

## Psalm 23

Series: Who Is God?  
Jehovah-Raah  
*The LORD Is My Shepherd*

What's in a name? I was looking on line this week at some of the unique names of towns in America. The list is long, but here's just a couple of actual names I came up with. You can check these out on Google maps and locate each one.

Knockemstiff, Ohio; Cut and Shoot, Texas; Sweet Lips, Tennessee; Looneyville, Minnesota; Sleeping Buffalo, Montana; Ding Dong, Texas; Pee Pee, Ohio; Devils Elbow, Missouri; Screamer, Alabama; Roaches, Illinois; and Whynot, North Carolina.

Obviously there's a story behind each of those names. Maybe it's my twisted nature, but I just had to find out where Pee Pee, Ohio got its moniker. Actually its name isn't quite as colorful as you might first think. Its name is said to derive from Pee Pee Creek, which in turn is said to come from the initials of an Irish settler.

Some names are just names without much significance. But often times names have a rich meaning. And that's especially true when it comes to Hebrew names in the Bible.

We tend to pick names for our kids because we like the name or it's a family name. My son Ben and his wife Amanda are going to give us our 4<sup>th</sup> grandchild this coming week if all goes according to plan. His name is Mason Edward Regensburg. Mason because they like the name, and Edward because it's been a family name for generations.

But we named our first born son Ben, Benjamin because the Hebrew *Binyamiyn* means "the son of my right hand." The right hand was a place of blessing so it was a name of honor.

Hebrew names take on a much greater significance than our English names usually do. That's especially true of the names of God.

There are compound names made up of the covenant name of the God of the Bible, Yahweh or Jehovah along with a noun or a verb describing some aspect of His character.

This morning we're starting a series in which we're going to look at some of those names and see how they answer the question: Who is God? How is He presented in Scripture? What's He really like? And this series is going to lead us right through the Christmas Season.

So many times I've heard people make a statement like, "My God is..." and then they go

ahead give their idea of what they'd like God to be like. As if we can define the Almighty.

It's not up to us to define God. It's up to God to define Himself and the way that He does that is through the Bible and often through descriptive titles.

This morning we want to begin with one of the best known titles for God in all the Bible. It's יהוה רעי or we would translate it The LORD my Shepherd.

There are some basic words for God in the Hebrew Bible and our English translators have given us an easy way to spot them.

“God” is *elohiym* or simply *el* which is a general name used for the God of the Bible as well as false gods. It's the basis in Arabic for Allah.

“Lord” is *Adonai* which means “lord, master, or owner.”

But you know the Bible uses the most sacred name of all when you see LORD or GOD. That's the name Jehovah.

In Hebrew the word originally had 4 letters. We call it the *Tetragrammaton*. Those 4 letters, יהוה, come from the verb הוה which is the verb “to be.”

In Exodus 3:15 God said to Moses, *Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.”* God said “I'm the one who is. I am totally self-existent.” And so while, the Jews called God *elohiym* and *Adonai* those names could be applied to the gods of the Canaanites too.

But the sacred name Yahweh was the covenant name of the true and living God of Israel.

Actually no Jew would pronounce the name Jehovah or Yahweh. It was considered too hallowed to pronounce so they came up with an ingenious idea.

Original Hebrew didn't use vowels, only consonants. In fact today modern Hebrew doesn't use vowels. You just have to know them. Here's the web page for the Israeli newspaper Ha'Aretz. What you have is all Hebrew consonants without a single vowel.

Because they didn't want to pronounce the sacred name of God, the Jews inserted the vowels for Adonai in the constants hwhy. That way they'd remember to pronounce the

name Adonai instead.

That means that the name Jehovah is actually a made-up word. We have no idea what the original vowels were supposed to be. But for our purposes we'll use Jehovah as we study out these compound names of our great God.

The God who is, and always has been, the God who is self-existent and needs no one or nothing else, has chosen to reveal Himself as our shepherd.

