

The LORD is my  
*Shepherd*

Psalm 23



## Psalm 23

(1) A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

(2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

(3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

(4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

(5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

(6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

What are the duties of a shepherd? On your phone, find the *Blue Letter Bible App (BLB)*, and open it to Psalm 23. Tap on the first verse and then on **Dictionaries**. Tap on “shepherds” under *Eastons Bible Dictionary*. Take notes.

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How is God a Shepherd? Go back to Psalm 23:1, tap on it, and this time choose **Cross References**. Look through the verses under “my” and write down what God does.

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What is a bad shepherd? God has appointed people to be shepherds of His sheep. Sometimes this did not work out well. Find Ezekiel 34 and read through it and take notes on what makes a bad shepherd.

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What does it mean not to want? Go back to Psalm 23:1, tap it and then choose **Interlinear**. Find the Hebrew word across from “want” and tap on it. This will open up the dictionary entry for this word. Write down the definition.

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Go back and tap on **Cross References** for this verse. Go through the verses under “I shall”. Take notes.

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If you still have time, go back to verse 1, tap on it, and then choose **Dictionaries**. Scroll down to *Thematic Subject Guide*, and tap on “God’s Provision”. Have a look through some of the verses in the Psalms, and write down some of the things God provides.

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What kind of a sheep are you? Are you content to follow your shepherd? To trust Him to provide what you need?

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What do you picture when reading verse 2? I see sheep lying down, chewing their cud, in a grassy meadow. This is an unlikely picture in Israel but let's take a look at the idea of lying down and having enough to eat.

There is a huge difference between sheep with a shepherd that cares for them, and sheep that are treated as dumb animals only fit for the slaughterhouse. Sheep that are afraid of predators, out of sorts with each other, bothered by parasites, or anxious about food will not lie down (from *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Philip Keller). Below are some questions with some verses that should help to answer them. You may want to look at the cross references for each passage as well. Take notes.

How does God dispel fear? Deuteronomy 31:8, Romans 8:31.

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How does God dispel friction among His sheep? 1 Peter 5:5, Philippians 4:11.

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How does God keep His sheep healthy? Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:11.

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How does God provide food? Deuteronomy 8:3, John 6:35.

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What importance does God place on rest? Exodus 23:12, Hebrews 4:10.

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God provides spiritual food and the means for rest, but we have to be good sheep and take it.

There is the contemplative part of being a sheep (lying down and eating), and then there is the active part of being a sheep (following the shepherd).

Go to Psalm 23 in the **BLB** app, and tap on verse 2. Choose **Interlinear** and then the Hebrew word across from “he lea-deth”. Scroll down to the *Gesenius Lexicon*, and take notes on what it says there. Scroll down a bit further and look through the verses that also have this word in them.

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Go back to Psalm 23:2 again and choose **Interlinear**. This time tap on the word across from “beside the still”. Write down the meaning for this word.

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A lack of water can quickly lead to restlessness among the sheep, then dehydration and weakness. Polluted water can cause illness and disease. A shepherd would know where to lead his sheep to good water which would keep his flock content and strong.

What are the restful waters? Start with Isaiah 55:1 and look through the Cross References as well. Take notes.

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Sheep often get most of their water requirement from the dew of early morning. They will often rise just before dawn to begin feeding on the dew drenched grass.

What is dew compared to in the Bible? Start with Deuteronomy 32:2 and have a look through the Cross References as well. Take notes.

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We can trust the Shepherd to lead us to water that is good, pure water that will satisfy and content us.

The good shepherd provides all that is necessary for the sheep - rest, food and water. But that is not all. A good shepherd cares about each of his sheep.

Open the **BLB** to Psalm 23 and tap on verse 3. Choose **Inter-linear**. We are going to look at the Hebrew word for “he restoreth” but first, tap on the little box that says PARSE under the number. This tells us a little bit more about the grammar of the word. Now tap on the Hebrew word and you will notice under the *Outline of Biblical Usage* that there are several definitions. Scroll down to the definition under “Polel”. Take notes.

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Why does a sheep need restoring? In Philip Keller’s book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, he tells about a cast sheep - one who has turned over onto its back and cannot get up. If it is hot and sunny it can die in a few hours because gases build up in the rumen cutting off blood circulation. Another way that sheep can get themselves into trouble is by wandering off from the flock and getting lost.

Use the verse provided as a starting point and have a look through Cross References as well. Take notes.

