

Shepherd's spirit

And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.

Numbers 27:15-17

This request by Moses was his response to the LORD's direction to climb mount Abarim and view the promised land, in preparation for his death, reminding him that this was the consequence of his own rebellion at the water of Meribah in response to the murmuring of the people. After forty years of dealing with the stubbornness of the people, Moses understood that the "spirits of all flesh" were rebellious, and they would continue to need leadership to direct them to obey the LORD. Even though the previous generation, which had refused to go in and take the land at the outset, was now deceased, as God had promised according to their request to die in the wilderness, Moses knew that the next generation would not necessarily learn from their parents' mistakes, but would be in danger of similar attitudes and behavior. The LORD answered Moses' request in this same account, directing him to ordain Joshua in the sight of all the people to be the new leader. As He gives Moses the order, He refers to Joshua as "a man in whom is the spirit." We have no clear indication of the exact meaning of "the spirit" here, but if not the Spirit of God, it may at least indicate the spirit of a shepherd's leadership.

Moses' description of the Israelites without a leader, *as sheep which have no shepherd*, becomes a theme throughout their history. When Micaiah predicted the death of Ahab, he described the resulting armies of Israel as *sheep that have no shepherd (II Chronicles 18:16)*. When the LORD through Ezekiel condemned the derelict leaders of captive Israel, the people are described similarly: *they were scattered, because there is no shepherd (Ezekiel 34:5)*. Yet the LORD promised in that same chapter to seek, save, and gather His flock, and to set up one shepherd over them, according to His covenant with David (Ezekiel 34:20-24). Zechariah also applies similar imagery to the exiles (Zechariah 10:2-3). It is not surprising then that the Good Shepherd of Israel viewed the multitudes similarly: *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36)*. Just after this in Matthew's account, Jesus ordained the apostles to expand His ministry *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6)*.

May all who follow the Shepherd understand and cultivate that spirit, that we would have compassion on the multitudes, and desire that lost people, now either Israelite or Gentile, would seek and be gathered unto Him, *that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 13:20-21)*.