

# The Need for a Nomadic Theology (Part Three)

*In this article Dr. Phillips continues his study of the biblical message as viewed through nomadic eyes. This article is the continuation of "Nomadic Theology: Part One" and "Nomadic Theology: Part Two," which appeared in "Nomadic Peoples I," (IJFM, 17:2, Summer 2000).*

by David J. Phillips

The Bible's message is one continuous whole, initiated and sustained by God's revelation. But the coming of God as a man forms the crucial fulfillment of all that had gone before. While the Old Testament appeals to the interests of the nomads, we live as the disciples of Christ and must consider the New Testament and how we are to apply this nomadic emphasis in the Bible in our ministry and life. Nomads need to follow the Good Shepherd, both to understand their own itinerant life and to share in an eternal destination. Jesus was, by his choice, the supreme peripatetic and we lose much of his meaning if we ignore this. Jesus invites us all to come and follow him.

## Redemption Fulfills God's Pastoral Relationship

The purpose of God to develop the faith of the patriarchs and Israel began with their journeys. God promised the good shepherd ("my servant David, and he shall feed them," Ezek. 34:22-24; Jer. 23:1-6) to lead his people into a new era of redemption. Jesus fulfills this pastoral role in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

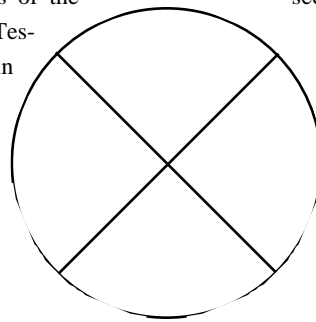
The only public announcement in the first 30 years after his arrival was to otherwise unknown shepherds. These were probably not local men. They probably lived with the sheep and migrated around the land, only returning to the owners of the sheep once or twice a year. These men became the first Christian missionaries (Luke 2:8-19). Jesus began his journeying early, spending a period in Egypt. By this he explicitly identified himself with Israel's formative experience of being in Egypt and with the Exodus (Matt. 2:13-15).

His parents were artisans like the modern Inadan, Waata, or Ghorbati, but unlike many of these, they were too poor to have a flock to provide a sacrifice (Luke 2:24). The carpenters formed themselves into guilds, their sons inheriting the trade, making doors, roofs, furniture, bowls and spoons, boxes, ploughs, yokes, carts, and threshing sledges (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55). In a rural society, this gave Jesus contact with everyone.

Jesus is the Way to travel to the Father (John 14:6). John the Baptist declared repentance as the preparation of the Way of the Lord (Matt. 3:13; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76,

79; 3:4-5). He did this by quoting Exodus 23:20 and Isaiah 40, which we have seen has many nomadic themes of a new exodus. In line with this he identifies Jesus as the Lamb of a new Passover (John 1:29, 36). For his hearers, the idea of a "way" echoed the Old Testament's call to make the path of the coming Savior straight, by a believing response and obedience. This can be understood as a challenge to all classes to support Jesus on his way that will lead to the cross.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus left the settled life of a carpenter to be an itinerant preacher, having no permanent residence. After he declared in Nazareth his "manifesto" based on Isaiah 61:1-2 as one "sent," there was an attempt on his life. From this time Jesus is presented as always on the move on a mission.<sup>3</sup> He had no lodging place, he said, such as even the solitary fox has or the temporary nests of the birds, even though his family was offering one (Matt. 8:20; 12:46; Luke 8:19; 9:58). The itinerant life style was by his choice; he lived as the complete transient in a sedentary society. Home and family were rejected so that he could fulfill God's will.



We cannot say that his journey was just getting to a destination. The numerous historical details appear to refer to more than one circuit of Palestine (Luke 9:51, 53, 57; 10:1, 38; 13:22, 33; 14:25; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 28). The traveling life style expressed something more than the functional necessity to arrive at a destination. While topographically the route was indirect, morally the progress was direct (Matt. 16:21; Mark 10:33; Luke 9:31,51), each event contributing both to his fulfilling his mission and to our spiritual understanding of him (John 14:4-6).

As we saw with the patriarchs and Israel, the journey was not considered as only getting to a destination, but rather as following God with times of waiting for God's direction. This is similar to nomads who can be said to have a "circular" destination as they fulfill their annual circuit of migration. Their arrival at the summer pasture may perhaps serve as a social goal for celebration. Their travel serves to maintain their freedom and identity, with overtones of a mandate from the supernatural. Many nomadic peoples

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Jesus' life and that of his disciples was to be a journey of obedience to God and missionary service to others. We can discern multiple motives for this: first in relation to God, second in relation to Israel's history, and third in relation to his contemporaries.

