

# What's with All the Sheep?



The Astonishing Roles of Sheep within the  
Bible: Mind-blowing Insights to Make You  
Think, Smile, & Leap with Joy



Critters for  
Christ

No 1





Every single creature is full of GOD and is a book about GOD.

Every creature is a word of GOD.

—Meister Eckhart

Russ McNeil writes prolifically for the selling, the network-marketing, and the Christian communities. His earlier content—endorsed by over 50 top-earners and experts—addresses the art & science of human connection. Russ’s unique teaching approach uses traits and behaviors of animals as illustrations for communication, sales, & potent people skills. More recently, his work has shifted focus from ‘how to relate to people’ to ‘how to relate to God.’ His trademark humor, unique use of animals, and unorthodox writing style appeal to readers on every continent except Antarctica (and if he ever manages to get an audience with one of those pesky penguins, he’ll probably stake a claim there too.) Discover more at [AhaUniversity.com](https://AhaUniversity.com).

Hey,  
you!

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# Acknowledgements

Our HEAVENLY FATHER is always willing to share his talents, but never his glory. It is he who inspires the concepts and content of my books. The truth is they're not mine anyway. He simply chose my name to put on the covers. The same is true of all my writing, including the work herein. I enthusiastically give him all the glory for every word of it.

Thank you, HOLY SPIRIT, for leading me in the creation of this work. I know you're involved in all the books with my name on the cover, and this one even more so. The past year has been a full spectrum of emotions, from abject anxiety to extreme elation. Being laid off put me in a position where I had to face my biggest weakness. More specifically, it highlighted my need to trust you in *all* things, not just the 'easy' things. Only you and I will ever know the immense spiritual growth you brought me through while working on this book. Thank you for the revelations you showed me about you and about myself and thank you for helping me to capture those revelations herein. You truly are my Shepherd.

Thank you, Tammy, my love. I acknowledge you in every book I write because every book I write is part you. If not for you, I would be a very different man, and the books with my name on the covers would be very different books. Your love for the LORD and your love for me shine brightly through your never-ending support and encouragement. You may never know how much you inspire me. Sometimes, it's a simple glance across the room with those gorgeous hazel eyes. Sometimes, it's a silent smile that melts my heart like wax. Sometimes, it's when I sneak a peek at your curly golden fleece, I mean bangs, that always make my heart flutter. There isn't enough space to list all the ways you make me aspire to be my best. I'm grateful the LORD put us together in such a fine flock, but the truth is, you are the only ewe for me.

Dear Reader,

This book is written for people of faith; more specifically, people of the *Christian* faith. I use ‘Christian’ in the pure, biblical sense of the word: someone who has been redeemed by the sacrificial death and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, the SON OF GOD.

If you have any doubts as to your standing with JESUS, I plead for you to consider this clear and concise four-minute [video](#).<sup>a</sup> My plea has nothing to do with your reading of this book. Of course, I welcome you to continue reading. No, my plea is out of concern for your eternal destiny. It’s a matter of where you will spend eternity. Heaven or Hell? Contentment or agony? Those are the only two choices. It’s worth pondering, you know, for eternity is....

For. Ever.

Our limited minds do not allow us to fully grasp the concept of time with no end. And yet, that is precisely the situation in which we exist. What we have is a classic case of good news/bad news. The good news is you get to choose where you spend eternity. The bad news is you have to make your choice in this life. Afterwards is irreversibly too late. Years ago, I found one of these [little comic books](#)<sup>b</sup> lying on the ground. I read it, acted upon it, and was forever changed. There’s that term again: ‘forever’—a recurring theme indeed.

Okay, my friend, the commercial is over. For now. What follows, as promised, is a unique peek at sheep and why they’re so important within the *Bible*. Don’t assume you already know everything herein because I’m pretty sure that is not the case. And even if you do know it all, I can assure you that you’ve *never* seen the information presented the way it is here.

Enjoy the read. May the words stay with you. For. Ever.

Russ

June 2025

## Introduction,

The LORD once told me during a journaling session<sup>c</sup> how beluga whales (aka white whales) are one of his favorite animals. Based on the prevalence of sheep in the *Bible*, I'm convinced they too might be among His favorites. Dare I suggest they are his *very* favorite?

The LORD recently shifted the focus of my writing from 'how to relate to people' to 'how to relate to GOD.' The *Critters for Christ Series* is the initial result of that shift. He went on to identify themes of the first three volumes. You are currently reading volume No. 1.

By this point in my journey as a writer, I've researched hundreds of animals. At the time of this writing, well over 200 of them serve as illustrations for 'human connection skills,' my former area of focus. I have a profound love for animals. I love to learn about their behaviors and traits; I appreciate the stunning beauty with which many of them are adorned. Animals are marvelous and majestic to behold. (Better be careful which ones you be holdin' though.)

While I cherish every species, I'm especially fond of the exotics. I have to admit, the domesticated varieties are the ones I find least interesting. The kinkajou, tamandua, binturong—I could go on and on espousing the traits thereof. Parrots—there are four separate full-length volumes dedicated to those precious jewels of the jungle alone. Sting rays, garden eels, cuttle fish—you better know how to find my OFF button. But—and a big hippo but it is—cows, horses, goats, and other denizens of the barnyard—not so much. So, his directive to write about sheep ... well let's just say that 'unexpected' is an understatement. Unexpected, but not *uninspired*!

Don't get me wrong. Writing for him brings me genuine joy. It nourishes my soul. So, I'm enthusiastic about the instruction. Furthermore, sheep are a recurring theme in the *Bible*. It's a theme repeated multiple times. In numerous passages. Over and over. And




over. And then, just to make sure we get it, the *Bible* gives us even *more* verses involving sheep.

Apparently, sheep are important. In this book we endeavor to learn why. Why is the theme of sheep so pervasive within the *Bible*? Is it the way they behave? Certain traits they exhibit? Is the correlation more symbolic than literal? This volume aims to answer these questions and more. By the end we will more fully appreciate the roles of sheep within the *Bible*.

Ewes, rams, and lambs—very different, and yet very much the same. A ewe is a female sheep, and a ram is a male sheep. Precisely zero gender ambiguity; male and female exactly as created. You know—just like humans. A lamb is a young sheep of either gender. Despite these distinctions, ultimately, they all are sheep.

Counting sheep


So, just how often are sheep mentioned in the *Bible*? Well, thank you for asking because it just so happens, I counted them (with a little help from a certain website). Here’s the breakdown:



If I ever tried to count this many sheep, I’d sleep through an entire 40-hour workweek.

Term	Old Testament	New Testament	Total
Ewe	7	0	7
Ram	85	3	88
Lamb	147	39	186
Sheep	147	41	188
Total	386	83	469

Well, I could sure use the break.



You can relax. We’re not about to address all 469 occurrences. I managed to pare the list down to a much more manageable number of only 459. I’m joking of course. Sheep are central to certain themes within the *Bible*. This book focuses on themes, not every individual mention.

## Who is this book for?

The peeps who read this book will necessarily fall into one of two groups. The first group includes readers who have been redeemed by the blood of JESUS. These are genuine Christians (as per GOD's definition). Specific denominations are 100% irrelevant. Man's labels and divisions have absolutely no bearing. It is simply a question of your standing with YAHWEH (the one true GOD of the *Bible*). Christians (aka Believers) are the first group. The second group of readers includes everyone else.

It is with open arms I welcome both groups to read away!

Group one will enjoy a wide range of powerful insights to amplify your relationship with the LORD. You will gain new levels of appreciation for the foresight, love, and omniscience on full display as characteristics of our CREATOR. All within the context of sheep.

Group two will enjoy direct answers to challenging questions, questions which often stand in the way of a person accepting GOD's plan for their personal salvation. If you consider yourself among this group, you will also be presented with a succinct, no-frills explanation of his plan. Perhaps the explanation herein will resonate with you in a way that others have not.

***Author's note:*** *This book depends upon several biblical narratives. I realize readers in group 2 might not be familiar with these narratives. To close the gap, early chapters herein provide high-level overviews. Even peeps already familiar with much of the Bible are encouraged to read through the overviews because they highlight details that come into play later in the book. The theme of sheep within GOD's Word is an incredibly rich subject. If you want to experience the full impact thereof, I urge you to read without skipping.*

## Bible references

If you're going to properly address a theme as pervasive as sheep in the *Bible*, you're going to refer to a lot of verses. In some cases, I include *Bible*

text for your convenience. In other cases, I simply include a reference to the verse referred to in the prose. All cases include a hyperlink to the supporting verse. This way, if you're reading a digital copy of this book, you can quickly bring up the verse for your own edification.

I limit my research to three translations of the *Bible*: <sup>(1)</sup> the 1995 edition of the *New American Standard Bible*, <sup>(2)</sup> the *King James Version*, and <sup>(3)</sup> the *Schocken Bible* for the first five books of the Old Testament. There are compelling reasons for these choices, but let's not debate those reasons here.

As with all the books with my name on the covers, I strive to cite all sources. Some references are used throughout an entire paragraph. In these cases, only a single reference is specified at the end of the paragraph. These citations are preceded with the universal symbol for a paragraph (e.g., ¶<sup>176</sup>).

## Terminology

Names are important. We all have names by which we prefer to be called. How much more important is it to properly address the CREATOR of the universe? This book is fraught with references to him, and therein lies the challenge. Two challenges, actually. <sup>(1)</sup> To avoid repetition. It would be unduly repetitious to refer to him as GOD in every single instance because there are so many mentions. <sup>(2)</sup> The term "God" does not necessarily refer to a specific person. Capitalization helps, but still, we're not referring to some ancient Egyptian little-g god. We're referring to the only true and living GOD. As a demonstration of respect, we also use explicit alternatives.



This book addresses both issues by employing a mixture of names given to us by the *Bible*. It also uses a mix of labels. GOD has many facets. A mixture of names and labels help to

highlight his various facets. This same concept applies to JESUS and the HOLY SPIRIT.<sup>d</sup>

The following lists summarizes names and labels used to reference GOD, JESUS, and the HOLY SPIRIT. Notice the use of “small caps.” This font style visually differentiates holy names within the text. Metaphorical labels (e.g., Lamb) are capitalized, but retain the normal font style.

GOD—FATHER, HEAVENLY FATHER, YAHWEH, CREATOR, LORD, THE ONE TRUE GOD, I AM, THE ALPHA AND OMEGA, Shepherd, Great Shepherd, Good Shepherd, Heavenly Shepherd.

JESUS—LORD, SON OF GOD, YESHUA, CHRIST, SAVIOR, MESSIAH, KING, Shepherd, Good Shepherd, Lamb, Lamb of God,

HOLY SPIRIT—SPIRIT, SPIRIT OF GOD.

## How it began

Writing this book has changed my life. Literally. These are not words I use lightly. I had been recently laid off when the LORD led me to begin writing the *Critters for Christ Series*. (While this current volume is labeled “No. 1” in the series, it is in fact the third one for me to write. Long story, don’t ask.)

That layoff takes a huge toll on our monthly income. While Tammy is an absolute rock of faith, I experience moments of extreme anxiety. It is during this time that a very good friend calls and tells me the HOLY SPIRIT is prompting her to purchase for me a certain video series. To make a long story short, that video series teaches me a system by which I can enjoy two-way conversations with the ONE TRUE GOD.

This new-found skill sends my life on an entirely different trajectory. Through the course of conversations with the LORD, he shifts the emphasis of my writing. This shift becomes the genesis of the *Critters for Christ Series*. When he first inspires me to write about sheep, I think, *Okay. No big deal. I’ve written hundreds of lessons using animals as metaphors.*

*Why would sheep be any different? I know enough about the presence of sheep in the Bible to realize there are several lessons, but I mean really, how deep and involved can those lessons be?*

Silly me. I am basking with extravagance in the luxury of ignorance.

But not for very long.

### **I had no idea**

At first, this book seems like so many other books with my name on the cover: straightforward enough with the usual amount of research detailed. Ha! The more I write, the more needs to be written. Research leads to research which leads to yet even more. It's like pulling a thread on a well-worn woolen sweater.

The chapter on Passover in particular keeps growing and growing. One Fascinating detail gives rise to two more. The Passover chapter mushrooms with more impact than anything else I have ever written.

Until.

Until, that is, I get to the chapter about The Song, which zeroes in on a simple six-verse *Bible* passage. For nearly my entire life, I think I know that passage. Not so. I know next to nothing. Metaphors wrapped in metaphors which lead to more metaphors. Only a perfect, omniscient, GOD, operating outside of time could orchestrate creation in the manner portrayed in those six verses.

That one chapter, all by itself, changes me. Forever. I think differently. I think about our HEAVENLY FATHER differently and more often. As in very nearly constantly. My priorities are different. I am closer to him than I have ever been. The things I learn writing that one chapter are, for me, nothing short of profound. I can only pray the words have the same kind of impact on you.

If so, you will never be the same. Nor will you want to be.



## What you can expect

What follows is a series of progressive chapters. Some of the early ones contain overviews for important episodes in the *Bible*. These serve as background. The background chapters are followed by the core content. Along the way, you'll encounter cool trivia; at least one narrative for which some readers will need tissue; plenty of appealing humor; and, if I did my job right, some unexpected biblical revelations. The latter—the revelations—aren't 'preachy' nor do they involve weird doctrines from the Book of Russ. They stem from shedding light on cultural, historical, biological, geographical, and even supernatural contexts with which many people, in our modern times, might not be familiar.

And then there are the metaphors. The seemingly endless stream of sheep-related metaphors. I love teaching in metaphors. *Especially*, when they're based on animals. When I began to realize the ~~shear~~ sheer number of sheep-related metaphors in the Word of GOD, I was in Heaven (metaphorically speaking, of course).

If you're new to the books with my name on the covers, be aware: you're in for a different kind of reading experience. I write as inspired by the HOLY SPIRIT. And the way he expresses himself through my keyboard pecking, is a bit unorthodox. Readers tend to enjoy it, and I take no credit for it. I am merely a scribe with a word processor and a connection to the Internet. And about a k'billion clipart images. And a love for animals. And a love for the one who created the animals. It is his Word for which we shall pursue a deeper understanding.

The title of this book starts with a question: *What's with All the Sheep?* The answer isn't trivial, but once you know it, you recognize it for what it is: a beautiful expression of limitless love.

Okay. Enough already. Ready for the answer to the question *What's with all the sheep?*

Well, sit right down, my friend, and let me tell you a story...

### I realize not everyone reading this

comes from a long line of sheep ranchers. So, before we delve into the core themes, let's take a moment to familiarize ourselves with the nature of sheep. That way we can more fully appreciate the roles they play within the *Bible*.

Everything GOD does, he does with specific intent. This being the case, I pose a question: Why does he use sheep in the ways that he does? Keep reading. There answers are straight ahead. But for them to make any



sense, we need to know the things that make sheep ... well ... sheep. It takes more than a bunch of fluffy fleece to be one, you know!

### Ever the prey

A prey animal is one that is preyed *upon* but, does not itself prey on other animals. Prey animals exist in every type of habitat. Camels, meerkats, gazelles, macaws, reindeer, hares, and kissing gourami fish—all are prey, but do not themselves hunt prey. There are domesticated varieties of prey animals as well; the classic example being sheep.<sup>9</sup>

Very few prey animals come equipped with mechanisms of violence with which to protect themselves. Instead, their means of defense tend to be passive. In the case of sheep, many of their design features are optimized for passive self-defense.

### Sheep smell good

Just imagine... it's right before shearing season. Sheep's fleece is thick and dense. Embedded in this unwoven, wiry wool is the fragrance of living life as a sheep: dust, pollen, mud, the smell of the ground acquired from sleeping upon it; the smell of dung from occasionally stepping *in* it. Mmm, mmm, oh, the aroma thereof!

Hey! Wait a minute! *That's* not what I meant. Sheep don't smell good. What I meant to say is that they have a keen sense of smell.<sup>13</sup> And they put it to good use too.

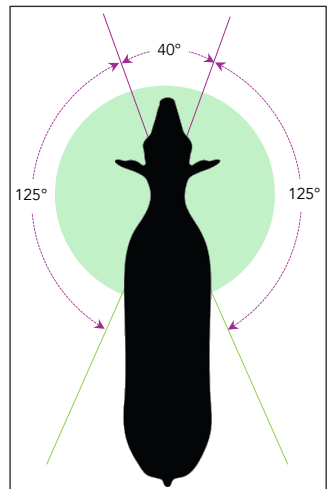
- 🐏 With no physical defense, sheep stay on the alert for trouble. One way they do so is by detecting the scent of predators.<sup>14</sup> Even scents that are merely unfamiliar make sheep wary.<sup>14</sup>
- 🐏 Sheep use scents to differentiate between types of feed.<sup>12</sup> Likewise for pastures.<sup>12,13</sup> Similarly, they can locate water by smell.<sup>13</sup>
- 🐏 Rams use their sense of smell to detect fertile ewes.<sup>12</sup>
- 🐏 Ewes use their sense of smell to identify their newborn lambs.<sup>13</sup>

## Eye see ewe

Sheep stay on the lookout for trouble. Their eyesight is optimized for this task. Their vision benefits from two clever design features: <sup>(1)</sup> pupils shaped as elongated horizontal slits, and <sup>(2)</sup> eyes placed on the sides of their head.<sup>13</sup> The combination of these traits yields an exceptionally wide field of view as shown in figure N-1.

As you can see, a forward-facing sheep has a field of view of 290°. <sup>12 p36</sup> (Actual angles vary with the state of a sheep's fleece because a full fleece may block part of its view, thereby reducing the angle.<sup>13</sup>) Within the blue arc, the sheep has poor, but binocular (3D) vision. Green arcs have only monocular vision.<sup>12 p36</sup>

This arrangement means, that by turning its head only slightly to one side, a sheep can see directly behind itself. This ability comes at a cost though. Sheep have poor depth perception; even more so as they walk in a heads-up posture.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, they stand still when they need to examine something closely.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, sheep aren't very adept at picking out details.<sup>13</sup> And



because they are reluctant to approach areas they can't see, sheep prefer to avoid shadows.<sup>13</sup>

### Hear ewe, hear ewe

What sheep lack in eyesight, they make up for with their sense of hearing. While their auditory frequency range is similar to that of humans, they have two additional advantages.<sup>16</sup> The first is large ears with which to better capture sound.<sup>9</sup> The second is the ability to rotate their ears independently to pinpoint the source of a sound.<sup>13, 15</sup>

Sheep react adversely to loud, unnatural sounds.<sup>13</sup> Yelling, barking, fireworks—pretty much anything out of the ordinary will put sheep in a state of agitation or even panic.<sup>13, 15</sup> This is an involuntary reaction brought on by stress-related hormones.<sup>13</sup>

Ewes and lambs also use their sense of hearing to locate each other. This is vital in grazing areas crowded with a large flock.



### Sheep of a feather follow together

Perhaps the behavior most commonly associated with sheep is that of 'flocking.' The phrase, 'There's safety in numbers' was probably not coined by a sheep, but it might as well have been. For it is precisely the reason sheep gather together. When frightened, they band together for protection.<sup>13</sup> Even while grazing in the absence of a threat, sheep need to maintain visual contact; a lone sheep is a nervous sheep, indeed.<sup>13</sup>

The ovine flocking instinct goes hand-in-hand with the ovine instinct to follow. Sheep follow a leader. “When one sheep moves, the rest will follow.” <sup>13</sup> A wise and caring shepherd earns the trust of his sheep. He trains one to follow him, and the rest eagerly follow that leader sheep.

The sheep instinct to follow is so strong they often follow “even when it does not seem like a good idea.” <sup>13</sup> The instinct is, in fact, so irresistible, it leads to a puzzling incident. <sup>17,18</sup> The date is July 8, 2005. <sup>17,18</sup> Imagine you’re in the rocky terrain of a remote region of Turkey, near the agricultural village of Gevas. <sup>17</sup> Now, join me as I describe the event of interest...<sup>18</sup>

It's sunrise, and the village shepherds pool their sheep into a single flock and lead it up the nearby mountain to graze. They’ve done it hundreds, maybe thousands, of times before, just as their fathers did, and just as *their* fathers did before that. While the sheep graze, the shepherds break out breakfast to do a little grazing of their own. <sup>17</sup>

In the middle of their meal, as the shepherds look on, one of the sheep suddenly jumps off a cliff committing suicide. Then, to the shepherds’ utter horror, one-by-one, other sheep follow. In the end, 450 of the creatures lay dead at the base of the cliff.

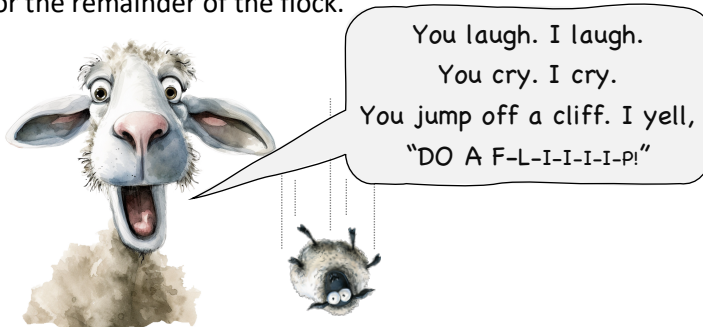
This disturbing incident piques the interest of Australian researchers because suicide is not something normally associated with animals. So, operating under a grant, the researchers perform a six-month investigation after which, they get to the bottom of the matter (sorry, couldn’t resist ☺). This is what they found:

The terrain of the elevated grazing area forces the sheep to flock together in a tight crowd. At some point, the lead sheep moves precariously close to the edge of a cliff. The remaining sheep still shuffling and crowding forward, cause the lead sheep to lose its footing and plummet over the edge to its death. The others,



succumbing to their hormonal instinct to follow, do the same. They follow the first sheep right over the ledge.

As tragic as this story is, there is somewhat of a humorous edge to it. Turns out, there aren't 450 sheep in the flock, there are 1,500 of them. And every last one of them jumps over the edge! Only 450, however, meet their demise. The others survive because they land on top of the first 450, which break their fall. In effect, the first 450 serve as a cushion for the remainder of the flock.



You might think the story proves what little intelligence sheep have. Their natural instincts of flocking and following are often interpreted as an inability to think for themselves. But, as we're about to learn, not everything is as it appears.

### Sheeps be smarter than most people think

Sheep are surprisingly intelligent. Research shows they can remember the faces of at least 50 different sheep for over two years.<sup>10</sup> Another study discovers they can discriminate between individuals merely by looking at photographs, even when the photos represent different ages and different viewing angles.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, sheep can also differentiate between certain facial expressions (e.g., calm, surprise, fear).<sup>20, 21</sup>

Sheep are not stupid. They are simply misunderstood. Need more convincing? Okay. Just ask the good people of Marsden, a village in North Yorkshire, England.<sup>23</sup> They'll tell you all about it, and with a little help from the BBC, so will I...<sup>22</sup>

It all starts in 1994. That's the year an undisclosed number of sheep stray from their home grazing area in search of greener pastures. The wayward flock apparently discovers several suitable pastures: a cricket field, a public park, a graveyard, and several private gardens. The latter prove to be their downfall. One irate gardener has no patience for inconsiderate sheep. So, he corrals the wooly perpetrators and holds them hostage until they can be moved back to their home pasture.

In response to the sheep invasion—or *escape*, depending on one's perspective—cattle grids are installed. These are 3 meters (8 feet) across and span the entire width of the road. Apparently, this addresses the issue. Gravesites retain their beautifully manicured lawns and cabbage plants no longer appear on local ovine menus.

A decade later, in 2004, that all changes. The sheep invade again. And again. The attack on local gardens becomes a continuous onslaught. The fleeced monsters don't behave as normal sheep. Witnesses see the sheep hurdling 1½ meter (5 foot) fences and squeezing through 20 cm (8 in) gaps. They ignore shouting humans and barking dogs alike. While this sort of behavior is highly unusual for sheep, it's hardly worthy of publication by the BBC.

But wait! That's not all!

It's an altogether different behavior that stuns the rural English countryside. The sheep, it seems, learn how to defeat the cattle grids. Dorothy Lindley describes how the crafty critters go about it:

“They lie down on their side, or sometimes their back, and just roll over and over the grids until they are clear. I've seen them doing it. It is quite clever, but they are a big nuisance to villagers. They eat plants, flowers, and vegetables in gardens. It is soul destroying.”<sup>22</sup>

Oh, I don't know. 'Soul destroying' might be a tiny bit overdramatic, but stop-drop-and-roll to defeat a cattle grid? Sounds pretty smart to me.

The next time you're feeling a little down or a tad bit blue, just remember somewhere in a small, quaint little village, situated in the bucolic countryside of England, is a man frustrated with fugitive sheep for nibbling at the cabbage in his award-winning garden. *Cabbage? Really?*

Sheep may not give a bleat-bleat about property rights, but they're a lot smarter than what most people think.



I came, I saw, I forgot what I was doin', retraced my steps, and got distracted on my way back. Now, I have absolutely no idea what's goin' on, and I need to pee.

... well ... most of 'em anyway.

**Did you know?** <sup>24</sup> On September 19, 1783, something extraordinary takes place: the world's first flight involving live occupants. Joseph and Jaques Montgolfier, air balloon pioneers, launch a balloon from Versailles in the presence of King Louis XVI, Queen Marie Antoinette, and a crowd of onlookers. The question on everyone's mind: Can a living creature survive flight? The risk of experimenting on humans is simply too great. So, they decide to send animals instead: a duck, a chicken, and a sheep. The flight attains an altitude of 1,500 feet and lasts for eight suspense-filled minutes. All occupants survive. Oh, and the sheep's name: Montauciel, which means 'climb to the sky.'



Sometimes, you have to go up really high to understand how small you really are.

## “What’s in a name? That which

## The Girl

we call a rose, by any other name would

smell as sweet.”<sup>1</sup> This may be true if you’re Juliet, bemoaning a forbidden love. Otherwise, cool your jets, Turbo, because as we shall see, not every rose is oh so sweet.

There exists a website listing 924 distinct varieties of roses.<sup>2</sup> In the middle of the list is one variety with the seemingly harmless name of ‘Mary Rose.’ Mary. Now there’s a name with some history behind it.

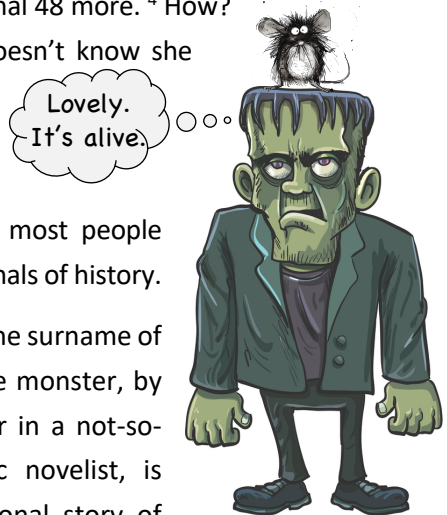
Take, for instance, Mary Tudor (d. 1558), also known as Mary I, Queen of England.<sup>3</sup> She’s famous, primarily, due to her fiery disposition towards protestants. And by ‘fiery,’ I mean literally. The malevolent monarch has protestants burned at the stake for, what she deems as heresy.<sup>3</sup> This Wholly-but-not-so-holy behavior earns her a rather distinctive moniker: ‘Bloody Mary.’<sup>3</sup> We have no reports as to whether anyone ever has the moxie to repeat the nickname in her presence.

Or, how ‘bout Mary Mallon, the cook, who, in the early 1900s, kills three people and very nearly kills an additional 48 more.<sup>4</sup> How?

By transmitting typhoid fever. She doesn’t know she carries it because she, herself, exhibits no symptoms.<sup>4</sup> This doesn’t make her any less dangerous, though.

‘Typhoid Mary’ is probably not how most people want to be remembered within the annals of history.

