Job 12:7-10; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added) (See studies: **Every Beast of the Field*; ***A Cage for very Unclean Bird*; and ****Two Earths*).

In addition to sheep and fish, mankind is sometimes compared to “grass”,

All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away (1Pet. 1:24; emphasis added).

With the exception of vegetarians and vegans, mankind eats animals that are sustained by the grass they eat. By extension then, those who eat animals are sustained by grass. Therefore, figuratively speaking, man is “grass” because he is tied intrinsically to it for his existence,

And I (God) **will send grass** in your fields for your livestock, **that you may eat** and be filled (Dt. 11:15; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Until the Industrial Revolution, mankind relied on animals for transportation, clothing, and farming. Therefore, mankind is connected to the grass which sustained these animals,

And Ahab had said to Obadiah, ‘Go into the land to all the springs of water and to all the brooks; **perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive**, so that we will not have to kill any livestock (1Kgs. 18:5; emphasis added).

God compared the teaching of His truth to mankind as rain showers falling upon the grass. Therefore, the word grass is used in this verse to represent people,

Let My teaching (doctrine) drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, **as the showers on the grass** (Dt. 32:2; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Mankind’s vulnerability is also compared to grass which is easily destroyed,

Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded; **they were as the grass of the field** ... (2Kgs. 19:26a; cf. Ps. 102:4; emphasis added).

As the primary evildoers are Satan and the fallen host (Eph. 6:12), who will also experience the same consequence of sin as disobedient people, they are compared to grass which is easily removed,

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. ²For **they shall soon be cut down like grass** and wither as the green herb (in a future judgment; cf. Rev. 8:7) (Ps. 37:1-2; cf. 97:7; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Therefore, when grass is used in a prophetic statement, the context must be examined to determine whether the grass is referring to mankind, or the fallen host. In the next scripture, the grass is totally removed. As the context is judgment in the spirit realm, this would apply to the fallen host (Rev. 8:1-2). Besides, God promised that mankind would not be completely removed in Matthew 24:22, so it can only apply to the fallen host,

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and **all grass was burned up** (Rev. 8:7; emphasis added).

Mankind’s ability to grow in large numbers, given the right set of circumstances, is compared to the abundance of grass upon the earth,

You shall also know that your descendants shall be many, and **your offspring like the grass of the earth** (Job 5:25; emphasis added).

Man’s mortality and relatively short life span is compared to grass,

As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field so he flourishes. ¹⁶For the wind passes over

it, and it is gone and its place remembers it no more (Ps. 103:15-16).

Grass lasts only a short time, and so is the case with flowers. Therefore, mankind is compared to flowers in God's symbolic and figurative language,

Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble (turmoil). ² He comes forth like a flower and fades away (Job 14:1-2a; cf. Ps. 103:15; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Whatever is deemed beautiful, or valuable according to the standards of this present age, will come to a quick end like a flower,

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower ... (Isa. 28:1-2a).

The grass withers, **the flower fades**, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass (Isa. 40:7; emphasis added).

The beauty of God's servants is not their outward appearance, that will fade and die like a flower, but in their attitudes and motives,

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day (i.e. growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ; cf. 2Pet. 3:18) (2Cor. 4:16; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Finally the word "water", and "waters", is used throughout God's word and, depending on the context, can refer to a group, a nation, or a company of nations in either the physical or spiritual realm. One of the reasons that "water" and "waters" is sometimes applied to physical and spiritual groups is because water symbolizes the spirit given by Almighty God to every created human and spirit being (Ps. 104:30). In contrast God's Holy Spirit, which is referred to as "living water", is given to those who seek to obey Him (Ac. 5:32),

He who believes in me (Christ), as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow **rivers of living water**. ³⁹ But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, (which) those who believed in him would receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn. 7:38-39; cf. Jn. 4:10-11; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

God compares the king of Assyria and his army to the waters of a strong river,

Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them (the nation of Judah) **the waters of the river, strong and mighty – the king of Assyria and all his glory**; he will go up over all his channels and go over his banks. ⁸ He will pass through Judah, he will overflow and pass over; he will reach up to the neck... (Isa. 8:7-8a; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

In the context of God judging the nations, He compares them to the rushing of many waters,

The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters; but God will rebuke them and they will flee far away, and be chased like the chaff of the mountains before the wind, like a rolling thing before the whirlwind (Isa. 17:13; emphasis added).

The nations of Judah and Israel are compared to waters which swear by the name of the Lord,

Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the

waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness (Isa. 48:1; KJV).

