

Jeremiah 50:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace.

Analysis

My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace. This verse employs the shepherd-sheep metaphor central to biblical ecclesiology. The phrase "lost sheep" anticipates Jesus' self-identification as the Good Shepherd seeking the lost (John 10:11-16; Luke 15:3-7). The problem isn't the sheep's nature but failed shepherds—false leaders who led the flock astray rather than toward proper pasture.

The reference to "mountains" and "from mountain to hill" alludes to Canaanite high places where idolatry flourished (1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10). Corrupt shepherds (kings, priests, prophets) led God's people into syncretistic worship combining Yahwism with Baal worship. The result: "they have forgotten their restingplace"—losing sight of God Himself as their true rest and security (Psalm 23:1-3; Matthew 11:28-30).

Theologically, this verse teaches:

1. Spiritual leaders bear profound responsibility for those entrusted to them (Ezekiel 34:1-10; James 3:1)

2. false teaching destroys by leading away from God, not merely by intellectual error
3. idolatry consists fundamentally of seeking rest/security in created things rather than the Creator
4. God's people become vulnerable when leaders fail.

Christ emerges as the faithful Shepherd whose leadership rectifies all previous failures (1 Peter 2:25; 5:4).

Historical Context

Judah's final kings (Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah) exemplified failed shepherding through injustice, idolatry, and political folly leading to national destruction. The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah all employ the shepherd metaphor to critique failed leadership and promise divine intervention (Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11).

"High places" (bamot) were local shrines where worship often blended Yahwism with Canaanite religion. Though Josiah's reforms (640-609 BCE) temporarily eliminated these sites (2 Kings 23:1-20), they reappeared under subsequent kings. Archaeological excavations have uncovered cultic high places across ancient Israel, confirming biblical descriptions. The spiritual confusion resulting from such syncretism made exile necessary—only the trauma of losing land, temple, and independence would purge Israel of idolatry. Post-exilic Judaism indeed showed remarkable resistance to idolatry, suggesting the lesson was learned.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the metaphor of failed shepherds leading sheep astray warn about the importance of discerning godly leadership?
2. In what ways do contemporary 'high places' (idolatrous securities) cause believers to forget their true rest in God?
3. How does Christ's identity as the Good Shepherd address the perpetual problem of human leadership failure?

Interlinear Text

צֶאֱן	אֶבְדּוּת	הִי הֵ	עַמִּי	רֵעֵיהֶם	
sheep	hath been lost	H1961	My people	their shepherds	
H6629	H6		H5971	H7462	
	הִתַּעֲוּ	מֵהָר	שׁוֹבִיבִים	מֵהָר	אֵל
	have caused them to go astray	on the mountains	H7726	on the mountains	H413
	H8582	H2022		H2022	
גִּבְעָה	הָלָכוּ	שָׁכַח וְ	רִבְצָם:		
to hill	they have gone	they have forgotten	their restingplace		
H1389	H1980	H7911	H7258		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 53:6 (Parallel theme): All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Matthew 9:36 (Parallel theme): 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 10:6 (Parallel theme): But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Ezekiel 34:14 (Parallel theme): I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.

Psalms 119:176 (Parallel theme): I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

Jeremiah 50:17 (Parallel theme): Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones.

Psalms 91:1 (Parallel theme): He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalms 116:7 (Parallel theme): Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.

Jeremiah 3:6 (Parallel theme): The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

Jeremiah 50:19 (Parallel theme): And I will bring Israel again to his habitation, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied upon mount Ephraim and Gilead.