A bit less offensive is a Mary with the surname of Shelly. This Mary gives birth to a true monster, by which, I mean, an authentic monster in a not-so-true story. Mary Shelly, the gothic novelist, is famous for bringing to life the fictional story of *Frankenstein*. Not exactly deserving of indictment, but still plenty scary enough to send certain genteel readers ‘bolting’ for the door.



Then we have the less threatening, but still wholly disagreeable variety of Mary; a real contrarian she is. We know this about her because her unfriendly demeanor is documented as far back as the 1700s.<sup>5</sup>

Mary, Mary, quite contrary,  
How does your garden grow?  
With silver bells, and cockle shells,  
And pretty maids all in a row.

There are multiple theories as to the backhanded meaning of this rhyme. The details of those theories are not important to our discussion. Suffice it to say the rhyme is quite possibly a veiled allusion to one of two historical figures, both malicious monarchs, and both named Mary.

Of course, not all Marys immortalized in nursery rhymes are murdering, malignant, or disagreeable. Consider the rhyme about a certain sweet schoolgirl and her famous little lamb. You know the one...

Be careful following the masses.  
Sometimes the 'M' is silent.



Mary had a little lamb,  
Its fleece was white as snow;  
And everywhere that Mary went,  
The lamb was sure to go.

He followed her to school one day—  
That was against the rule;  
It made the children laugh and play,  
To see a lamb at school.

So the teacher turned it out,  
But still it lingered near,  
And waited patiently about,  
'Till Mary did appear.

**Did you know?** “Mary Had a Little Lamb” owns bragging rights as the first audio recording in all of history. In 1877, Thomas Edison recited the poem to test his newly invented phonograph. The test was successful, securing a spot in history for the poem as well as the phonograph.<sup>17</sup> You can listen to that original recording at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10137/10137-m/10137-m-001.mp3>



In this rhyme, it isn't Mary causing the controversy, or even the poem itself, but rather the provenance of the poem. The poem is often attributed to a one Sarah Josepha Hale, but this is not correct.<sup>6</sup> After a bit of online sleuthing, I finally manage to get to the bottom of the matter. The true author is a young man by the name of John Roulstone.<sup>6</sup>

Now, here's where it gets interesting. Turns out, there's more to the poem than what you may think. A lot more. Because, you see, it really happened. Exactly as written. The lamb, the school, the teacher—all very real. So was the Mary; Mary Elizabeth Sawyer (b. 1806), to be precise. You can read the entire story as told by Mary herself. Checkout the short, free, PDF [here](#) (also listed as source number 6). For the sake of reading continuity, I'll provide a brief overview of the story here:<sup>6</sup>

Since the age of toddling, Mary Sawyer is fond of animals. On one cold March morning, she and her father go to the barn to tend to their animals. They discover a pair of lambs born the previous night. One is suffering from motherly neglect. The poor thing has not been fed nor does it have any way to keep warm. Mary's father is convinced the lamb is beyond help. Kind-hearted Mary, on the other hand, is not so quick to give up on the little creature.

She pleads with her father for permission to take the lamb into the house where she can nurse it back to health. She wraps it in a blanket and cuddles it all day in front of the fireplace, nursing it with weak tea. There they remain, with Mary holding the little lamb all through the night. By morning, it can swallow normally and stand on its own.

On a diet of milk, and under the careful care of young Mary, the lamb recovers quickly. Unbeknownst to Mary, lambs imprint<sup>e</sup> soon after birth, usually within a few days.<sup>11,12 p171</sup> So, in no time at all, the lamb is following her everywhere. The two quickly develop a close bond. Mary has few playmates, and her little lamb fills the gap. Mary bathes it regularly, trims its fleece, and even fastens colored ribbons on its forehead.

Likewise, the little lamb adorns Mary ... in a roundabout way. Mary's mother knits two pairs of "nice stockings" from fleece sheared from the pet lamb. So, in a way it gives of itself for Mary's benefit.

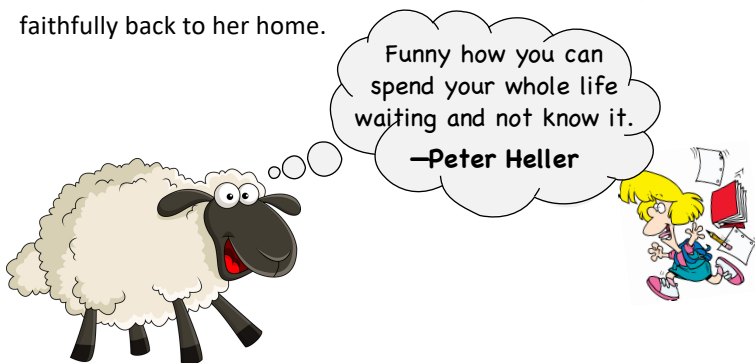
During the season in which the rest of the sheep are put to pasture, Mary's pet stays behind in the woodshed. It enjoys its special status, and according to Mary, "does not take kindly to its own species." In fact, while in the field, it prefers the company of cows and horses over that of other sheep.

One morning, Mary prepares to leave for school and doesn't see the lamb, so she calls for it. Sure enough, the young sheep runs to Mary, bleating excitedly the whole way. When it gets near, Mary's brother, Nat, says, "Let's take the lamb to school with us." So, that's just what they do; Mary and Nat trod the path to school, with the lamb following close behind.

When the trio gets to school, the teacher, a certain Miss Polly Kimball, has not yet arrived. Mary makes the fateful decision to bring the little lamb into the classroom. She places the lamb under her chair and covers it with a blanket. The lamb settles in, quiet as a mouse. It lay there contentedly even after class begins.

Until.

Until, that is, Mary is called up front to recite a lesson. Just as she begins, the lamb squirms its way from under the desk and then, with a clatter, clatter, clatter, proceeds to follow Mary, making its way to the front. The other students giggle at the unexpected commotion. So does Miss Kimball, initially. Mary, of course, must remove the lamb from class. She takes it outdoors and shuts it in a shed until after class, at which point it follows her faithfully back to her home.



As providence would have it, visiting the school that very same day, was a young man by the name of John Roulstone. He's older than the others and preparing for college. Mary explains what happens next:

“

The young man [John Roulstone] was very much pleased with the incident of the lamb; and the next day he rode across the fields on horseback to the little old schoolhouse and handed me a slip of paper which had written upon it the three original stanzas of the poem.”<sup>6</sup>

And *that* is the true story of Mary and her little lamb. The referenced book (source #6) was published by none other than Henry Ford (Yes, *that* Henry Ford). It contains <sup>(1)</sup> a facsimile of the original Roulstone note, signed by Mary Sawyer, and <sup>(2)</sup> a facsimile of the affidavit testifying to the veracity of the story as printed in the book.

Roulstone’s rhyme immortalizes a beautiful relationship between human and animal. It does not, however, describe the heart-wrenching end of that relationship. One Thanksgiving morning, when the lamb was four years-old, it follows Mary to the barn. Let us again turn to Mary’s own narrative...

“

One of the creatures [a cow] gave its head a toss, then lowered its horns and gored my lamb, which gave an agonizing bleat and came toward me with the blood streaming from its side. I took it in my arms, placed its head in my lap, and there it bled to death. During its dying moments it would turn its little head and look up into my face in a most appealing manner, as if it would ask if there was not something that I could do for it. It was a sorrowful moment for me when the companion of many romps, my playfellow of many a long summer's day, gave up its life; and its place could not be filled in my childish heart.”<sup>6</sup>

That is one sorrowful ending for sure. However, as sad as it is, it mirrors a similar story which, in contrast, ultimately calls for celebration. The follow-on story also involves a Mary. And a Lamb.

Another precious little Lamb.

Which leads us to the next stop along our journey of ovine discovery.

130 km (80 mi) trek, on the back of a donkey, over rough, rocky roads, is no bed of roses, even if your name is Mary.<sup>29</sup> Even less so if you're pregnant at the time. And yet, such is the plight of Mary, soon-to-be mother of JESUS, long-awaited MESSIAH.

Mary's pregnancy is a miracle because she is still a virgin. An angel tells her beforehand that she will be impregnated by the HOLY SPIRIT, himself, and such is currently the case. [Luke 1:26-38](#) Three reasons<sup>37</sup> make the virgin birth necessary: <sup>(1)</sup> to fulfil a 700-year-old<sup>36</sup> prophesy, <sup>f</sup> [Isaiah 7:14](#) <sup>(2)</sup> to prove JESUS's divine nature, [Matthew 1:20](#) and <sup>(3)</sup> to bypass the curse of sin, which is passed to us by Adam at the time of our conception. [Psalm 51:5](#) Somehow—we are not told how—conception by the HOLY SPIRIT avoids this passing of the curse. Thus, JESUS is born without sin.

**Did you know?** It is likely that Mary & Joseph (M&J) stayed with relatives of Joseph, *not* at an inn and *not* in a stable as commonly portrayed.

The word translated as 'inn' is *kataluma*. This word only appears three places in the New Testament: the lodging place of M&J, [Luke 2:7](#) and twice regarding the **guest room** used to host the 'last supper' on Jesus's final Passover.<sup>40</sup> [Luke 22:11](#) & [Mark 14:14](#) Luke uses *kataluma* to describe all three. Furthermore, he uses a different word, *pandocheion*, elsewhere, to indicate an actual 'inn'<sup>39</sup> [Luke 10:34](#) so, clearly he knows how to differentiate the two. Finally, the story makes no mention of a barn, stable, or innkeeper.<sup>40</sup>

In the culture of M&J, hospitality is a big deal.<sup>39</sup> Bethlehem is the ancestral home of Joseph's ancestors. Furthermore, Joseph is a descendant of King David. For these reasons it is nearly certain Joseph's relatives make accommodations for them, especially with Mary being close to delivery.<sup>40</sup>

It is more likely there was no room for M&J in the **guest room** of the home where they stayed. Remember: due to the census, many visitors had come to Bethlehem. Mary & Joseph were among many others.

So, what about the 'manger' or feeding trough for animals? It is common practice at the time for valuable and vulnerable animals to be kept indoors, thus an indoor manger would be expected.<sup>40</sup>

The birth of JESUS is the natural conclusion to a *supernatural* pregnancy. [Luke 1:26-35](#) Mary wraps the child in cloths and lays him in a manger. Two-thousand years later, this very event will inspire the lyrics to one of the most tear-jerking Christmas songs ever written, “[Mary, Did You Know?](#),”<sup>8</sup> including the line asking Mary whether she knows her baby boy is Heaven’s perfect Lamb?<sup>32</sup>

About this same time, some shepherds are attending their flocks in fields near Bethlehem. An angel appears to the shepherds, saying, “Don’t be afraid! I’ve got great news for you guys! Today, over in Bethlehem, your SAVIOR has been born! He’s the ANOINTED ONE! You’ll know him when you see him b’cause he’s wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Then some other angels show up and they sing praises to GOD. [¶ Luke 2:8-14](#)

When the angels return to Heaven, the shepherds huddle together and say, “Let’s run over to Bethlehem and check out what we just heard.” So, that’s exactly what they do. They hustle to town and locate Mary and Joseph. Sure enough, there’s the baby lying in a manger. As you can imagine, the shepherds are beyond excited, and they share the good news with a lot of people. [¶ Luke 2:15-18](#)



As we continue to read in Luke’s narrative of the Gospel, we learn of an episode occurring at the temple when JESUS is twelve years old. [Luke 2:41-51](#) After this, the very next verse (in Luke) tells us, “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with GOD and men.” [Luke 2:52](#)

From there we move to the apostle John’s rendition of the Gospel. Bear in mind, by the time John records his account of the Gospel, JESUS has already returned to Heaven. John’s text is a written record of his testimony as an eyewitness.

In the first chapter of John's account, he introduces us to a different man, also named John: John the Baptist. John the Baptist is a cousin of JESUS. He is flat-out sold-out telling people that the long-awaited MESSIAH (JESUS) is about to make known his identity as the SON OF GOD. John the Baptist is so-called because he baptizes people and urges them to repent.

## Lamb of God

One day, John the Baptist is baptizing folks in the Jordan River. He sees YESHUA approaching and exclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of GOD, who takes away the sin of the world!" [John 1:29](#)

And there it is.

The entire biblical theme of sheep, all rolled into one simple proclamation. It's not about the sheep though. Not really. Nor is it about lambs in general. It's about **the** Lamb, the Lamb of GOD. The entire *Bible*, from start to finish, from nose to tail, so to speak, is the story of redemption. For if there's one thing a man needs, one thing he lacks, one thing he is unable to accomplish for himself, it is reconciliation with his CREATOR. The Lamb of GOD makes this reconciliation possible.


It all comes down to the Lamb of GOD.

*"Mary, did you know ... [He] is Heaven's perfect Lamb?"* <sup>32</sup>

**Did you know?** Mark Lowry, the songwriter of "Mary, Did You Know?" shared this in an interview:

"As my mind went back to the manger scene, I began to think about the power, authority, and majesty she cradled in her arms. Those little lips were the same lips that had spoken worlds into existence. [...] Even now, He was the very one who had given life to his [own] mother, Mary." <sup>33</sup>

The theme of the Lamb is central to the *Bible*. But why? What makes JESUS so special? How can we know he is who he claims to be? Why refer to him as a lamb? Why not a cow or goat or a raccoon? Why is an animal necessary at all? And what's the deal with all the sacrifice? If GOD is so loving, why does he require sacrifice? Isn't that a contradiction? And still there's the question posed by the title of this very volume: What's with all the sheep? Prayers, prophecies, proverbs—sheep are practically everywhere in the *Bible*. So, what's so special about all those woolly wonders of the Word?



Don't ask so many questions and they will all be answered.

All good questions, and all will be answered in due time. The answers to these questions, and others, are based on symbols. The *Bible* is full of symbols. When I use the term 'symbol,' I don't mean simple coincidences subject to wishful thinking or wild ... *ahem* ... @\$\$ donkey interpretations. I mean legitimate 'types and shadows.'

“A type [or shadow ...] is a prophetic foretelling of future events. A pre-echo. Like God is so excited about what he is going to do that he drops hints. Like a father preparing his child for what is going to happen.” <sup>31</sup>

The details outlined in this chapter are vital to the theme of this book. This will become apparent in later chapters.

Let us now return to the Jordan River. As JESUS approaches John the Baptizer. He asks John to baptize him, which he does. When JESUS rises from the water, a voice from above speaks, saying, “This is my beloved SON in whom I am well pleased.” [Matthew 3:13-17](#) This pivotal event marks the beginning of JESUS's earthly ministry. And what a ministry it is. JESUS

performs many miracles for the benefit of individuals. The Gospels, (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), provide records for some of these miracles:

- One case of deafness [Mark 7:31-37](#)
- Two restorations (an ear and a hand) [Mark 3:1-5](#) [Luke 22:50-51](#)
- Three cases of muteness [Matthew 9:32-34](#) [Mark 7:31-37](#) [Matthew 12:22-23](#)
- Three cases of lameness [Mark 2:1-12](#) [John 5:1-9](#) [Luke 13:10-13](#)
- Three resurrections (not including His own) [Luke 7:11-16](#) [John 11:1-45](#) [Mark 5:21-24, 35-43](#)
- Four deliverances from demonic influence [Matthew 9:32-34](#) [Mark 7:24-30](#) [Mark 9:14-29](#) [Matthew 12:22-23](#)
- Five instances of unspecified illness [John 4:46-54](#) [Mark 1:30-31](#) [Matthew 8:5-13](#) [Mark 5:24-34](#) [Luke 14:1-6](#)
- Six cases of blindness [Matthew 9:27-31](#) [Mark 8:22-26](#) [John 9:1-12](#) [Matthew 12:22-23](#) [Mark 10:46-52](#)
- Eleven cases of leprosy [Mark 1:40-42](#) [Luke 17:11-19](#)
- Plus, many others for which no detail is provided [Mark 1:32-34](#) [Mark 6:53:56](#) [Matthew 21:14](#)

HE also performs miracles which benefit groups of people:

- Changing water into wine at a wedding [John 2:1-11](#)
- An unnaturally large haul of fishes [Luke 5:1-11](#)
- Stilling a storm [Matthew 8:23:27](#)
- Feeding well over 5,000 people [Matthew 14:15-21](#)
- Feeding well over 4,000 people [Matthew 15:32-39](#)
- Immediate withering of a fig tree [Matthew 21:18-22](#)
- A second great haul of fishes [John 21:1-11](#)

Bear in mind these lists include only the healings and miracles about which we are told. We have no way of knowing every miracle JESUS performs. Here's what we do know: "Each miracle demonstrate[s] HIS divine authority and compassion." <sup>34</sup> Not bad for only 3 ½ years of work.

<sup>35</sup> And to think HE has to walk everywhere HE goes!



Well ... *nearly* everywhere. There is that one episode with the colt...

It's a few days from Passover. JESUS and his disciples are on their way to Jerusalem. As they near the village of Bethphage, YESHUA tells two of the disciples, "Run on ahead to the village. Just as you get there, you're gonna see two donkeys, a colt which has never been ridden, and its mother. Untie 'em and bring 'em to me. If anybody asks what you're doin', tell 'em, 'The LORD needs 'em.'" The two men do exactly as JESUS instructs. When they return, they lay their coats on the backs of the donkeys. Then they help JESUS to sit on the coats which are on the colt. [¶Luke 19:29-35](#) & [¶Matthew 21:1-6](#) Once YESHUA is seated upon the colt, the procession resumes its trek to Jerusalem—barely a mile away—and another ancient prophecy is fulfilled. <sup>41</sup>, [Zechariah 9:9](#)

**Author's note:** *The subject of the two donkeys and which one our LORD rode upon is, for some people, a source of confusion. This confusion is easily dispelled with careful study and a tiny bit of critical thinking. There are no inconsistencies. I'm resisting the temptation to explain here. Donkeys are so underrated! I feel a new booklet coming on. What's with All the Donkeys? anyone?*

Leadership is a pride of lions led by a donkey.



JESUS, along with a group of followers, complete the short trip to Jerusalem on Sunday. <sup>43,44</sup> Soon after, YESHUA heads to the temple. To worship? Nope. Instead, he cleans the place out. In an episode referred to as 'the second cleansing of the temple,' JESUS drives from the temple both money changers and merchants selling animals for sacrifice. These activities are rife with corruption, so He 'cleanses' them from the house of GOD. <sup>¶42</sup>, [¶Matthew 21:8-13](#) Dr. Paul Jehle describes the situation like this:

“

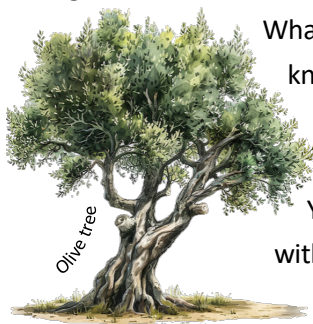
The Jewish bureaucracy at the time of JESUS had warped the intent of the Law to such a degree that they not only had a monopoly on selling the sacrifices needed at exorbitant prices (and taking

advantage of the common people), but they had become the only ‘inspectors’ of the lambs as well.”<sup>44</sup>

If you’re familiar with the story, you know that YESHUA’S actions in the temple, don’t exactly improve his relations with the priests. They’re already jealous and fearful of his influence, so they seek a way to get rid of him. Permanently. As in having him executed. So, they devise a plan.

Meanwhile, Thursday evening rolls around. Time for the Passover meal, which is partaken of in the evening, (the beginning of Passover day).<sup>h 44</sup> JESUS and his disciples have their Passover meal in the guest room of a sympathizer’s home. [Luke 22:8-15](#)

After the meal, they all go out to the Mount of Olives. JESUS and others proceed to Gethsemane, a nearby olive orchard situated on the mount. He steps away from the disciples to be alone, and prays: “FATHER, if you’re willing, take this burden from me. However, what I want is not important.



What matters is the fulfillment of your will.” He knows what’s coming, of course. This foreknowledge causes massive stress. An angel appears on a mission to strengthen JESUS. YESHUA’S prayer is so passionate and so filled with anguish, he literally sweats drops of blood.<sup>i, 45,</sup>

[¶Matthew 26:30-36](#) [¶Luke 22:39-44](#)

Just about this time, another group approaches, bringing trouble with them. Big trouble. It’s those angry priests again and they are hell-bent (perhaps literally) on dispensing vengeance. They have commenced their plan. And the first step of that plan is to arrest JESUS. They, along with others, have come to Gethsemane to do just that. They arrest CHRIST and take him to the home of the high priest, where additional Jewish leaders are gathered. Meanwhile, the disciples scatter. [¶Matthew 26:47-57](#)

The priests attempt to elicit false testimony against JESUS, for they want desperately to have him put to death. Much to their frustration,


they find no such testimony. Upon interrogation, JESUS claims to be the SON OF GOD. The unbelieving priests consider this blasphemy, a capital offense in Jewish law. In their hatred, they beat JESUS. [Matthew 26:59-67](#)

The next morning, YESHUA is taken before the Council of elders for an official hearing. Chief priests and scribes are present. Again, they challenge JESUS's claim, and again, he affirms that he is, indeed, the SON OF GOD. They now have the witnesses they need for blasphemy, a capital offense in Jewish law, punishable by death. [Luke 22:66-71](#)

They bind JESUS like the criminal they're making him out to be. After which they proceed with the next step of their plan: bring him before Pilate, the Governor of Judea to present a case for execution. [Luke 23:1](#)

The Jews are subject to Roman control. As such, they lack the jurisdiction to impose a death sentence on their own. Only the Romans are allowed to carry out executions. For this reason, the priests must convince the local Roman governor to order YESHUA's punishment by death. <sup>147</sup>

And therein lies the rub. The Jewish priests want JESUS dead, supposedly for committing blasphemy, but the Romans don't give a flip about blasphemy. <sup>48</sup> They don't even acknowledge YAHWEH as GOD. Not only do the priests have to rely on the Roman governor to order the execution, they also must come up with a reason to make the governor want to get involved at all.

A cartoon illustration of Pontius Pilate, a Roman official. He is depicted as a man with a large nose, wearing a light blue tunic and sandals. He is holding a scroll and looking towards the left. A speech bubble is coming from him. To the right of the cartoon, there is vertical text that reads "Early photo of Pontius Pilate".

People say I act like I don't care. It's not an act.

So, they drag JESUS before the local governor, a Roman by the name of Pontius Pilate. The charges: rebelling against taxes and claiming to be king (in opposition to the Roman emperor). The priests use these false accusations in hopes that Pilate will pronounce an immediate summary judgment. <sup>48</sup> Instead, Pilate begins asking JESUS questions. Pilate is

unconvinced of YESHUA’S guilt. He really doesn’t want to get involved. So, when Pilate learns JESUS is from Galilee, he passes the buck. He sends JESUS to Herod, Governor of Galilee, who just so happens to be in Jerusalem at the time. [¶Luke 23:1-7](#)

Herod is excited because he’s been wanting to see JESUS for a long time. He’s been hearing about the wondrous things he’s been doin’ and is hoping to see the man ‘perform.’ Herod questions JESUS at length, amidst accusations from the angry priests. YESHUA remains silent throughout the barrage. Herod and his soldiers mock JESUS, dress him in a fine robe for added sarcasm, and return him to Pilate. [¶Luke 23:8-11](#)

So, Pilate gets the priests together again and tells them, “Look, you brought this man to me asking for capital punishment on the basis of some serious charges. I don’t believe he’s guilty. Neither does Herod. I’m going to punish him and let ‘im go.” [¶Luke 23:13-16](#)

Pilate has YESHUA scourged (more on this in the next chapter). Then Roman soldiers twist together a crown of thorns, force it on his head, and mock him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” Pilate brings JESUS out so the crowd can see his pitiful condition. He hopes they will be satisfied, but they are not. “Crucify! Crucify!” they shout. Pilate repeats himself, “I find no guilt in this man.” He addresses JESUS, “Where are you from?” JESUS remains silent. Pilate tries again to convince the crowd, to no avail. Pilate, fearing a revolt, finally relents. He hands YESHUA over to be crucified. [John 19:1-16](#)

At this point JESUS is well on his way to fulfilling his role as SAVIOR of the world. In the next chapter pieces of the puzzle start falling into place. And the image of that puzzle looks very much like a lamb—the LAMB OF GOD.



## The previous chapter introduces

## The Sacrifice

the concept of types and shadows. If you're not already aware, when it comes to indisputable 'types' within the *Bible*, sheep take the **blue** ribbon. Or perhaps I should say they take the **red** ribbon. Red for blood, because, as unpleasant as the idea may be, sheep in the *Bible* are sacrificed, and with their sacrifice comes the letting of blood. Stay with me, my friend. I promise to be sensitive. At the same time, it's imperative for us to understand the whole truth. And, while the whole truth includes profound mercy, this mercy comes at a price—a price paid for in the currency of blood.

Pilate has JESUS scourged. [John 19:1](#) So simple to write in a sentence. So difficult for a rational mind to fully grasp. And, yet, to fully appreciate what our LORD went through, we must consider all forms of his torture, including the scourging.

### Scourging

First, let's consider the medical condition of YESHUA just prior to the scourging. From Thursday night through Friday morning, he endures: <sup>149</sup>

- Tremendous emotional stress (evidenced by *hematidrosis*, the sweating of blood)
- Fragile and tender skin brought on by the hematidrosis
- Abandonment (upon his arrest, the disciples leave him)
- A physical beating after the first Jewish trial
- A night without sleep
- Forced walks between various trials at separate locations

"These physical and emotional factors may have rendered JESUS particularly vulnerable to the [...] effects of the scourging." <sup>49</sup> The Gospels don't elucidate details about YESHUA'S scourging. It's not necessary for them to do so because Roman subjects are well-aware of the savagery of the punishment. <sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, there are credible sources that do describe the nature of Roman scourging (also referred to as 'flogging').

By Roman law, executions are preceded by a flogging. The instrument used to administer floggings is a short whip composed of a handle attached to short leather thongs of varying lengths. Embedded in these thongs, are small iron balls and sharp fragments of knucklebones from sheep. ¶<sup>51</sup>

Sheep ... imagine *that*.

The victim is stripped of clothing and tied to a sturdy pole or between two columns, after which the beating begins. The iron balls cause bruising while the bone fragments cut deeply. The goal of the tormenting soldier is to bring the victim to a point just shy of death. By the end of the scourging, the victim's skin is hanging in shreds from the back, buttocks, legs, and arms. One historian reports that in some instances nearby witnesses can actually see a victim's internal organs. <sup>52, ¶<sup>51</sup></sup>

Victims of Roman scourging suffer from shock and extreme blood loss, and many of them die from the flogging alone. <sup>49, 51</sup> The ones who don't succumb are then subjected to the next phase of their torture: crucifixion.

While the Gospels spare us from the details of YESHUA's flogging, [Isaiah 52:14](#) gives us prophetic insight 700 years before the fact. Albert Barnes' Commentary describes the full meaning of Isaiah's prophecy: Isaiah tells us many people are shocked at the MESSIAH's appearance because his body is so disfigured, they almost can't tell he's human. <sup>53</sup>

A person condemned to crucifixion is forced to carry their own cross from the flogging post to the crucifixion site. Technically, they carry only the horizontal crossmember. The vertical posts are permanently anchored at the crucifixion site. Crossmembers range in weight from 75 to 125 lb. (35 – 55 kg). Crossmembers are laid across the back of the victim's neck and shoulders and tied to his outstretched arms. This of course, assumes the victim is physically able to bear the load at all. ¶<sup>49</sup>

JESUS is flogged inside the city, at the site of his conviction. Crucifixions are administered *outside* the city. [Hebrews 13:12](#) John, tells us JESUS carries his

own cross as he goes 'out.' [John 19:17](#) Out from where? From the place where the Romans flog him. After the flogging, they load YESHUA with the crossmember and escort him in the direction of Golgotha, the well-established execution site, located outside the city. (The Romans prefer to locate crucifixions where they are visible from the road as a deterrent to would-be criminals.<sup>54</sup>) JESUS isn't able to carry the load all the way to the destination. So, as the procession exits the city gate, the Romans force another man to carry it the remaining distance. [Matthew 27:31-32](#)

**Did you know?** In some places we read that JESUS was crucified at Golgotha. Other times we see the location given as Calvary. Both are accurate. 'Golgotha' is ancient Greek for "place of the skull." <sup>55</sup> 'Calvary' is Latin and has the same meaning. <sup>56</sup>

A large crowd follows along with JESUS and his Roman escort. [Luke 23:27](#) You can almost hear some of them jeering, yelling, and mocking as they go. And all the while his supporters, some of the disciples, and certain relatives look on in horror and grief. We know Mary, his mother, is among those present ([John 19:25](#)). Can you imagine the emotions she's dealing with? Love, mourning, confusion (How can they kill the SON OF GOD?). This imagery brings to mind another line from the Mark Lowry song: Mary, do you realize the child you just delivered in the future will deliver *you*?