The Bible says: *He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.* (Isaiah 40:11)

*Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.* (Psalm 100:3)

Who is God? He's a shepherd. In fact, if we'll simply trust Him He's promised to be our personal shepherd.

Of course the verse that comes immediately to mind when we think of God as shepherd is Psalm 23:1 so I'd like us to turn there.

### **Psalm 23 page 537 Read verse 1**

I don't know about you, but I don't have much personal experience with sheep. Most of us city slickers don't get a lot of hands-on time with sheep.

I have seen sheep in pens, petting zoos, and being herded down the road in India. But most of my knowledge of sheep has to come second hand.

Here's what I've found as I've researched sheep:

#### **1. Sheep are foolish**

I don't know what sheep would score in an animal IQ, but I think they would be close to the bottom of the scale. They seem to only know how to do one thing well – eat grass (and produce more grass-eating sheep).

Sheep are irrational. They pause in front of a stream. They know they can't jump it or swim it. So what do they do? They jump in anyway!

## **2. Sheep are slow to learn**

Every shepherd will tell you countless stories about how sheep can be taught a very painful lesson, and yet fail to learn the painful lesson. A sheep may get caught in barbed wire trying to break through a fence. And the next day it will try it again, and again,...

## **3. Sheep are unattractive**

Some animals may not be very bright, but make up for with their movements and actions. They're graceful, they're beautiful in motion. But sheep are so awkward, so lacking in agility and dignity. Although some shepherds may tell you differently, to most outside observers sheep are dirty, smelly, and ugly.

## **4. Sheep are demanding**

One writer said: They demand grass, grass, and more grass; day after day, and night after night. (Do they ever sleep?) And when snow is on the ground, they aggressively demand food from the shepherd.

Just listen to them bleat if their troughs are empty even for a short time. And watch the life-or-death stampede when the shepherd appears.

## **5. Sheep are stubborn**

Trying to move a sheep is almost impossible.

## **6. Sheep are strong**

You look at their skinny legs and think "easy." Next thing you are flat on your back or face down in the dirt. I read one shepherd who said, "I've been flattened by running sheep. It was like getting run over by a tank."

## **7. Sheep are prone to wander**

Maybe the main reason the Bible compares us to sheep more than any other animal is because sheep are so prone to wander off. Isaiah 53:6 says, *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.*

## **8. Sheep are unpredictable**

A number of years ago when the Haags were pasturing a church in Edinburgh in Scotland we got a chance to travel there and visit their work. You'd be driving down a long straight road with no cars. You'd see sheep in the distance on the side of the road. They watch you driving along towards them. Hundreds of yards pass. You are almost beside them and what do they do? They'd just turn right in front of you.

## **9. Sheep are copycats**

When one sheep decides to start running, they all decide to start running. A study was done by a researcher at the University of Leeds in Britain and published in the Animal

Behavior Journal. Here's what he found: like sheep, people in a group as small as 5 percent can influence the direction of an entire group.

The researchers put groups of up to 200 people in a hall and told them to move around and not to communicate. A few individuals were told where to walk and every time the crowd eventually followed. Most were totally unaware that they were being led.

### **10. Sheep are restless**

You can check on them any time day or night and they're still eating grass.

### **11. Sheep are dependent**

Some animals can cope and thrive on their own. Not sheep. They are totally dependent on their shepherd. They can't live without him.

I think you get the idea. The ideal animal to match up with us is a sheep.

Now think about this: David, who wrote Psalm 23, was a shepherd. He spent the beginning years of his life caring for flocks of sheep. He knew exactly what sheep were like and why they were such a reflection of human nature.

David Allen Hubbard writes, "The Lord is my shepherd. These words are startling both in their simplicity and their brashness. The Psalmist is claiming that the God of heaven and earth, who rules the destiny of men and angels, who defeated the Egyptian Pharaoh and rescued Israel from slavery, personally takes care of him."

