

Psalms 23

Psalms 23 is one of the dearest passages of the Bible. It is a beautiful reminder that the Lord is caring and compassionate. It reminds us that, like sheep, we depend on God's care and provision.

PSALM 23	THE SHEPHERD'S CARE	APPLICATION
<i>The LORD is my shepherd.</i>	Sheep are able to recognize their shepherd. Care for sheep means ownership of them.	I am like a sheep under God's care. I belong to him.
<i>I shall not be in want.</i>	Sheep may wander off in search of "greener pastures." A stray sheep becomes easy prey for predators.	God meets my deepest needs.
<i>He makes me lie down in green pastures.</i>	Sheep will not rest until they are free from conflict with other sheep, and predators, pests, and hunger. The shepherd's protection is crucial for sheep to rest.	God makes me free to rest.
<i>He leads me beside quiet waters.</i>	Sheep will not drink from waters moving too swiftly because they are not good swimmers, laden down with heavy woolen coats. Shepherds lead them to still waters.	I can drink deeply of God's Holy Spirit who is water to my thirsty soul.
<i>He restores my soul.</i>	Sheep may become "cast," stuck on their backs, unable to get up. A sheep struggling to get up can quickly become dehydrated in the summer sun or become prey for wild animals. The shepherd helps the sheep stand up again.	God cares for and keeps my heart and mind.
<i>He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.</i>	Sheep are creatures of habit. By overgrazing they will destroy their own pastures. They must be led to new pastureland. Only shepherds know the best way to get their sheep there.	God will lead me on the right path because of his great promise.
<i>Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.</i>	Valleys on the way to high pastureland often have the best grass, but those valleys can also be places of dark danger for sheep.	God knows and deals with my fears about the deadly dangers of life.
<i>Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.</i>	Sheep need to learn to trust their shepherd. The shepherd's rod protects and disciplines; it guides and saves.	God's discipline and guidance makes me feel safe.
<i>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.</i>	Often shepherds must prepare the pasture to remove poisonous plants. Predators often wait at the margins of the tableland for a chance to attack.	God provides for my hunger, even when my enemies surround me.
<i>You anoint my head with oil.</i>	Flying insects often plague sheep in summer. Oil is a natural bug repellent that also aids in the healing of skin.	God takes care of my bodily needs.
<i>My cup overflows.</i>	The good shepherd is willing to take the sheep to better grazing and water sources even if it means cost and danger.	My provision from God is abundant.
<i>Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.</i>	Sheep can aid in the fertility of the land, transforming wilderness into parkland and fertile fields. The good shepherd makes blessing follow his sheep.	God's goodness and grace will be with me my whole life.
<i>And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</i>	Sheep, after spending the summer in high pastures, are taken back to the shepherd's property in the fall and winter.	I shall live eternally with God.

Shepherd Imagery in the Bible

OLD TESTAMENT

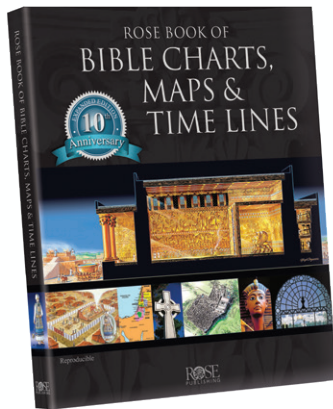
- God is the Shepherd (Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23; 80:1).
- God's appointed leaders are undershepherds (Ezek. 34).
- Many people in the Old Testament were shepherds by trade, like Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Rachel, Jacob, Moses, and David.
- Foreign leaders were sometimes called shepherds when their leadership impacted God's people (Isa. 44:28).
- The prophets depicted the distress of Israel without leadership or bad leaders in terms of a flock without a shepherd (Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 10:2; 13:7).
- The prophets used shepherd imagery to point to the Messiah to come (Ezek. 34:22-24; 37:24; Isa. 40:11; Zech. 13:7; see also Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27).

NEW TESTAMENT

- Jesus is our Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:34).
- Jesus is our Good Shepherd (John 10:1-30).
- Jesus is our Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20).
- Jesus had compassion on the large crowds who came out to see him because they were "like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34).
- Jesus used sheep and shepherds in his parables (Matt. 12:11-12; 18:12-14; 25:31-46).
- Jesus commissioned his disciples to care for his sheep (Matt. 10:6, 16; John 21:16-17).
- Jesus is the lamb of sacrifice (John 1:29; Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19; Rev. 5:6).
- Elders are shepherds under Christ (1 Peter 5:2).



SHEPHERD'S DUTIES	JESUS' ACTIONS
Leads the sheep to safe pasture and water.	Calls disciples to follow wherever he leads (Matt. 4:18-22; John 10:4-9).
Protects the sheep from predators, pests, parasites, other sheep, and natural dangers.	Warns, intercedes and rescues (Mark 8:15; John 17:12-15; Matt. 20:28; John 10:15).
Feeds the sheep, including removing poisonous plants and providing access to foliage on high branches or after a snowfall.	Feeds the crowds. He himself is the bread of life (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:32-39; John 6:22-71).
Cares for the weak or sick lambs.	Cares for the weak and sick (Matt. 14:14; 34-36).
Disciplines wayward sheep and retrieving the lost.	Rebukes his disciples and finds those who have lost their way (Matt. 14:29-31; 16:23; Luke 22:31-34).
Protects cultivated land and crops from the sheep.	Guides his disciples in the way of caring about others (Luke 6:27-36).
Prevents over grazing.	Teaches his disciples to be wise and harmless (Matt. 10:16).



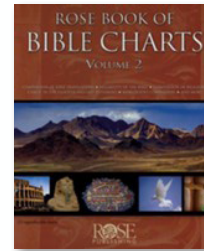
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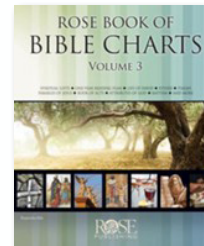
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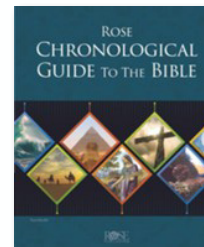
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