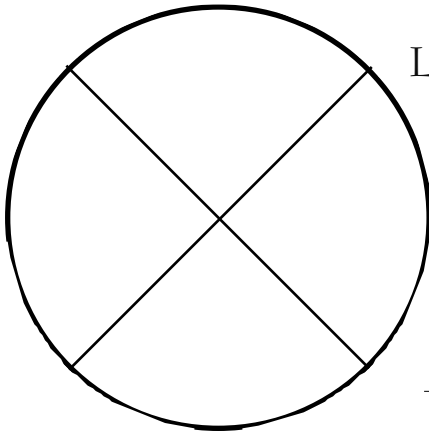
In relation to God, Jesus described his coming as fulfilling righteousness and fulfilling the law. His traveling life style was the expression of his total commitment to fulfill his Father's will (Matt. 3:15, 17). The four Gospels present Jesus' ministry in the form of his traveling towards the cross. In the first three Gospels this is stressed from the time of the enquiry about his identity and his revelation that the Son of man must suffer (Matt. 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). So in relation to God, his traveling was an expression of his obedience.

As a "moving target," Jesus' itinerant life style may have made his arrest more difficult. But he could have settled in Capernaum, Bethany, or Jerusalem and still have been arrested and crucified (John 7:1 with v. 10, 8:59). The very abandonment of his home and family and his circular traveling was, in Jesus' mind, to have the cross and a return to the Father as his goal (Matt. 10:37; 12:46-50; Mark 3:31ff.; Luke 2:43-51). As an expression of his commitment to God's purpose and to people, it did not matter how circuitous the route may have been. Jesus saw his destination as lying beyond death for the redemption of this world in his resurrection.

His traveling also identifies him with God's purpose for Israel. Like Israel crossing into the land under Joshua, Jesus was associated with the Jordan in his baptism. His journey might be seen as a spiritual re-conquest of the land, leading to an ultimate Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His journey is a new beginning or a new exodus for the people of God (Luke 9:31). Like Israel he was led into the wilderness to be tested. The transfiguration has a parallel with Moses' taking three companions with him up Mount Sinai. The difference is that Moses was a spectator of the glory and received the plans of the tabernacle, but Jesus was glorified as the Son in anticipation of his return as the Son of man (Exod. 24:9-16; Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-35).<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' traveling certainly identified him with prophetic figures like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha who never settled down in God's service. This implies that his traveling was symbolic of his commitment to his task and his disassociation from the contemporary religious conventions and institutions. As Israel learnt to obey in the wilderness way, learning that they must continue to "walk in the ways of the Lord," so Jesus was to use the same model and metaphor relating a physical journey with the way of faith in himself.

Jesus described his coming in relation to people as a shepherd for the sheep (Matt. 9:36; 10:6; 12:11-12; 15:24; Mark 6:34; 14:27; John 10:10; 21:15). All men from creation need the Creator as shepherd, but their present state as sinners is like the disorientation, straying, and dying of lost and leaderless sheep (Matt. 9: 13, 36). Even spiritually privileged Israel was in the same state (Matt. 10:6; 15:24), arousing the compassion of Jesus (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34). Jesus' empathy, or care for each person, is likened to a shepherd's search for one lost animal (Matt. 12:11-12; 18:10-14). The Fulbe and Turkana do not count sheep to know that one is lost; each shepherd knows them individually.<sup>5</sup> We notice that the man who lost one in a hundred did not count them either. Most nomads know the habits and character of their animals indi-



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vidually in a flock or herd of over a hundred by their markings and behavior (Matt. 18:12; Luke 15:15:3-7; John 10:4).

Jesus' traveling was not only for him to reach people, but also that they might make the effort to reach him. Faith has an outward expression of trust and obedience. Crowds sought him from considerable distances (Matt. 4:2; 12:15-16; Mark 1:37-39; 2:2, 13; 3:7; Luke 6:17-19; John 6:2; 10:42). Even the uncommitted were obliged to travel along with him to hear him, when stopping would have been more convenient for teaching (Matt. 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; 19:2; Mark 3:7-8). His course was so unpredictable that on two occasions the crowds could not provide food for themselves. In relation to people Jesus' travels were an object lesson, because Jesus expected people to follow him (Matt. 8:20; Luke 14:33), much like a pastoralist with his flock or a peripatetic plying his craft.

Christianity began in the context of Jesus' traveling life. In Mark Jesus defined discipleship in the context of his journey (Mark 8:27-10:45)<sup>6</sup> Discipleship and the cross are interrelated by the practical commitment of both Jesus and the disciples to travel around together. But the disciples could not accept that this involved suffering and death. It has been suggested that Mark organizes his Gospel around the idea of Jesus' bringing a second spiritual exodus for God's people as predicted in Isaiah.<sup>7</sup> But he stresses that Jesus saw his journey to Jerusalem as an enactment of God returning to his people as foretold in prophecy.<sup>8</sup>

Much of Jesus' teaching that only Luke gives us is set in the framework of his traveling towards Jerusalem, as the place of decision for Israel's leadership and his obedience to the cross, which he described as an exodus (Luke 9:31, 51-19:44). The parable of the banquet has the king inviting those of the roads and under the hedges, that is, those who are denied access to the town for reasons of poverty, disease, or social prejudice, and who live on the margins like nomads. While this teaching can be arranged in some topical order, the original context of the Teacher as a traveler is important for Luke.