King David used the word “waters” to describe foreign nations, which could also include nations in the realm of the fallen host that human beings have to contend with (Eph. 6:12),

Stretch out Your hand from above; rescue me and **deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of foreigners** (Ps. 144:7; emphasis added).

The king and army of Egypt is compared to the waters of a flood as they create havoc during a period of God’s judgment,

Who is coming up like a flood, whose waters move like the rivers? ⁸**Egypt rises up like a flood, and its waters move like rivers**; and he (king of Egypt) says, ‘I will go up and cover the earth; I will destroy the city and its inhabitants.’ (Jer. 46:7-8; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

The army of the Philistines is also compared to the waters of a flood as they cause destruction,

Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, waters rise out of the north (location of the Philistines; cf. vs 1), and shall be an overflowing flood; they shall overflow the land and all that is in it, the city and those who dwell within; then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail (Jer. 47:2; Ed. note in parenthesis).

From these examples, it can be concluded that the flood of water that Satan “spews out of his mouth” represents the action of an army against God’s obedient servants who are pictured as a “woman”, which is a symbol representing God’s true church. God’s people are then protected when the earth opens its mouth and swallows up the flood. Therefore, God is using figurative language to describe attacks by the fallen host against those who are keeping the commandments of God (Rev. 12:17),

So the serpent (Satan; cf. Rev. 12:9) spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon spewed out of his mouth (Rev. 12:15-16; Ed. note in parenthesis).

When God’s people are in “deep waters”, more than likely they are under attack from the nations of the fallen host as King David acknowledged in the next scripture,

Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink; let me be delivered from those who hate me, and **out of the deep waters** (Ps. 69:14; cf. Rev. 12:15-16; emphasis added).

The many nations that benefited from trade and commerce with Babylon are described as waters, and in the next section of scripture God’s judgment is against Babylon that dwells by these many nations,

Set up the standard on the walls of Babylon; make the guard strong, set up the watchman, prepare the ambushes. For the Lord has both devised and done what He spoke against the inhabitants of Babylon. ¹³**O you who dwell by many waters**, abundant in treasures, your end has come; the measure of your covetousness (Jer. 51:12-13; emphasis added).

In a final fulfillment of Babylon’s judgment, the nations that have benefited from their association with the Babylonian system are pictured as “waters”,

And he (an angel of God) said to me (John), '**the waters which you saw** (in vision), where the harlots (symbol of an apostate system), are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (Rev. 17:15; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

These waters will be removed by God, and replaced by waters that are healed through His corrective punishment (Eze. 47:9). The time frame is at the end of Christ's millennial rule on earth,

Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary (Almighty God's throne; cf. Rev. 22:1-2). Their fruit will be food, and their leaves for medicine (Eze. 47:12; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Once this symbolic language is understood, other scriptures take on a new meaning. For example, Christ's sacrifice that benefited all nations in both the physical and spiritual realm is foreshadowed by *the tree* (a symbol representing a spirit-being; cf. Eze. 31:16-18) that was cast "into the waters" (figuratively speaking of death by the nations of the fallen host) making them sweet (in other words; forgiven and reconciled to Almighty God),

So he (Moses) cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree; and when he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet... (Ex. 15:25a; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The creation account in Genesis also takes on a different perspective, especially if the word "waters" represents nations,

The voice of the Lord is over the waters (cf. Gen. 1:2); the God of glory thunders; the Lord is over many waters (nations) (Ps. 29:3; cf. Dan. 12:6-7; Jn. 6:19; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Some of the waters, or nations, that the Lord is "over" are described elsewhere in scripture as being above the heavens; in which case they would refer to nations in the spirit realm that are in close proximity to Almighty God,

Praise Him, you heavens, and **you waters above the heavens!**⁵ Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created (Ps. 148:4-5; emphasis added).

The account of creation in Genesis appears to show God separating the waters, or nations in the spirit realm. Some were under the firmament while others were above it. This separation may have followed the rebellion of Satan and the fallen host (Isa. 14:12-15; Eze. 28:14-16),

Then God said, 'Let there be a firmament (expanse) in the midst of the waters (nations), and let it divide the waters from the waters.'⁷ thus **God** made the firmament, and **divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament**, and it was so (Gen. 1:6-7; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

When God's servants diligently apply themselves to doing God's work (cf. Lk. 2:49b; Jn. 9:4), they are figuratively casting bread (God's word) upon the waters (nations),

Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it (i.e. there will be a return) after many days (Eccl. 11:1; Ed. note in parenthesis).

In conclusion, many scriptures take on a new and more accurate meaning when God's symbolic and figurative language is better understood.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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