How can we avoid becoming “cast” sheep? The reason a sheep becomes “cast” is often because it has chosen a soft, comfortable spot - a little hollow that tips it enough so that its feet come off the ground and it is now in trouble - 2 Timo-



thy 2:3.

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Another reason a sheep becomes “cast” may be that it has too much wool - Mark 10:21.

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How does a shepherd restore a cast sheep? When a cast sheep is discovered by the shepherd, he picks her up and holds her up while he rubs her legs and little by little she is restored to health and can run back to join the other sheep - Psalm 18:6.

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How can we avoid going astray? Psalm 119:11.

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How does a shepherd find a lost sheep? When a shepherd notices a sheep is missing, he goes to find her. Perhaps he will call her, since sheep do respond to their shepherds voice. Per-

haps he will track her by her footprints or wool she has left behind. Maybe he will hear her bleating - Psalm 119:176.

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There were no lush pasture lands in Israel. The shepherd had to keep his sheep moving in order to find enough grass for them every day. Sometimes the paths would be difficult, but the sheep had to trust the shepherd's leading.

Open the **BLB** to Psalm 23 and tap on verse 3. This time we are going to look at the word "lead". It is a different word than the word in verse 2. Write down the definition and then scroll down through the verses where this word is used elsewhere. Write down anything that catches your attention about who is leading and where they are being led to.

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What are the paths of righteousness? There is a lot in the Bible about where different paths lead. Read through Proverbs 2 and take notes on the different kinds of paths mentioned here.

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Find Proverbs 8:20 and look through the cross references for this verse. Take notes.

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How are we to follow? Start with Matthew 16:24 and have a look through the cross references as well.

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Read also through Isaiah 58. Take notes.

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What does “for His name’s sake” mean? Find the magnifying glass in the top right corner, and type “name’s sake” in the search box. Go through the verses that come up and take notes.

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This is how much the sheep must trust the shepherd.

What is the valley of the shadow of death? Open the **BLB** to Psalm 23 and tap on verse 4. Choose the **Interlinear** and tap on the Hebrew word opposite the “shadow of death”. Write down the definition and then have a look through the verses where this phrase appears in other places.

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This is a reminder that even with a good shepherd, there are times when all seems dark, and the shepherd may not even be visible.

Read through Psalm 22:1-5. David, a man after God’s own heart, felt this way at times. But what did he encourage himself with? How can we encourage ourselves in the same way?

How do you fear no evil? Go back to the **Interlinear**, and choose the Hebrew word opposite “no evil”. Take notes.

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The opposite of fear in this case, seems to be “trust”. If the sheep know the shepherd is there, they know they have nothing to fear. Find Psalm 5:11 in the **BLB**, and choose **Interlinear** and then the Hebrew word opposite the first phrase. Write down the meaning of this word, and then have a look through the other verses where it occurs. What is the reason for trust? Take notes.

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The sheep are never alone.

Open up the **BLB**, and tap on the magnifying glass in the top right corner. Type “I will be” (including the quotation marks) into the search box. Look through the verses that come up. Take notes.

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The name that God gave Moses as the name that He had chosen for Himself in Exodus 3 means “I will be” although it is often said to mean “I am”.

*“This is a verb that often indicates more than simple existence, but makes a strong statement about the being or presence of a person or thing... indicating that their presence (or absence) is noticeable - it makes a real difference to what is happening.”*  
(Nelson’s Expository Dictionary).

What is the shepherd’s rod? Find Psalm 23 in the **BLB** and tap on verse 4, and then choose Interlinear and tap on the Hebrew word opposite “rod”. Write down the definition.

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In Philip Keller’s book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, he says that the rod was an extension of the right arm of a shepherd - it was a club or stick used for defence, but also for chastening. Have a look at what the Bible says about chastening - start with 1 Corinthians 11:32 and look through the Cross References associated with this verse.

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What is the shepherd’s staff? Go back to the **Interlinear** and tap on the Hebrew word opposite “staff”. Write down the definition.

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Philip Keller tells how the staff was a stick with a crook on one end perfect for reaching out and catching sheep to bring them near for examination, or rescuing from brambles or ditches. We have already looked at how the shepherd rescues his sheep.

How do a shepherd's rod and staff bring comfort? Go back to the **Interlinear** and tap on the Hebrew word opposite "comfort". Write down the definition.