## Crucifixion

Once the procession reaches the execution site, Roman law mandates the victim be given a drink of wine mixed with myrrh (aka gall). <sup>49</sup> The intent is to make bearable the ultra-excruciating pain of the next step. [Note: When YESHUA tastes the myrrh, he declines the drink. [Matthew 27:34](#)]

After the offer of drink, the victim is thrown to the ground on their back, with arms stretched out along the crossmember. This, of course, exacerbates the scourge wounds. Then, nails are pounded through the wrists, into the wood. These nails are carefully positioned to both avoid

major blood vessels, and to intentionally crush or sever the *sensorimotor median nerve*, causing “excruciating bolts of fiery pain in both arms.” ¶<sup>49</sup>

The crossmember is raised and affixed to the vertical post, thus completing the cross. At this point, a single spike is driven through both feet and into the vertical post. Here too is the high probability of nerve damage, adding misery to misery. ¶<sup>49</sup>

The pain, as agonizing as it is, is not the most pressing issue for the victim. Lack of respiration is. The weight of the body pulling down on the outstretched arms and shoulders make it extremely difficult to exhale. This means the body can’t get rid of carbon dioxide. As the carbon dioxide accumulates it causes rapid uncontrollable muscle contractions, which hinder respiration even more. The only way to exhale is to lift the body by pushing up with the feet and flexing the arms. Of course, both these movements cause the nails to further aggravate the damaged nerves. Moreover, lifting the body scrapes the scourged back against the rough surface of the wooden upright. Every. Single. Breath. Eventually, exhaustion and lack of oxygen bring death. ¶<sup>49</sup>

**Did you know?** The Latin word for cross is ‘crux.’<sup>57</sup> Crux is also the root word of ‘crucify’<sup>58</sup> and ‘excruciating.’<sup>59</sup> So, a word we use to describe intense pain, originated with the word for ‘cross.’

YESHUA isn’t the only one hung on a cross that day. Two criminals are strung up likewise, right there with him. Between the pain and the difficulty exhaling, JESUS speaks very little while on the cross. Close to the end, however, he says, “I am thirsty.” Someone soaks a sponge with sour wine, places it on a stalk of hyssop, and lifts it to JESUS. After partaking of the liquid, he says, “It is finished,” and dies. [John 19:28-30](#)

The Jews don’t want the bodies to remain on the crosses on the Sabbath. This means they have to be taken down prior to sunset. So, they ask the governor to order *crucifracture*, the process of breaking legs to



hasten death (by preventing the victim from raising up to breathe). The soldiers do so on the two criminals, but when they come to JESUS, they see he is already dead. Rather than break his legs, one soldier shoves a spear into YESHUA'S side. When blood and water pour from the wound, the soldiers are satisfied that he is, indeed, dead. [¶John 19:31-34](#)

**Author's note:** *Okay. We're past the rough part. If you find it tough to read, think about me doing the research. Trust me, I watered it down a lot.*

The good news—*extraordinarily* good news actually—is that the story doesn't end here. The body of our LORD is taken down and buried in a tomb. [Matthew 27:57-60](#) But, on the third day, the tomb is empty. The SON OF GOD has risen from the dead! He is alive! [¶Matthew 28:1-10](#)

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Thus concludes our overview of the life, death, and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST. Up to this point we've been laying groundwork. We will draw upon this background throughout the remainder of this book. As we begin to transition to the primary focus of the book, let us answer some very important questions.

The following explanations contain a lot of references to the pronoun 'you.' I am absolutely *not* preaching at the reader. Nor do I mean to come across as judgmental. The pronoun 'you' is used merely to make the prose easier to read (and write). Having said that, some readers may feel unexpectedly convicted as they read. If so, it's the SPIRIT OF GOD. Ask him about it. Afterall, it is he who inspires the content of this work.

## Questions

**Question: If GOD is so loving, why does he require sacrifice?**

The *Bible* provides a black and white answer to this question:

“For **the wages of sin is death**, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord [emphasis added].” [Romans 6:23](#)

Sacrifice is required because sin is a crime worthy of capital punishment. It matters not how ‘small’ the sin may be. Consider the following illustration:

Imagine you take a job for 20 bucks an hour to be paid weekly, in cash. You put in your 40 hours for the first week. When Friday afternoon rolls around, the business owner refuses to pay you the \$800. This is a silly example, of course, but play along for a moment. You have an agreement that you will receive a certain pay in exchange for a certain amount of your time. That’s what a wage is: payment in exchange for time or effort. Is the business owner in the right? No! Absolutely not! You earned that pay. You worked for it. You put in the effort, and you deserve payment.

Now, imagine your agreement is to work only a single hour for 5 bucks. At the end of the hour the business owner refuses to pay you. He only owes you \$5. Does this mean he is any less wrong than in the first agreement? No! He has wronged you just the same. The amount may differ, but the *nature* of his action toward you is exactly the same.

If the business owner does right, he will pay you what you deserve. Here’s another way of saying it: if the business owner is *just*, he will pay you what you deserve. The specific dollar amount makes no difference. He wronged you in both situations.

Now consider this: GOD is perfect in every way. By his very nature, he is *just*. Perfectly just. His character requires him to pay us what we deserve. We all have sinned, [Romans 3:23](#) and we all deserve to be paid the wages due for our ‘effort.’ Not all sins are equal. Some are worse than others, but the severity of the sin is not the question. The wage is the same. That wage is death. The word, ‘death,’ in [Romans 6:23](#) (previous page) can mean physical and/or figurative death.<sup>61</sup>

“

When the Bible refers to death it means separation. There are two types of death. Physical death, which is the separation of

your spirit from your body, and spiritual death, [which] is the eternal separation of your spirit from the presence of God.”<sup>62</sup>

So ... why does YAHWEH require sacrifice? Because sin must be paid for with death.

The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation. —Martin Luther.



**Question: If sin requires death, why doesn't a person die as soon as they commit a sin?**

Because not only is YAHWEH just, he is also merciful. He gives us time to make arrangements to have our sin covered prior to our physical death. This is known as GOD's grace, which is described later in this same section. And, while he extends grace for the duration of our physical life, sin affects our spiritual life immediately. Sin drives a wedge into our relationship with him. Have you ever had difficulty praying, and you sense in your gut it has to do with some sin you're holding onto? That is a form of separation from GOD (i.e., spiritual death). This is why confession directly to the LORD is so vital. [1 John 1:9](#)

**Justice:** when you get the punishment you deserve

**Mercy:** when you *don't* get the punishment you deserve

**Grace:** when you receive a blessing you *don't* deserve

**Question: Why does the Bible include so much talk about blood?**

The *Bible* has a direct answer for this question as well.

“For the **life of the flesh is in the blood**, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood

by reason of the life that makes atonement [emphasis added].”

[Leviticus 17:11](#)

Why does the Bible contain so many references to blood? Because a creature’s blood contains the life of that creature. Sin requires payment in life. If blood contains life, then by removing a creature’s blood, you end the creature’s life. Blood is required for life, and it is used throughout the Word of GOD to represent life.

### **Question: What is ‘atonement’?**

Let’s revisit the verse in Leviticus, this time with a different emphasis:

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood **by reason of the life that makes atonement** [emphasis added].”

[Leviticus 17:11](#)

The word atonement in this context means to reconcile the relationship between man and GOD.<sup>60</sup> Memory trick: atonement = *at-one-ment*.<sup>60</sup> GOD accepts the sacrifice of certain animals as payment for sin. In other words, he accepts the life of an animal as payment for the sin of a man. But only temporarily. This is how it was, back in the times before JESUS.

### **Question: What’s the difference between atonement and forgiveness?**

Atonement and forgiveness are related, but they are not the same thing. Atonement is when you do something to right a wrong you’ve committed against someone else. Forgiveness is when someone else pardons you for something you’ve done against them.

Fast forward to the New Testament, and we read this:

“And [...] all things are cleansed with blood, and **without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness** [emphasis added].”

[Hebrews 9:22](#)

Notice that atonement and forgiveness both involve the shedding of blood. They both require a life.

### **Question: Why did GOD tell the Israelites to use animals in sacrifice?**

The short answer is because he is opposed to the taking of innocent human life (wartime enemies and would-be assailants are not innocent). While a sacrificed sheep is innocent of crime, it is also on a lower level of creation than a man. During sacrifice, sin is paid for with the loss of life, but *not* the loss of *human* life.

YAHWEH does not delight in the death of any animal. He created the animals, and he cares greatly for them. Even a sparrow falling, does so only with his direction. [Matthew 10:29](#), <sup>64</sup> Rabbi Marc Gruber adds the following perspective regarding YAHWEH's instructions of animal sacrifice:

“It [blood] is the very elixir of being. It is the miraculous ingredient that enables life to open its eyes and interact with the world, and so it is given special attention in the sacrificial system. It is dashed on the altar, rubbed on the sides, speckled on the curtains, sprinkled on the priests. It is the essence of the sacrifices. **The God of Life is not honored with the death of an animal, but rather, with the offering up of its life-principle** [emphasis added].” <sup>63</sup>

### **Question: Where does the sacrifice of JESUS fit in?**

JESUS lives a life of perfection. He lives as a man. He is subject to human temptations, and yet he never sins. He is utterly without sin. His blood is superior to that of the animals because he is human. His blood is superior to that of any other man because his blood is untainted by sin. Therefore, his sacrifice is complete and perfect. Not *figuratively* perfect, but *literally* perfect. Thus, his sacrifice, all by itself, is sufficient to pay for the sin of all men. It's not a temporary atonement as with animal sacrifice. The payment made by YESHUA'S sacrifice is permanent.

The wages of sin is death. YAHWEH'S character demands the wages be paid. JESUS wants desperately for you to let him pay the tab, so to speak. If you confess your status as a sinner, and if you believe in JESUS'S death, burial, and subsequent resurrection, you will avoid eternal separation from GOD. The only other choice is to pay the tab out of your own pocket, with eternal separation from GOD. And *that* means Heaven is off-limits. Rejecting the sacrifice of JESUS, rejecting or even ignoring the sacrifice of GOD'S Lamb, leaves only one alternative: its name is Hell. The choice is yours. Choose wisely because the outcome is permanent.

### **Question: How could a loving GOD send anyone to Hell?**

I understand the spirit of the question, but it's the wrong question to ask. The correct question is:

How could a perfect GOD love us wretched sinners so much?

Imagine the following. Let's say you and I live next door to one another. And one day you do something dreadful, say ... you burn down my house while me and my family are on vacation. No people are harmed, thankfully, but we lose everything, including our pets. Unbeknownst to you, I have an alarm system that pipes video to an offsite archival service. The video clearly shows you starting the blaze.

Now imagine also, I have one child, a son, of whom I am immensely proud. I knock on your door, and say, "You and I both know you burned down my house. No need to deny it because I have proof. Somebody's gonna have to pay. It's only right. But here's the thing: I value you as my neighbor. I know you can't afford to replace the damage yourself. So, I'm going to provide for you a way out. I'll have my son arrested instead of you. I'll make sure he pays the price by serving the time. All I ask is this: I want you to confess that you did the crime, and when my son gets to prison, I want you to accept the fact that I arranged it just to keep you out of prison."

Would you take the deal or not? That's the deal YAHWEH has put before every single person. Confess the crimes (i.e., sin) for which we cannot pay, and believe he sacrificed his only son (who did nothing wrong) as payment for our sin. Or ... reject his offer and be sentenced to a prison of fire for eternity. That is the offer he makes to us. This 'plea bargain' is good until the moment a person passes from this life ([Hebrews 9:27](#)).

So... the question is *not*, how can a loving GOD send people to Hell? The correct question is: How can a perfect GOD love us wicked sinners enough to sacrifice his only son so we can have a way to stay out of Hell?

**Author's note:** *Just to be clear, I have not one, but three sons. I am proud of them all. The house is intact. My neighbors are fine people. And I would never make the offer in the illustration. And ... oh yeah ... my dogs are keepin' an eye on you...*



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### Something to Ponder

The theme of this chapter is sacrifice. We just finished reading about the physical and spiritual aspects of the sacrifice made by our LORD and SAVIOR. In just a moment, we'll look at his sacrifice from a different angle. But, before we get to that, there's something else I feel led to mention.

We Christians talk about how JESUS allowed himself to be sacrificed on our behalf. And, while true, this thought alone falls woefully short of the full story. We often think of our LORD hanging on the cross, slowly bleeding to death from the piercings in his hands and feet. The fact is, he suffers *tremendous* blood loss, and it's the result of a savage flogging, not so much from the piercings. Likewise, we often fail to consider the 'fiery bolts of excruciating pain' that come with his every breath. The entire ordeal—every moment—is fraught with suffering and abject misery.

The next time you sing about the 'blood of JESUS,' take care to consider the totality of the horror of his suffering, blood and otherwise. His death is slow, agonizing, humiliating, and full of rejection. [Mark 15:34](#)

He went through it all for you and for me. And he did it voluntarily. Furthermore, he once told me, “I would do it all over again.” Let us never forget the whole truth of his suffering.

## The Lamb of GOD

In the beginning, GOD. In the beginning GOD created. In the beginning GOD created the world and all that is in it, including all of nature. Including the animals, each with its own unique set of traits and behaviors. His most special creation of all, though, is man. He loves every person dearly. He longs to have fellowship with them. Every single one.

But there exists an obstacle. Its name is Sin. GOD, of course, sees this obstacle from the outset, and he makes provision for it. *His* name is JESUS. Very nearly the entire *Bible* speaks to us about CHRIST. Some verses contain prophecies providing extraordinary detail ahead of time. In some verses, we read details about his time on Earth. Other verses describe the meaning and ramifications of his death, burial, and his resurrection.

When we examine closely, the types and shadows, the already fulfilled prophecies, and the sheer consistency of verses pertaining to JESUS CHRIST, they all fall perfectly into place. Not one piece is missing. And through it all, one theme keeps popping up: the theme of sheep.

Those docile, ever gentle, sheep. They respond to the master’s voice. They are all too willing to follow a leader. All too willing to give of themselves. They freely allow the taking of their fleece, and even their lives, with no resistance whatsoever. <sup>1</sup> [Isaiah 53:7](#)

This same description applies to JESUS. He is gentle. He responds to the FATHER’S voice. He follows the FATHER’S will. And He allows the taking of His life with no resistance. JESUS is, in all respects, the perfect Lamb of GOD.

It’s true: a little girl named Mary really did have a little lamb. It’s also true that a different young Mary had a profoundly different kind of Lamb—the Lamb of GOD. Here’s a poem to celebrate both Marys and



the lambs for which they have so much love. The LORD gave the following poem to me just for this chapter. Read it with the same rhythm as the nursery rhyme.

GOD ALMIGHTY has a Lamb.

His robe is white as snow.

And everywhere YAHWEH says,

The Lamb is sure to go.

The Lamb is born into the world,

To live a perfect life.

For only then could YAHWEH'S Lamb

Save us all from sin and strife.

The Lamb agrees to be slain.

HE'S hung upon a cross.

While HE expires in agony

His friends mourn their loss.

Taken down before the night,

And buried in a tomb.

Disciples wonder what to do.

Their worry starts to loom.

Three uncertain days go by.

Worry, doubt, feelings of dread;

YAHWEH does a miracle:

The LAMB is no longer dead!

For GOD so loved the world

HE did it all for us.

If you only will believe,

You'll avoid eternal fuss.

lyrics © 2025 Russ McNeil. AhaUniversity.com

Here's a little something *purely* for the purposes of entertainment. It's the kind of thing I refer to as 'mind candy.' It contains no proverbs or prophecies. What it does contain is a list of fascinating parallels between the Mary of the nursery rhyme and Mary, the mother of JESUS (and the respective lambs in their care). Furthermore, the list is based on historical facts. The LORD inspired the list, so here it is. Enjoy.

Nursery rhyme

BIBLE

01	Mary's father agrees to let Mary care for the neglected lamb Our heavenly FATHER chooses Mary to deliver his humble little Lamb. <a href="#">Luke 1:26-35</a>
02	Mary forms a special bond with the lamb while 'mothering' it. Mary, has a natural bond with the Lamb of GOD because she is his mother.
03	The lamb follows Mary 'everywhere' she goes. JESUS follows the will of our heavenly FATHER to wherever that leads. <a href="#">Matthew 26:36-39</a>
04	Mary has few playmates. Mary is alone in that only she is the mother of GOD. <a href="#">Luke 1:26-35</a>
05	The lamb is kept separate from all the other sheep. Jesus is sinless, separating him from our sinful nature. <a href="#">Hebrews 7:26</a>
06	The lamb does not enjoy being around other sheep. Although JESUS is a Jew, he abhors the corruption of Jewish priests. He prefers to spend time with people who need his healing touch and those who hunger for his message.
07	The lamb gives of itself for Mary's benefit when its fleece is used to knit her stockings. Jesus gives his all for our benefit. <i>Bonus example:</i> A woman is healed merely from touching the fabric of Jesus' garment. <a href="#">Luke 8:43-44</a>
08	One morning, Mary doesn't see the lamb and has to call out for it. As a twelve-year-old, Jesus wanders away from Mary and Joseph in Jerusalem. They go back to find him, and when they do, Mary scolds him. <a href="#">Luke 2:41-48</a>
09	Mary's brother suggests bringing the lamb to school. Perhaps, to show it off to schoolmates? John the Baptist proclaims to onlookers, "Behold the Lamb of GOD..." <a href="#">John 1:35-36</a>
10	Mary's classmates laugh at the spectacle of the lamb inside the school. Some people ridicule and scoff at JESUS. <a href="#">Luke 23:63</a>
11	Mary's lamb makes a ruckus in the classroom Jesus makes a ruckus in the temple <a href="#">Matthew 21:12-13</a>

12	Mary's teacher objects to the presence of the lamb in class.
	Jewish priests/teachers object to the words and presence of Jesus. <a href="#">Mark 11:27-28</a>
13	John Roulstone writes a poem about Mary's lamb. That poem endures the test of time.
	Saul of Tarsus (Paul) wrote letters about Jesus and Christian living. Today those letters comprise much of our New Testament. They also have endured over time.
14	Mary's lamb is killed by a cow, which is not of the sheep species.
	Jesus is executed by Romans, who are not of the Jewish culture.
15	Mary's lamb is pierced in the side by the horn of a cow.
	God's Lamb is pierced in the side by a Roman spear. <a href="#">John 19:33-34</a>
16	Mary's lamb looks at her and bleats as it is dying.
	Jesus addresses his mother, Mary, as he nears death. <a href="#">John 19:25-27</a>
17	Mary's lamb dies a painful death
	Gods Lamb dies in agony.

Worthy is the lamb that was slain.

Revelation 5:12



Next up: We go aaaaall the way back. Well ... *nearly* all the way.



## The Bible tells us when

YAHWEH finishes with creation  
at the end of the sixth day, he

surveys his handiwork and that it is not merely good, but *very* good.

[Genesis 1:31](#) Then Adam and Eve do their bit, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. [Genesis 3:6](#) Suddenly, everything changes. And *not* for the better.

By eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve introduce sin into the world. They attempt to hide their guilt from GOD by covering themselves with sewn fig leaves. [Genesis 3:7](#) Their efforts are fruitless because “the fig

The First



leaves of religious works will never cover the guilty sinner and make him right with God.”<sup>26</sup>

YAHWEH has a different plan. He covers the disobedient duo with garments made from animal skins. [Genesis 3:21](#)

### The first sacrifice?

Outside of Genesis 3, we see garments as symbols of righteousness.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes, the righteousness is sufficient. Other times it is not. The book of Isaiah explains the distinction. Garments provided by GOD come with salvation and righteousness. [Isaiah 61-10](#) When man is left to his *own* devices, he ends up with filthy garments of insufficient *self*-righteousness. [Isaiah 64:6](#)

The physical garments of skin, with which the LORD covers Adam and Eve, are symbols of righteousness. It is the LORD, Himself, who provides the garments. The garments of skin ‘cover’ Adam and Eve, making it possible for the couple to stand in the presence of Yahweh’s holiness. Consider the following facts:

- The word used for skin is *owr*, which can mean either human skin or animal skin. At the time, Adam and Eve are the only humans, and it is their skin being covered. Therefore, we know the skins must be from animals.
- We know the animals of interest had to die in the process.
- YAHWEH created man and animals as vegetarians. [Genesis 1:29-30](#) So, when we read that Adam’s son, Abel, raises sheep, we know he didn’t raise them strictly for consumption. [Genesis 4:4](#)
- All through the Old Testament, sheep are at the center of sacrifice as specified by GOD. In fact, The Law of Moses requires, among others, the sacrifice of two lambs per day. [Exodus 29:38-39](#)

Now, add to these facts a bit of deductive reasoning, and one can naturally and automatically arrive at the following conclusions:

- If Adam & Eve are clothed by GOD in the skins of animals, it is reasonable to assume their children are clothed the same.
- If Abel's primary responsibility is raising sheep, there must be a significant need for an ongoing supply of the animals.
- The skins serve as a symbol of 'covering' of the couple's sin. The coats they wear are an everyday reminder that the cost of their shame is the taking of life.
- Before they sin, Adam and Eve commune with YAHWEH directly. They walk with him and talk with him in the Garden of Eden without shame. After they sin, the only way for them to stand before a holy GOD, is for their sin to be covered, for the price to be paid for by an innocent life.
- The animal deaths serve as substitutionary deaths, which would otherwise be required of Adam and Eve.

Conclusion: GOD, himself, performs the first sacrifice. He sacrifices sheep on the behalf of Adam and Eve.

In providing the skins for Adam and Eve, YAHWEH lays the foundation of animal sacrifice, a pattern we see from this verse all the way up to the crucifixion of CHRIST. <sup>26</sup> There is little doubt GOD gives instructions regarding sacrifice, <sup>26</sup> otherwise man would find a way to mess it up. The subject of sacrifice is too vital to leave to the fallibility and folly of mortal man.



Imagine Adam and Eve looking on in horror as GOD performs the first animal sacrifice right before their eyes. <sup>26</sup> Until this point, they have not known death, much less the spilling of innocent blood. Now, put yourself in their shoes, witnessing the slaughter of the animals. Imagine GOD giving you instructions regarding the ritual of sacrifice and the necessity of it. Does

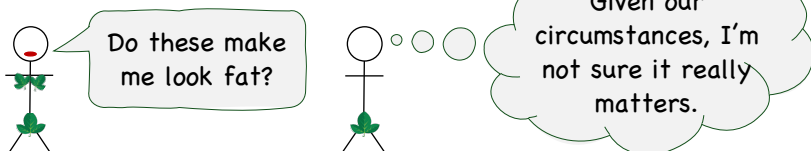
he have your attention? Are his instructions not carved indelibly into the tablet of your mind? Might you begin to grasp the seriousness of sin?

The *Bible* does not specify this level of detail. We can't know for certain whether an exchange like the one described actually occurred. It fits though. It's consistent with what we do know from the *Bible*, is it not? Think on it and form your own opinion. Regardless of your conclusion, one unassailable fact remains: 'someone' of the time understands the ritual of sacrifice. We know this because they teach it to the next generation (i.e., Abel). [Genesis 4:4](#), [Hebrews 11:4](#) If that 'someone' is not Adam, then who? And from whom did *Adam* learn the ritual of sacrifice? Who else could it be but GOD?

And so, Adam and Eve learn the ins-and-outs of sacrifice. They pass this knowledge on to their children. Sheep are required for sacrifice and for the coverings made of leather coats. As the population expands, the need for sheep expands along with it. Abel (and most certainly others) raise flocks of sheep to fulfill these needs.

Salvation is of grace. The leather coats are gifts from the LORD GOD. They are neither the idea nor the work of man. The LORD furnishes the skins. Adam and Eve do nothing, absolutely nothing, to cover themselves satisfactorily. How much good would fig leaves do after they dry up and crumble away? <sup>123</sup> The only sacrifice GOD accepts is his own work; his gift; his *Lamb*. This is how grace works. The sheep are merely substitutes. They are innocent victims. "God could not obtain the skins of the substitutes without putting them to death and shedding their blood." <sup>126</sup>

Adam and Eve covered only their loins with 'aprons'. [Genesis 3:7](#) The coverings made by GOD clothed them fully with coats. [Genesis 3:21](#) Big difference. This further illustrates how man's efforts fall short; how only YAHWEH's provision is sufficient.



YAHWEH knows before creation that man will sin. He knows all along that man's redemption will require sacrifice. [Titus 1:2](#) During the time before time, he already knows, and he plans accordingly. That plan involves those meek, gentle, innocent creatures we know as sheep.

We may never know how many sheep have been sacrificed for temporary atonement. But we do know how many are required for *permanent* atonement: one. Not just any ol' sheep mind you, but a profoundly special, one-of-a-kind sheep. This special sheep is meek and gentle and perfectly innocent. Innocent enough to purchase the forgiveness of all men, from all races, in all cultures, for all time. This sheep has a name. His name is YESHUA, also known as JESUS.

Otherwise known as the Lamb of GOD.

John the Baptist may have dined on locusts and honey, lived outdoors, and smelled like a sweat-soaked camel, but he surely knew his theology, the only theology that matters. [Matthew 3:4, Luke 1:80](#)



Behold, the Lamb of GOD,  
who takes away the sin of the world.

— John 1:29



Next up: Twinkle, twinkle, little Lamb ...

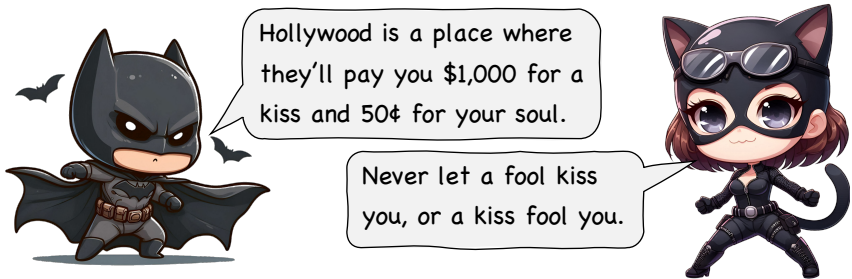
## The Twinkling

**The date: November 23, 1960,**

one day before Thanksgiving.<sup>66</sup> The location: Hollywood Boulevard. The ceremony is timed to coincide with the annual Hollywood Christmas Parade.<sup>66</sup> The ceremony in question? Public dedication of the Hollywood Walk of Fame. You know ... those names cast in brass and embedded in pink terrazzo stars, which in turn, are laid flush in dark gray sidewalks.<sup>66</sup>

At the time of this writing, the Walk of Fame includes 2,790 stars, the most recent of which applauds Batman, a fictional super-hero.<sup>66</sup> The so-called 'Dark Knight' is famous for his habit of swooping in just in time to save the day by dispensing justice to well-deserving evil doers.