In John he is declared to be the Lamb of God and he immediately asks men to follow him (John 1:36, 43). As with the other Gospels his ministry is a journey that is directed towards the cross. The Father works through an itinerant Son as he did with Abraham and Moses (John 5:20, 45). Jesus identifies himself with Israel's experience by journeying within the Promised Land like Abraham, and like Israel not finding rest in the land.

A traveler whose goal is human sacrifice is considered a scandal, and the cross can be rejected on these grounds, although Tibetans and Mongols do have a tradition of a human scapegoat who took the curse on behalf of the whole people.<sup>9</sup> The disciples objected to it in principle (Matt. 16:21f.). However, the purpose of Jesus' journey is that the Shepherd might lay down his life for the sheep, and he goes to his death as a lamb to slaughter (John 1:29, 36; 10:11, 15; cf. Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27). In the context of the Passover lamb, his blood is the basis for a new covenant (Mark 14:24; cf. Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19). Christ's death is likened to that of a sacrificial lamb as representing a people united to him (John 1:29, 36; 10:15, 17f.; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19), but he also describes the circumstances of his death as like sheep thieves killing the shepherd in order to seize the sheep (Matt. 26:31; Zech. 13:7; John 16:32). His final return is as the Great Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).

Like a nomad Jesus had his earthly migration pattern. That was a crucial part of his teaching pattern for the giving of salvation, but at the same time his ultimate destination was not of this world. Supremely he would be both the Great Shepherd and the Lamb on the throne (Rev. 5:6-12, *passim*). The apostolic church continued to see the Christian life as a journey.

## Following as Faith in Jesus

Discipleship involves following Christ.

All four Gospels stress the metaphor of following Jesus; the first three use it equally with faith and more than repentance. Only John's special emphasis on belief overshadows his similar use of following Jesus. But even here the disciples follow Jesus, and at the beginning and end of his ministry he gives the challenge to follow (John 1:37f., 54; 21:19-22). This fulfills Old Testament models who "followed" God (Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:8; 1 Sam. 12:14; 1 Kings 14:8) or followed key men of God (Exod. 14:15; 1 Kings 19:19-21).<sup>10</sup>

Jesus both called individuals and challenged all who would be disciples to deny themselves and identify themselves with himself as if to be crucified (Mark 8:34; Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:27). His geographical traveling was, for many, a literal challenge to travel with him, in commitment, trust, and obedience to God and missionary service to others. Indeed martyrdom would be their end. In Jesus' conception, faith and being a Christian are to follow him on his journey, learning from his example something of the same sacrificial commitment (Matt. 4:19-20; John 8:12). This removes faith from being only a matter of

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believing about Jesus or trusting for something. Faith is seen to be identification with him for all that he is and in all that he does, and of living in utter dependence on him.

The Gospel of Mark uses the concept of "the way" as the key to discipleship. Disciples are challenged to a life of self-denial, of not conforming to the surrounding sinful generation (Mark 8:31-38). The spiritual and physical "following" become fused (Matt. 19:27-28), so that life and everything in it—possessions, relationships, etc.—are seen as a temporary stewardship. The challenge of literally leaving family and the security of family, fortune, or the familiar brings into sharp relief whether we trust and obey him above the comforts of conforming to social conventions of home life (Luke 9:57-62).

In John 10 he "expels" the sheep from the fold for their own good to feed on the available pasture, which is not near the fold, but in an area of danger from "pastoral" enemies (Matt. 7:15; 26:31). He knows that the sheep will respond to his call, and each flock separates to gather around its shepherd (John 10).<sup>11</sup> He judges according to the behavior of the species; sheep and goats must be separated because they tolerate different forage and go to different pastures (Matt. 25:32ff.). His choice throughout his ministry of being despised and rejected by surrounding society and being forced to travel on his way identifies him with the experience of many nomadic peoples.

There is an initial or fundamental commitment to Christ that is the basis for the progressive and continual following (shown by the tenses in Mark 8:34; Matt. 10:38; 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:27). Justification and the forgiveness of sins are crucial elements in salvation (Luke 1:73; Matt. 6:12; 12:31f.), but are not dependant on the sacrifice or quality of our following which is the expression of faith in God's grace. Forgiveness is given to a paralytic before he could walk (Matt. 9:1-8; Luke 5:20-24)! There is an instantaneous acquittal for the guilty that produces a sense of indebtedness that also forgives others, who are repeatedly guilty (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-33; Luke 7:43-49; John 8:11).

Yet this faith relationship is lived out in a lengthy "walk" of faith as perseverance in the face of suffering (Rom. 8:1-39; Heb. 2:1, *passim*). This is shown in the cases of Habakkuk and Abraham that Paul quotes (Hab. 1:3f.; 2:2-3; Rom. 4:18ff.; Heb. 11:17-19; James 2:21ff., etc.). Such a life is characterized by deeds of obedience that have nothing to do with intrinsically meritorious "good works" that would render faith and forgiveness irrelevant. The disciple follows Jesus and lives the spiritual peripatetic life out of gratitude for a reconciliation effected with God as Father (Matt. 6:9-7:34; John 14:6); God then deepens and completes the pastoralist relationship.

