

Vicarious Sacrifice: Isa 53: The Sheep & the Shepherd: Sheep Are Prone to Wander: Robert Burns: “Gang aft agley,” Sheep “Often go astray”; Sheep Respond Only to the Voice of Their Shepherd; Majority of the Lord’s Sheep Have Gone Astray into Heresy, Apostasy, & Blasphemy

Verse 6: The Sheep and Shepherd

Isaiah 53:6 - All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. (NASB)

1. Isaiah begins this verse with an indictment of the entire human race: “All of us” confirms the universality of sin.
2. Romans 5:12 clearly reveals that “all (of us) sinned when Adam sinned.” This refers to the imputation of Adam’s sin to our genetically formed sin natures at physical birth.
3. Isaiah illustrates our fallen condition in what should be considered a demeaning way: “like sheep have gone astray.”
4. The word astray is the Qal perfect of the verb תַּעֲרָה (*ta’ah*): “to wander about.” The application in this context is being misled in a moral or religious sense.
5. When anyone rejects the existence of God, or the salvation work of Christ, or the leadership graciously provided by the completed canon of Scripture, then he functions as a sheep: intoxicated by ignorance, he wanders about without any internal restraints regarding his decision-making or behavior.
6. The unbeliever or benighted believer wanders about because he does not have the soul inventory to know better. Instead he is led by the trends of his sin nature.
7. Unbelievers are completely aware of the biblical claim that God exists and His offer of salvation. We know this because they are not shy to announce their rejection of both.
8. Their arrogant refutation of God and Christ results in the justice of God allowing their free will to choose the perilous course of self-destruction:

Romans 1:19 - that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

v. 20 - For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (NASB)
9. Every one of us is born without excuse in the sense that we are condemned at birth and with no personal means of rectifying the situation.
10. We are actually born goats, but become sheep through faith alone in Christ alone. Nevertheless, we remain in status-quo helplessness minus the leadership of a shepherd.
11. Our Shepherd is Jesus Christ Who leads us by His voice, i.e., revelation contained in the Bible. Adherence to His mandates and divine guidance allows us to be productive.

12. Refusal to seek this guidance or disinterest in applying its principles causes Christian sheep to *Gang aft agley*: “often go astray,” as Bobby Burns reports in his poem, “To a Mouse.”¹
13. So since we are sheep that are preprogrammed from birth to “go astray,” it behooves us to do some research about who we actually are. First we note our species:

Sheep, genus *Ovis*.² **Sheep are basically timid animals who tend to graze in flocks and are almost totally lacking in protection from predators.**

Sheep were first domesticated from wild species of sheep at least 5000 BC, and their remains have been found at numerous sites of early human habitation in the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia. Domesticated sheep are raised for their fleece (wool), for milk, and for meat. The flesh of mature sheep is called mutton; that of immature animals is called lamb. There were estimated to be more than 1,000,000,000 sheep in the world in the late 20th century.³
14. There are more people classified as Christians than there are sheep, but those that are positive to the only resource for executing the Christian way of life is a precious few.
15. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of assumed Christians are self-benighted sheep that have gone astray en masse into heresy, apostasy, or blasphemy (to reject, renounce, or revile).
16. This trend needs to be examined so that we may have guidelines to recognize when we might be straying from the flock.
17. In R. T. Kendall’s book *Why Jesus Died*, he has a subchapter he titled “Characteristics of Sheep.” He relates their behavior patterns as they were revealed to him by Douglas MacMillan, a shepherd in the highlands of Scotland before he became a minister.
18. We will note the observations of Scottish shepherd MacMillan and then take up those of Shepherd-in-Chief Jesus Christ.

¹ “The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men / Gang aft agley, / An’ lea’e us naught but grief an’ pain, / For promised joy!” (Burns, “To a Mouse,” lines 39–42.)

² “*Ōvis*, a sheep (1) wool (2) as a term of reproach, *simpleton*, *foolish fellow*,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “*ōvis*.”

³ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. (2010), s.v. “sheep.”