

WEEK 28 | SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2026

David the Shepherd King

Primary Scripture: Psalm 23

Supporting Scripture: 1 Samuel 16 to 17 | John 10:11 to 15 | Ezekiel 34

Memory Verse, Psalm 23:1: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

BIBLE TIMELINE PLACEMENT

This lesson follows right after David defeats Goliath and steps forward as Israel's champion and future king. Before David ever wears a crown, he lays claim to something greater than any throne, calling the LORD his own shepherd. Israel's greatest king still needed someone to shepherd him, and that pattern points all the way forward to Jesus.

2 CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Shepherding was one of the oldest and most common occupations in the ancient Near East. In Israel it carried extra weight, since the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds long before Israel became a nation. A shepherd's day began at dawn, leading the flock to pasture and water, and did not end until every sheep was safely inside the fold at night. Predators were a constant threat. Wolves, lions, and bears hunted flocks in the hill country of Judah, which is exactly why young David could later tell Saul he had already killed a lion and a bear while guarding his father's sheep. A shepherd carried two simple tools. A rod, a short wooden club, to fight off predators. A staff, a long hooked stick, to guide sheep and pull them back from danger. Sheep themselves are notably defenseless. They cannot outrun predators, they wander easily, and they panic under stress. Across the ancient world, kings in Egypt and Mesopotamia were commonly called shepherds of their people. Centuries later, the prophet Ezekiel rebuked Israel's own kings for failing their flock as shepherds, and promised that God would shepherd His people Himself, even through a future servant called David (Ezekiel 34). David is the rare figure in Scripture who had genuinely been both, a literal shepherd and later a king, which is exactly why his words in this psalm carry such personal, firsthand weight.

3 WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS PASSAGE

Psalm 23 opens with the boldest claim David could make. The LORD Himself is his shepherd, and because of that, David says he lacks nothing. He is led to green pastures and quiet waters, pictures of complete provision and deep rest. His soul, not just his body, is restored. He is guided in right paths, and David is careful to say why. Not because he earned it, but for the LORD's name's sake.

The psalm then turns dark without warning. David writes of walking through the valley of the shadow of death. He does not promise the valley will be avoided. He promises he will not fear evil there, because God is with him. The rod and staff, tools built for a shepherd's daily work, become sources of comfort rather than mere utility.

The imagery shifts again, this time to a banquet table. God prepares a feast for David in full view of his enemies. He is anointed with oil, a sign of honor and welcome. His cup overflows. Provision continues even while opposition is standing close by.

David closes with confident hope. Goodness and mercy will follow him, and the Hebrew word behind follow suggests active pursuit, not something merely trailing behind. He expects to dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

4 KEY THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS

1. What This Reveals About God (Psalm 23:4)

God is not a distant ruler watching from far away. He is a personal shepherd who provides, guides, protects, and comforts His people through every circumstance, including the valley of death itself. David did not need to imagine this. He had spent years watching a real shepherd do exactly this for real sheep.

2. What This Reveals About People (Isaiah 53:6)

People are like sheep. Prone to wander, easily frightened, and unable to fully provide for or protect themselves. That is not an insult. It is an honest picture of how much every person actually needs someone else to lead them well.

3. How This Points to Jesus (John 10:11)

David the shepherd boy grew up to be Israel's shepherd king, yet he still needed the LORD as his own shepherd. Jesus, the greater Son of David and the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, is the fulfillment Ezekiel promised and the reality this psalm pictures.

5 GOSPEL CONNECTION

Psalm 23 reveals that every person needs a shepherd. Someone to provide, guide, protect, and walk with them through the valley of death itself. David could write beautifully about that need. He could even shepherd Israel as king for a time. But David eventually died, and his throne eventually failed. Jesus, David's greater Son, does not merely write about walking through the valley of death. He walked through actual death for His sheep, and rose again, breaking its hold forever. He is revealed centuries later as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.

Simple Gospel Sentence: Jesus is the Good Shepherd who did not just walk with us through the valley of death. He walked through death itself, so we could follow Him all the way home.

6 QUESTIONS CHILDREN WILL ASK

What is a shepherd? Why does the Bible say God is like one?

A shepherd is someone who takes care of sheep every single day, leading them to food and water and keeping them safe from danger. The Bible says God is like a shepherd because He does exactly that for His people, with constant, personal care.

What is the valley of the shadow of death? Is that scary?

It is a way of describing the darkest, most frightening moments in life, the kind that feel like death is close by. The psalm never promises we will avoid that valley. It promises God walks through it with us, so we do not have to face it alone.

If God is my shepherd, why do bad things still happen to me?

Having a shepherd does not mean a sheep never faces danger. It means the sheep never faces danger alone. This psalm promises God's presence and provision through hard things, not the total removal of every hard thing.

What are the rod and staff? Were those weapons?

A shepherd's rod was a short club used to fight off wild animals threatening the sheep. The staff was a long hooked stick used to guide sheep and gently pull them back from danger. Both were tools of protection and care.

Why does it say God prepares a table for me in front of my enemies? That sounds strange.

It is a picture of God's provision and honor continuing even while danger is nearby. It shows that God's care for His people never pauses or hides just because trouble is close.

7 TEACHER SUMMARY

Big Idea	The LORD is a shepherd who provides, guides, protects, and welcomes His people home forever.
What God Did	Personally and intimately shepherded David, providing rest, guidance, and protection through even the darkest valley.
How It Points to Jesus	Jesus, the Son of David, is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep, fulfilling what this psalm pictures.
Error to Avoid	Do not teach this as a reward for good behavior. God provides for His name's sake, not because the sheep earned it. Also, never promise children the valley will be removed. The promise is His presence within it.
Hope to Emphasize	Goodness and mercy actively pursue God's people every day of their lives, and one day they will dwell in His house forever.