The Gospels as we know them probably circulated some time after the Lord's ascension, and yet the apparent circumstantial detail that Jesus has no "settled" home would continue to challenge the early church (Matt. 8:20). His example of being a mission and a "seminary" constantly on the move challenges the way that Christians embrace the conventional standards of sedentary life. But the main thrust is metaphorical: Christ's followers give him, his death for them, and his teaching exclusive priority in their lives and like nomads, have a distinctive identity separate from the surrounding sinful "generation."

Jesus showed God to be egalitarian in his choice of companions, as he spent time with unimportant or even despised individuals and sacrificed himself for his friends. Pride of position, rank, or expertise is eliminated in the church. Jesus' traveling life

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style was also due to his interest in the ordinary classes, rather than in the religious and social elite (Luke 9:52; 10:1). Jesus became despised because he mixed with the ordinary people, the poor, and the religious outcasts. The Gospels, and through them the influence of Jesus' teaching on the rest of the New Testament, have to be re-read from the point of view of the interests of vulnerable minority groups, not just the economically poor. For example his teaching on inner cleanliness would be of interest to the Romans (Luke 8:37-41). Initially, Jesus only had 120 in hiding as a result of his ministry to multitudes. Small, if not beautiful, is fulfilling to Jesus.

The Christian life is compared, especially by Paul, to a peripatetic (Greek *peripateo*) life style in moral contrast with the world (Rom. 6:4; 8:4; 14:15; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:2; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1). There is a contrast between the new life and the former way of life which is rejected due to darkness and willful ignorance of God (1 Cor. 3:3). The Christian walks by faith (2 Cor. 5:2), "in the light" (Eph. 6:8f.), and in the Spirit and life (Rom. 6:4; 8:4; Gal. 5:6). This parallels the nomad's life which is often contrary to the dominant society. The nomad often sees his values and way of life as superior and even representing mankind at its best.

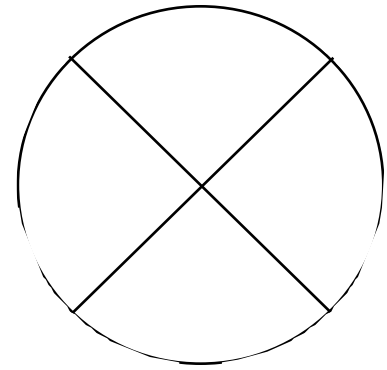
The destination is otherworldly, as it is according to the nomad's religious view (Phil. 3:10f.; Heb. 11:39). Therefore, the challenge to be a Christian is as radical as that which came to Abraham and Israel to embark on their journeys, leaving the familiar comforts to trust God alone. This message of being a traveler or a shepherd has been largely lost in the Western understanding of the Christian life.<sup>12</sup>

### Pastoring the Flock

Like the Old Testament prophets Jesus condemned irresponsible leaders. The background of John 10:1-6 is the condemnation of Israel's leaders (Ezek. 34:24; Jer. 25:32-38). The hired man in John 10:12 has to be interpreted with care, as many pastoralists are hired. The term simply means wage-earner, and he is specifically described as "no-shepherd," possibly an agricultural worker, introduced to demonstrate the worth of the true shepherd.<sup>13</sup> He is a comic figure. When left in charge of the flock and danger threatens, he hesitates, uncertain what to do. He then runs away from a solitary wolf, which would not normally attack men. A real shepherd would drive off or wound such a routine threat with stones from a sling, and then if he is able to get close enough, club it to death.

The shepherd's life, literally and spiritually, is not for well-meaning novices, and even less for those only wanting the pay! The analogy from nomadic life is that a true shepherd has affinity with his sheep and is an experienced combatant against all threats. Jesus describes the accountability the world's ethnic groups have to God in images of the pastoral life (Matt. 25:32f.). Jesus is saying that the only person qualified to lead believers is he himself, who is morally and emotionally bonded to them and even ready to die for them.

The worldwide mission which extends Jesus' ministry is also described in pastoral terms (John 10:16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). Jesus' disciples are likened to sheep as they set out on his mission, because they are in constant need of him as shepherd in their ministry (Matt. 10:16; Luke 10:3; John 10). The disciples were called to an itinerant life and relied on the hospitality of those God provided for them (Matt. 8:20; 10:10). Peter, the fisher of men, is transformed into a shepherd (John 21:15-17) even in the context of his home ground of fishing. This suggests



that traveler and pastoral metaphors have priority in our Lord's mind.