In order to 'earn' their star, a celebrity must be nominated with an application fee of \$250. If deemed worthy of a star, and upon selection, a fee of \$75,000 is required prior to installation.<sup>66</sup> (Presumably, a real-life person paid on behalf of Batman.) Celebrities must provide a letter of approval as part of the application process.<sup>66</sup> So, despite their portrayal in the press, celebrities are *never* surprised by their nomination.

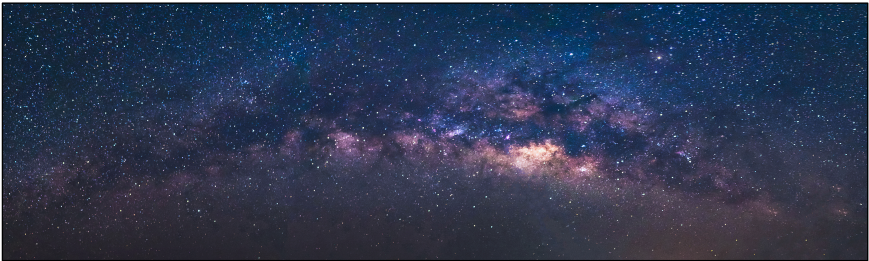


Fans (abbreviated form of 'fanatics') go crazy over their favorite celebrities. The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce claims the "Walk of Fame is one of the most-visited attractions in the world, attracting millions of visitors annually."<sup>67</sup>

Hollywood fanatics aren't the only ones interested in stars. Many centuries ago, a certain man has a profoundly keen interest in stars. It



all starts around 4,000 years ago, when the LORD promises Abram a “very great” reward for his faithfulness. <sup>68</sup> Abram replies, “How’s that supposed to happen, when I have no heir, no child of my own?” In response, the LORD shows Abram the heavens and the stars, and says, “See all those stars twinkling up there? There’s so many of ‘em, you can’t even count ‘em. That’s how many descendants you’re gonna have—too many to count.” [¶Genesis 15:1-5](#)



The man named ‘Abram’ is a central figure in the Old Testament. We don’t need to rehash his entire story here. We do, however, need to recap the sequence of certain events in his life. Here’s a quick rundown (all verses are in the book of Genesis:

Event	Age	Verse
GOD tells Abram to move from Haran to Canaan. “... will make you a great nation.” Abram leaves with Sarai, his wife.	75	<a href="#">12:1-5</a>
YAHWEH makes the promise regarding the stars; that Abram will have a natural heir, and from that heir will come descendants too numerous to count. At the time, Sarai is still barren.	80+ <sup>k</sup>	<a href="#">15:1-5</a>
GOD makes a covenant with Abram. He confirms that he will make Abram the “father of a multitude of nations.” He changes Abram’s name to Abraham (‘father of a multitude’). GOD also changes Sarai’s name to Sarah (‘princess’), and tells Abraham, “[...] she shall be a mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her.”	99	<a href="#">17:1-8,</a> <a href="#">15-16</a>

Abraham laughs to himself, thinking: *How's a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman supposed to get pregnant?*

GOD: "You're gonna have a son next year, and you're gonna name him Isaac ('he laughs').".

99

[17:17,](#)

[19,21](#)

Isaac is born.

100

[21:2-8](#)

Now, take a moment to consider the LORD'S promise to Abraham. The man is nearly a century old, has no legitimate heir, and a barren wife. Then God tells him, "Oh by the way, not only are you gonna have a son, but your descendants through that son are going to be too numerous to count.

Imagine the joy of Abraham and Sarah upon the birth of Isaac, their miracle baby! As unlikely as it may have seemed, YAHWEH'S promise is starting to come true. It's a long way from a single newborn to a multitude of nations, but hey, it's gotta start somewhere. Indeed, it does, and that 'start' has a name: Isaac. With the arrival of Isaac, a star is born.

And, as we shall see, Isaac soon becomes the star of the show.



You can learn a lot from children. How much patience you have, for instance.

—Franklin P. Jones

**Author's Note:** What follows is a retelling of the account in which Abraham very nearly sacrifices Isaac. It's a story familiar to many of us. And therein lies the danger. Sometimes, familiarity can cause us to gloss over important details. The Abraham-Isaac story is jam-packed with easy-to-miss, yet important, details. You're encouraged to read the following narrative with particular attention to the details. [Hint: The more detail the Bible includes on a subject, the more those details matter]. No references are included in the narrative below because the entire episode transpires in [Genesis chapter 22](#).

Time passes after the birth of Isaac. The *Bible* does not say how much time, so we don't know Abraham's age at the time. We can reasonably deduce that Isaac is in his 20s to early thirties. <sup>l</sup> Abraham is 100 when Isaac is born. So, this puts Abraham's age at around 125, give or take a few years. However old he is, it is at this point the LORD decides to test him. Abraham does not know this of course. It's a short conversation...

**LORD:** "Abraham!"

**Abraham:** "Here I am."

**LORD:** "Take your son, your only son, <sup>m</sup> whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. When you get there, offer Isaac as a burnt offering sacrifice. I will tell you which mountain upon which to perform the ritual."

A burnt offering is a grisly affair. Imagine, if you can, the profound anguish Abraham suffers through on that sleepless night before. John Gill provides a vivid description:

“ [...] this was dreadful work he [Abraham] was called to, and must be exceeding[ly] trying to him as a man, and much more as a parent, and a professor of the true religion, to commit such an action; for by this order he was to cut the throat of his son, then to rip him up, and cut up his quarters, and then to lay every piece in order upon the wood, and then burn all to ashes; and this he was to do as a religious action, with deliberation, seriousness, and devotion.” <sup>72</sup>

I don't know about you, but I would've had a tough time getting out of bed the next morning. Not Abraham. He rises early, saddles a donkey (most likely for himself to ride), takes two men (most likely to carry the wood <sup>74</sup>), and Isaac, and then splits wood for the burnt offering. The four of them then take off to the land of Moriah.

On the third day of their journey, Abraham sees the ritual site from a distance. The *Bible* does not specify how YAHWEH indicates the precise location. Nevertheless, Abraham is certain of the location, because he says to the two men with them, “You guys stay here with the donkey. Me and Isaac are going to go over there. We’ll be back after we worship.” Notice the plural pronoun ‘we.’ Abraham has faith that GOD will fulfill his promise, even if he has to raise Isaac from the dead to do so.

Abraham takes the wood they brought and lays it on Isaac to carry. He then grabs the fire and a knife, and off they go.

**Isaac:** “My father!”

**Abraham:** “Here I am, my son.”

**Isaac:** “I see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

**Abraham:** “GOD will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

They walk until they reach the place indicated by GOD. Abraham builds the altar and arranges the wood. He then binds Isaac and lays him on the altar on top of the wood. This shows remarkable faith and obedience on the part of Isaac because he is perfectly capable of fending off his aged father. Abraham stretches out his hand, with the knife, to slay his son. At this very moment, the LORD <sup>n</sup> intervenes...

**God:** “Abraham, Abraham!”

**Abraham:** “Here I am.”

**God:** “Stop! Don’t do anything to ‘im. I now know you truly revere me because you have not withheld your only son from me.”

In other words, Abraham passes the test.

Abraham looks behind him and sees a ram whose horns are caught in a thicket. Presumably, the ram makes noise trying to free itself, causing Abraham to turn and look. <sup>75</sup> Abraham takes the ram, sacrifices it, and

offers it up for a burnt offering in place of his beloved son, his only son, Isaac, the son of promise.

This story is well-known. I’ve read it multiple times. I suspect you too are familiar with it. It’s no secret the Abraham-Isaac story contains parallels pointing to JESUS. An only son, the theme of sacrifice, the ram’s substitutionary death—all pretty obvious parallels of JESUS’s sacrifice. I wanted to know more about the significance of the ram (i.e., male sheep) in the story because depending on what I find, it may make good content for the theme of this book. So, I began researching. What I learn is nothing short of astounding. Nearly *everything* in the Abraham-Isaac story points to the story of JESUS. Check out this list:

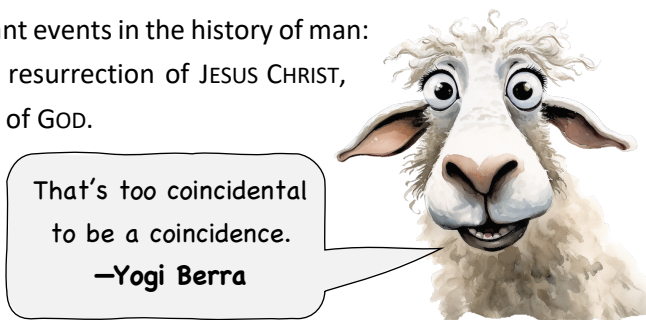
Abraham-Isaac	JESUS/YESHUA
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01	Isaac’s birth was prophesied	<a href="#">GENESIS 17:15-16</a>
	YESHUA’S birth was prophesied	<a href="#">ISAIAH 7:14</a>
02	Isaac’s birth is proclaimed by a supernatural visitor	<a href="#">GENESIS 18:1-2,10</a>
	JESUS’S birth is proclaimed by a supernatural visitor	<a href="#">LUKE 1:26-31</a>
03	Sarah’s pregnancy with Isaac is “contrary to nature” <sup>76</sup>	<a href="#">GENESIS 21:2</a>
	Mary’s conception with JESUS is supernatural	<a href="#">MATTHEW 1:18</a>
04	Isaac is named prior to birth	<a href="#">GENESIS 17:19</a>
	JESUS is named prior to birth	<a href="#">LUKE 1:30-31</a>
05	Isaac is, by covenant, Abraham’s only son	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:2</a>
	YESHUA is GOD’S only begotten son	<a href="#">JOHN 3:16</a>
06	GOD refers to Isaac as Abraham’s beloved son	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:2</a>
	GOD refers to JESUS as <i>His</i> beloved son	<a href="#">MATTHEW 3:16-17</a>
07	Isaac is Abraham’s son of promise	<a href="#">GENESIS 18:10</a>
	YESHUA is GOD’S son of promise	<a href="#">ACTS 13:32-33</a>
08	Isaac brings joy upon his birth	<a href="#">GENESIS 21:1-7</a>
	JESUS Christ brings joy upon His birth	<a href="#">LUKE 2:8-11</a>
09	Isaac is to be offered up as a burnt offering	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:2 &amp; Leviticus 1:9</a>
	JESUS serves as a burnt offering	<a href="#">EPHESIANS 5:2</a>

10	Isaac is offered up by his father	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:10</a>
	JESUS is offered up by <i>his</i> FATHER	<a href="#">JOHN 3:16</a>
11	Isaac has done nothing to warrant his sacrifice	
	JESUS has done nothing to warrant his crucifixion	<a href="#">2 CORINTHIANS 5:21</a>
12	Through Abraham (and thus Isaac), all the people of earth will be blessed	<a href="#">GENESIS 12:1-3</a>
	Through JESUS (via Isaac °) the whole world is blessed	<a href="#">1 JOHN 2:1-2</a>
13	A donkey accompanies Abraham & Isaac on their journey, but not to the site of sacrifice	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:3</a>
	A donkey is present on JESUS's last journey to Jerusalem, but not on His way to the site of the Crucifixion	<a href="#">LUKE 19:28-35</a>
14	Two servants accompany Abraham and Isaac	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:3</a>
	Two other men are sacrificed along with JESUS	<a href="#">MATTHEW 27:38</a>
15	The servants do not go to the place of Isaac's sacrifice	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:5</a>
	The disciples scatter upon JESUS's arrest	<a href="#">MARK 14:50</a>
16	Others help to carry wood for a part of the distance <sup>74</sup>	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:3</a>
	Another man helps carry JESUS's cross part of the way	<a href="#">MARK 15:21</a>
17	Isaac carried on his back the wood for his own sacrifice	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:6</a>
	JESUS carried on His back wood of the cross for his own sacrifice	<a href="#">JOHN 19:17</a>
18	Abraham carries a knife and fire as he leads Isaac to the site of sacrifice	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:6</a>
	The crowd who arrests YESHUA and brings him to trial, carries weapons and torches	<a href="#">JOHN 18:1-3</a>
19	The site of Isaac's near sacrifice is in on Mount Moriah <sup>P</sup>	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:2</a>
	The site of JESUS's sacrifice is just outside of Jerusalem, which is situated upon Mount Moriah	<a href="#">2 CHRONICLES 3:1</a>
20	Isaac questions his father about the sacrifice	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:7</a>
	JESUS questions our Heavenly FATHER about the sacrifice	<a href="#">MARK 15:33-34</a>
21	Abraham's son is obedient to his father, even unto death; he offers no resistance.	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:9</a>
	The SON OF GOD is obedient to HIS FATHER, even unto death. He willingly offers his life.	<a href="#">MARK 14:36</a> <a href="#">JOHN 10:17-18</a>
22	Abraham binds Isaac before laying him on the altar	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:9</a>
	The priests bind JESUS prior to him being nailed to the cross	<a href="#">MATTHEW 27:1-2</a>
23	Abraham lays Isaac on top of wood on the altar	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:9</a>
	The Romans lay JESUS flat on his back on top of crossmember so they can drive the nails	see "Crucifixion" on p36.

24	Isaac maintains his silence	
	JESUS remains silent before Herod	<a href="#">LUKE 23:8-9</a>
25	An angel appears to Abraham prior to the sacrifice of Isaac	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:11</a>
	An angel appears to JESUS prior to his arrest	<a href="#">LUKE 22:41-43</a>
26	Isaac's resurrection is prophesied	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:5</a>
	YESHUA prophesies his own resurrection	<a href="#">MATTHEW 20:17-19</a>
27	The ram's horns are caught up (i.e., twisted) in a thicket <sup>a</sup>	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:13</a>
	The Romans ridicule JESUS by twisting thorns into a mock crown and putting it on his head	<a href="#">MATTHEW 27:27-29</a>
28	The ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:13</a>
	JESUS is sacrificed in place of you and me	<a href="#">2 CORINTHIANS 5:21</a>
29	Isaac is resurrected (figuratively)	<a href="#">HEBREWS 11:17-19</a>
	JESUS is resurrected (literally)	<a href="#">MATTHEW 28:6</a>
30	Isaac's 'resurrection' takes place on the third day	<a href="#">GENESIS 22:4</a>
	JESUS's resurrection takes place on the third day	<a href="#">1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-4</a>

Pretty impressive list, right? What are the odds that all these would line up so perfectly 2,000 years apart? <sup>77</sup> It couldn't possibly be a series of random events. GOD doesn't deal in odds or random events. What we have here is a collection of gen-u-ine types and allegories foreshadowing the most significant events in the history of man: the sacrifice and resurrection of JESUS CHRIST, the perfect Lamb of GOD.



**Question:** If JESUS is the LAMB OF GOD, and if a lamb is a 1 to 12-month-old sheep, why did GOD provide a ram which is, by definition, an adult?

Refer [to Genesis 22:8-14](#), and consider the following.

When Isaac asks his father about the lamb, Abraham responds with, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering [...]" (v8). In

verse 13 Abraham sacrifices the ram. *After* the sacrifice, Abraham names the site JEHOVAH-JIREH, which translates to “The LORD Will Provide” (v14). Notice the use of future tense “will.” Even after the sacrifice, Abraham is still anticipating GOD providing *the* lamb. <sup>78</sup> And to remove any lingering doubt, we have the remainder of verse 14. Here it is in its entirety:

“Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said **to this day**, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided [emphasis added].” [Genesis 22:14](#)

While this story is *about* Abraham, it is not *written by* Abraham. The first five books of the *Bible* were penned by Moses, who was born over 400 years after Abraham’s death. <sup>77</sup> The phrase ‘**to this day**’ refers to the present day of Moses. So, for at least four centuries after Abraham, the Israelites are still anticipating YAHWEH’S provision of a lamb! <sup>78</sup>

The ram is not a symbol of JESUS (and thus not a symbol of the Lamb of GOD). The ram symbolizes the substitutionary nature of JESUS’S sacrifice (ram instead of Isaac; JESUS instead of us). In the narrative, JESUS is represented by Isaac.

**Did you know?** Due to the role of the ram’s horn in the Isaac story, the ram’s horn (aka *shofar*) “holds immense significance within Jewish culture and religious practice.” It is believed the shofar has the capacity to awaken the soul, to inspire self-reflection, and to call one to repentance. Blasts from the shofar are associated with the High Holy Days, particularly Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Various blast cadences have specific purposes. ¶<sup>79, 80</sup>

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Hollywood. Stars. Each one gorgeous, glittering, glamorous.

Gaze longingly and feast your eyes upon our sparkling, our twinkling, our diamondesque shimmering. The illusion that you can reach up and touch us, all the while knowing you could never hope to attain the level of

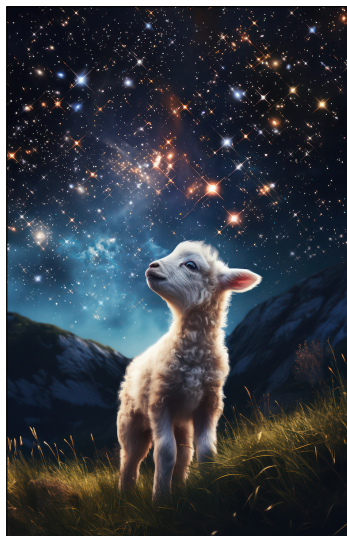


our heavenly presence, much less our status of borderline divinity. Even fictitious bat-like celebrities are welcome to join our age-defying club, where the darker the night and the sweeter the elixir, the brighter we shine. Mere mortals, not so much. So much illusion; so little authenticity.

So much decadence; so little decency. And to remove all doubt, let us ‘immortalize’ ourselves in concrete sidewalks for all to see. How, you ask? Simple. We each purchase our personal star simply by writing a check for an amount equal to the U.S. *annual* median income.<sup>87</sup> So much pride; so little room for humility. But, hey, why be humble when our ~~fanatics~~ fans consider us gods? Why be humble when the masses don’t know what we do behind closed doors of exclusive parties? Thanksgiving parade? Puh-leeze. We’re the ones who should be given thanks. **[Author’s note: So much sarcasm; so much truth. The more you know, the more you’ll agree.]**

Celestial stars. Innumerable real-life heavenly bodies created by the only true and living GOD. They sparkle, and twinkle, and shimmer like multi-color diamonds in the nighttime sky. No illusion whatsoever. They’re within the grasp of GOD, but not the grasp of man. We have zero chance of attaining their heights, and they have zero chance of being divine. They are, after all, merely a portion of creation; majestic yes, worthy of worship? *Never!*

YAHWEH displays these very same stars to Abram. “Look up and see the stars I created. You can’t even count ‘em. Neither will you be able to count your descendants. That’s how many of them there will be. This is my promise to you.” [Genesis 15:5](#) Abram didn’t go looking for fame. The LORD’s promise is a gift to Abram for his obedience.



In order for GOD's promise to manifest, Abraham must first have a son by Sarah. The aged couple is beyond the age of childbearing. Moreover, Sarah is barren. Years go by. Eventually though, Isaac, their miracle baby, is born. And with his birth, GOD's promise of a "multitude of nations" is no longer 'pie in the sky.' It is now in motion. Solid as concrete.

Abraham is a man of considerable wealth.<sup>81</sup> And yet his submission to the LORD is so complete, so genuine, he is willing to offer his own son as a sacrifice. Talk about humility!

When Abraham passes the test put forth by GOD, GOD expounds upon his promise to the man, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." [Genesis 22:18](#) This, of course, alludes to YESHUA in his role as SAVIOR. It further confirms that YAHWEH has yet (as of that time) to "provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering." [Genesis 22:8](#) This very same lamb, the LAMB OF GOD, YESHUA, aka JESUS, once refers to himself as the "bright and morning star." [Revelation 22:6](#) As a man of profound faith, Abraham goes to his grave believing in and looking for that star, the Lamb of promise.

You can almost imagine Abraham, in the final moments of his long, full, faithful life, meditating upon the extraordinary nature of the LORD's promise—meditating, and humming quietly to himself ...

Twinkle, twinkle, little LAMB,  
How I wonder where YOU AM.†



## Well before the near sacrifice

(aka “binding”) of Isaac, the LORD tells Abram something very interesting:

## The Passover

“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they [your descendants] will come out with many possessions.” [Genesis 15:13-14](#)

Now, four centuries <sup>5</sup> may not seem like a huge span of history, but when much of that time is spent enslaved in a foreign country hostile to your own culture, it’s a long time indeed. Such is the plight of the Israelites in Egypt. [Exodus 12:40](#) Passover is the annual commemoration of GOD delivering the Israelites from their Egyptian oppressors.

Our story picks up when YAHWEH appoints Moses to speak to Pharaoh on his behalf (Pharaoh is king of the Egyptians). He wants Moses to request that Pharaoh allow the Israelites leave Egypt. It’s a long conversation between Moses and GOD. Moses keeps objecting and making excuses. GOD demonstrates some miracles, which bolster Moses’s confidence, and eventually the man accepts his GOD-given mission. [¶Exodus 3: 4:1-17](#)

Moses confronts Pharaoh and makes the request as instructed by the LORD. The Egyptians enjoy using the Israelites as forced labor. Pharaoh has no interest in upsetting the status quo. Pharaoh, of course, dismisses the request. Poor choice on his part. [¶Exodus 5](#)

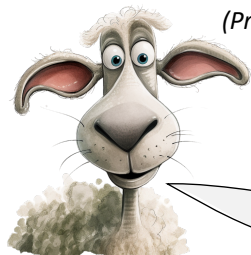
GOD sends Moses (and Aaron) back to Pharaoh. Despite a miraculous demonstration, Pharaoh again denies the request. GOD tells them to go back to Pharaoh the next morning. His instructions to Moses and Aaron: Tell Pharaoh if he doesn’t let my people (i.e., the Israelites) go, that you will strike your staff on the Nile River, and all water associated with the Nile will turn to blood (rivers, ponds, vessels, etc.). Moses and Aaron do

so. This is the first plague. The Pharaoh's sorcerers reproduce the same effect. Unimpressed, Pharaoh refuses their request yet again. [¶Exodus 7](#)

This becomes a pattern: <sup>(1)</sup> Moses & Aaron repeat the message from YAHWEH: let his people go or such and such plague will come upon the land of Egypt, <sup>(2)</sup> Pharaoh refuses to let them go, <sup>(3)</sup> the prophesied plague occurs. This pattern repeats nine times in total. Each plague demonstrates GOD's judgement on one or more of the Egyptian gods. [Number 33:4](#)

**[Author's note:** While researching background for this chapter, I came across a true treasure trove of fascinating information regarding the plagues of Exodus. The stuff is simply too interesting to ignore. However, details of the plagues are not pertinent to the focus of this chapter. Nor are they germane to the subject of sheep. Look for volume 4 in the Critters for Christ Series. It's gonna be epic!

*(Probably not as epic as the plagues themselves, but still plenty epic enough to be immensely interesting.)]*



Isaac Newton invented calculus while he was quarantined during a plague. <sup>82</sup> How bored do you have to be to invent calculus?!

YAHWEH, of course, knows Pharaoh isn't yet going to give in. So, after the ninth plague, he, that is GOD, gives Moses more words to say to the Egyptian king: "I [GOD] am gonna go through all of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt will die. From the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of slaves, to the firstborn of your livestock—all will die. There will be great cries of grief over the Egyptian losses, but the Israelites won't be disturbed by even the barking of dogs." <sup>83</sup>, [¶Exodus 11:1-7](#)

Notice how GOD does *not* give Pharaoh the opportunity to avoid the final plague. The announcement of the tenth plague is a proclamation, not a warning. [Exodus 11:4-8](#) GOD tells Moses in advance that after the tenth plague they will be leaving Egypt. [Exodus 11:1](#) The tenth plague is not unleashed immediately. There is a short reprieve, most likely of several days, to give the Israelites time to prepare for their departure. <sup>84</sup>

There's something else to notice in the passage. GOD says the tenth plague (death of firstborns) will affect **all** the firstborn in the land of Egypt, including the firstborns of slaves. [Exodus 11:5](#) This includes the Israelites! Apparently, their firstborns are going to be killed as well. Then GOD goes on to say he will differentiate between the Egyptians and Israelites to such a degree that not so much as a dog will bark against the Israelites. [Exodus 11:7](#)

So, which is it? Will the Israelites lose their firstborns, or will they be so protected not even a dog will bark at them? Is this not a contradiction? Of course not. Here's what's going on: the plague most definitely is going to affect the entire land of Egypt. And *all* firstborns are *potential* victims. GOD is going to provide protection from the plague. This protection comes with conditions, in the form of instructions. Some very specific instructions, which GOD is about to give Moses. GOD already knows the Israelites will follow his instructions thereby avoiding the plague (and the barking dogs 😊). The Egyptians will not implement GOD's instructions. Consequently, they will suffer greatly. By following GOD's instructions, the plague will 'pass over' the Israelites. It is from this miracle we get the name Passover.

The Passover narrative runs through the entire *Bible*, from beginning to end. <sup>108</sup> Indeed, it is one of the main themes throughout the Word of GOD. <sup>108</sup> Passover frees GOD's people from bondage, which is necessary for the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham. Furthermore, Passover is jam-packed with parallels that point to JESUS CHRIST, who offers all of us freedom from the bondage of sin.

This latter point is the focus of this chapter. Passover is positively brimming with detailed parallels that anticipate the nature, the necessity, and the uniqueness of YESHUA'S sacrifice on the cross. Follow me as we delve into some of the most mind-blowing symbology in all the *Bible*. As we do, consider the following abbreviated timeline summarizing the week leading up to the crucifixion of JESUS. We'll refer to this timeline several times along our wondrous trip through the marvels of Passover.

## Jesus's Final Week (Prior to His Resurrection) <sup>93</sup>

### Day 08 of Nisan Saturday, March 28th, 33 CE/AD

JESUS is on his final excursion to Jerusalem. Six days prior to Passover, he stops off at Bethany. [John 12:1](#) This is our reference date. We use it to mark the days below. Passover occurs on day 14 of Nisan. [Exodus 12:6](#) If we back up 6 days from the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, we land on the 8th day. JESUS raises Lazarus from the dead • Mary anoints his feet with oil • JESUS eats supper with them • Stays overnight.

### Day 09 of Nisan Sunday, March 29, 33 CE/AD

The next day (9<sup>th</sup> of Nisan): JESUS rides the donkey into Jerusalem (which is only about 2 miles away) • The crowd welcomes him [John 12:12-15](#) • JESUS returns to Bethany [Mark 11:1-11](#) • Spends the night in Bethany a second time.

### Day 10 of Nisan Monday, March 30th, 33 CE/AD

The next day (10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan), JESUS and followers leave Bethany and return to Jerusalem • JESUS drives the corruption (money changers) from the temple • Infuriated, the chief priests begin to plot his execution. [Mark 11:12-18](#)

### Days 11-13 of Nisan Tuesday, March 31st thru Thursday, April 2nd, 33 CE/AD

YESHUA delivers many of his most famous teachings during this period: Lesson of the fig tree • Olivet Discourse • Great Commandment • Multiple parables • and others

### Day 14 of Nisan Friday, April 3rd, 33 CE/AD

This is the day; the culmination of so many prophecies, so many types, shadows, and parallels alluding to the Lamb of God. A lot happens on this day. YESHUA ... Is betrayed by Judas and arrested [Luke 22:47-54](#) • Is brought to a preliminary hearing before Annas [John 18:13-14, 19-24](#) • Stands trial before Caiaphas [John 18:24](#) • Stands trial before the Sanhedrin [Luke 22:66-71](#) • Stands trial before Pilate [John 18:28-38](#) • Stands trial before Herod [Luke 23:6-12](#) • Back before Pilate, pronounced innocent [Luke 23:13-16](#) • Crucifixion [Mark 15:24](#)

*Note: Nisan is the first month of the Jewish religious calendar instituted by God, in Exodus, just prior to the Passover miracle.*

Table P1: Passion Week

## Passover Instructions

GOD gives Moses an extremely detailed set of instructions. The Israelites must follow these instructions to avoid the coming plague. Any household not following the instructions precisely will suffer the loss of its firstborn (both human and beast). The following list is a *super brief* overview of the instructions. The details are described later with their corresponding parallels. Use this simplified list to grasp the overall sequence of Passover activities.