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In the history of the people Israel, it is not hard to see the rod of defence, but also correction and guidance, and the staff of deliverance and in the broad picture that we have, we can see that it was for their good. Scroll through the list of other verses where this word appears, especially in Isaiah. Take notes.

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Philip Keller also talks about how a shepherd may go ahead and prepare a summer grazing ground, by rooting out poisonous plants, setting out a salt lick, and searching out and getting rid of any possible predators. The idea is that this thought out and effort has been taken.

What does it mean to prepare a table? Open Psalm 23 in the Blue Letter Bible, tap on verse 5 and then on Interlinear. Tap on the Hebrew word across from "prepared". Write down the

definition (Qal).

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Scroll through the verses where this word is also used and notice how often this word is used in reference to the tabernacle worship.

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What is the table that is prepared? Go back to the **Interlinear**, and tap on the Hebrew word across from “table”. Write down the definition under “Strong’s Definitions”.

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Scroll through the verses where this word is also used. It is interesting that it is also used often for the table of shewbread.

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The table of shewbread held the twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. New bread was placed before the LORD every Sabbath, and the old bread would be eaten by the priests. It was meant to show God’s willingness to have fellowship with His people. God is also said to have provided a table in the wilderness with the manna (Psalm



78:19) and Jesus, of course is said to be the true bread of life. Look up the following verses and write down what is happening in each situation.

Isaiah 25:6-9

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Luke 12:36-37

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Luke 14:15-24

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Matthew 22:1-14

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Revelation 19:7-9

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Who are the enemies? Since this Psalm was written by David, we know as a shepherd boy he had fought the enemies of his sheep, and as a king had fought the enemies of his people and among his own people. David knew enemies. Read through Psalm 18 and see how God deals with enemies. Take notes.

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What is referred to as the “last enemy to be destroyed” - 1 Corinthians 15:26?

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In the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, it is suggested that this Psalm is like the year in the life of a sheep, going from the folds where they are kept over the winter, out through the valleys and rough places to the open grazing of summer. But summer would also bring insects which often caused distress among the sheep. This would be alleviated by a mixture of oil and other substances poured on the head to keep the flies away. But let’s have a look at what this might mean in a spiritual sense.

What is anointing with oil? Open Psalm 23 in the **BLB**, tap on verse 5, and then **Interlinear**. Beside the word “anointest” there is a little box PARSE. This tells us a little bit more about the grammar of a word. When you tap on it, you will see that the Stem is Piel, and the Aspect is Perfect. You can tap on Piel and Perfect and the definition of this grammar term will open below. Close that and tap on the Hebrew word. In the Outline of Biblical Usage it will give you a general definition and then you will see the word “Piel” with definitions listed below this. Words can often have more than one meaning depending on context and this helps to narrow down the meaning a bit. Write down the definition.

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You can also look through the Gesenius Lexicon. Then scroll through the other verses where this word is used. Take notes.

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What is the oil? Go back to the **Interlinear** and tap on the Hebrew word across from “oil”. Write down the definition and then scroll through the verses where this word is also used. What is the oil put on? What was its purpose? Take notes.

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Why is the cup running over? Philip Keller suggests that summertime is when the flock is at its healthiest and full of life. Go back to the **Interlinear**, and tap on the Hebrew word across from “cup”. Scroll down to the *Gesenius Lexicon* and read through the definitions given there. Take notes.

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Scroll through the verses where this word is also used. What is in the cup?

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Go back to Psalm 23:5 and tap on **Cross References**. Look through the one related to the cup. How does your cup run

over?

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This is the result of having the LORD as our shepherd.

Open the **BLB** app to Psalm 23:6, and the **Interlinear** to find the definitions for goodness and mercy. Write them down.

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If we look for it, it is not hard to find examples of the blessings of goodness and mercy in our lives. Take a few moments to consider the goodness and mercy in your life.

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What does it mean to dwell in the house of the LORD? Find the magnifying glass in the top right corner of the **BLB** app, and type “house of the LORD” in the search box, including the quotation marks (otherwise the search will find verses where any of these words appear and not as a phrase). Have a look through the verses and note what the house of the LORD usually refers to in the Old Testament.

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During the time of David, the house of the LORD was a tent, and he wanted very much to build a proper house for God. Instead, in 2 Samuel 7, God told David that He would build David a house that would be eternal. David was looking forward to that day.

## APPLICATION:

Go back through this Psalm and write it out for yourself in your own words. It's also great one to memorize :)