### Mission of Travelers to Travelers

Israel's missionary task has been described as centripetal, that is the prophets envisaged the nations being attracted towards Israel to worship the true God.<sup>14</sup> The missionary task of the chosen people can be summed up by Johannes Blauw's conclusion that "the whole history of Israel is nothing but the continuation of God's dealings with the nations . . . to be understood from the unsolved problem of the relation of God to the nations."<sup>15</sup> With the coming of the redemption in Christ the mission of the church is seen as centrifugal, as a going out to the nations to make disciples. Christians must go out to the peoples, while maintaining their own spiritual identity among them.

Jesus has a representational role for all the ethnic groups of the world in his redemptive work. He fulfilled the promise to Abraham and the role of Israel, and worked for God's future for Israel and, through that, for the blessing of all ethnic groups (Gen. 12:3; Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Gal. 3:9). The original terms signify clans (Gen. 12:3; 28:14) and nations (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4), which means every subdivision of human population is to be blessed. The Old Testament promises and prophecies and the New Testament commission use the term "all the eth-

nic groups” to signify the blessing being presented to the groups differentiated by descent, social organization, culture, and language.<sup>16</sup>

Jesus used the title “Son of man” and fulfilled prophetic figures such as Son of Abraham and of David, king of Israel, and Messiah. These show him as representing and acting on behalf of a people group, Israel (Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3; etc.). The genealogies of Jesus demonstrate his credentials to act on behalf of the people (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). God’s purpose for Israel was that his blessing might reach every section of mankind. Therefore the specialization of Christ’s work for the people group Israel does not have to be “generalized” for humanity. He is actually acting for all humanity because he fulfills the promises for “all the ethnic groups” to bring reconciliation to any group within its history and traditions (Luke 24:45-47; Rom. 1:5). His solidarity with each group provides what is appropriate for everyone both in relation to his group and to God. It is effective for the individuals that respond.

This is important for societies which, like nomads, seek to maintain their distinctive identity in a dominant culture, and among whom the honor of the group must be maintained against both outsiders and members who offend that honor. Some nomadic peoples call themselves by names that just mean “man” and see their own people as the real mankind. This perhaps can be developed to show God’s specific interest in them. In Western theology the incarnation has been understood in a metaphysical way, of God becoming man and God’s interest in mankind as a whole and individualistically. But peoples with tribal social structures are more inclined to see the incarnation in terms of solidarity and corporate responsibility within a family or clan. The disobedience of one member brings consequences for the whole, and

another member may be able to atone for the offence as a substitute for the whole group (Rom. 5:12-21). In a sinful world, lack of atonement leads to expulsion or death of the offending member or to indiscriminate revenge on other groups.

Individuals are evangelized and blessed within the context of the social and cultural values systems which they live by and within which they have their identity, just as Jesus spent much effort in correcting contemporary Jewish traditions. Jesus’ teaching of Israel’s true identity and values, his criticism of the leadership, his being the champion of the ordinary people, and his death on behalf of the people are the basis for how he fulfills the blessing of the promise to other peoples. Jesus is God’s solution for all people groups and individuals within their many different cultures and societies, to give them salvation, to maintain an ongoing witness and worship, and to contribute to the well-being of the people group.

The Father, as Creator or “High God” who is behind the group’s leadership, must be seen as the ultimate sanction of the group’s standing and honor with himself (cf. Acts 17:26; Eph. 3:14-15). Therefore the highest authority in the tribe, the High God, sent Jesus as the representative member to restore the people’s broken honor or standing with himself. Jesus is the brother, who seeks to maintain each group’s honor with the Father. He not only reinterprets and challenges the values and rules of the group, but also acts on behalf of the group to reconcile all to the Father. He takes the penalty of expulsion or death of the guilty upon himself in order to satisfy the demands of honor in relation to the Father. His cross upholds strict justice and yet provides mercy for reconciliation.

But further, Jesus also has authority to reconcile tribal members with each other, because he restores the standing of honor with the supreme Authority at the head of the people, the Father. He also has authority to arbitrate and determine guilt in intergroup conflict and see that only the guilty are punished, rather than arbitrary revenge. An example of this reconciliation was how the New Testament church worked out the relationship of Christ with Israel and the Gentiles. The ethnocentricity that is the springboard for conflict is countered.

Jesus’ atonement affirms God’s honor by being a just penalty for rebellion, and provides justification for both the innocent and guilty victims of revenge attacks. He therefore has authority to act as Mediator. The reconciliation is to God, but it has effect between peoples for those willing to accept him (Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:13-16; 2 Cor. 5:16). Jesus and his atonement have secured the opportunity for reconciliation, and therefore the potential well-being of the ongoing life of each ethnic group until his return.

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## A Nomadic Eternity?

The Lord's transfiguration was an anticipation of the end of faith's journey in heaven.