Who is this God that we read about in the Bible? David wrote *The Lord is my shepherd*.

He didn't write, "The Lord is a shepherd." That would be amazing enough. That would be a striking revelation. That God is a shepherd who cares for His wandering sheep. Instead David goes way beyond that to say, *The Lord is my shepherd*.

You know what makes the difference between formal, cold religion and a living faith? It's the personal pronouns. There are 17 of them in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

It's one thing to know facts about God. It's a whole other thing to know God. A biblical faith isn't faith in cold facts and dry doctrine. A biblical faith is a relationship with the living God.

In the New Testament Jesus said this:

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*

*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:11,14,27,28)*

David lived a thousand years before Christ. He didn't know what the Messiah's name would be. He didn't know that it would be Jesus. But he did know that God was his Savior and that's where he placed his trust.

So David could say with confidence, *The Lord is my shepherd*. Now notice what flows from the truth that the Lord is the shepherd of those who have faith in Him... *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want*.

We say, "Money talks," and that's true to a point. But money becomes strangely silent when our hearts are hurting.

We say, "Knowledge is power," but if all we have is the learning of this world system then when life's greatest needs come crashing in on us, that knowledge is empty weakness.

The truth is, only God can meet those deepest needs we all face at sometime in life.

You might translate verse 1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack."

So what are some of the things that only the Good Shepherd can supply in our lives?

*I. Jehovah-Raah provides rest*

## **Read verse 2**

It's hard to get sheep to lie down. To get them to rest they have to feel completely free from fear, tension, aggravation, and hunger.

So when David the shepherd says, The Lord my shepherd *makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters*, he's conjuring up some powerful imagery that everybody that lived at his time would identify with.

When our soul is hungry and thirsty, when our life is oppressed by conflict and the

pressures of life the Good Shepherd meets our need.

*He says, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)*

*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

Life can disappoint us in a thousand different ways. But when we know Jehovah-Raah we'll find real rest in Him.

*I. Jehovah-Raah Provides Rest*

*II. Jehovah-Raah Restores*

### **Read verse 3**

Literally the Hebrew says, "He brings back my soul." This is so crucial for us to understand. At times every one needs to be restored. Even a believer who recognizes Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd can become so distressed that only God can bring them back.

Even King David who's described in the Bible as "a man after God's own heart" knew what it was like to feel helpless, defeated, and bitter. He knew the pain of his own personal sin.

In Psalm 42:11 he writes, *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*

There's an interesting term among shepherders. It's called a "cast sheep." This is from the web site [sheep101.info](http://sheep101.info): A sheep that has rolled over onto its back is called a "cast" sheep. Cast sheep can become distressed and die within a short period of time if they are not rolled back into a normal position. When back on their feet, they may need supported for a few minutes to ensure they are steady.

When a shepherd comes on a cast sheep he doesn't kick it in the side and say, "You stupid sheep. Get up on your feet." The shepherd is overjoyed to be able to save that sheep's life.

Jehovah-Raah does the same for us. We may stumble and fall under the weight of our own sin, but God delights in bringing us back. He hates our sin. He hates what it does to us, but nothing gives Him greater joy than to put His sheep back on their feet and set them off in

the right direction.

Now sometimes a sheep can become “cast” because of a massive accumulation of wool just weights them down and throws them off balance.

The cure is to shear it clean. That can be a difficult process. Sheep don’t like to be shorn. Shearing the sheep can be a tough process for the shepherd and the sheep. But when it’s done the sheep is relieved to get rid of that hot, burdensome weight.

Sometimes we need a shearing. Sometimes the only way for the shepherd to restore us is to cut off the things that encumber us.

*I. Jehovah-Raah Provides Rest*

*II. Jehovah-Raah Restores*

*III. Jehovah-Raah Guides*

### **Read verse 3 again**

The Bible says, *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.* (Proverbs 14:12)

It says, *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way.* (Isaiah 53:6)

If there was one thing David knew from years of shepherding it was how desperately sheep need to be led.

