

The Attackers: Anthropopathisms: Definition & Description; Doctrine of the Public Lie: The Sheep Metaphor: Relationship of the Sheep to the Shepherd & Believers to the Teacher; the First Generation Rebels against Moses; Logistical Grace Continued, Ps 78

Anthropopathisms: Definition and Description

1. Anthropopathism is a compound of two Greek words, (ἄνθρωπος (*ánthrōpos*), meaning “man,” and πάθος (*páthos*), meaning “to suffer.” Together they form the Classical Greek word ἄνθρωποπαθέω (*ánthrōpopathéō*): “to have human feelings.”¹
2. An anthropopathism is “language of accommodation” that ascribes to God a human characteristic which He does not actually possess, but is used to reveal and explain God’s policy toward mankind in terms familiar to a human frame of reference.
3. Accommodation means that human modus operandi is ascribed to God, such as human affection or human sins, so that man can understand divine policy, attitude, and function.
4. Misunderstanding language of accommodation leads to confusion about the essence of God and the stability of His divine attributes.
5. In order for the infinite modus operandi of God to be understood by the finite human mind, certain human characteristics are ascribed to God to help explain His statements and actions.
6. Some of the anthropopathisms ascribed to God in Scripture are love, compassion, and longsuffering; hatred, anger, wrath, and vengeance.
7. The purpose of biblical anthropopathisms is to explain to man in language he can understand divine function toward humanity, both individual and collective.

III. The Sheep Metaphor:

שׁוֹן (*so’n*). Metaphorically speaking, the notion of flock worked its way deeply into the consciousness of biblical writers, particularly as a metaphor for Israel itself. Israel is often described as a flock in distress (Jeremiah 13:17), a flock destined for sacrifice (Ezekiel 36:38), or a flock under Yahweh’s watchful care (Psalm 74:1). (p. 729)

It was as Shepherd of his flock that the Lord led his people out of Egypt and through the sea (Psalm 78:52–53), and in like manner he will lead them out of captivity (both Babylonian and eschatological; Jeremiah 31:10; Zechariah 9:16). (pp. 729–30)

It is only natural, then, that the prophets depicted Yahweh as intensely jealous and protective of his flock, especially when one remembers that it was common in the ancient Near East to designate rulers and leaders as shepherds. Thus the Lord declares, “My anger burns against the *shepherds*, and I will punish the *leaders*” (Zechariah 10:3a). (p. 730)

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., “ἄνθρωπο-πάθεια,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. Henry Stuart Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 141.

There are several other figures taken up in the Old Testament based on the characteristics and behavior of sheep, e.g., straying like sheep serves as an analogy for human sinfulness and frailty of humans (Isaiah 53:6; cf. also Psalm 119:176), while being like a sheep led to slaughter typifies innocent suffering (Isaiah 53:7; Jeremiah 11:19), and calves leaping when released from the stall speaks of the unbounded joy of the righteous in the day of God's judgment (Malachi 4:2). (p. 731)

The early Christians often spoke of the church as God's "flock." In John 10:16, Jesus announces his desire to gather all of his "sheep" into one fold, so that there might no longer be sectarian division, but "one flock, one shepherd." ... this flock imagery continues to describe the vulnerability of the church to heresy (Acts 20:28–29), the constant need of the church for spiritual nourishment (1 Peter 5:2–3), and the need to encourage those who faithfully serve Christ's flock as humble, peaceable, and disinterested overseers.² (p. 732)

1. Sheep behave stupidly. They have no instincts making them totally helpless. Sheep can't find food for themselves. They wander away from the flock and therefore become easily lost. This causes them to be easy prey for predatory beasts.
2. Helpless, the sheep become an analogy for believers in Jesus Christ or the human race in general. The helplessness of mankind is because he is infected by the genetic presence of the sin nature to which is imputed Adam's original sin at physical birth.
3. This helplessness causes mankind to have no idea what to do about his sins: many simply submit to its temptations and become addicted to its lust patterns, others assuage their guilty conscience by becoming extremely ascetic, and there are those who rationalize away any wrongdoing at all and become embarrassingly lascivious.
4. The problem-solving device for each of these categories is spiritual growth. The First Generation of the Exodus was not interested in the instruction offered by the priesthood who explained Christology by means of the Levitical sacrifices.
5. Yet, God continued His logistical grace for forty years. He provided all the necessities to keep them alive so that they might come to their senses and submit to His guidance and leadership.
6. Psalm 78 was composed by Asaph, a Levite, who was appointed choral director by King David (1 Chronicles 16:5). In the Psalm, Asaph addresses the grace provisions of the Lord as He reaches out to the reversionistic sheep of Israel as they wander in the Jornada:

Psalm 78 ... is a didactic psalm ... to show how Ephraim [the Northern Kingdom] lost its special status of blessing and prominence in favor of Judah. Out of Judah King David was chosen to shepherd God's people, and in Judah God had chosen to dwell. On the one hand, the didactic element of the psalm shows the folly of rebellion and disobedience. While on the other hand, it demonstrates the bliss of David's kingship. The psalm explains that David and Jerusalem were chosen out of all the tribes because Yahweh is free in his choice.³

² Michael S. Moore and Michael L. Brown, ("שׁוֹן so'n"), in *Theological Dictionary of Old & New Testament Exegesis*, 3:728–32.

³ Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:504.

7. Israel's history reveals a record of rebellion in contrast to God's continuing grace. Asaph uses the episode in the Jornada to illustrate Israel's propensity to rebel while God continued to provide through grace:

Psalm 78:52 - He led forth His own people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.