- Recalibrate your calendar.
- Select a lamb—one per household—on the specified date.
- The lamb must be free of imperfections.
- The lamb must be a male within its first year of life.
- Keep the lamb safe until the second specified date.
- Kill the lamb on the second specified date at the specified time of day.
- Apply blood from the lamb to the doorways of your homes.
- After applying the blood go into your homes.
- Dress, prepare and eat the specified meal as instructed.
- Stay in your homes for the remainder of the night.
- The next day you will leave Egypt.

To the degree they are followed,  
GOD's instructions always lead to  
favorable results.



## Parallels

As we shall see, lambs are the central theme of Passover. These are known as Passover lambs (*Paschal lambs* in Judaism). We've already established that JESUS is the Lamb of GOD. [John 1:29](#) As we explore the relationships between Passover and the New Testament, we learn just how completely he fulfills his role as the Lamb of GOD. To that end, we begin with the overarching parallel upon which the other parallels rest.

## 01 JESUS is the Passover.

The Bible makes this plain: “[...] For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.” [1 Corinthians 5:7](#)

Notice how this verse doesn’t refer to JESUS as the Passover *lamb*, but rather as the Passover itself. Why is this? If JESUS is the LAMB OF GOD, why doesn’t this verse refer to him as the Passover lamb? Because YESHUA is more than just the Passover lamb! He fulfills *every* aspect of the Passover. This includes the role of Passover lamb plus much more as well. ¶123

YESHUA chooses the time of his death to coincide with the time of Passover. The sacrifice of JESUS is not some event that just ‘happens’ on some random date. His sacrifice is substitutionary. It is something he does for my benefit, in place of me, and for your benefit, in place of you. He does so deliberately, with specific intent, on a specific date. JESUS doesn’t merely die. He dies as an offering of sacrifice. ¶102

Passover overflows with treasures of priceless symbolism. As we begin our exploration, it is paramount we keep one thing in mind. Symbols—rare gems as they may be—are just that: symbols. They testify to the involvement of a loving, all-knowing GOD, but symbols, themselves, have no power. Passover symbolizes CHRIST, but it does not fulfill the role of CHRIST. Only he does that.



The gems found in GOD’s word sparkle with inspiration.

## 02 The purpose of the lamb is to avoid punishment.

“For I will [...] strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments.”

[Exodus 12:12](#)



So, the plagues are YAHWEH'S judgement of idolatry. The Israelites are guilty right alongside the Egyptians. Otherwise, they would not need protection from the death of their firstborn; the Passover lambs would not be necessary. Their idolatry is spelled out after the fact in Ezekiel:

GOD says, "I said to them, '[...] do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord, your God.' But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to Me." [Ezekiel 20:7-8](#) GOD accepts the sacrifice of the Passover lambs as a substitute for the firstborns. Their deliverance is *not* a reward for their righteousness, but the gift of GOD'S mercy.<sup>92</sup>

**Parallel:** GOD is willing to accept the sacrifice of JESUS in place of you and me. As our substitute, the Lamb of GOD provides a way for us to avoid punishment. He is our substitute. During his last supper with the apostles, he describes this literal substitution with figurative illustrations. He likens the bread to his body, and the wine to his blood, both of which he gives up on our behalf, as our substitute. [Mark 15:22-24](#) In so doing, he gives us a way to avoid punishment. JESUS is GOD'S ultimate gift of mercy.

### 03 Recalibrate the calendar.

"Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you." [EXODUS 12:1-2](#)

To what month does "this month" refer? GOD identifies it in the next chapter of Exodus as the month of Abib. [Exodus 13:4](#) Abib means "freshly budded barley."<sup>125</sup> It signifies sprouting, budding, and new life.<sup>123</sup> Later in history, this month is called Nisan. Abib and Nisan are the same month.

For centuries, the Hebrews have been oppressed as slaves in a foreign land (Egypt). At the time of the instruction in Exodus 12, the first Passover is mere days away. And with Passover, the Hebrews will be free; free from oppression and slavery; and free to relocate to the Promised Land. In other words, the nature of their very existence is about to change. This

means, quite literally, a new life, a new beginning. The new calendar commemorates the start of this new beginning. Thus, the phrase “the beginning of months.” ¶188

**Parallel:** A person’s birthday marks the day of their birth. That day is quite literally the beginning of their life’s calendar. Likewise, when a person receives YESHUA as their SAVIOR, new life sprouts and buds within them. <sup>123</sup>, [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) Another verse likens the experience to being born again. [1 Peter 1:3](#) As followers of CHRIST, we are born again. The day of our ‘rebirth’ is, in a manner of speaking, a personal ‘beginning of months.’

One famous *Bible* teacher put it like this:

“This tells us that for an unsaved person [...] No matter if he is forty or fifty years old, as long as he is not saved, his days are not counted before God. All these years are wasted in vanity! [...] As soon as a person is saved, he has his first month. The day that we receive the life of God is the first day of our year.” <sup>126(p12)</sup>

**Did you know?** From this point on, the Israelites maintain two calendars.

<sup>89</sup> Their religious calendar begins in March/April and is used to count months and festivals. <sup>90</sup> Their civil calendar begins in October/November and is used to advance the year number. <sup>89</sup> Passover occurs in the first month of the religious calendar. <sup>90</sup> Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of new civil years. <sup>89</sup>



Someone removed the fifth  
month from every one of  
my calendars. I've been  
dismayed ever since.



## 04 Select a lamb on the 10th day of the month.

“On the tenth of this month, each family is to take a lamb for themselves, according to their families, a lamb for each household.” [Exodus 12:3](#)

Referring to Table P1, we see that on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, the high priests begin to plot JESUS's death. They don't realize it, but in so doing, they have decided to sacrifice the Lamb of GOD. <sup>115(p126)</sup> They have, *figuratively*, selected YESHUA as the ultimate Passover lamb. <sup>t</sup>

**Parallel:** Sacrificial lambs for Passover are selected on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan. JESUS was 'selected' for execution on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

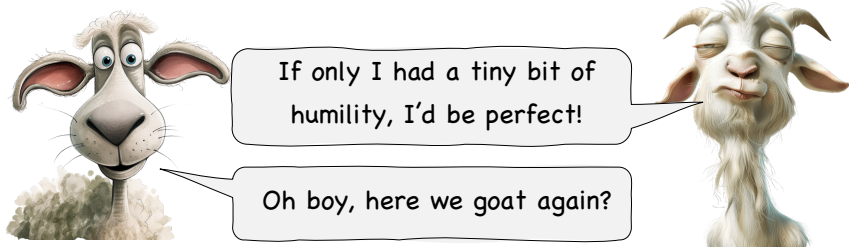
## 05 The selected lamb must be unblemished.

"Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or the goats." [Exodus 12:5](#)

Do not select an imperfect lamb (not crippled, no blind eye, no missing ear, etc.) Traditional Jewish religious law stipulates 50 types of blemishes any one of which disqualify a lamb from selection. <sup>104</sup> Some of them are broad and extraordinarily picky. YAHWEH deserves our best in everything. He expects the selection of Passover lambs to reflect this sentiment.

**Parallel:** Passover lambs must be perfect, without blemish. JESUS is unblemished, utterly without sin. [1 Peter 1:18-19](#) GOD's Lamb is perfect. Otherwise, JESUS's sacrifice would have no effect.

**Parallel:** GOD holds us to a high standard. While we can't be literally perfect, he desires our best. And he deserves nothing less. He doesn't want us to regard him half-heartedly or with an indifferent spiritual attitude. Consider Amaziah, King of Judah: *He did right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a whole heart.* [2 Chronicles 25:2](#) If your attitude toward GOD is only half-hearted, then half of your heart is focused on things other than GOD (worries, worldly desires, etc.). Our service to YAHWEH should be without blemish. <sup>¶94</sup>



## 06 The selected lamb must be male.

“Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or the goats.” [Exodus 12:5](#)

Why a male? Because the first man, Adam, is male. Mankind inherited his sinful nature through Adam. [Romans 5:12](#) Sin entered the world through a single male. For Passover, each Israelite home selects a single male lamb. The blood of that male lamb is the only thing that will protect the firstborns from the judgment of GOD.

**Parallel:** YESHUA is male and the perfect Passover Lamb. His blood is the only thing that will save us from the judgment of GOD. One specific man is the cause of sin; one specific man is the remedy for sin. [Romans 5:19](#)

Something else to consider... In Exodus 4, GOD directs Moses back to Egypt (after a 40-year exile). Within the conversation, GOD refers to his people (Israel) as his “firstborn son.” [Exodus 4:22](#) Blood from Passover lambs is used to prevent the slaying of firstborns (Hebrews and otherwise). In this respect, we may consider the Passover lambs as substitutes. Male lambs are substitutes for the firstborn of GOD’S son, Israel.



**Parallel:** JESUS is the firstborn child of Mary. [Luke 2:7](#)

He also is the only begotten SON OF GOD. [John 3:16](#)

My kids laugh because they think I’m crazy. I laugh because they don’t know it’s hereditary.

## 07 The selected lamb must be within its first year of life.

“Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or the goats.” [Exodus 12:5](#)

Commentators disagree whether this requirement means the animal is before its first birthday or after. The original Hebrew is plain enough. It translates to “of its first year,” meaning prior to its first birthday. <sup>127, 131(p25)</sup> The lamb is to be fresh; “not used for any other purpose.” <sup>123</sup>

**Parallel:** Prior to professing faith in JESUS CHRIST, we're engaged in worldly endeavors. Before our salvation we are the very opposite of fresh. In contrast, JESUS goes to the cross fresh, never having been used for any other purpose. ¶<sup>123</sup>

In Luke, we read that JESUS begins his ministry at the age of about 30. [Luke 3:23](#) Bible historians calculate his age at the time to be 32. <sup>106</sup> This is important because Ancient Jewish law stipulates that by the age of thirty years, a man has attained the mental and physical maturity required for a high degree of responsibility. <sup>107</sup> "Thirty is also the age at which Jewish scribes and rabbis were regarded as mature enough to enter their office as teachers." <sup>107</sup> The disciples refer to JESUS as 'rabbi,' meaning teacher.

[Matthew 26:25](#); [Mark 9:5](#); [John 1:49](#); [John 3:26](#); [John 4:31](#)

**Parallel:** At the time of his crucifixion, the Lamb of GOD, is fully qualified to teach and minister to the people. He cannot be disqualified on the basis of age.

Certain rabbinical teachings mention that some of the Passover lambs may be so young as to have trouble walking to the spot chosen for their sacrifice, so they prescribe the actions to take in such situations. ¶<sup>111</sup> Sheep are docile animals. They have but one defense: run. Young lambs are especially vulnerable.

**Parallel:** JESUS has legions of angels at his disposal, [Matthew 26:53](#) which he can call on at any time to rescue and defend him. Instead, he deliberately remains vulnerable, allowing his torturous sacrifice to run its course.

"A lamb of its first year" represents the vulnerability of CHRIST.

Your birthday is the perfect opportunity to remind you that my birthday is coming up.



## 08 Sheep or goat?

“Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or the goats.” [Exodus 12:5](#)

**Parallel:** Matthew tells us sheep represent the godly, while goats represent the ungodly. [Matthew 25:31-33](#) During his time on the cross, JESUS is both a sheep and a goat. In his divinity, he is good in every sense of the word, and as our substitute, he takes on sin. [Isaiah 64:6](#), [¶123](#) [2 Corinthians 5:21](#)



The pastor is called to feed the sheep, even if the sheep don't want to be fed. He is certainly not to become an entertainer of goats. Let the goats entertain goats and let them do it in goatland. You will certainly not turn goats into sheep by pandering to their goatishness.

—William Still

## 09 Share the selected lamb as necessary.

“[...] take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.” [Exodus 12:3-4](#)

The language of this passage is a bit tough. In essence, here's what it's saying: select one lamb per household. If your household/family is too small for a lamb, get with your neighbor and share. Take into account the appetites of the individuals in the household(s). A household can be too small for a lamb, but a lamb cannot be too small for a household. <sup>123</sup>

**Parallel:** YESHUA, the Passover lamb, is always sufficient. “With Him there is no scarcity.” Neither the situation, nor the size of our family, nor the size of our appetite for him is too large. He is all-sufficient. <sup>¶123</sup>

## 10 Keep the lamb for four days (10th to 14th of Nisan).

“And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.” [Exodus 12:6](#)

While the Christian *Bible* does not say so, most Christian commentators believe the practical purpose of the four-day period (10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan to 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan) is to give the households time to inspect their lamb; to make absolutely certain it has no blemishes. <sup>94, 96, 123</sup>

The Torah (the first five books of the Jewish Bible) states this explicitly. The same verse in the *Torah* reads, “And you shall **keep it for inspection** until the fourteenth day of this month, and the entire congregation of the community of Israel shall slaughter it in the afternoon.” [Shemot \(Exodus\) 12:6](#)

The original language of this verse refers to the animal as a *mišmeret*, an ‘entrusted thing.’ <sup>97</sup> This seems to mean that the lamb is not only to be inspected, but also to be carefully protected. It must be kept from injury to ensure it remains spotless. <sup>96</sup>

“Near Eastern cultures, including the Israelites, often brought sacrificial animals into close proximity to their dwellings.” <sup>96</sup> In fact, traditional Jewish literature mentions one way to properly inspect and protect a Passover lamb is by bringing it into the home. <sup>96</sup> A list of Jewish laws dating back to 200 CE/AD contains a description of the rope used to tether a Passover lamb to a bedpost. <sup>98</sup> How protective is that?!

**Parallel:** Just prior to the Crucifixion, JESUS is subjected to no less than six trials (Table P1, Nisan 14). No guilt is found in him. The priests attempt to find false witnesses to support their case, but in truth, JESUS has done nothing wrong. [Matthew 26:59-60](#) In essence, JESUS passes ‘inspection.’

While we typically regard the inspection period as a duration of four days, when you consider the Jewish method of marking days, it can be counted as closer to 3 ½ days. <sup>99</sup>

**Parallel:** YESHUA’S ministry occurred over a period of approximately 3 ½ years. Not once during that time was fault found in him. <sup>99</sup> Appendix 1

## 11 All households are to kill their lambs.

“You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.” [Exodus 12:6](#)

Four days after lamb selection day, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, every household will kill its selected lamb. They are to do so at “twilight,” which is the beginning of the Jewish day, and equivalent to our sunset.

**Parallel:** Four days after JESUS is ‘selected’ as YAHWEH’S Passover lamb, he is crucified.

Just imagine a precious, cute little lamb in your home living indoors with your family. How quickly it would become a pet! Imagine your children playing with it, and how attached they become to the animal over the next few days. Now imagine the tears of grief streaming down their faces as you, the father and leader of the household, slaughter the tiny critter. It is GOD’S intention for the Israelites to have affection for their Passover lambs before killing them. He wants the people to fully experience the lambs dying on their behalf. <sup>94</sup>

The Jews are GOD’S chosen people. As such, he intends them to develop affection for YESHUA, the Passover Lamb. JESUS lives among them. They are supposed to grieve upon his death. They are supposed to realize the Lamb is sacrificed for their sin.

**Parallel:** We are to fully realize the price JESUS paid to redeem us. Afterall, it is our need for forgiveness—our sin—for which he paid with his life. He was slaughtered on our behalf. Does this not bring us to tears?

Who kills the lambs? The “whole congregation” of Israel. They all are involved.

**Parallel:** Who is responsible for YESHUA’S death? The entire congregation of GOD’S people. Due to our sin, we all played our part. <sup>123</sup>



## 12 The date of the month matters.

“You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.” [Exodus 12:6](#)

Fact: The 14<sup>th</sup> of the month is precisely two weeks into the month, two seven-day periods. The first week ends on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and the second week on the 14<sup>th</sup>. So, when the LORD specifies the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, he is referring to the last day of the second week of that month. Here are some highlights from this most notable week:

**Nisan 09:** This day marks the start of Nisan week #2.

**Nisan 10:** On this day, the Israelites select their lambs for Passover. JESUS is selected for execution. <sup>Table P1</sup>

**Nisan 14:** Passover lambs are killed. In modern times, we refer to this day as “Good Friday” because it’s the day JESUS died on our behalf. After he dies, JESUS is taken down and placed in a tomb.

**Nisan 15:** Saturday is the last day of the week. It is the official Sabbath, the weekly day of rest.

**Nisan 16:** First day of the next week. This is the day YESHUA rises from the dead. [John 20:19](#)

Here's a graphic to go with the notes:

Nisan:	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Day:	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
• Households select lambs								• 3rd day in tomb
• Priests 'select' JESUS								• Resurrection!
								• New week
				• Lambs killed;				• New life
				• JESUS crucified				
				• End of work week				
				• JESUS entombed			• Jewish sabbath	
							• End of week	

Table P2: Week of Nisan 14

There's some great stuff 'hiding' in this timeline. Wait 'til ya get the next page!



**Parallel:** JESUS is executed on Nisan 14, which at the time of the crucifixion, is a Friday. Friday marks the end of the six-day workweek (work Sunday through Friday then rest on Saturday, the Sabbath). <sup>u</sup> When JESUS dies on the cross (on that Friday), he dies on the final workday of the week. His last words, while on the cross, are “It is finished!” [John 19:30](#) Upon his death, both are complete: the week, and his work of redeeming us!

*Note: In the Bible, the number seven represents completion or perfection. <sup>128</sup> A week comprises seven days. This too points to the completion of his mission as SAVIOR.*

**Parallel:** JESUS dies at the end of a week. His new, resurrected life follows immediately on the next day, which is the first day of a fresh, new week. “Christ’s death terminates the entire history of our old life.” <sup>123</sup> Upon professing faith in JESUS, we begin a fresh, new life.



It's been a rough week so far... but on the positive side, I don't need bail money and I don't have any bodies to hide.

## 13 The time of day matters.

“You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.” [Exodus 12:6](#)

What does “twilight” mean? GOD’s instructions regarding the Passover are meticulously detailed, so surely “twilight” doesn’t refer to some general time of day. Surely, it has a specific meaning.

There is much erroneous teaching about the time of day specified in Exodus 12:6. Inconsistencies in rabbinical sources, historical sources with agendas, and honest, yet misguided interpretations—all contribute to the false teachings regarding the time of day. ¶131 p23-54

Some believe the Passover slayings begin at 3PM because that time corresponds to time of day when JESUS was hung on the cross. I love a good metaphor. Indeed, this entire chapter is dedicated to them. I certainly see the elegance of this position. I wanted it to be true. However, the LORD led me to look more closely at the matter. Having done that, I can say with certainty, the lambs are not slayed at any time in the afternoon, 3PM or otherwise.

I know this because eventually, I came across the correct explanation. I know it's correct because it uses the *Bible* as corroboration (scripture interprets scripture). Fred Coulter lays out the explanation brilliantly in twenty-two pages of meticulous detail.<sup>131 p23-54</sup> Don't worry. I won't drag you through the nitty-gritty. While the time of day is literally a matter of life-or-death for the Israelites, the same is probably not true of you and me. Nevertheless, the information is still very much relevant to our lives.

Some translations of the *Bible* translate the phrase in Exodus 12:6 as "between the two evenings." The same verse in the *Schocken Bible*, expresses the time of day as "between the setting-times."<sup>129</sup> Leviticus 23:5 of the same *Bible* uses the identical phrase ("between the setting-times"). That instance isn't related to Passover, but the original Hebraic three-word phrase (*ben ha-`arbayim*<sup>134</sup>) is identical.<sup>v</sup> And this instance comes with a footnote: Think of the sunset as having two phases.

**Phase 1** begins when the sun first drops out of sight below the horizon.<sup>129</sup> This phase lasts approximately half an hour.<sup>130</sup> There is still enough light in this phase to continue daytime activities.<sup>130</sup>

**Phase 2:** begins at the end of phase 1, when it is no longer light enough to continue normal outside work activities.<sup>129, 130</sup> This phase continues until it is completely dark (approximately one hour in duration).<sup>130</sup>

Putting all this together, we see that GOD is saying to the Israelites: "When the sun drops below the horizon on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib/Nisan, I want all you guys to take the lambs you've selected and slay 'em."

Now, keep in mind, nighttime is when the Israelites *begin* their days. What you and I refer to as ‘daytime,’ they consider the second half of a daily 24-hour period. To the Israelites, every 24-hour period begins with the fall of night.

**Did you know?** The Israelites start their 24-hour periods with night. Their reasoning for this goes all the back to the book of Genesis: “[...] And there was evening and there was morning on the first day.” [Genesis 1:5](#) Apparently, evening comes first.

With this concept of night vs. day in mind, let us now paraphrase the instruction from YAHWEH in Exodus 12:6: “At the beginning of the day, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib/Nisan, I want all you guys to take the lambs you’ve selected and slay ‘em.”

They were to slay the lambs at the very beginning of the appointed day. But why? Does it really make any difference. You bet it does! And later in this chapter, we will learn that reason. Once you know the reason, you can’t *unknow* it. GOD does not waste His breath. He has a reason for everything he says, and most especially when it comes to instructions regarding the Passover.

**Parallel:** The time of day, alone, does not represent a parallel. It does however contribute one we shall soon examine. Stay with me, my friend, it only gets better from here.



When you can’t sleep at night, have you ever thought maybe it’s GOD saying, “We need to talk. And right now, you have the time.”

## 14 The lamb's blood purchases freedom.

“[...] I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”

[Exodus 6:5-6](#)

GOD will bring the judgment (the tenth plague) which will lead to freedom for the Israelites. The next day they will finally leave Egypt. However, each household must slay their lamb so they can avoid the judgment. Their protection is provided by the blood of a slain lamb. After surviving the night, they can move from bondage to freedom.

**Parallel:** We too can avoid GOD's judgment. We too can be delivered from bondage (the bondage of sin). The LAMB OF GOD was slain on the cross. his shed blood has, within it, the capacity to protect us from the punishment we deserve. By avoiding GOD's wrath, we can move from the bondage of sin to eternal freedom.

## 15 Firstborns in the land of Egypt will die.

“For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night [Nisan 14<sup>th</sup>] and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the Lord.” [Exodus 12:12](#)

The final plague brings death. All firstborns are potential victims, Israelites, and Egyptians alike.

**Parallel:** The wages of sin are death. [Romans 6:23](#) This applies to everyone, regardless of their rank or their status in the eyes of man.

## 16 Apply the lamb's blood to the doorway to avoid the plague.

“[...] and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.” [Exodus 12:12-13](#)

YAHWEH promises the Israelites they will not be affected by the plague as long as they follow his instructions. [Exodus 11:4-7](#) The blood of an

unblemished lamb, sprinkled upon a doorway, is the signal that a home is to be spared (i.e., passed over).

**Parallel:** Every household desiring to avoid the death of its firstborn must apply blood to the doorframe of its dwelling. Every household has access to a slain lamb's blood. Every person is a sinner. Every person needs the blood of CHRIST. CHRIST died for everyone. Everyone is eligible to partake in his sacrifice. Forgiveness is available to everyone.

**Parallel:** The application of blood is not automatic. It requires a deliberate act to sprinkle the blood upon the doorframe. Forgiveness through JESUS CHRIST is available for every individual. However, every individual must deliberately admit their need for forgiveness. They must personally accept the substitutionary sacrifice made by the Lamb of GOD. No one else can do it for them.

**Parallel:** A home is a place of refuge. The Israelite homes represent YESHUA as our refuge. The door of a home provides access to the home. Lamb's blood on the doorframe signifies that we gain access to the home (i.e., CHRIST) via his blood. "Our entry into Christ has been guaranteed by His redeeming blood!" ¶123

## 17 Use hyssop to apply blood.

"[...] take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin [of blood collected from the lamb] and apply some of the blood"

Exodus 12:22

Hyssop is a symbol of purification. [Psalm 51:7](#) By applying blood with hyssop, we get a picture—a symbol if you will—of the purifying nature of GOD's own blood. In Exodus, GOD's blood is symbolized by the blood of the unblemished Passover lamb applied with hyssop. ¶101

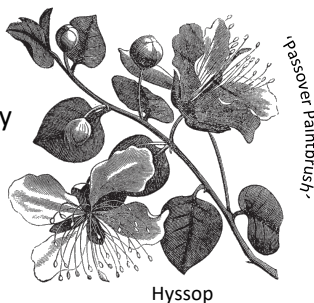
**Parallel:** In the New Testament, YESHUA's blood is quite literally YAHWEH's own blood. [Acts 20:28](#) It alone is pure enough to redeem sinners. [1](#)

[Peter 1:19](#), [John 14:6](#)

King Solomon mentions hyssop when he speaks “of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall [...].”

[1 Kings 4:33](#)

In the time of Solomon, Lebanese cedars are known for their enormous height and size. “From cedars to hyssop” is a literary device of contrast. It signifies a full spectrum, in this case of size (cedars being very large and majestic and hyssop being small and lowly). ¶138



**Parallel:** JESUS refers to the small size of our faith. [Matthew 17:20](#) Hyssop, being small, can represent our faith. From this we see that even a small amount of faith is sufficient to apply YESHUA’S blood. “God does not require that our faith be as the cedar tree, for none of us could meet such a requirement.” We can call upon (i.e., apply) blood from the Passover Lamb even if our faith is very small. A simple prayer of “LORD JESUS, thank you for dying for me,” is enough for JESUS to save a sinner. [Romans 10:13](#) ¶133

## 18 The lamb’s blood must be applied to specific parts of the door.

“[...] You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood, which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; [...]” [Exodus 12:21-22](#)

The blood is to be sprinkled on the doorposts, which are vertical, and the lintel which is horizontal. The physical parallel is clear:

Old  
Testament



New  
Testament



**Parallel:** Notice that no blood is sprinkled on the threshold (the plate beneath the door, over which you step to pass through). We are not to trample on the blood of JESUS. His blood is holy, and we are to value it accordingly. [Hebrews 10:26-29](#)

**Parallel:** “The blood of the sacrificial lamb dribbles down Israelite doorposts and rescues GOD’s people from the knock of death on every door.” <sup>95</sup> Just as the doorposts are covered in blood, so are our sins covered by the blood of JESUS. <sup>102</sup>, [Romans 4:7](#)

**Parallel:** A lintel is a fixed, horizontal beam that supports the weight of a structure bearing down from above a doorway. <sup>112</sup> YESHUA’S sacrifice bears the weight of our sin. [1 Peter 2:24](#)

**Parallel:** Consider this mental image: the left post represents sinners, and the right post represents GOD. The lintel represents JESUS. He spans the gap between us and GOD. YESHUA’S sacrifice is the only thing that makes it possible for us to access GOD. <sup>113</sup> [John 14:6](#)

**Parallel:** The phrase “two doorposts” mentioned in Exodus 12, testifies that there are exactly two posts, and no more. In other words, a single pair of doorposts. From this we know the Israelite dwellings had only one door. There is only one path to salvation, through JESUS, YESHUA, the LAMB OF GOD. [John 14:6](#) If we consider the door analogous to a gate, these words of JESUS come to mind: “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” [Mathew 7:14](#)

## 19 After applying the blood, enter your home and stay there.

“[...] apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.” [Exodus 12:22](#)

Stepping through the bloody doorway and waiting through the night while unprotected firstborns die, is a demonstration of faith in the blood.



