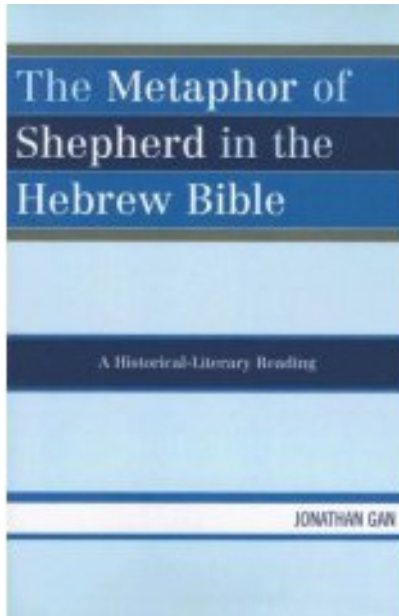


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**Gan, Jonathan**

***The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible: A Historical-Literary Reading***

Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007. Pp. xii + 135. Paper. \$23.95. ISBN 076183754x.

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Every book deserves readers and every author an audience. The reviewer of this book, however, wonders to what kind of audience *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible* should be recommended. Jonathan Gan presupposes a Christian audience, but he seems to address a part of Christianity that (1) does not understand the Hebrew Bible as the source for understanding the New Testament and that (2) displays a disregard for theological reflection as opposed to the practical application of theology, which is certainly not the case for all mainline Christian denominations. Gan also does not target academics but students and interested readers. But while seasoned scholars will be able to add to Gan's, at times, sketchy summaries of scholarship, as in chapter 2, the beginning student might come away from this book with the impression that renowned Old Testament scholars of the past such as Gerhard von Rad or Walther Eichrodt are, at worst, faulty theologians and at best outdated.

So, to whom should *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible* be recommended? Maybe to the pastor, who is either looking for fresh insights into his or her pastoral role as shepherd of a congregation or who might refer to Gan's chapters 3–8 in order to find an overview of shepherd imagery in the Hebrew Bible for the purpose of writing a sermon. But even this pastor will struggle, because this book is not an easy read. It lacked a careful editing process (even though it seems to have been written by a nonnative

speaker of English), which creates insurmountable hurdles for the arguments that Gan tries to communicate. The result is a stop-and-go reading process, in which this interested reader and reviewer became discouraged on more than one occasion.

In the preface of his work, Gan questions the contemporary understanding of the shepherd in pastoral theology as referring to a counselor, a therapist, or a caregiver, which is mainly based on the New Testament understanding of the image of shepherd and Ps 23. The logical result and the stated purpose of Gan's book is to explore the shepherd metaphor in the Hebrew Bible in order to find its deeper meaning, which can then be applied to modern pastoral ministry.

In chapter 1 Gan discusses the changes he perceives in church structure and in the role of the pastor since World War II. The author then summarizes the definitions of pastoral theology by Thomas C. Oden, Martin Thornton, Seward (Steward?) Hiltner, Carl Kromminga, William G. T. Shedd, John C. Thiessen, Jay E. Adams, William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, and Derek J. Tidball, most of whom wrote at least twenty years ago. But if Gan demands a "rethinking of pastoral theology," as he puts it somewhat tediously after almost each subchapter, why does he not discuss newer approaches?

Chapter 2 outlines Gan's hermeneutical methodology. The author lists several methods of interpreting the biblical text by discussing one or two older representatives of each approach: Gerhard von Rad and the diachronic method; Walther Eichrodt and the thematic method; Geerhardus Vos and the historic progression of revelation method; Brevard S. Childs and John Sailhamer and their canonical approach; Graeme L. Goldsworthy and the so-called "Christ-Events or Redemptive-Historical Approach." At the end of this chapter Gan lifts up his own method of choice: the historical-literary approach to the Bible and to the study of metaphor. He considers this to be a method that will "return the religiosity to the Bible," which is necessary because "the liberals" abused the historical-critical method "to falsify the authenticity of the Bible" (24). The author of *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible* never defines how he understands the concept of metaphor, neither does he provide his readers with literature on metaphor theory.

