

2007

Review: Shepherds after my own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible

Donald L. Fowler

Liberty University, dfowler@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs

 Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Epistemology Commons](#), [Esthetics Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Other Philosophy Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Fowler, Donald L., "Review: Shepherds after my own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible" (2007). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 88.

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/sor_fac_pubs/88

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Religion at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

(Some helpful popular evangelical authors such as Alcorn are omitted, as are authors with a prophetic edge, such as Sider.)

Powell meets his professed goal, namely, the production of "a guide to biblical stewardship" (p. ix). The result is an important text worthy of widespread use.

Jason Hood
Generous Giving, Inc., Chattanooga, TN

Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible. By Timothy S. Laniak. New Studies in Biblical Theology, 20. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006, 313 pp., \$24.00 paper.

In this volume, Timothy Laniak has attempted to provide an exhaustive study of the shepherd metaphor in the Bible. He has also given a helpful overview of the metaphor in the ancient Near Eastern world. The present volume is largely an overview of the texts rather than a careful exegesis of pertinent passages, a feature that is both the strength of the book as well as its weakness (as is the case with any survey). As a survey the book provides an impressive overview of a very important and often misunderstood biblical metaphor. The author's ability to do cross-disciplinary work is both unusual and admirable given the complexities of biblical studies today.

The book is, in my opinion, a must-read for both ministers and scholars because it locates the metaphor in its original context (kingship) and, inferentially, discredits popular views of the metaphor. A single book study of a metaphor of this magnitude is likely to generate criticism from those who have specialized in the various biblical disciplines. Laniak has correctly identified the essence of the metaphor in this statement: "Just rule, military protection, abundant provision: these are the shepherd ruler's traditional responsibilities" (p. 64). At first glance, it would seem very strange to associate militarism with the shepherd metaphor, but militarism is a common theme in many of the shepherd contexts, whether Mesopotamian, Egyptian, or the Bible. There are other unusual associations as well such as "healing" (p. 81) and "law-giving" (p. 83), to name a few. These various activities find their context not primarily in the metaphor of animal husbandry but in the meaning of the metaphor—namely, kingship. Take, for example, his treatment of Psalm 23: "While shepherd/sheep imagery may fade towards the end of the psalm, it still provides a comprehensive rubric for this poetic reflection on God's presence in the life of an individual in his 'flock'" (p. 112). In fact, scholars have struggled for years with the jarring shift from the shepherd imagery to a military context and have often suggested that the Psalm is a composite of two or three different sources. In fact, the shift is only "jarring" if the shepherd imagery (i.e. the animal world) is the organizing principle rather than the object of the imagery, which is kingship. Laniak consistently animates the imagery, and thus, in the case of Psalm 23, the individual components of the imagery (rod, staff, green pastures) are explained in light of the animal world rather than explaining the psalm in light of the text's goal of glorifying God for his providing and protecting activities (probably celebrating his deliverance in the wilderness as in Pamela Milne, "Psalm 23: Echoes of the Exodus," *SR* 4 [1974–75] 237–47).

This is, I think, one of Laniak's most difficult tasks in explaining this metaphor. How much of the individual components of the metaphor should be "animated" rather than the central "theme" of the metaphor, which is clearly kingship? Take, for example, an inscription from the Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I (c. 1245–1208 BC): "The king (who is) the choice of the god Enlil, the one who shepherds his land in green pastures with his beneficent staff, foremost purification priest, designate of the god An, the

one who with his *fierce* (emphasis his) valor subdued princes (and) all kings, faithful shepherd, desired of the god Ea, the one who has established in victory his names over the four quarters, exalted priest, loved one of the god Sin, the one who properly administers peoples and habitations with his just scepter" (Albert K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, Vol. 1 [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1972] 118).

This royal inscription shares much of the language and themes of Psalm 23, yet the inscription is not dominated by its components (shepherds in green pastures) but by the central theme of the celebration of Tukulti-Ninurta's kingship. Laniak follows the majority of interpreters who consistently animate the components. There are passages such as Ezekiel 34 where the components are clearly to be animated but the issue of animating the components as an organizing principle remains problematic. In John 10, for example, should the components (wolf, hireling, etc.) be emphasized rather than the royal, messianic context? Surely the Palestinian wolf, a solitary animal weighing about twenty pounds and scarce in NT times, would hardly have occasioned the flight of any shepherd. Indeed, the narrative suggests that his audience heard him in royal/messianic terms when several months later (but in the same context) they asked him, "How long will you keep is in suspense? If you are the Christ (Messiah), tell us plainly" (John 10:24).

This problem of how to interpret the metaphor continues to present a challenge to interpreters. Another comment needs to be made in that those who are looking for information about "leadership in the Bible" will be surprised to find only several pages at the end of the book actually interact with that subject. The book seemed to come to a sudden end, and many readers will want more help in this area. Perhaps Laniak could write a companion volume and flesh out this "practical" area in more detail. He also provides a helpful translation of the various titles and epithets as listed in M.-J. Seux's *Epithetes royales akkadiennes et sumeriennes* but surprisingly omits the important volume by Knut Leonard Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta*. He has an excellent bibliography that will serve readers and researchers well.

The book is published in the series *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (ed. D. A. Carson). This series focuses on three goals: (1) biblical theology; (2) exposition of a biblical book or corpus; (3) "the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora" (p. 11). The goal of books in this series, consequently, is to read the Bible as a unit (Biblical theology) and to avoid the sometimes "atomistic" tendencies of other methodologies. To be successful in such a broad task requires exceptional skill. Laniak has clearly demonstrated these skills, and the main purpose of this review is to affirm his success and to encourage others to read and enjoy the book.

Donald Fowler
Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary. By C. John Collins. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006, 318 pp., \$18.00.

Given the ever-narrowing specialization in biblical studies and the complementary narrowing of focus we see in Bible commentaries, this work stands out as an experiment in integration that reflects the broad educational background and interests of its author. Collins holds advanced degrees in science and in theology that couple with his experience as an engineer, pastor, scholar, and seminary teacher. This unique blend shapes both the distinctiveness of his method and the manner of his presentation.

The commentary springs from the evangelical assumption that God has planted a theological message within the pages of the Bible that we may uncover through the careful process of exegesis. Thus Collins's goal for the early chapters of Genesis is to