

## Psalm 23:1-3

Ps 23:1-3 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. (3) He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

### Questions On The Text

#### How does this passage describe the Lord?

Verse 1: David, the author of this psalm, describes God as his shepherd. "LORD" is the Hebrew name Yahweh. This is the covenant name by which God was known to His people, Israel.

David himself was a shepherd, and therefore understood what it meant to be one. (See 1 Samuel 16:11)

However, even though this psalm is written about Yahweh the Shepherd, it is not written from a shepherd's point of view, nor even from the viewpoint of the flock. Shepherds normally tend flocks, but David has personalised this psalm by declaring that God is not just the shepherd of a group, but his own personal shepherd. It is written from the viewpoint of one individual sheep.

David's thinking is not just that Yahweh is *our* shepherd, although that is true (see Psalm 95:7), but that He is *my* shepherd.

In the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), as well as the good shepherd (Jn 10:11,14). A shepherd's role was to care for, provide for, and protect the sheep.

#### What is the result of having God as your shepherd?

Verses 1-2: I shall not want. The word "want" does not refer to a desire or a wish, but to a lack. In other words, if God is my shepherd, I will never lack; no genuine need in my life will go unfulfilled. See also Philippians 4:19, as well as Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:25-34.

David pictures a sheep being made to lie down in green pastures which symbolises a place of plenty and an abundance of food. Compare this idea with the one in Psalm 37:3 where it tells us to "feed on His faithfulness." The Shepherd makes His sheep lie down; the sheep have plenty of time to eat without rushing. This is a symbol of rest.

#### Where does God lead His sheep?

Verse 2: He leads us beside still waters. There are two important points here. First, in Bible days, shepherds didn't drive their sheep as in later times. They led them, going out ahead of the flock. That's the kind of leadership that God models. He doesn't just tell us what to do. He has already done it Himself in the Person of Jesus.

Second, the meaning of "still waters" is literally waters of rest. This reinforces the idea, already mentioned, that God wants us to experience rest. This is further reinforced by what Jesus said on the subject of rest in Matthew 11:28-30.

#### What does God our Shepherd do for our souls?

Verse 3: God promises restoration for our mind, will and emotions. The three faculties of the soul are mind, will and emotions. Therefore, as our shepherd, God is available to bring restoration to these areas of our lives. Compare this promise with the one in Joel 2:25-26.

## **In what paths does God lead us?**

Verse 3: God's leading takes us in the paths of righteousness. Compare this with what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:13.

The reason God leads His sheep in the paths of righteousness is for His name's sake. In other words, His reputation is at stake when His people walk in unrighteousness. See 2 Samuel 12:14 for an example of how ungodly behaviour results in blasphemy.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to make us good witnesses for Christ. See Acts 1:8.

## **Further Questions For Discussion:**

In what way does God shepherd you? Can you think of specific instances of God's caring for you, His provision, or His protection?

In what way have you experienced God's provision for your needs?

Do you think that the green pastures might represent something besides food for the body? If so, what?

How can you become a partaker of the waters of rest?

In what way might you receive restoration in your mind, your will, or your emotions?

How can your righteous behaviour reflect well on the nature of God?