Chapter 3 serves as an introduction for the image of shepherd in the Hebrew Bible. Gan distinguishes between shepherd-kings who lead, feed, and provide protection and tender care to the ones entrusted to them and the shepherd-God who does similar things but on a larger scale. Gan's arguments in this chapter are, at times, circular. For example, he first introduces the thought that people are called sheep only when in distress and in dire need of a leader. Then he provides some evidence for each case just to draw the conclusion that the sheep metaphor is used for the people when they are in distress or in lack of

leadership. The same point is made again in the short summary at the end of the paragraph and yet again in the summary wrapping up the chapter.

Gan's chapter 4 then discusses the metaphor of shepherd in the Torah. He draws the conclusion that the ancient profession of a shepherd can train the future leaders of Israel to one day become shepherds of God's people, naming Moses as the main human example. But Moses is more than a shepherd to Israel. He also speaks the word of God to the people and, to quote the author of *The Metaphor of Shepherd in the Hebrew Bible*, "prophesied the coming Messiah which eventually, came in the person of Jesus Christ (Dt 18:15)" (45).

In chapter 5 Gan discusses the shepherd metaphor in the Former Prophets. He distinguishes between shepherds among the priests (Samuel), among the kings (David), and among the prophets. He concludes that "the shepherd image in the monarchical period displays in the facets of priest, prophet and king is established to lead, protect and feed the nation of Israel, the sheep, for the development of their faith through the instruction of the Laws and the reminding of the covenant" (56–57, grammar and punctuation are, as in all quotes, the author's). Throughout Gan's study, but especially in chapters 4 and 5, it is apparent that the author does not understand the Hebrew Bible to be a text developed over centuries. Gan interprets the text without discerning its historicity, its development, or the different voices that might have influenced it over time.

Chapter 6 treats the shepherd metaphor in the books of the prophets. Gan discusses every prophet, albeit in summaries, the specific texts where the image of shepherd is utilized, and the specific contributions to the metaphor made in each of the prophetic books.

Finally, chapter 7 discusses the shepherd metaphor in the Writings. Gan gives short summaries of psalms where this metaphor appears, including Ps 49, where death is attributed some of the characteristics of a shepherd. The bulk of the chapter, however, deals with Ps 23 and the New Testament reception of this text. Since Ps 23 receives so much attention in Christian circles, this reviewer found Gan's chapter 7 the most interesting of all the chapters in the book. Unfortunately, some of the sentences in this chapter were quite cryptic, such as, "The shepherd and Jesus are shepherd (see Isa 40:11; Jn 10:14)" (90), so that Gan's argument suffers.

The eighth and final chapter lists Gan's assessment of how his book might influence both the discipline of biblical studies and the idea of leadership. If one reads the Hebrew Bible with the shepherd metaphor in the back of one's mind, says Gan, one can "understand the rationale behind the actions of Yahweh in history" and can "correlate the historical

events to the acts of Yahweh that are interspersed in the Hebrew Bible” (100). Gan also mentions that “this perspective of shepherding is useful in reading the New Testament” (100) but does not provide examples for this statement.

In his conclusion, Gan points out that the shepherd metaphor is about leadership and not the “therapeutic image exhibited in the contemporary pastoral theology” (101). But where and how pastoral ministry needs to be reexamined and rethought in light of the book’s findings he neglects to mention. This is most unfortunate because, if Gan’s audience is indeed the group of people who do Christian ministry, they would certainly want to know how their day-to-day shepherding is supposed to be shaped by the Hebrew Bible. “The relationship of shepherd and sheep ties Yahweh and Israel together, and if derailed from this relationship, the course of future for his people is detrimental” (102) ends Gan’s discussion of this major Hebrew Bible metaphor. This conclusion neither satisfies the goals Gan set for himself in his introduction nor the needs of his intended audience.