We have the English word “lead” in both verses 2 and 3 but there’s actually 2 different words in Hebrew. In verse 2 the word means “gently lead.” In verse 3 it carries the idea of “constraint” or “forcible guidance.”

Jesus said, *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* (John 10:10)

That sounds good right? I mean, who doesn’t want abundant life? Our problem so often is, we don’t want to follow. We don’t want to be led in paths of righteousness.

We have our own way of living. We want to be in control. We want to make all the decisions and call the shots.



And in the midst of all our self-will and stubbornness Jesus calls out, *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.* (Luke 9:23)

Sounds good, but it's hard to do. Down inside we don't want to deny ourselves. Down inside we don't want to let go of the control of our lives.

We struggle with being led in paths of righteousness. But that's what the Shepherd does for His sheep.

*I. Jehovah-Raah Provides Rest*

*II. Jehovah-Raah Restores*

*III. Jehovah-Raah Guides*

*IV. Jehovah-Raah Comforts*

#### **Read verse 4**

I don't know if you noticed it or not but there's an interesting change that takes place in verse 4. Up until this point David had been using the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular to describe his relationship with the Shepherd.

It's been, "He leads me beside the still waters, He makes me lie down, He restores, He leads me in paths of righteousness." But now suddenly, when he gets to the subject of death, David drops the 3<sup>rd</sup> person for the 2<sup>nd</sup> person. "You comfort, Your rod, Your staff."

He's not talking to us about God now. Now he's talking to God. He's talking to the Shepherd using personal, intimate language.

The whole reason there can be comfort from the Shepherd is because He's a personal Shepherd. We communicate with this Shepherd. We know Him and He knows us. That's what gives us peace. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We've had several people walk through that valley here in the past week. Olga Kripner, William Entwistle Sr., Kathy Pritchett's mother in PA.

Where do we get our hope? Where do we get our comfort? We get our comfort from the fact that Jesus Christ defeated death. He went to the cross, paid for sin, and rose again. If we have faith in the Shepherd, death is just a shadow and a shadow may seem very dark but it's harmless.

## Read verse 5

There are enemies all around. There's Satan and his demons, there's this deceptive world system with it's upside down values, there are even people who would be glad to see us fail. But the Shepherd provides our needs right in the very presence of our enemies.

He anoints our head with oil, an Oriental sign of blessing. He fills our cup until it overflows.

The King of Heaven, who deserves to be served by His people, ministers to us by bringing comfort and satisfaction. And the truth is, if our Good Shepherd is the one with all knowledge and wisdom and understanding, if He's the Lord over all our circumstances, then we should to be content with His care.

*I. Jehovah-Raah Provides Rest*

*II. Jehovah-Raah Restores*

*III. Jehovah-Raah Guides*

*IV. Jehovah-Raah Comforts*

*V. Jehovah-Raah Provides Eternal Life*

## Read verse 6

When the sun sets and the day is over does the shepherd say to the sheep, "So long guys. I'll see you tomorrow?" Does he just leave them to fend for themselves?

Of course not. It's when the night comes that they need him the most. That's the time of the most intense danger. He doesn't leave them, he leads them and he doesn't rest until every one of them is safely in the sheepfold.

Here's a promise we can count on. This Psalm opened with this exuberant declaration of joy; *The Lord is my shepherd.*

Now look how it closes. *And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.* God's goodness and mercy will follow us as we follow the Shepherd. He'll hold us with His right hand through the darkest, most difficult times. And then, when our life is over we'll dwell in His house forever.

Listen again to Jesus, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them*

*eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*  
(John 10:11, 27-28)

You probably know the words to Psalm 23. A lot of people do. But the question this morning is, do you know the Lord who is our Shepherd?