“When God [looks] at the blood of the lamb [on the doorway], He [sees], ultimately, the blood of Christ.” <sup>102</sup>

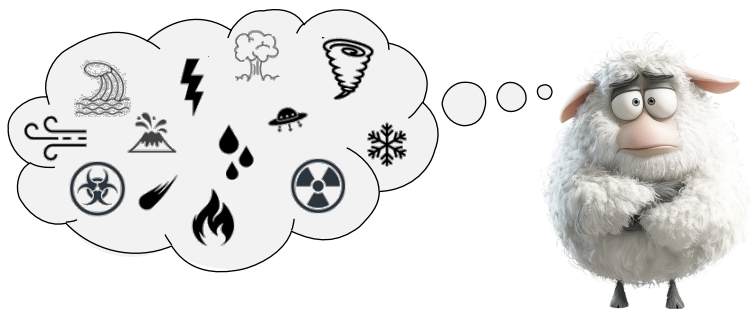
**Parallel:** JESUS said, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved [...]” [John 10:9](#) Salvation requires faith in the blood of JESUS.

It is GOD who will kill the firstborns, and it is GOD Who will look for the blood and when he sees it, pass over. [Exodus 12:12-13](#)

**Parallel:** He who is redeemed by the blood of JESUS is inside the house, through the door, so to speak. The blood is on the outside where you can't see it. The blood is between us! GOD does not require you to see the blood. You may not even feel the emotion of your salvation. The important thing is not what you see or feel. Apply the blood and have *faith* in the blood. “When GOD sees the blood, he passes over us.” He passes over us not because we are good, because we aren't. [Romans 3:24](#) He passes over us not because we deserve it, because we don't. [John 3:16](#) He passes over us because we believe in CHRIST as our SAVIOR. ¶<sup>126</sup> [John 3:16](#)

GOD is the same yesterday, today and forever. [Hebrews 13:8](#)

**Parallel:** Even in the night; through the darkest of times; with anguish and mayhem all around us, GOD is with us. The storms of life come and go, but we can always rely on him, despite the circumstances.



Some people create their own storms then they get  
upset when it rains.

## 20 The door vs. the veil. ¶102

The houses with blood on their doors are safe. Thus, a blood-smeared doorway represents access to a safe space.

**Parallel:** The [post-Passover] temple is constructed as per GOD's specifications. Within the Temple is a curtain (aka veil), which separates the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. Only a high priest is allowed to enter this space, and only once a year at that. Everyone else is barred from entering beyond the veil because behind the veil is GOD's very presence, and sin is not allowed into his presence. The space behind the curtain is the ultimate safe space.

At the moment of JESUS's death "[...] the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split."

[Matthew 27:51](#)

**Parallel:** JESUS's sacrifice opens to us the presence of GOD. [Hebrews 10:19-21](#) JESUS is our high priest. [Hebrews 3:1](#) Being cleansed by his blood, we have access to the very presence of GOD. We no longer need a man to act as intermediary between us and GOD ALMIGHTY.

## 21 The lamb must be cooked a certain way.

"They shall eat the flesh that *same* night, roasted with fire, [...]. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails." [Exodus 12:8-9](#)

**Roast the lamb with fire. Roast it.**

GOD tells the Israelites to roast the lambs. Then, just to make sure they get it, he repeats the command: "Don't eat it raw and don't boil it, *roast* it." So, what's the big deal about roasting? Well, roasting requires the heat from fire to be applied directly to the lamb.

**Parallel:** Roasting represents divine punishment, GOD's holy wrath exercised in judgment. <sup>102, 123</sup> "When CHRIST is on the cross, the holy fire of GOD judges him and consumes him." <sup>123</sup> Isaiah provides a vivid description of this imagery when he prophesies thus: <sup>102</sup>

For behold, the Lord will come in fire,  
And His chariots like the whirlwind,  
To render His anger with fury,  
And His rebuke with flames of fire.  
For the Lord will execute judgment by fire  
And by His sword on all flesh,  
And those slain by the Lord will be many. [Isaiah 66:15-16](#)

While Isaiah isn't referring to the tenth plague, he certainly uses fire as a metaphor for GOD's judgment. (Scripture interprets scripture.)

Perhaps even more vivid are David's words when he prophesies on behalf of YESHUA: <sup>123</sup>

My heart is like wax; It is melted within me.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;  
And You lay me in the dust of death. [Psalm 22:14-15](#)

While this may or may not be a figurative description, the imagery holds true. YESHUA's heart melting like wax: Oh, the searing heat of GOD's fiery judgment! And tongue sticking to the inside of his mouth ... does JESUS not declare his thirst from the cross? <sup>123</sup> [John 19:28](#)

**Do not eat any of the lamb raw.**

**Parallel:** Some people consider JESUS a positive role model; a man with a positive message; a man of morals; someone we should emulate. At the same time, these same people deny that JESUS is anything beyond that. They do not regard him as GOD or SAVIOR. They regard him only superficially, as a mere man, like you and me. In effect these people are consuming the Lamb of GOD 'raw.' <sup>¶123</sup>

**Don't boil the lamb at all with water.**

Boiled meat is a far cry from raw meat. It takes a tremendous amount of heat to bring water to a boil. Here's the thing about boiling though: the



I am certain the LORD has a purpose behind the command, so I set out to learn the nature of that purpose. Turns out ‘entrails’ does not refer to *all* the lamb’s innards. It refers only to the edible organs. The heart, liver, and lungs were considered symbolic of the lamb’s vitality, so they are likely the ones roasted with the lamb. The remaining organs pose health risks and are disposed of (as described in a subsequent section). ¶132

So, now we know the Israelites were expected to eat only the yummiest of the organs. What a relief! But why eat any of the organs at all? And why the head? The legs make sense, but why did GOD call them out explicitly? The answer leads us to yet another parallel.

Imagine that.

**Parallel:** The head symbolizes wisdom, the legs signify activity, and the ‘entrails’ symbolize the inward parts of CHRIST’S being. To consume the LAMB’S head, legs, and inwards, is to take YESHUA in his entirety. As we partake of him, we take in his wisdom, his activities, and his inward parts. ¶123

Always take a good look at what you’re about to eat. It’s not so important to know what it is, but it’s critical to know what it was.



## 23 Do not break any of the lamb’s bones.

“It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.” [Exodus 12:46](#)

**Parallel:** The Romans hasten the death of crucifixion victims by breaking their legs to inhibit respiration. When they get to JESUS, he has already expired, so they do not break his legs. [John 19:32-33](#) None of his bones are broken. Once again, we see the Hebrew Passover lambs as parallels to GOD’S Passover Lamb, also known as JESUS.

**Parallel:** The LORD took a rib from Adam and used it to create Eve. [Genesis 2:21-22](#) The bone of Adam imparted his life into Eve. Similarly, when we take in CHRIST, his bones impart eternal life into us. Furthermore, the Lamb's bones remain unbroken. This signifies the unbreakable and indestructible nature of our redeemed eternal life. ¶123

## 24 Eat unleavened bread as part of the same meal.

“They shall eat the flesh [of the lamb] that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.” [Exodus 12:8](#)

Leaven, or yeast, is an ingredient added to bread dough to make the bread rise. Without leaven, the bread would remain flat. Within the *Bible*, leaven is used in both Old [Leviticus 2:11](#), [Leviticus 6:17](#) and New Testaments [1 Corinthians 5:1-8](#), [Matthew 16:11-12](#) as a symbol of sin and contamination.

On the first night of Passover, the Israelites are to remove leaven from their homes. [Exodus 12:15](#) GOD goes on to tell them that for a week, starting on the day after Passover, the bread they eat shall be *unleavened*. This seven-day period is known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. [Leviticus 23:6](#)

On one level, this is a practical concern. The Israelites are to leave Egypt the next day. Kids, livestock, belongings—there are million things to do to get ready. With all the preparations going on, they haven't time to wait for bread to rise.

On another level, removal of leaven from their homes symbolizes their new beginning; a clean slate if you will. It's a metaphor for turning from their sin, for starting fresh with GOD. This symbology is made apparent 1,500 years later during the 'last supper.'

During his last supper with the apostles, YESHUA takes some bread, and after a blessing, he breaks the bread, gives it to them, and says, “Take it; this is my body.” [Mark 14:22](#) JESUS tells the apostles the unleavened bread they are eating (during Passover) is a symbol of his body (which will soon be broken on our behalf).

**Parallel:** Leaven represents sin. Unleavened bread is an integral part of the Passover celebration. JESUS likens the *unleavened* bread of Passover to his sinless body, and he does so quite explicitly. When the Israelites partake of the unleavened bread of the first Passover, they are figuratively partaking of the sacrifice of JESUS CHRIST. The same is true for us today. [1 Corinthians 5:7-8](#) JESUS CHRIST is holy, without sin. Figuratively speaking, he is unleavened.

**Parallel:** For you and me, eating unleavened bread signifies the elimination of sinful things from our life. <sup>123</sup> When we consume the Lamb of GOD, the 'body' of YESHUA, he makes us holy in the eyes of GOD. ¶<sup>102</sup>

“Modern Jews will say that as they’re eating Passover meal, they’re being reminded of the affliction or suffering that was brought on them by slavery in Egypt.” <sup>102</sup>

The Old Testament corroborates this:

“You shall not eat leavened bread with [the Passover celebration]; [...] the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.” [Deuteronomy 16:3](#)

Fast forward to the New Testament. During the last supper, JESUS takes some unleavened bread, gives thanks, breaks the bread, and says, “This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” [Luke 22:19](#)

**Parallel:** JESUS is saying that he is going to take on physical punishment (i.e., be ‘broken’). In so doing, he provides freedom from our bondage to sin.

**Parallel:** The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the day after Passover. YESHUA’s sacrifice defeats sin. When GOD raises Him from the dead, it is possible for us to be redeemed from sin. Redemption means that figuratively, we are unleavened.



I've always wondered... what was the best thing **before** sliced bread came along?

## 25 Eat bitter herbs as part of the same meal.

“They shall eat the flesh [of the lamb] that *same* night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.” [Exodus 12:8](#)

Bitterness—“a feeling that involves a mixture of anger and resentment generated by the experience of unjust suffering.” Within the *Bible*, bitterness is often associated with slavery. ¶116, [Deuteronomy 29:18, 32:32](#)

The Israelites’ lives are filled with unjust suffering. The bitter herbs remind them of their bitter existence under the slavery of the Egyptians. Their oppressors—

“[...] made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.” [Exodus 1:14](#)

GOD specifies the bitter herbs so the Israelites will remember from what he delivered them.

**Parallel:** In addition to slavery, the *Bible* also uses bitterness as a metaphor for sin. [Acts 8:23](#) The bitter herbs remind us that YESHUA has freed us from the slavery of sin. [John 8:36](#)

When JESUS and his escorts arrive at Golgotha for the crucifixion, our LORD is offered a drink consisting of a mixture of wine and myrrh. [Mark 15:23](#) Matthew describes it as a mixture of wine and gall. [Matthew 27:34](#) ‘Gall’ is a term referring to one of several substances, one of which is myrrh. Two well-known properties of myrrh: <sup>(1)</sup> It tastes bitter, and <sup>(2)</sup> it relieves pain. <sup>117</sup>

When JESUS tastes the wine-myrrh mixture, he recognizes the bitter taste of myrrh and refuses the drink. In a supernatural display of courage,



YESHUA rejects anything that will numb the pain he is enduring for our salvation. <sup>118</sup> Oh my soul—the depth of his love!

**Parallel:** The bitter herbs of Passover remind the Israelites of their deliverance from the suffering of bondage. The bitterness of the myrrh reminds *us* of the suffering YESHUA endures to deliver us from the bondage of sin. ¶<sup>102</sup>

**Parallel:** We too should eat bitter herbs. We eat ‘bitter herbs’ by regretting and repenting of our sin. Sinful things cause us to experience a ‘bitter’ taste. To believe in JESUS CHRIST and give up sinful things is to ‘eat’ CHRIST, the Lamb of GOD, with bitter herbs. ¶<sup>123</sup>

LORD, grant me  
the grace to  
bear what I  
cannot change,  
a friend to  
make it funny,  
and the wisdom  
**not** to get my  
knickers in a  
knot because  
that solves  
nothing.  
(Besides, it  
makes me walk  
kinda funny.)



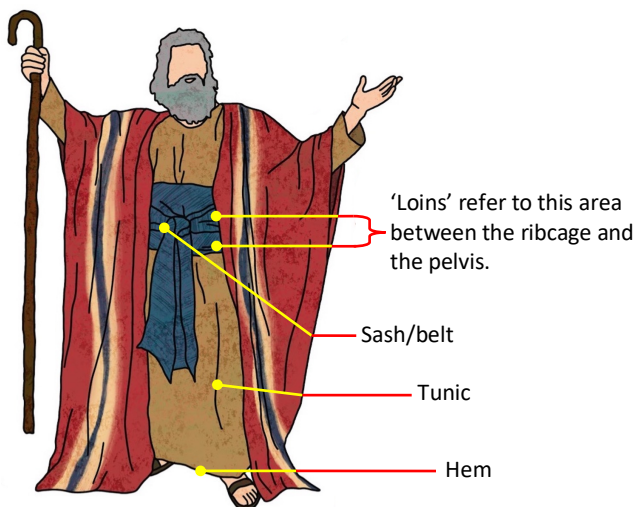
## 26 Dress for travel while you eat.

“Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste—it is the Lord’s Passover.” [Exodus 12:11](#)

Apparently, the Lord has a specific dress code in mind for the Passover meal. Not only must the Israelites prepare and cook the lamb a certain way, they must also dress a certain way during the meal itself. Don't you get the idea that the night's meal is not going to be one of those sit-around-the-fire-pit-and-tell-stories kind of meals?

**Parallel:** “We must, by faith, make Christ our own; and we must receive spiritual strength and nourishment from him, as from our food.” <sup>92</sup>, [John 6:53,55](#) YESHUA said, “My flesh is true food.” [John 6:55](#) We must partake of CHRIST [figuratively] to receive salvation. We must personally, as individuals, receive (i.e., take in) his sacrifice as payment for our sin.

But what about the girded loins, and the sandals, and the staff? What's up with those things? Let's examine their meanings and then we'll discuss the reasons behind them. A picture's worth a thousand words, so consider the following:



### Gird your loins

The phrase 'gird your loins' is not one you're likely to hear in modern times. Today, we're more likely to say something like, "Hitch up your pants." By this we mean, your pants are hanging down or dragging the ground. Grab 'em by the waist and pull 'em up.

In ancient times men would gird their loins. They would grasp the upper part of the tunic (above the belt) and pull it up so that the excess drapes *over* the belt. Long tunics make it difficult to walk quickly. By girding one's loins, the tunic no longer hangs so low to the ground. By girding it enough to raise the hem above knee-level, one can walk without being inhibited by the tunic. Girding is done to ready oneself for travel. It is also done to prepare for battle. The Israelites are to eat with their loins girded.

### **Sandals on your feet**

A common tradition associated with ancient Hebraic celebrations of various feasts, is the tradition of feet washing. This, of course, requires the shoes to be off. The Passover instructions tell the Israelites, explicitly, to eat with their shoes on. ¶133

### **Staff in hand**

The staff is a staple of ancient travelers. It is useful for physical support and defense. The Israelites are told to eat with staff in hand. ¶133

**Parallel:** The Christian life is not without conflict. Spiritual forces, persecution, and just plain ol' honest ignorance on the part of unbelievers results in conflict. We are to gird our loins, put on our shoes, and grab our staff in anticipation of these conflicts. ¶123

**Parallel:** As Christians, we are but pilgrims passing through a foreign land (the world). We should remain ever dressed/ready to move out and follow GOD's direction.

We will revisit the instructions regarding dress in a later section.

## **27 Consume it all.**

“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.” [Exodus 12:10](#)

To avoid the coming judgment, the Israelites must eat the lamb during the night of Nisan 14. They must take its flesh into their bodies. “The paschal lamb was not to be looked upon only, but to be fed upon.” 92

Another biblical scholar put it like this: “The climax of the Passover did not end with the death of the lamb. It ended with the eating of the flesh.” <sup>114</sup>

Earlier, we learned of GOD’s instructions about cooking the lamb. Now, in this verse, he instructs them to eat it in its entirety. Don’t leave any of it.

**Parallel:** “We must by faith make Christ our own; and we must receive spiritual strength and nourishment from him, as from our food.” <sup>92</sup>, [John 6:53,55](#) YESHUA said, “My flesh is true food.” [John 6:55](#) We must partake of CHRIST [figuratively] to receive salvation. We must personally, as individuals, receive (i.e., take in) his sacrifice as payment for our sin.

**Parallel:** Matthew Henry explains the symbology beautifully: “Those who by faith feed upon Christ, must feed upon a whole Christ; they must take Christ and his yoke, Christ and his cross, as well as Christ and his crown.” <sup>120</sup> John Gill offers the same sentiment with a slightly different emphasis: “[...] a whole Christ is to be received and fed upon by faith; Christ in both his natures, divine and human, united in his person, [and] in all his offices of prophet, priest, and King, [...]” <sup>121</sup>

**Parallel:** Lambs sacrificed for the first Passover symbolize YESHUA. They are eaten during the night, prior to morning. This means they fulfill their role as substitutes the night of Passover, meaning prior to the next day. After JESUS expires on the cross, the Jews request the Romans to take down his body, so it won’t be on the cross the next day, which is the Sabbath. [John 10:31](#) The ultimate Passover Lamb, YESHUA, fulfills his role as our substitute, and is taken down prior to the next day.

## 28 Burn the remains on the following morning.

“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.” [Exodus 12:10](#)

If you’re like me, you may be wondering, *well, if they eat the whole thing, how could there be any left to burn the next morning?* Rest assured there is no contradiction. They do eat all the *flesh*, but some parts of the

lamb are not edible (intestines, connective tissues, bones, etc.). It is these remains that are to be burned. *Note: while bone marrow is perfectly edible, it can only be accessed by severing bone, something the Israelites are explicitly forbidden to do to the Passover lambs (#23).*

The requirement of burning the remains fulfills several purposes: <sup>(1)</sup> it prevents the Israelites from using the remains for superstitious or occultic purposes such as bone divination (at the time they've been practicing idol worship), <sup>(2)</sup> it prevents the Israelites from feeling compelled to bring the remains with them when they leave Egypt, and <sup>(3)</sup> it denies the Egyptians an opportunity to treat the remains with contempt. ¶121

Furthermore, the Israelites are not to leave any “unfinished business” when they leave Egypt. This includes the remains of the lambs. ¶132

**Parallel:** Once JESUS's sacrifice on the cross is complete, the price for sin is paid in full. Nothing else need be done to defeat sin. There is nothing 'left over' that *remains* to be done. Similarly, for the person who is redeemed by the blood of JESUS, there is nothing else for them to do to avoid judgment. Leave your old ways behind and don't look back.



Lighting a fire **under** someone is not nearly as effective as lighting a fire **within** them.



## 29 The necessity of the Passover. ¶102

“But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the Lord at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin.” [Numbers 9:13](#)

The timing of this verse is after the Israelites have long since left Egypt. It refers to Passover celebrations done in remembrance of the first Passover, the one back in Egypt.

Observance of the Passover is not a suggestion, it is a divine command. Failure to comply is a serious offense to GOD. To be “cut off” is to be excommunicated from the congregation of Israel; a serious punishment befitting the seriousness of the offense. Furthermore, anyone who fails to observe Passover, will bear the cost of their own sin because they will be without the covering of the Passover lamb.

Now, consider this verse:

“[...] and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds, you were healed.” [1 Peter 2:24](#)

In contrast, YESHUA bears our sin for us. He is our Passover Lamb. It is not necessary for us to get covered by his blood over and over. His sacrifice is sufficient. Once we have been redeemed, we remain redeemed. Rather than being cut off, we are “grafted in.” <sup>¶102</sup> [Romans 11:17](#)

**Parallel:** “Passover is not optional for the people of Israel. JESUS, [the Passover Lamb] is not optional for the people of the world.” <sup>¶102</sup> We all need the Passover Lamb desperately.



Nothing but grace makes a man so  
humble, and at the same time, so glad.  
—Charles Spurgeon

## 30 Eat the meal “in haste.”

The lesson of this section is the most important one in the book. It’s deeply personal for me, and potentially for you as well. It does require a

fair amount of setup. I urge you to stay with me because, again, the ensuing lesson is the most important one in the book. Let us start by revisiting a couple of GOD's instructions:

“Now you shall eat it in this manner: *with* your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste – it is the Lord's Passover.” [Exodus 12:11](#)

“And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire.” [Exodus 12:10](#)

Key points to keep in mind:

- The LORD tells the Israelites to dress for travel.
- He tells them to eat the lamb “in haste.”
- He tells them to eat it all before daybreak.

The Israelites prepare the lamb and eat it on the night of Nisan 14, Passover night. GOD tells them to eat the meal in haste, and even gives instructions regarding their attire. They know they'll be leaving Egypt the next day. Apparently, the LORD wants them to get ready for their journey and to eat their meal in a hurry so they can leave on schedule.

But is this really what's going on? No! Not even close! The LORD led me to the correct sources for analysis. He then showed me how it applies to you and me. Talk about sobering. If you get nothing else from this book, get ahold of this section. Or, more appropriately, let *it* get ahold of *you*.

### **The meaning of “in haste”**

The first thing we need to do is establish the meaning of “in haste” within the context of this passage. It gives the impression they will be leaving immediately after the meal. However, we know this can't be GOD's intent because it would contradict his instruction to stay indoors until daybreak. <sup>¶131(p67)</sup> [Exodus 12:22](#)

The original phrase translated here as “in haste” has two possible definitions: “hurried flight” or “trepidation.” The Israelites are not fleeing

as they eat the meal. Nor do they end up leaving Egypt in a rush. The book of Numbers makes this clear: ¶<sup>131(p67)</sup>

“[...] on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly [“with a high hand” in some translations] in the sight of all the Egyptians [...]” [Numbers 33:3](#)

John Gill, famous for his detailed 18<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the *Bible*, writes this about Numbers 33:3:

“[The Israelites] went out openly and publicly, with great courage and boldness, without any fear of their enemies [the Egyptians]; who seeing them march out, had no power to stop them [...]” <sup>135</sup>

So, the Israelites aren’t in flight while eating, and they don’t leave Egypt in a rush. Thus, we confidently rule out “in hurried flight” as the meaning of “in haste” in Exodus 12. This leaves us with only one other definition: trepidation.

Trepidation means terror, panic, and/or dread. Does this fit? Are the Israelites really suffering in abject fear while they eat? Do they not look forward to leaving Egypt behind? GOD has given them the recipe for protection. What do they have to dread?

Yes, the Israelites are looking forward to getting out of Egypt. And yes, they most assuredly *are* suffering in fear and dread as they eat. To understand why, to fully appreciate the emotions involved we need to examine, one more set of facts.

## Prep time

Bring up any one of the k-zillion online recipe sites. Drill into a recipe to see the details. Almost without exception, the description specifies something labeled as “prep time.” Prep time is the estimated amount of time it takes to prepare, measure, and lay out the necessary ingredients.

I’m reasonably confident the Israelites didn’t consult RecipesRUs.com for an estimate of prep time for the Passover meal. They know exactly what needs to be done.



Given the time of year and the fact that the lambs are within their first year of age, Coulter estimates the Passover lambs weigh 20-30lbs (9-14 kg) after the removal of their skin and guts. What follows is a breakdown of various tasks associated with “prepping” a lamb and then cooking it. Min and Max account for variations in lamb size. The time periods are derived from actual performance of the tasks. ¶131(p66-67)

Task	Min		Max	
	Hrs	Min	Hrs	Min
Kill humanely and drain the blood into a basin (for sprinkling)	—	10	—	15
Skin and gut the lamb	—	10	—	15
Put it on a skewer for roasting	—	10	—	15
Roast the meat and edible organs competely	4	0	5	0
<b>Total hours</b>	<b>4.5</b>		<b>5.75</b>	

Table P3: Lamb prep time

Nisan falls in the springtime (March-April). At that time of year, in that part of the world, days and nights are nearly equal in duration. From this, Coulter estimates Passover sunset to occur at approximately 6PM. Indeed, a modern-day site lists the sunset in Cairo, Egypt on March 1<sup>st</sup> occurring at 5:54PM.<sup>w 136, ¶131(p67)</sup>

Precisely at sunset (Passover #13), on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, every Israelite household takes hold of its selected lamb and begins. If they start at 6PM, and if a lamb takes between 4 ½ and 5 ¾ hours to prep and cook, we calculate completion times to fall in the range of 10:30 to 11:45PM.

And we know what happens at midnight, don’t we? Yep. That’s when GOD begins his pass through the land of Egypt killing every firstborn not covered by the blood of a lamb. Let’s have another look at the reference verse. This time, we’ll incorporate what we’ve learned:

“[...] you shall eat it in trepidation — it is the Lord’s Passover.” [Exodus 12:11](#)

Notice how GOD ends the instruction with a reminder (“it is the LORD’S Passover”). In other words, “Eat the meal in fear because I’m passing over the land meting out my holy judgment.”

Imagine yourself an Israelite parent in Egypt on that Passover night, so long ago ...

*You’re hunkered down indoors ... your family along with you. The lamb just out of the fire ... flat bread ... bitter herbs. You eat ... barely tasting. Waiting ... anxious ... trembling. No one dares speak. No one willing to violate the sanctity of silence. You nervously steal a quick peek through a small window. Nothing to see ... nothing but darkness.*

*Wait. What’s that? It sounds like ... like .... “ohhhh,” you groan almost imperceptibly ... It’s a woman screaming in the distance! A moment later, others join her soulful mourning ... wailing ... pitiful cries of anguish emanating from Egyptian homes. Chew faster. You want desperately for the LORD to skip your house. Did you do everything exactly as he instructed? Did you remember to sprinkle blood on the lintel? Did you use the hyssop to do it?*

*The entire lamb must be eaten, but we can eat only so fast. More cries ... even more still ... louder than before. Will it ever stop?! Please LORD! Please LORD! Please pass over us. Please don’t kill my son! Or me.*

*Your eyes squeeze shut ... so, so tight. One lonely tear escapes meandering down your cheek.*

*Your next bite of lamb is bigger. You chew faster.*

*And you pray.*

*It is the LORD’S Passover.*

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My younger brother passed away unexpectedly when he was a junior in high school. He’s with JESUS now, praise GOD. Knowing this gives us tremendous peace. Even so, the pain my parents have endured is beyond words. It’s not natural for a parent to outlive their children.

The imagined Passover narrative reflects my firsthand observations of grief-stricken parents. Now, consider this: whereas my parents had no warning of the pain to come, the Israelite parents do. GOD even tells them exactly how to avoid the misery of losing a firstborn child! They simply have to prepare according to his instructions. One misstep, though, and death will collect its due. Zero exceptions.

This section is, by far, the longest section of the chapter. You may be wondering when we'll finally get to the punchline. The answer is right now. Only it's not a simple parallel like in the other sections. It's not merely symbolic. It is nothing short of profound in its implication. Don't just read it. Meditate upon it. Process it; both mentally and spiritually.

**Author's note:** *What you are about to read is not meant to be judgmental. It is, however, extremely direct, and personal. If you feel convicted, it's the SPIRIT OF GOD working on your heart. In that case, I urge you to respond. (To him, that is; not to me.)*

The Israelites who experienced the Great Passover are not so different from you and me. We want the same kinds of things: provision, protection, and people with whom to live and love. We also share with the Israelites a full range of emotions, from jubilation to fear. The latter—a particular fear—is the focus of our current discussion.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was blatantly mistaken on matters of theology. He was, however, dead on when he famously wrote, “All fear springs from ignorance.” Ignorance—the lack of understanding—is ultimately, the source of our fears. We fear the dark because we *don't know* what dangers might be lurking within it. FOMO, Fear of Missing Out, occurs when we *don't know* whether some particular positive outcome will come to fruition. We fear death because we *don't know* what it's like ‘on the other side.’



