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Shepherds in biblical times

Shepherding is one of the oldest professions, beginning some 6,000 years ago in Asia Minor. Sheep were kept for their milk, meat and especially their wool. Over the next millennia sheep and shepherding spread throughout Eurasia.

Some sheep were integrated in the family farm along with other animals such as chickens and

to be recruited externally. Shepherds were most often the younger sons of farming peasants who did not inherit any land. Still in other societies, each family would have a family member to shepherd its flock, often a child or an elder who couldn't help much with harder work.

Shepherds would normally work in groups either looking



goats. To maintain a large herd, however, the sheep must be able to move from pasture to pasture; this required the development of a profession separate from that of the farmer. The duty of shepherds was to keep their flock intact and protect it from wolves and other predators. The shepherd had to supervise the migration of the flock and to ensure they made it to market areas in time for shearing. In ancient times shepherds also commonly milked their sheep, and made cheese from this milk.

In many societies shepherds were an important part of the economy. Unlike farmers, shepherds were often wage earners, being paid to watch the sheep of others. Shepherds also lived apart from society, being largely nomadic. It was mainly a job of solitary males without children, and new shepherds thus needed

after one large flock, or each bringing their own and merging their responsibilities. They would live in small cabins, often shared with their sheep and would buy food from local communities.

Shepherding developed only in certain areas. In the lowlands and river valleys, it was far more efficient to grow grains and cereals than to allow sheep to graze, thus the raising of sheep was confined to rugged and mountainous areas.

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