AM, I MY BROTHERS KEEPER?



by Andre Vorster

The world we live in is currently a world of chaos, a world of self-enrichment, a world where technology through AI is fast replacing jobs and putting more people out of work in an already poverty-stricken world. Wars, famine, political agendas, and corruption in systems that are supposed to be aiding the downtrodden also play a major role and have a tremendous influence in this regard.

Regrettably, even in this society there is corruption, one needs only look at the migrant situation. Yes, there are among them those who seek to improve themselves and to find honest work, but there are those who take from the helping hand offered and demand more and corrupt society.

This is not something new in the world and has been with us throughout generations, in the very beginning God took a chaotic world and then created order in it, He created man to rule over it, but man fell and evil entered the world. The world became corrupt and once more God stepped in to take control through the flood. You need only study the history of Israel, God's chosen people, and see how often God had to put His foot down and say, 'Enough is enough!"

God in His compassion and love for us gave the Law, and when we look at the Ten Commandments and see what Jesus said about them:

> *And when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they themselves gathered together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with a question: "Teacher, which commandment is the greatest in the Law?" Jesus declared, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* **Matt 22: 34-40**

Who is our neighbor? Your neighbor is anyone that is in close proximity to you, not just people living next door to you. Yes, that includes the poor and the homeless. In the life of Jesus we see a perfect example of all that has been mentioned above, how a disciple of Jesus turns against all that has been taught and places himself above the teachings and compassion of the Lord:

> *"But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was going to betray Him, asked, "Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" Judas did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to take from what was put into it. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "She has kept this perfume in preparation for the day of My burial. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have Me."* **John 12: 4-8**

When we go back in the Bible to the Levitical Laws we find that God's stand on this is very clear:

> *"You must not mistreat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to Me in distress, I will surely hear their cry. My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; then your wives will become widows and your children will be fatherless. If*

you lend money to one of My people among you who is poor, you must not act as a creditor to him; you are not to charge him interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as collateral, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? And if he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate". **Exod 22: 22-27 BSB**

"If there is a poor man among your brothers within any of the gates in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, then you are not to harden your heart or shut your hand from your poor brother. Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him whatever he needs. Be careful not to harbour this wicked thought in your heart: "The seventh year, the year of release, is near," so that you look upon your poor brother begrudgingly and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin. Give generously to him, and do not let your heart be grieved when you do so. And because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything to which you put your hand. For there will never cease to be poor in the land; that is why I am commanding you to open wide your hand to your brother and to the poor and needy in your land." **Deut 15: 7-11 BSB**

"Blessed is he who regards the poor, for in the day of evil, LORD JEHOVAH will set him free." **Ps 41: 1 PHBT**

"He who oppresses the poor taunts and insults his Maker, But he who is kind and merciful and gracious to the needy honors Him." **Prov 14: 31 AMP**

"Insult your Creator, will you? That's exactly what you do every time you oppress the powerless! Showing kindness to the poor is equal to honoring your maker."

"The entire crowd was trying to touch Him, because power was coming from Him and healing them all. Looking up at His disciples, Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh...." **Luke 6: 19-21 BSB**

Clearly from the few scriptures I have quoted God emphatically states that we should care for the poor and needy. Remember the following when carrying out God's commandments:

- God is a God of compassion, so too must we be compassionate.
- In giving your motives must be pure and from the heart.
- God sees what we do in secret, and He is rewarder not your fellow men.

This then brings us to the question:

> *"And the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I do not know!" he answered. "**Am I my brother's keeper (**shoh-mer)**?"* **Gen 4: 9 BSB**

The New Living translation says it as follows:

> *"Afterward the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother? Where is Abel?" "I don't know," Cain responded. **"Am I my brother's guardian** (shoh-mer)**?"***

In Hebrew **שׁוֹמֵר** (shoh-mer): Translates to "guardian" or "keeper," often implying an active watchman who protects, preserves, or guides you.

Let's go back a few verses to verse 2:

> *"Later she gave birth to Cain's brother Abel. Now **Abel was a keeper** (ra` ah) **of sheep**, while Cain was a tiller of the soil."*

Here we find the word keeper translated as **רָעָה** *(ra` ah) and means: to tend a flock i.e. pasture it, (generally) to rule and (by extension) to associate with (as a friend).*

The dictionary defines a keeper as someone that keeps: such as:

- protector
- gamekeeper
- warden
- custodian
- curator

While guardian is defined as:

- someone or something that guards: custodian
- someone who has the care of the person or property of another

In my own life I can testify to the differences between keeper and guardian because as a young boy I was sent to a boarding school far away from my parents but close to my sister who was thirteen years older than me. She and her husband became my legal guardians and keepers. I will explain what I mean when I say they were both guardian and keeper.

During the period that I was dependent on them as a boy and later as a young man as a student, with no income, they met all my needs, paid my school fees, bought clothing gave me pocket money, fed me and provided a roof over my head. In other words, they kept me, they were my keepers.

Later when I was drafted into military and earned an income, they became my guardians in such as they started teaching me the principles of life. I remember with my first pay, my sister sat down with me and we started to work out a budget, this included a percentage for board and lodging, the time for handouts was past, I now had to take responsibility for self-sustainment.

Scripture is very clear in this regard:

> *…For even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "If anyone is unwilling to work, he shall not eat." Yet we hear that some of you are leading undisciplined lives and accomplishing nothing but being busybodies. We command and urge such people by our Lord Jesus Christ to begin working quietly to earn their own living….* **2 Thes 3: 10-12**

The LORD does not let the righteous go hungry, but He denies the craving of the wicked. 4Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. **Prov 10: 3-4**

There is profit in all labor, but mere talk leads only to poverty. **Prov 14:23**

In closing I want to take you through the first four verses of a psalm that we all know and that is Psalm 23, I will be using The Message Translation.

But before we do we need to see the picture as it was in those days. We must not envision green luscious pastures of fields of grass or lucerne but rather see Israel as it was in those days, green pastures were not abundant but rather scattered and centered around wells or springs as it was an arid country. If you can envision that then you will get a full image of just what the psalmist is conveying.

1. *God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing*.
   The first thing we see in this psalm is that the needs are met, not the wants.

2. *You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from*.
   Notice how the psalmist emphasizes the fact that he was led to the meadows and the water, once there as a sheep he needed to take care of himself to nourish his body. He does not say you fed me.

3. *True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction*.
   He was ministered to and taught the word and directed in the way he should go.

4. *Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side*.
   Note it a journey, through thick and thin, talking about the shepherd being supportive in times of trouble.

5. *Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure*.
   The crook was there to discipline the sheep and to pull them back from harms way, in other words to guide and lead them.

In summing up, the answer in part of being my brother's keeper, is true, but the greater part to me is being my brother's guardian. In so doing, we can mentor and guide them to fulfilling that which God has promised. For God's desire is that not one should perish but that we all should enjoy life and prosper as he designed us to. Therefore love your neighbor as you would yourself, be kind and considerate but also be firm in knowing when to change from keeper to guardian or shepherd as you will.