It inspired Peter to offer to make tents, which imply a very transitory life style to us, but indicate to Peter permanence, security, and appropriateness for the divine presence (Mark 9:5; Luke 16:9 *skenai*). Life in heaven is described in terms of being led by the Shepherd (Rev. 7:15) and living in tents. While terms based on the word for house are used of God's dwelling in the believer's life on earth, the immediate presence of God is conveyed by using *skene* and *skenoo* as an ongoing allusion to the wilderness camp around the tabernacle (Rev. 12:6, 12; 13:6; 15:5; 21:3). This is symbolic of intimate visual and audible contact with each other, for in a camp one's behavior is transparent and life is shorn of all pretence or insincerity. What is clear is that to the biblical mind dwelling in nomadic tents does not imply temporary discomfort, but is the natural medium for enjoying God's presence. It must take its place in our minds alongside the figure of the eternal city.

The final destination of life's traveling is a recreated environment of a new earth (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1). Israel is described as seeking a city (Heb. 11:16), and we have referred to the different way cities were considered by the Hebrew mind. A city provided security and spiritual focus for a whole rural region, rather than representing a life style. The vision of the New Jerusalem does not imply that urban life is the ideal (Rev. 21:25-26). If urban life were the ideal, many nomadic peoples might see that as regrettable rather than desirable. Rather God is "tented" in the center of the new earth as a New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). Some might draw the conclusion that the images imply that the saints are shut within the city, but one has to wonder why there is a new earth outside it and why the city gates are never shut. The point of the vision is that this city is the antithesis of every known fortified city, for it never has to defend itself nor does it pose a threat to anyone.

The city is a missionary vision in which the presence of God transforms the whole earth and access to him is continual through ever open gates. The apostolic foundations of its walls express the call to faith in the gospel invitation that is forever the basis of resurrection life. Every ethnic group on earth has its redeemed representatives to bring their homage (Rev. 21:26). They do not add to the city's glory, but nevertheless have their fulfillment in rendering homage. If they did not come in and go out continually, the gates surely would be presented as finally and irrevocably shut.

No ancient city's sphere of influence ended at the inside of its walls. It was a center for the rural populations for a distance around and was itself sustained by the freedom of traffic through its gates. The Old Testament visions of the city also include the surrounding land outside (Ezek. 47; Zech. 14:8). The vision reveals the freedom of movement in a redeemed environment, made radiant by God's presence to suit all the life styles of God's image, including that of the traveler and nomad. The economic necessity of migrating and the sense of divine disapproval that many peripatetic peoples feel will be finally removed. Traveling done on the new earth consists of rendering worship to the Creator.

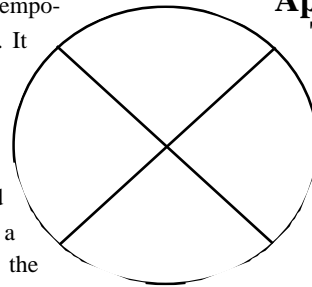
Like Israel of old, the Christian church is intended to be ready to move in obedience to her Master. It is appropriate that both the gospel and the church became known as "the Way" (Acts. 9:2; 16:17; 18:26; 19:9; 22:4; 24:14, 22). To experience salvation is to be a traveler or nomad trusting the divine Shepherd, having involvement with the conventions and commitments of surrounding society only sufficiently to fulfill

his service. Early after the New Testament, the term for alien residents was used for local churches. They were seen as not "of" a location, but merely temporarily resident pilgrims (1 Pet. 1:1). From this word came the term "parish," that now conveys a totally contradictory idea of territorial permanence and elaborate ecclesiastical structures.<sup>17</sup>

## Applying a Nomadic Theology

Of all the possible methods that God could have used to establish his purpose in the world, the pastoralism of a traveling people was the one he chose. The traveler and pastoral themes of the Bible are not merely a powerful teaching device, but the historical method that God used to reveal himself and to begin the process of redemption. This should influence our understanding of both the Bible and salvation.

Adequate preparation to befriend nomads must begin with our own rediscovery in the Bible of a theology that sees the Christian life as a pastoral journey. To Westerners the figure of the shepherd has been romanticized, so that the prevailing interpretations of the Bible passages stress such ideas as safety and comfort, rather than struggle and survival. The shepherd's life is lonely, and hard physical effort is often involved, with long shifts in the cold or heat, with nothing but a cloak to cover one, and with only a sling and heavy stick to guard against wolves and leopards. There is the continual threat of theft of livestock, when fights can lead to injury and death. The loot is often quickly converted into mutton to cover the crime (John 10:9). All the effort expended in an attachment to animals is unglamorous. The Gaddis say, "It is very bad work, too cold and too dangerous, all for two *chappattis* in the eve-



ning.” We shall be able to appreciate more of God’s care for Israel and what it meant for the Good Shepherd to lay down his life for his sheep, when some of us share the practical difficulties of modern nomads.

However, these metaphors cannot be used patronizingly, as if nomads have no other interest than sheep! Further, caution is necessary in interpreting pastoral passages such as Psalm 23 and John 10. Kazakhs, for example, dislike being compared to sheep! In some circumstances, they follow, not lead, their sheep. Turkic and Iranian nomads keep billy goats to lead the sheep, and this may be an apt illustration of Christian leadership! While some nomads have developed cultural relations with their animals, many have a more pragmatic attitude. Also the Bible’s agricultural, political, and military metaphors of tribal societies are more meaningful to nomads than to us. Nomads’ view of themselves is broader and deeper, resonating with the common human needs of mankind that are also dealt with by other themes of the Bible.

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To convince the nomads that Christianity is supremely for the nomadic life, we need a “nomadic” theology both for reaching nomadic peoples and for helping all Christians to rediscover that life is like a journey or pilgrimage. It is a history of God’s actions and revelation and our responses. The Creator’s word is intended to affirm and enhance the nomadic life, and we dishonor him and the people we are called to if we allow our own assumptions to mis-see nomadism as “inconvenient,” dying out, or even “immoral.” Many nomads, such as the Fulbe and Kyrgyz, have histories of long one-way migrations, just as Israel migrated from Mesopotamia to Egypt and then to Canaan. They also have traditions of key leaders like Moses. Many see their nomadism as divinely authorized. Others see it as divine penalty.

The nomadic emphasis in the Bible relates to many aspects of nomadism. We are not suggesting that nomads are more spiritual, or that we endorse all their values and methods. However, the very nature of nomadism has important parallels to the Christian message and life, for example:

- Commitment to relationships rather than to property or place.
- Maintaining a distinct social identity from surrounding society.
- Assigning natural resources according to use rather than exclusive ownership.
- Symbiotic relationship with nature, attributing its resources to the supernatural.
- A form of “living by faith,” trusting in the supernatural to provide in an often precarious environment.
- Radical limitation of personal possessions to be “ready to move” in a sacrificial life style.
- Stress on virtues such as perseverance, suffering, self-reliance and initiative, and corporate responsibility.

We shall be able to appreciate more of God’s care for Israel, the lessons of her experience, and what it meant for the Good Shepherd to lay down his life for his sheep, when we live with the practical difficulties faced by modern nomads.

### Key Elements in a Theology for Nomads

1. God is seen as a pastoralist of a traveling people. This is a first step toward presenting the character of God as personally present in life for trust, before a need of salvation is felt. God as pastoralist brings the creator into the fortunes and trials of human life, countering ideas of God’s being a will to which one must submit or a remote high god or a fickle deity of India or a supreme state of Buddhism.
2. God is the transcendent pastoralist to those whose ties are more to traveling through life with him, rather than to property or place. This view of God becomes more personal, practical, and dynamic than the usual abstract treatment of the nature and attributes of God. These can be treated in illustrative story form. To change the nomad’s concept of God, we must make contact with the way they seek guidance and success in finding their way in life.
3. Life as a journey, dependent for subsistence on precarious or marginal resources, requires faith in the providence of God and constant decision making. Providence is the way God fulfills his creation and shapes events and the way he gives direction and care to his people in the problems of earthly life. It requires us to trust God’s wisdom and power in our life and to obey him in a progress to spiritual maturity. The experience of the patriarchs and the wilderness generations was formative both



## David J. Phillips

for the faith of Israel and the beginnings of the Church. This character of faith should influence interpretation of the rest of Scripture (Heb. 11; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

4. Providence is the common ground that the Bible has with people everywhere, especially those with a profound sense of the supernatural being in control of the environment. Nomads also have suffered in the mystery of providence which does not always seem to respond to legitimate cries for help. God's providence as a traveler and pastoral theme reaches the felt needs of the nomads, such as sickness, hunger, fear of attack and crime, the welfare of their animals, poverty, shame of failure to fulfill the aspirations of the group, fear of curses and spirits, and the afterlife.
5. Faith can have small practical beginnings before an individual has a specific commitment as a Christian. Israel trusted God for political freedom and survival in the desert before salvation from sin was revealed to her. Christianity has to be seen as practical in this life, with perhaps secret partial trust developing. For the individual, and those close to him or her, this biblical theme of God as pastoralist or as the traveler's guide introduces the Bible at the point of most concern for the course of his or her life. Life is an ongoing interaction with God, best likened to a story or journey, and for most nomads it rapidly draws to a conclusion. Faith has to be seen as commitment, as leaving behind practices, as having a route, and as a journey to a destination in company with like-minded companions.
6. When we begin with the relationship that the Bible begins with, the other themes are found not to be alien to nomadic peoples. The pastoral-traveler theme is comprehensive but has to be completed by the other biblical themes, such as God's fatherhood, covenant lordship and law, priesthood and reconciliation, and prophecy and kingdom in the fulfillment of God's purpose. As with Israel these prepare for the specific Christian facts such as the deity and atonement of Christ. Biblical Christianity rediscovered in these terms, and lived out in practice, lays the foundation for introducing the other themes of morality and accountability to God and of salvation.
7. Jesus fulfilled by his life and death the biblical "nomadic" ideal of the person who is utterly committed to trust God's providence and purpose. He did this for those identified with him by the metaphorical "walk" of faith. The gospel cannot be abstracted from its biblical context of spiritual nomadism of faith as being a follower or disciple.
8. Being a disciple requires a readiness to "move" with God in Christ, in spirit and morally and often geographically. It requires a willingness to sacrifice and not to conform to the standards of surrounding society, perhaps accepting a simpler life style and leaving behind anything that is a hindrance to being conformed to Christ and his service. For both nomadic and settled Christians there can be no settled life of commitment either to worldly interests or to static Christian structures set up to last.
9. God requires a simpler life style that derives its sufficiency by trust in providence. The biblical emphasis that subsistence comes by means of trust and obedience needs to be rediscovered. The message of nomadism is that one must have wisdom and trust to move according to the provision of resources for each season and circumstance. The nomad's migration cycle is both a practical necessity and also a formative influence on attitudes and values, aiming to be content with a measure of self-sufficiency from the surrounding society.
10. The "rugged" nomadic interpretation of the Bible and Christian life puts a value on the individual's walk. As God's nomads, we must have a measure of spiritual self-

sufficiency in our relationship to Jesus who understands the nomad's life. We must hold to the authority of the Bible as primary over ethnic traditions or the standards of the surrounding society.

11. The biblical emphasis on God as pastoralist should guard churches formed of nomads from imitating other sedentary churches and encourage them to express their faith with an appropriate discipleship structure in keeping with their way of life. The church must be redefined as stressing the individual's walk and relationships in small groups. Membership is by spiritual and moral loyalty, and leadership is by example and persuasion, not by the authority of institutional structures. A church that is "nomadic" in its attitudes will be a missionary church.
12. Most nomadic peoples are concerned to maintain their distinctive identity as minorities. God cares about the identity and fulfillment of despised, disregarded, and misunderstood peoples and gives them a place in history, economically and geographically. We have not thought through God's purpose for a people group for fear of stirring up patriotic or political issues, and we need to learn from the solidarity and corporate responsibility that lies behind much "tribal" behavior. The relationship to kin and sin as disloyalty need to be worked out as part of discipleship. A man can be loyal to his father rather than to his wife; that undermines the nuclear family (Gen. 2:24).
13. God's purpose in redemption involved his creating a new people, Israel, and adding representatives from every people (Matt. 28:19; Rom. 11:17ff.). Israel was a paradigm of God's purpose for all peoples, and the followers of Jesus are the fulfillment of this. Here is a model of how a people group must be blessed of God, through faith and obedience, rather than through strife, before it is able to serve other peoples. Disobedience and injustice by a people

leads to the people's disintegration and God's condemnation. This is only removed by seeking his pardon on his terms of atonement.

14. Many nomadic peoples have a history of defensiveness and revenge because of the hostility of the surrounding society, such as the aggressiveness of the Afar. Others have a sense of guilt built into the traditions of their origins. The gospel must be shown to be the solution to these attitudes. The true greatness of any people is judged by its ability to pass on God's blessing and the gospel, just as Israel was created to be a blessing to other peoples. A nomadic theology must convey God's place for nomads as well as building good relationships with other peoples and with the environment.

15. The moral changes needed in the nomad's life and society should be taught from an awareness of God as shepherd leading in the journey of life. Many nomads have their behavioral codes and values, such as the Fulbe *pulaaku*, by which they maintain their identity and which they consider to show their culture to be superior. It is easy to hastily judge these systems and practices, and so reject the entire value system. The points of contact between these values and the Bible's ethical

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teaching need to be found so nomadic followers of Christ will know what to keep and what to renounce in their culture. The Bible's moral standards were derived from the covenant relationship with God, but many of the details were adapted and modified from contemporary practices of its day. This corrected contemporary standards in much of the behavior shown in the biblical narratives. This should encourage us to see that a gradual transformation of the people's culture is possible. For example, Christian Gypsies are already modifying their customs, prohibiting fortune-telling but continuing their custom of the bride price as biblical.

Often nomads can identify themselves with the Bible's message without any prompting.

A Gypsy woman who had nothing but an old pram for her belongings found a Sunday School lesson book thrown away in a hedge. From the pictures, for she was illiterate, she came to identify herself with Jesus, for, she said, he was poor like them, he came to crossroads and wondered which way to go, he was moved on by the authorities of the day, he had no knife and broke his bread, and he had no light only a candle. She concluded that Jesus was a Romany like them, a traveler before them.<sup>18</sup> Nomads can identify themselves with Jesus with the minimum of means.

The supreme lesson is that we must not fail in the challenge to demonstrate Christian love to pastoralist and peripatetic peoples for their spiritual and practical benefit. Nomads recognize that they should be better teachers of the Bible to us! In fact, nomads like the Tuareg and Kazakhs point out the irony in the fact that Westerners, who know nothing about pastoralism, have to teach them a message that is based so much on their own experience. When converted nomads begin to minister to us, Christians who mostly belong to the sedentary world will gain fresh insight into the Bible and their journey with God. Cross-cultural evangelism is ultimately a partnership of learning from each other.

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