And make no mistake, there *is* another side. We know this instinctively, even if we choose to deny or repress it. [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#) What we *don't* know instinctively is the precise *nature* of the afterlife. This element of the unknown explains why it isn't natural for a person to want to die. Of course, many of us readily admit the existence of an afterlife. And this position comes with its own big question: "Where will I be after I transition to the afterlife?"



And *that* question is, quite literally, the most important one a person can ever ask because once a person passes to the next life, their destination is locked in. Permanently. A person who does not know their destination ahead of time will naturally fear death. It's the worst thing of which to be ignorant. And 'destination ignorance' brings with it the worst kind of fear.

As it should.

Being relegated to the wrong destination for eternity is *not* the position you want to be in. I mean, have you ever stopped to think about eternity? To wrap your mind around the concept of time without end? I have done exactly that. To no avail. Our mortal minds are simply not capable of fully grasping the concept of eternity.

And yet we know it exists. [Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)

Our instinctual fears tell us so.

I realize it may seem as though this section has taken a dark turn, but this isn't the case. On the contrary. The goal of this section is to make you think about the subject. The message of this section is actually one of great news! And to fully appreciate that great news, we first must appreciate the ominous warning behind it.

None of us know the time of our last breath. I could pass at any moment. You could pass at any moment. We're only one car crash, one freak accident, one heartbeat away.

Jonathan Edwards expressed this same thought in 1741, in his timeless sermon, "[Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.](#)" <sup>137</sup> I find the sermon incredibly convicting. Perhaps you will too. What follows are merely a tiny handful of his powerful points.

- Deuteronomy 22:35 says, "[...] In due time their foot will slip [...]." God is referring to unbelievers. The unbeliever walks on slippery ground and is liable to fall under his own weight. The only reason he hasn't fallen already is God's appointed time for his life has not yet arrived.

- "If you do not believe [in Christ as Savior] you are condemned already." [John 3:18](#) Every unconverted man properly belongs to Hell; that is his place, for the wages of sin is [spiritual] death. [Romans 6:23](#)

- At any given moment, it is only the pleasure of God that keeps us out of Hell.

- No man has the power to resist God. Not only is God able to cast wicked men into Hell, he is able to do so most easily. Who are we to think we can stand before Him?

- "There are black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over [our] heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon [us]."

- "Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards Hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of Hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock."

I'm writing this the day after my dad went home to be with his SAVIOR. He passed peacefully surrounded by people who love him. Two twenty-five in the afternoon. That was his appointed time. He took one last gentle gasp, and his heart pumped for its final time.

One moment he was here in this life. The next moment he was in the next life. Only one thing separated the two: a heartbeat. One single, solitary heartbeat.

### Good news!

So, the question is: What will be your destination the moment after *your* final heartbeat? There are only two options: Heaven or Hell. Eternal bliss or eternal torment. That's the scary part. The good news is that you get to choose!

**Option A:** <sup>(1)</sup> Admit that you have sinned against GOD. He already knows it, of course. You're not surprising him, but he requires you to admit it. <sup>(2)</sup> Believe that JESUS died for you to pay the wages for your sin. He settled your tab, so to speak and was buried. <sup>(3)</sup> Believe that GOD raised JESUS from the dead to be your living SAVIOR. [For an alternative presentation of the same good news, click here: <https://youtu.be/Wh1VU-OF98>.]

**Option B:** Any other action or belief, including no action or no belief.

Just be clear: Only Option A leads to Heaven. [John 14:6](#)



On the night of that first Passover, the Israelites hunker in their homes dressed for travel; waiting; eating in trepidation, in fear of the LORD's judgement. Despite having prepared as the LORD instructed, the thought of his judgement still fills them with apprehension. What if they slipped up somewhere? Even an honest mistake would result in the termination of a beloved firstborn's heartbeat. It's hard to imagine the anguish that would ensue from that. "This fearful state of mind was a natural reaction to the death and terror that surrounded their houses during the Passover meal." <sup>131</sup> (Apx. E)

GOD is the same yesterday, today, and forever. [Hebrews 13:8](#) The GOD who showed up at Passover is the same GOD who shows up for us today. The only true and living GOD who judged during the Passover, judges by the same holy standard today. We are but one breath away from that very judgment; one final heartbeat and our eternity begins.

We hang by a thread in the hands of an angry GOD. He despises sin. He judges it with angry, fiery wrath. While he hates sin, he loves the sinner! (That's you and me!) He doesn't want anyone to have to pay the penalty of sin. [John 3:16](#) That's why he sent his SON to be our substitute. His judgment is real, and his judgment is just. So is His offer of salvation.

The good news is he's given us instructions on how to avoid the judgment we deserve. They're right there in the *Bible*. [John 3:16](#)

Now that you know the truth, you are no longer ignorant. 'Destination ignorance' is a thing of the past. Get dressed in faith. Realize the bitterness of sin. And 'take in' the Lamb of GOD. Do 'em right *now* because we don't know the schedule of that last heartbeat. Do 'em in haste so you don't have to hunker in trepidation.

# B.I.B.L.E.

**B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth

As we close this chapter, consider the many themes so prevalent in the Passover narrative. The bitterness and bondage of sin, the provision of the lamb, the protection of the blood, the freedom that comes with following GOD's instructions, and all the other themes—every single one a gem 'hidden' within the treasure of Passover.

When we survey the Passover narrative as a whole, along with the many parallels therein, something else emerges: clear evidence of the providence of GOD. Consider all the ways in which his handiwork manifests in the Egyptian Passover. How the lamb exemplifies GOD's Lamb, the number of days to keep the lamb and inspect it, how to prep the lamb, how to cook it, how to dress and even what emotion to feel as they eat it. Every miniscule detail has meaning, some of which won't even be apparent until centuries after that first Passover.

It's been said, "The definition of a coincidence is when GOD decides to remain anonymous." When it comes to the Passover and the Lamb of GOD, there is *nothing* anonymous about it. Our CREATOR is front and center, loving us, providing for us, and making himself known to us.



'Coincidence' is the word some people use when they don't see GOD's levers and pulleys.

Next up: a jaw-dropping look at the unveiling of the Lamb.



## The Revealing

### **Don't you just love to sit back**

and soak in the beauty of a picturesque sunset? I never cease to be awestruck at the exquisite blend of reds and oranges, yellows, and pinks, as they follow that receding ball of fire; the



dark of night chasing it tirelessly until, finally, that big ol' ball relents, and fades silently into the horizon. In the midst of enjoying a spectacular sunset, the planetary, cosmological, and astronomical reasons for it cease to be relevant. Instead of the solar system, I think of the one who created the solar system. I imagine the sky his canvass, and the stunning array of colors his artwork put on display just for us.

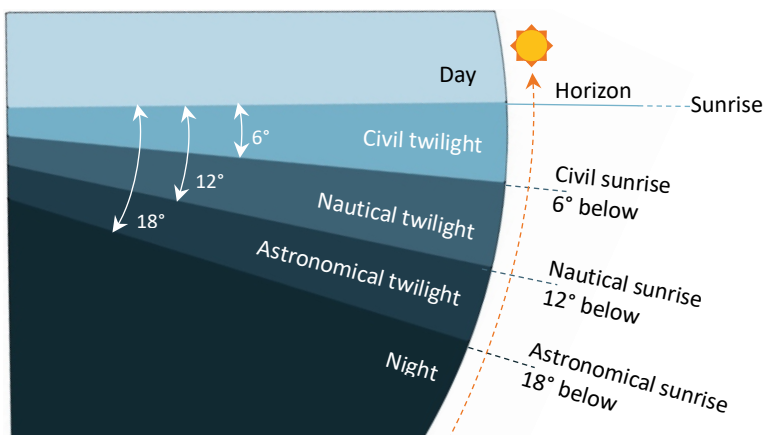
And I praise him for it.

They say a sunrise holds the same beauty as a sunset. I'll have to take their word for it because the sun rises before my time. That is to say, it takes place before my normal wakeup time. I mean, really, am I the only one on the planet who understands why *morning* and *mourning* sound so much alike?

Despite its propensity to arrive early, the daily sunrise does provide a strong visual for the message of this chapter. So, let's take a close look at the time of mourning, I mean morning time.

We all know the sky lightens as the sun approaches dawn. What is perhaps less known, is that there are four official stages of sunrise.

**Astronomical twilight** begins when the center of the sun is  $18^\circ$  below the horizon. At this point most celestial objects are still visible even though the atmosphere is beginning to scatter small amounts of sunlight. ¶<sup>139</sup>



**Nautical twilight/sunrise** begins when the center of the sun progresses to 12° below the horizon, marking the end of astronomical twilight. The name of this stage is derived from the time when ships navigated via the stars. Stars are still visible during nautical twilight. Likewise for the horizon if weather conditions are clear. ¶139

**Civil twilight** begins when the center of the sun progresses to the point of 6° below the horizon, marking the end of nautical twilight. During this stage, assuming the weather is clear, artificial lighting is not generally required to perform outside activities. During this phase of sunrise, only bright stars and planets are still visible to the naked eye. ¶139, ¶140

**Sunrise** occurs when of the upper edge of the sun first touches the horizon. <sup>140</sup> Your new day has begun! “This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” [Psalm 118:24](#)

And just for fun, King Solomon chimes in on the subject: ☺

“Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;

And hastening to its place it rises there again.” [Ecclesiastes 1:5](#)

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Now, you may be wondering what in the world phases of sunrise have to do with the roles of sheep in the *Bible*. Keep reading, my friend and you shall see. The phases of sunrise are a form of progressive revealing. As the sun progresses through the stages of sunrise, the light of day shines brighter and brighter.

The *Bible* makes use of this same principle. The star example being the revelation of YESHUA as the Lamb of GOD. As the narrative of the *Bible* unfolds, we see the Lamb revealed in a progressive fashion. This current chapter describes one of the most fascinating and compelling messages in the entire *Bible*. Indeed, the progressive revealing of the Lamb conveys the primary theme, the very essence of GOD’s holy word.

The sunrise is a metaphor for the progressive revelation of the Lamb of GOD. Furthermore, the revelation, itself, is a series of metaphors. The progressive sunrise is a metaphor for a series of metaphors. So, without further ado, let's get started. Let's consider the astronomical as metaphorical to make the theological recognizable. Don't worry, we won't veer into the philosophical, nor will we be over-analytical, but by the end of this chapter, I believe you will accept the truth as both remarkable and undeniable. (Pardon my penchant for rhyme. At least I entertain *me*.

Solomon pipes up with yet another sage comment for which he is so well-regarded. I know this is out of context, but it seems so on point, I feel compelled to include it anyway: ☺

“That which has been, is that which will be, [...]

So there is nothing new under the sun.” [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#)

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**Author's note:** *The core content presented below is not my original material. I learned it from the renowned preacher, J. Sidlow Baxter (1903-1999). The remainder of this chapter draws heavily from part 1 of his sermon, “The Doctrine of the Lamb.” What Baxter refers to as, ‘progress of doctrine,’ I refer to as ‘progressive revelation.’ One and the same.*

In order to set the proper tone for the remainder of this chapter, allow me to start by paraphrasing Baxter's own introduction:

Progressive revelation of the Lamb begins early in the Old Testament. It is mentioned throughout the *Bible*, “book after book, stage after stage, and century after century.” It finally culminates late in the New Testament. When you first encounter the chain of revelation, you don't suspect it is the start of such a revelation. The authors who write about the Lamb don't realize they are contributing to a chain of profound clues, which together, form the central theme of the *Bible*. This, of course,

makes the progressive revelation “all that much more obviously supernatural and endlessly fascinating.” ¶141

The progressive revelation of the Lamb is like a chain composed of ten links. They are, in order, as follows:

## 01 The necessity of the Lamb ¶141

Cain offers a sacrifice of grain. Abel offers a sacrifice of lamb; Cain’s sacrifice is “outwardly beautiful, but bloodless.” Abel’s little lamb is slain. “Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.” [Hebrews 9:22](#) For this reason, the LORD rejects Cain’s offering, and accepts that of his brother, Abel. This first emphasis on the lamb, highlights the necessity of the Lamb, for each of us is a sinner, “deeply guilty and hell-deserving.”

Scenario: Abel’s lamb

Verses: [Genesis 4:1-16](#)

The Lamb: ... for sin

Theological: Propitiation (appeasing the wrath of God)

Revealed: Necessity of the Lamb

## 02 The provision of the Lamb ¶141

Let us now move to the binding of Isaac. In this account, the LORD tests Abraham’s faith and obedience, by telling him to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice. Isaac knows he and his father are there to offer a sacrifice but does not realize he is the intended victim. He inquires of Abraham “Dad, we have the wood, and we have the fire, but where is the lamb for the offering?” Abraham’s reply shall forever reverberate through history: “God will provide for himself, the lamb for the offering.”

And this is precisely what GOD does. Just as Abraham’s knife glitters in the light of the rising sun, YAHWEH intervenes. “Abraham! Put down your hand. Do not hurt Isaac, for you have proven your reverence to me.” At this very moment, Abraham turns, looks behind him, and sees a ram caught in a thicket. He offers this ram in place of Isaac. So moved is Abraham, he assigns a name to that very location. He calls it JEHOVAH-JIREH, which means “The LORD will

provide.” Note the future tense. Let us be grateful to our CREATOR for providing the precious Lamb.

Scenario: Abraham’s lamb

Verses: [Genesis 22:1-14](#)

The Lamb: ... for one person

Theological: Substitution (YESHUA in place of a sinner)

Revealed: Provision of the Lamb

### 03 [The slaying of the Lamb](#) ¶141

Our chain of progression leads us now to the book of Exodus, where we touch, once again, on the Passover experience. On the night of Nisan 14, each Israelite household must slay a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts of their dwelling. The selected lamb must be without blemish. However perfect the selected lamb may be, it can offer no protection as long as it remains alive. It must be slain, and the resulting blood applied to the doorway of the home. The sprinkled blood is a sign for JEHOVAH to pass over the home, thereby sparing the lives of the firstborns within.

This episode reveals that you and I cannot be saved by the perfection of JESUS CHRIST, nor by his immaculate character. Our salvation depends upon his death, his selfless sacrifice. This author can relate to the following paraphrased words of Baxter: “I don't know how you feel friend, but the older I get, the more I feel the need for the precious blood of JESUS.”

Scenario: The Passover Lamb

Verses: [Exodus 12:1-13](#)

The Lamb: ... for one family

Theological: Protection

Revealed: Slaying of the Lamb

### 04 [The character of the Lamb](#) ¶141

Our next encounter with the Lamb occurs in the book of Leviticus. The emphasis here is on the character of the Lamb. In Leviticus 22, alone, we are told six times, that sacrificial lambs must be “without blemish.” And

to remove all doubt, the same passage says it [the lamb] “must be perfect to be accepted.”

This reveals to us that the power of YESHUA’S sacrifice on the cross is derived from the joining of his divine nature with his sinless manhood. Both are necessary. his nature as GOD, makes his sacrifice eternal. His nature as a sinless man, makes his sacrifice sufficient. This combination forms a foundation on which our holy GOD can remain righteous and yet pardon the repentant, believing sinner.

Scenario: The sacrificial Lamb

Verses: [Leviticus 22:17-25](#)

The Lamb: ... for one nation (the Israelites)

Theological: Absolution (removing our guilt; forgiveness)

Revealed: Character of the Lamb

## 05 <sup>¶141</sup> The person of the Lamb

The fifth link in the progressive revelation of the Lamb reveals that GOD’S Lamb is a person. Up until now, it has been an animal, but we see in the prophecy of Isaiah, he is a person:

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;

[...]

Yet He did not open His mouth;

Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, [...]” [Isaiah 53:5-7](#)

Note the phrase “Like a lamb.” This tells us the “lamb” is a metaphor for a real person.

Scenario: The suffering Lamb

Verses: [Isaiah 53](#)

The Lamb: ... for all Believers

Theological: Expiation (satisfying our punishment through His suffering)

Revealed: Personality of the Lamb

## 06 The identity of the Lamb ¶141

In the previous revelation we discover the Lamb is a person. Now, in the sixth revelation, we are told the identity of that person. John the Baptists reveals the person's identity. When he sees JESUS approaching, John the Baptist exclaims excitedly, "Behold, the Lamb of GOD, who takes away the sin of the world!" The identity of The Lamb is revealed. He is none other than JESUS of Nazareth.

Scenario: The Lamb announced by John the Baptist

Verses: [John 1:29](#)

The Lamb: ... for the entire world

Theological: Removal of sin available to all

Revealed: Identity of the Lamb

## 07 The Christhood of the Lamb ¶141

"Christ" is *not* the last name of JESUS. It is a title. It is derived from the Greek *Christos*, meaning "anointed one" or "chosen one." Thus, JESUS CHRIST means JESUS, the chosen one. The Hebrew equivalent is *Mashiach*, from which we get the word, MESSIAH. ¶142

The book of Acts describes the situation in which Philip shares the Gospel—the good news of JESUS—with an Ethiopian reading the words of Isaiah. He then says to the Ethiopian, "If you believe, you may be baptized." The Ethiopian's reply is short and sweet: "I believe that JESUS CHRIST is the SON OF GOD." This passage connects for us yet another dot. It is thus revealed that "JESUS is the promised CHRIST, and the CHRIST is the promised Lamb."

Scenario: The Lamb explained by Philip

Verses: [Acts 8:25-40](#)

The Lamb: ... for non-Jewish individuals

Theological: Individual salvation

Revealed: Christhood of the Lamb

Isn't it interesting that this revelation, #7, contains within it a mention to the verse we explored in revelation #6 (i.e., Isaiah 53)?

## 08 The resurrection of the Lamb ¶141

This eighth link in the progressive revelation of the Lamb is exceptionally insightful. The words of Peter, encompass all the preceding revelations! The numeric notations correlate to the comments following the passage below.

“[...] knowing that **you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold** <sup>01</sup> from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with **precious blood**,<sup>03</sup> as of a lamb **unblemished** <sup>04</sup> and spotless, *the blood of Christ*. <sup>05, 06, & 07</sup> For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world** <sup>02</sup> but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who **raised Him from the dead** <sup>08</sup> and **gave Him glory**, <sup>09</sup> so that your faith and hope are in God.” [1 Peter 1:18-21](#)

**01 Necessity.** Not even gold is valuable enough to redeem us, to pay for our sins. The blood of CHRIST is necessary for that.

**02 Provision.** Our REDEEMER was present before the foundation of the world. He has been provided for since the beginning.

**03 Slaying.** The blood is available only because the Lamb was slain.

**04 Character.** The Lamb is perfect, without blemish.

<b>05 The Lamb is a Person.</b>	}	The Lamb is CHRIST, which we already established is JESUS, who is a person.
<b>06 The Lamb is JESUS.</b>		
<b>07 The Lamb is CHRIST.</b>		

Peter goes on to reveal a new truth regarding the Lamb: the slain Lamb is resurrected! (**08** in the passage) The Old Testament is jam-packed with predictions of both YESHUA'S sufferings and the coming of his global Kingdom. What we *don't* find in the Old Testament is a direct prediction of his bodily resurrection from the dead. Our faith looks back to all the



Lamb has done for us. As soon as Peter testifies to the resurrection, we have hope to go with it. YESHUA's accomplishments give us faith. His resurrection gives us hope of victory over death.

By now, we understand this progressive revelation is building momentum. Something big is happening. Really big. To where is all this leading? Stay with me, my friend. Let's explore the next revelation of the Lamb and find out.

Scenario: The Lamb as Redeemer

Verses: [1 Peter 1:18-21](#)

The Lamb: ... for all of history

Theological: Redemption (His payment of the debt we owe due to sin)

Revealed: Resurrection of the Lamb

## 09 [The throne of the Lamb](#) ¶141

Up to this point, the attributes revealed about YESHUA testify to his *past* accomplishments. The ninth link in the progressive revelation of the Lamb speaks to his *present* status. In chapter 5 of Revelation, we read that the slain Lamb currently occupies the heavenly throne. [Revelation 5:1](#) A throne is a special seat reserved for a monarch. Thus, we know the Lamb has assumed his rightful role as sovereign ruler of all.

Scenario: The Lamb as sovereign ruler

Verses: [Revelation 5](#)

The Lamb: ... for the universe

Theological: Government

Revealed: Heavenly enthronement of the Lamb

## 10 [The eternal kingship of the Lamb](#) ¶141

Now, we progress to the tenth and final link in this most marvelous series of revelations. And where do we find ourselves? In chapter 22 of Revelation, the very last chapter of the *Bible*. In essence, it conveys the concluding words of God's holy Word.

It's not the end, of course. It's merely the start of the remainder of time. The 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter points us to eternity, in which Eden is restored, and the Lamb is the predestined emperor of all. He is the everlasting KING, ruling over the new Heaven and the new Earth. <sup>141</sup> As such, those of us who are redeemed will serve him forevermore.

Scenario: The Lamb as eternal emperor

Verses: [Revelation 22](#)

The Lamb: ... in eternity

Theological: Eternal glory

Revealed: The Lamb for all of eternity

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The Lamb was the Lamb before time. The Lamb will remain the Lamb forever. In the beginning, he created the universe. In the end he shall rule the universe with us as its inhabitants. The Lamb is present throughout the entire Word of GOD. He is present in the first chapter of the *Bible*, and he is present in the last chapter of the *Bible*.

The progression is revealed through the work of 40 different authors over the span of fifteen centuries. When you consider the Lamb's revealing in this light, it seems even more remarkable. Clearly, the progressive revelation of the Lamb has GOD'S fingerprints all over it. No surprise, given how vital the Lamb is to GOD'S plan for man.

The sun begins its daily march in the dark of early morning. It's so subtle you barely know it's happening. At 18° below the horizon, one might not even notice the newly arrived particles of light.



A day without sunshine is  
like ... you know... night.

—Steve Martin

Several minutes and a few degrees later: the light is dim, but the disclosure is undeniable. The revelation of a new day continues steadily as the horizon fades gently into view. The sun ascends to the level of six degrees below the freshly unveiled horizon. The revealing is in full swing now, diamonds of the nighttime sky giving way to a morphing mixture of reds, golds, and an untold number of oranges. Then, finally, right on cue, that big ol' ball of life-sustaining light makes its way to the horizon. The light of day bursts forth in all its glory. The revelation of the sun is complete.



The daily rise of the sun reminds us of the revelation of the Lamb. We know he participates in creation. [Colossians 1:16](#) We also know light does not exist prior to creation. [Genesis 1:1-3](#) From these facts, we can rightly deduce the revelation of the Lamb starts in the darkness before time.

Through the sin of Adam, and the sacrifice of Abel we see the necessity of the Lamb. Through the faithfulness of Abraham, we learn of the provision of the Lamb. The Passover teaches us the Lamb must be slain. Levitical rules of sacrifice reveal the perfect character of the Lamb. The prophecy of Isaiah introduces the Lamb as a person. John identifies that person as JESUS of Nazareth. The Book of Acts, unveils JESUS as the CHRIST; the Lamb is the ANOINTED ONE, the long-awaited MESSIAH. As the revelation of the Lamb progresses even further, we are told the Lamb is

resurrected! As the narrative of the *Bible* nears its conclusion, we see the Lamb is currently enthroned as sovereign ruler. The *Bible* ends with the Lamb as king of the universe, in all his glory, amidst our existence for all of eternity.

From pre-creation darkness to the light of his eternal glory, the progressive revelation of the Lamb is nothing short of profound. All by itself, it conveys JEHOVAH's provision for you and me and indeed the entire world. As the rising of the sun crowns the horizon, so too is the Lamb of GOD crowned as the eternal SON. At the dawn of morning, the sun's glory is revealed for a day. At the dawn of eternity, the SON's glory is revealed for eternity.

This truth, once again, brings to mind Solomon's wisdom:

"That which has been, is that which will be, [...]"

So, there is nothing new under the sun." [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#)

Thank you, FATHER, for the Lamb.

This is the day you have made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.

Next up: the oldest profession in the world.



## The Profession

**Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) is**

first to coin the phrase. Drawing from

[Joshua 2:15](#), the novelist refers to one of his fictional characters, Lulan,

as a member of the “oldest profession in the world.” Kipling penned the line in 1889. The notion catches on, and still today, we use “the oldest profession in the world” as a euphemism for prostitution. While the passage in Joshua does refer to a prostitute. It does *not* speak to the longevity of the so-called profession of ill-repute.

The *Bible* does, however, refer to another occupation, which is much more likely to be the true oldest profession in the world. Early in the *Bible*, we learn Adam & Eve’s second son, Abel, is a “keeper of the flocks,” a shepherd. [Genesis 4:1-2](#) Now, it doesn’t come right out and say shepherding is the oldest profession in the world, but we’re talking about one of the very first humans in history, and that makes it close enough for me.

The Hebrews of biblical times never completely abandon their shepherding lifestyle.<sup>147</sup> Since the time of Abraham, Sheep have been pervasive in the Middle East.<sup>147</sup> Job has 14,000 of them in his flock alone. [Job 42:12](#) The dedication of King Solomon’s temple involves the sacrifice of no less than 120,000 of the wooly creatures. [1 Kings 8:63](#) One Jewish historian reports that 256,500 lambs are sacrificed at the temple during a single Passover!<sup>148</sup> And all those lambs are 12 months or younger in age. How many total sheep do they imply? And how many shepherds are needed to tend those sheep? A lot, that’s how many!

In a world increasingly disconnected from nature, shepherds stand out as shining examples of compassion, responsibility, and dedication. Their lives remind us we are all part of something larger than ourselves.

Despite the long, ongoing history of shepherding, few of us, in modern times, can fully appreciate the multi-faceted nature of the profession. The *Bible* contains over 100 references to ‘shepherd.’ Many of these references are in relation to sheep. If we want to truly understand the biblical roles of sheep, we must also consider the biblical roles of shepherds. Afterall, JESUS refers to himself as “the good shepherd.” [John 10:11](#) Even prior to JESUS, some of the most significant

figures in the *Bible* are shepherds. Several of them exemplify specific traits of the Good Shepherd: <sup>145</sup>

Figure	Represents YESHUA as...
Abel	The sacrificed shepherd
Jacob	The working shepherd
Joseph	The persecuted and exalted shepherd
Moses	The freedom-giving, guiding shepherd
David	The shepherd king

**Moses, the humble shepherd**

Moses is a central figure in the Old Testament. And with good reason. The LORD uses him in mighty ways. If you study the life of Moses closely, you realize his life of 120 years is divided into three phases. Phase 1: He lives as a prince in Pharoah’s palace; Phase 2: Moses lives as a shepherd in the wilderness; Phase 3: He is the leader of a nation (the Israelites). Each of these phases encompasses a span of 40 years. This current section zeroes in on the middle phase of his life: that of a shepherd.

Fearing for his life, Moses runs out of Egypt and into the wilderness. He meets and marries Zipporah, daughter of Reuel, a priest. [Exodus 2:11-22](#) Moses stays for 40 years tending Reuel’s flocks. [Exodus 3:1, Acts 7:28-30](#) From prince to shepherd; from palace to wilderness; from being surrounded by servants to being surrounded by sheep—imagine the change in lifestyle. Talk about a lesson in humility!

According to Jason Sobel, the time Moses spent shepherding in the wilderness was a time of introspection and personal growth. <sup>151</sup> Sobel shares a story from Jewish tradition illustrating the character of Moses in his role as shepherd:

“One day while [Moses] was watching over the flock, one of the sheep went missing and he went in search of that one lost sheep. And when he found it drinking from the stream, he didn't scold it or beat it, but he spoke to it tenderly saying, ‘I didn't know you were so thirsty. You must be exhausted.’ He put it on his shoulder and brought it back to the flock. And God said, ‘If Moses so compassionately shepherds his father-in-law's sheep, how much more will he have kindness and mercy and compassion for my children?’ And that's why God chose Moses to become the great shepherd and leader of Israel.”<sup>151</sup>

Is the story true? I'm not sure. And to be honest it doesn't matter. True or not, it illustrates a principle that *is* true:

It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. [Proverbs 16:19](#)



Humility and compassion go hand in hand because humility increases our capacity for compassion. Humility means we recognize we aren't any better than others or superior to them. This recognition activates empathy toward others, empowering us to listen to their concerns and understand their perspective.

Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. Humility is thinking of yourself less. —C.S. Lewis



### David, the faithful shepherd

Shepherd duty is typically assigned to the youngest male in the family, especially when the father has crops to tend in addition to flocks. As the

older son ages, he begins helping the father with farming tasks (plowing, harvesting, etc.). At this point, he passes his shepherding responsibilities to the next oldest son. The job of shepherding passes, in this manner, from older son to younger son until the youngest of all becomes the family shepherd. ¶<sup>147</sup>

This certainly seems to be the case with David. [1 Samuel 16](#) GOD instructs Samuel, the prophet, to go to Jesse's house and anoint the next king of Israel. "I will show you which of Jesse's sons I have chosen," explains GOD. So, Jesse brings his sons, one at a time, before Samuel. One by one, the LORD rejects each son, declaring, "Don't look at the appearance or stature, for I, GOD, look at a man's heart." The LORD rejects all six sons.

**Samuel:** "The LORD has not chosen these. Are these all the children?"

**Jesse:** "Well, there is one more, my youngest. He's out tending the sheep."

**Samuel:** "Bring him. We will wait for him here."

When Jesse's youngest son, David, arrives, the LORD says, "Arise. Anoint him, for he is the one I have chosen."

We are not told the age of David at the time; most likely only 10-15 years. <sup>149</sup> The point is that, as the youngest, David has been assigned the 'lowly' duty of tending the flock. Perhaps ironically, his experiences as a shepherd form the basis of many of the psalms. Furthermore, David's faithfulness as a shepherd is why GOD chooses him to be king:

He also chose David His servant  
And took him from the sheepfolds;

From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him  
To shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. [Psalm 78:70-71](#)

Rabbi Sobel shares this story about David...



“ [...] there's actually a story in Jewish tradition that's very beautiful that describes [God's selection of David]. It talks about how David was out there with the sheep, helping them to graze, and he would let the tender ewe lambs eat the most tender part of the grass. And then he'd bring in the more mature sheep and they'd eat the middle center part, and then the tough rams to eat the roots that were the most difficult part to be able to digest. Then God said to himself, *If David shepherds sheep like this, how much more will he wisely shepherd my people, the children of Israel?*”<sup>151</sup>

Not only did David ensure provision for his flock, but he also ensured its protection. He even went so far as to slay a lion and a bear to keep his sheep safe. [1 Samuel 17:34-36](#) David literally put his life on the line to protect his flock. Provision and protection are top priorities of a good shepherd and a good king alike. David fulfilled both duties—provision and protection—admirably.

I just found out it takes five sheep to make one wool sweater. I didn't even know they could knit.



## Tools and methods of the trade

Clearly, character is an important aspect of responsible shepherding. Like many other trades, effective shepherding also entails the use of certain tools and methods. In order to fully appreciate the remainder of our discussion, we must first consider tools and methods used by the shepherds of biblical times.

- 🐾 Staff—a stick five to six feet in length. It is used as a walking stick and to handle sheep. It is often depicted with a crook on one end, but not all of them are so shaped. ¶<sup>147</sup>
- 🐾 Rod—a club made of hardwood used for defense. The business end is fashioned into a knob, which might have a nail driven through it to increase its effectiveness. ¶<sup>147</sup>

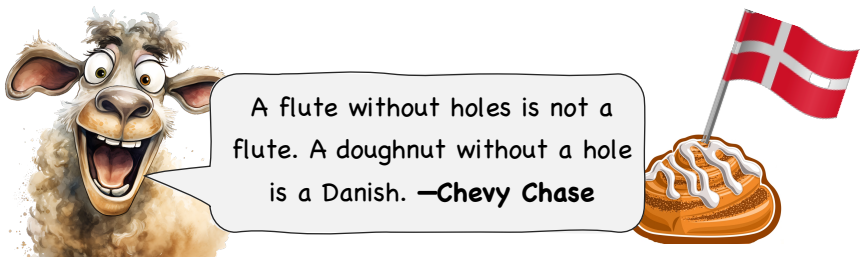
When Ezekiel writes, “I will cause you to pass under the rod[...],” [Ezekiel 20:37](#) he is referring to “the custom of sheep passing under the shepherd's rod for the purpose of counting or inspecting them.” <sup>147</sup>

Moses provides additional insight in Leviticus when he writes, “And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord.” [Leviticus 27:32](#) One Jewish historian describes the process like this:

“  
He should gather all of the lambs, or all of the calves born that year in a corral. He then makes a small entrance so that two cannot emerge at the same time. He positions their mothers outside the corral, and they bleat so that the lambs will hear their voices and leave the corral to meet them. This is necessary, as implied by [Leviticus 27:32](#) [...] i.e., they must pass on their own initiative; one should not remove them by hand.

As they leave the corral one by one, the owner begins to count them with a [rod ...]. The tenth animal that departs, whether male or female, whether unblemished or blemished, should be painted with red paint, and the owner should say: ‘This is the tithe.’” <sup>150</sup>

🐏 Flute—Shepherding is solitary work. Many Middle Eastern shepherds carry a two-piped flute. During times of rest, shepherds play for their own enjoyment and to soothe the flock. It’s easy to imagine David playing such an instrument while tending the flocks under his care. Would you like to experience the beautiful melody of a double flute? Click [here](#) (source 152). <sup>¶147</sup>



🐏 Sling—No self-respecting shepherd would be caught without their trusty sling. The sling is simple in design yet highly effective in the hands of a skilled slinger. Slings provide effective defense against wild animals and robbers. The sling also proves useful in directing sheep. The shepherd might drop a stone close to a lagging sheep to startle it into catching up with the rest of the flock. Or if a sheep strays off in another direction, a stone can be dropped just beyond the wayward sheep, bringing it back to the flock. ¶<sup>147</sup>



Young shepherd slinging.  
Jerusalem, circa 1910.

Clearly, David is quite proficient with the sling, for it is with a sling he dispatches the giant, Goliath.

For a detailed description of the shepherd's sling as well as a fascinating demonstration, click [here](#) (source 153).

**Did you know?** When David prepares to fight Goliath, he picks up five stones. [1 Samuel 17:40](#) He slays Goliath with only one of the five. What are the other stones for? Goliath had four sons. [2 Samuel 21:15-22](#) David has enough faith to not only take on the one giant, but he also has enough faith to take on that giant's sons should they decide to avenge their father's death!

🐏 Scrip—Rod, staff, flute, sling, stones, oil vials—You may be wondering how shepherds manage to carry all their stuff. This is where the scrip comes in. A scrip is a bag made of dried skin with a strap worn over the shoulder. In it, the shepherd carries flute, sling, stones, and snacks (bread, cheese, dried fruit, olives, etc.). ¶<sup>147</sup>

🐏 Sheepfold & sheepcote—During severe storms and at night shepherds prefer to gather their flocks into designated enclosures.

A *sheepfold* is akin to a corral. It may be temporary, out in the field, hastily constructed from tree branches, vines, thorns, etc. <sup>147</sup> Ezekiel refers to this type: “I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold [...].” [Ezekiel 34:14 KJV](#)

Sheepfolds situated near home base, are likely of permanent construction and built by stacking stones. Wight describes in detail:

“The walls of the enclosure are about three feet wide at the bottom and become narrower at the top. They are from four to six feet high. Large stones are used in constructing the outsides of the wall, and they are also placed on the top, and then the center is filled with smaller pieces of stone, of which there is much in the land. Sharp, thorn bushes are put on the top of this wall to protect the sheep from wild animals or robbers.” <sup>147</sup>

This description lends rich meaning to the following words of JESUS:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the [sheepfold], but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber.” [John 10:1](#)

A *sheepcote* is a building into which sheep can enter for additional protection. In the Middle East, where caves are prevalent, some sheepcotes are of a hybrid design. In these, the cave provides overhead protection while a fence—temporary or permanent—is built at the entrance to the cave. It is just such a place that David hid from Saul. <sup>¶147</sup> [1 Samuel 24:2-3](#)

## Jesus, the ultimate shepherd

JESUS refers to Himself as the good shepherd. [John 10:11](#) The writer of Hebrews refers to him as the *great* shepherd. [Hebrews 13:20](#) And Peter calls him the *chief* shepherd. [1 Peter 5:4](#)

The shepherd makes a fitting metaphor for JESUS. However, his reference to shepherd serves another, even more meaningful purpose: it fulfills prophecies.

Take Micah for instance. Seven centuries before the birth of CHRIST, the LORD speaks through the prophet, Micah:

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, <sup>a</sup> too little to be among the clans of Judah, <sup>b</sup> from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. <sup>c</sup> His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. <sup>d</sup> [...] And He will arise and shepherd *His flock* in the strength of the Lord <sup>e</sup> [...]” [Micah 5:2-4](#)

<sup>a</sup> “Bethlehem Ephrathah”—Bethlehem is the Jewish label for the town, and Ephrathah is the ancient Canaanite name for the same town. <sup>154</sup> Both names are used so as to distinguish the town from a different Bethlehem (“Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun” mentioned in [Joshua 19:15-16](#)). This distinction is vital because Bethlehem Ephrathah is the birthplace of YESHUA. ¶<sup>155</sup>

It is interesting to note that “Bethlehem” translates to “the house of bread” and YESHUA referred to himself as “the bread of life.” Furthermore, “Ephrathah” translates to “fruitful,” also descriptive of YESHUA.

Fruitful is an apt description for the town too for it is situated in a mild climate with plenty of rain. <sup>156</sup> The surrounding area is characterized by vineyards, orchards, and fertile fields. <sup>156</sup> No doubt some of these very fields are the ones enjoyed by the shepherds who are visited by angels upon the birth of JESUS. <sup>155</sup>

<sup>b</sup> “too little...Judah,”—Bethlehem actually *is* of Judah (JESUS is the Lion of Judah [Revelation 5:5](#)). The phasing here is a literary device to emphasize the *seemingly* insignificance of the town. <sup>155</sup> This

emphasizes the humility of JESUS who, despite his divinity, came into the world as a man.

<sup>c</sup> “from you...Israel.”—An obvious reference to JESUS, the MESSIAH. The term “ruler” denotes kingship, an apt description of YESHUA for He is KING of kings and LORD of lords. [1 Timothy 6:15](#)

<sup>d</sup> “His goings forth...eternity.”—Here, as in other passages, we are reminded of the eternal existence of CHRIST; not only in future eternity, but in the eternal past as well.

<sup>e</sup> “And He will...Lord”—This directly compares JESUS to a shepherd who feeds his flock. The original word translated as “feed” can be translated as “to feed” or “to lead.” <sup>157</sup> Shepherds *feed* their flock by *leading* it to pastures. Kings *provide* for their subjects and *lead* their people from a throne. What a beautiful passage! It takes two roles of JESUS—king and shepherd—and ties them together directly through specific mention (i.e., “ruler” and “shepherd”). It also ties the roles together *indirectly* through the connotation of specific word choice (“feed”/“lead”).

So, JESUS is born in a place with fertile pastures upon which shepherds tend their flocks. These same shepherds are dispatched by GOD’s messengers to go and welcome the newborn Lamb of GOD. This same Lamb is the Great Shepherd to those of us who profess our faith in him. The shepherds go to pay homage to their Shepherd! The Great Shepherd has existed from the eternal past. He will remain our Shepherd forever more. Can you see the sheer elegance of GOD’s provision?



To be a good shepherd is to **shear** the flock, not **skin** it!  
—Tiberius

Micah isn't the only prophet foretelling about the Great shepherd. Consider this excerpt from Isaiah, also written 700 years or so before the birth of CHRIST:

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, <sup>a</sup>

In His arm He will gather the lambs <sup>b</sup>

And carry them in His bosom; <sup>c</sup>

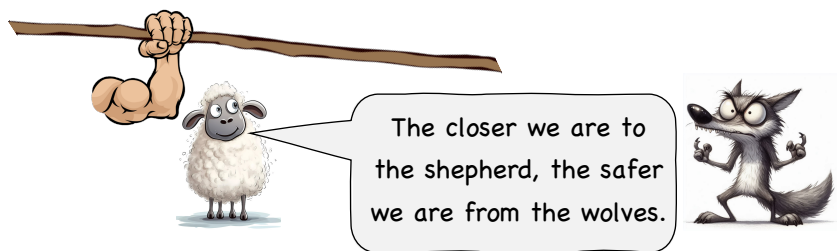
He will gently lead the nursing ewes. [Isaiah 40:11](#)

<sup>a</sup> “Like...flock”—Moses and David are exemplary examples of caring, responsible shepherds. How much more so is our loving LORD and SAVIOR? The verb “tend” encompasses all the qualities and responsibilities of a perfect shepherd: to lead, to guard, to gather, to provide pasture, and to defend from danger. In this passage, the word denotes how GOD shows his people the “same tender care, guardianship and protection a shepherd shows for his flock.” ¶158

<sup>b</sup> “In His arm...lambs”—The youngest of lambs may not be able to keep pace with the rest of the flock, and thus grow weary and exhausted. The caring shepherd will take such a lamb into one arm and carry it. This is a beautiful picture of how GOD cares for the weak and feeble among his people. The young, the frail, the fatherless, and the ones yet immature in their faith—GOD loves and cares for *all* his people. ¶158

<sup>c</sup> “And carry...bosom”—Here we see how the LORD not only cares for the ones in need, but he carries them in his bosom, the area of his chest. In other words: close to his heart. Grown sheep are carried on the shoulders up over the back. The back and shoulders are places of power. Tender lambs are carried safely in a place of love. What marvelous comfort this is to those of us who belong to his flock. What a loving shepherd we have in YESHUA. ¶145

<sup>d</sup> “He will...ewes”—If a lamb is young enough for the shepherd to carry it, chances are the mother is still nursing it. The mother trusts the shepherd, but she will want to follow and remain close to her little lamb. <sup>159</sup> This line of Isaiah’s prophecy speaks to the gentle and sensitive nature of YESHUA’S leadership; truly a touching portrait of how he relates to his flock. Thank you, LORD, for being gentle as you lead us.



So far in this chapter we’ve examined men who exemplify keys traits of YESHUA as they pertain to his role of shepherd. We’ve also expounded upon prophecies which describe JESUS as a “good shepherd” written before he is even born. Let us now experience how JESUS portrays himself as a shepherd. Turning to the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, we read this parable told by JESUS:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the [sheepfold], but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. <sup>a</sup> But, he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep.

<sup>b</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>c</sup> When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>d</sup> A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” [John 10:1-5](#)

<sup>a</sup> “Truly...robber.”—Recall the earlier description of sheepfolds. Here, JESUS warns against false teachers and deceivers who attempt to lead people away from the truth of JESUS being the SON OF GOD.



<sup>b</sup> “But...sheep.”—The legitimate shepherd has no need to sneak into the fold. The true shepherd does not resort to deception. He enters the fold in a straightforward fashion through the gate.

<sup>c</sup> “To him...leads them out.”—When it’s time to graze, the true shepherd leads his flock out from the sheepfold. He does not drive them from behind. He leads them from the front. His sheep trust him; they feel safe with him, so they follow him willingly. Note how the shepherd calls his sheep by name.

YESHUA cares for us. He knows us as the individuals we are. We can trust him. We should feel safe following him. YESHUA doesn’t force us to follow. It must be our choice to follow Him.

<sup>d</sup> “When He...His voice.”—The closer we get to CHRIST, the more intimate we know him, the more readily we recognize his voice. Literally. This, in turn, empowers us to be <sup>(1)</sup> more obedient, <sup>(2)</sup> more resistant to deception, and <sup>(3)</sup> more centered in his will for our life. [Note: *Critters for Christ* #3, explains a 4-step pattern to enjoy two-way conversations with GOD. Complimentary downloads are available at [AhaUniversity.com](http://AhaUniversity.com)].

YESHUA’S audience is quite familiar with sheep and shepherding. Indeed, this is why he uses the shepherd metaphor in the parable above. His audience, however, does *not* understand the meanings behind the analogies in the parable, so he explains further:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have *it* abundantly.”

While this passage continues with the shepherd metaphor, it’s a bit more explicit. JESUS identifies himself as the door to the fold. And what is the

fold? The fold represents the collective group of everyone who has received salvation from the LORD. In other words, if you want to be saved, you must go through JESUS. (A little later on, in [John 14:6](#), YESHUA states the same thing without the metaphor: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through Me.”)

But JESUS isn’t done with the shepherd metaphor yet. He goes on to say,

“I am the good shepherd; <sup>a</sup> the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. <sup>b</sup> [...] I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>c</sup> [...] No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.” <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> “I am...sheep.”—JESUS is not merely a shepherd, but **the good** shepherd. The adjective “good” speaks to the shepherd’s character. Use of the definite article “the” denotes the *only* such shepherd.

<sup>b</sup> What makes the shepherd good? The fact that he is willing to die to protect his sheep. This of course, alludes to his crucifixion.

<sup>c</sup> “I am...for the sheep.” YESHUA repeats his commitment to his sheep (i.e., us).

<sup>d</sup> “No one...own initiative.” YESHUA gives his life freely. He is going to allow his life to be taken. He has the authority to prevent his death, but he will allow it to proceed anyway.



Never let anyone pull the wool over your eyes. Talk is sheep.

Yes, talk is cheap, which is why JESUS did lay down his life for his flock. he literally dies on our behalf. He truly is the Good Shepherd.

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It's common among ancient Greek and eastern writers to refer to kings as shepherds. In fact, the ancient Greek word for king is the same word used for shepherd. It means both, to feed sheep and to govern people. ¶<sup>160</sup>

We read in [Ezekiel 34](#) how GOD is offended by the so-called “shepherds of Israel.” Through Ezekiel, GOD addresses both the political figures (princes, civil magistrates, etc.) and religious figures (prophets, priests, etc.).<sup>160</sup> He likens the collective group of them as ‘shepherds’ who take advantage of the sheep (i.e., people): “You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat *sheep* without feeding the flock.” [Ezekiel 34:3](#)

Yikes! Considering the source, that’s a scary indictment. After issuing a scathing rebuke through Ezekiel, GOD declares his remedy:

“Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep, [...] I feed them on the mountains, by the streams, [...] I will feed them in a good pasture [...] I will lead them to rest [...] I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick [...]” [Ezekiel 34:11-16](#)

And then, YAHWEH makes this declaration:

“I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.”

“David” does not refer to King David. While King David had been a shepherd, he has been dead many years at the time of this prophecy. “My servant David” is a reference to JESUS, the MESSIAH. GOD refers to him as David in this passage because <sup>(1)</sup> the name means ‘beloved’ (which

describes how GOD feels about JESUS), <sup>(2)</sup> JESUS is a descendant of King David, <sup>(3)</sup> David is a type/illustration of JESUS, and <sup>(4)</sup> David anticipated and wrote about the future arrival of JESUS, the MESSIAH. ¶161

So, when JESUS refers to himself as ‘the good shepherd,’ he is confirming this prophecy from Ezekiel. But there’s more going on here. When JESUS feeds the crowds, he is fulfilling this same prophecy literally! [Matthew 14:15-21 & Matthew 15:32-39](#) 151 Do you see in this, the depth of GOD’s providence? When the Good Shepherd feeds us, he addresses our earthly needs. When he lays down his life for us, he offers to meet our eternal needs. And it was all foretold 600 years before it ever came to pass.

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Imagine you live in ancient Israel. Imagine also you take care of sheep for a living. You’re a shepherd tending a flock near Bethlehem. You love your sheep. You have names for each one. You defend them with your life. They trust you and they follow you.

Now, imagine you’re in the field one night with your sheep. You look up at the countless stars, in complete awe of the CREATOR who placed each one just so. Suddenly a bright light appears in your view, temporarily



blinding you. You squint, barely able to open one eye due to the intensity of the light. After a few moments, you’re able to make out the terrifying source of the light. Your instinct tells you to run for your life, but your feet fail to comply. Just then aloud voice booms out: “Do not be afraid.” [Luke 2:10](#) Yeah, right, you think to yourself.

It’s an angel! And it announces the birth of the long-awaited SAVIOR, CHRIST, the MESSIAH! Then more angels arrive, and they all sing praises to

GOD. When they leave, you and your fellow shepherd friends seek out and locate the newborn KING.

You look on in wonder at the infant. You notice the mixed expression of love and adoration and worship as the child's mother gazes upon her son. You watch as tears of joy well up in the eyes of his earthly father. Suddenly, you catch yourself, realizing you're standing in the presence of a king, *the* KING. You drop instantly to your knees and bow your head. You raise your hands in praise and thank GOD for the occasion, for providing the MESSIAH.

In the midst of your praise, the LORD reminds you of the words of Micah and of Isaiah and of Ezekiel, and their prophecies of the coming shepherd. Then it dawns on you that you, a shepherd, are in the presence of the *promised* shepherd. The love and care with which you tend your flock are nothing compared to the love and care within that little shepherd lying in the manger before you. It's almost too much for you to take in. You realize you'll never be the same.

And neither will be the world.

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Thank you, LORD for sending YESHUA. Remind us to remain forever in awe of his love and care and the fact that he laid down his life for us and that you raised him from the dead. For he truly is the Good Shepherd.



Next up: The most popular song in all of history.



“Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” If you think about it, his words paint a pretty funny visual. I’m not sure what they mean when it comes to *writing* about music, but here I am doing just that—writing about music. Which is especially ironic because I don’t know the first thing about writing music, or reading it, I don’t even listen to very much of it.

Enter the Internet.

With the aid of a private browser and a fast connection, one can find information about virtually any subject. So equipped, I set out on a digital safari to track down a specific set of soundtracks. The goal of my quest is to score a list of the most popular scores of all time.

Who knew musical taste could be so utterly subjective?

There are tons of lists of the best songs of all time, the most commonly covered songs, the most commercially successful songs, the most weeks on the charts. Mix and splice ‘em however you choose, and there almost certainly exists a list ranking ‘em in order based on those criteria.

What follows is a list of seven iconic songs. The lyrics to #1 on the list express deep biblical truths. The others entice us with false promises of positive, perhaps even holy, connotation. Taken together, as a group, the songs form a Top 7 Heavenly Countdown.

Or do they?

**#7** “Live Forever” (1994). By Oasis. Written by Neil Gallagher, the title alludes to eternal life. In reality, the singer is dreaming to be “free” of authority. While the title qualifies the song to be on our Heavenly Countdown, angst-like lyrics cry out in an attitude of “I’ll do it myself.” Not exactly in line with the message of the *Bible*.

#6 “Stairway to Heaven” (1974). By Led Zeppelin. STH is considered by many to be the greatest rock and roll song of all time. It tells the story of a woman enamored with the material things in life. She believes, mistakenly, her future is secure. As the song progresses, it evokes fear and disillusionment. Towards the end, the listener is introduced to a sense of hope. Regretfully, this sense of hope is false because it’s founded in the music of “the Piper.” Verse five tells us, “Yes, there are two paths you can go by [...]” At the end of the song, the woman buys her stairway to Heaven.”

Let there be no mistake. GOD is *not* the author of fear or confusion. <sup>2</sup>  
[Timothy 1:7 & 1 Cor 14:33](#) Furthermore, there are not multiple paths to Heaven. Only one. [Acts 4:12, John 14:6, Matthew 7:13-14](#) “Stairway” may be a classic, but lead to Heaven, it does not.



#5 “Hallelujah” (1984). Lyrics by Leonard Cohen, music by John Lissauer. Lissauer deliberately wrote the music to give off a “Gospel vibe,” <sup>163</sup> presumably to highlight biblical references embedded in the lyrics. Despite the vibe; despite the religious symbolism; and despite the references to biblical figures like David and Samson, the song is most definitely *not* a Gospel song. If the “sexual scenery” <sup>162</sup> contained within doesn’t clue us in, perhaps the words of Cohen, himself, will:

“ This world is full of conflicts and full of things that cannot be reconciled, but there are moments when we can [...] reconcile and embrace the whole mess, and that's what I mean by 'Hallelujah.'”

Cohen's words are clear and to the point: his definition of Hallelujah is not 'praise the LORD.' "Hallelujah" is a beautiful song for what it is. But does it count us down any closer to our CREATOR or Heaven? 'Fraid not.

#4 "I Will Always Love You." (1992). Whitney Houston. Originally written and recorded by Dolly Parton in 1974, this song catapulted to worldwide acclaim when put to the voice of Houston. Her clear voice is ideally suited to make the song shine with vocal vibrance. It truly is a gorgeous love song. Only thing is it's about a breakup. And one thing about our LORD and SAVIOR: he'll *never* 'break off' his relationship with us. [Romans 8:38-39](#) As beautiful as the song is, it does not reflect divine Heavenly love.

#3 "Every Breath You Take." (1983). The Police. The refrain of this song digs its claws into your psyche and just won't let go. To paraphrase, it goes a little something like this: "Every time you take a breath, I'm gonna be watchin' you."<sup>x</sup> Talk about a magnificent love obsession! We could over-spiritualize the song and apply it to our CREATOR watching over us, for he knows our every breath. We could do that. But it would be a grave mistake. Here's what Sting, the song's author says about it in an interview:

"I don't think it's a sad song. I think it's a nasty little song, really rather evil. It's about jealousy and surveillance and ownership."<sup>164</sup>

The ugly truth is the song is about stalking! When asked about people mistakenly interpreting it as a love song, Sting tells the interviewer:

"I think the ambiguity is intrinsic in the song however you treat it because the words are so sadistic. On one level, it's a nice long song with the classic relative minor chords, and underneath



there's this distasteful character talking about watching your every move. I enjoy that ambiguity.”<sup>164</sup>

For sure, GOD sees our every move, and he gives us our every breath, [Proverbs 15:3 & Job 27:3](#) but he is no stalker. Nor is he ambiguous. Heaven is nowhere to be found in this hit song.

#2 “God Only Knows.” (1966). The Beach Boys. The sound of summer; the sound of love. Nobody does it like the Beach Boys, and “God Only Knows” is arguably the crown jewel of their musical catalog. Paul McCartney said of the song,

“‘God Only Knows’ is one of the few songs that reduces me to tears every time I hear it. It’s really just a love song, but it’s brilliantly done.”

“Only God knows what I would be without you.”<sup>x</sup> Such a classic line etched into the memory of all who listen. One music journalist describes the song as “[...] a swirling spiritual spine-tingler that not only tries to understand the true meaning of love but the meaning of life along with it.”<sup>166</sup>

So, what does the song’s author have to say about it? Soon after the song is released into the wild, Brian Wilson, of the Beach Boys, says,

“At present, our influences are of a religious nature—not any specific religion but an idea based upon that of Universal Consciousness [...]”

Timeless love sounds wonderful. “Universal Consciousness,” not so much. *Especially* not the capitalized kind. Universal Consciousness is a phantom, the ghost of a non-existent mansion. If, by “God,” the lyrics don’t mean the one true GOD, they shouldn’t reference him at all.

In Heaven, it isn’t only a matter of what GOD *knows*. It’s also about the glory he receives. “God Only Knows” is a beautiful song, but despite the title, it doesn’t lead to Heaven.

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Don't misunderstand my point. I happen to like a couple of the songs listed in the countdown. I certainly don't believe all secular music is bad or, by definition, evil. On the other hand, music has within it the capacity to affect our mood and even our actions. Research indicates that music with aggressive lyrics increases feelings of hostility toward others even without being provoked.<sup>167</sup> On the other hand, additional research indicates that some music facilitates deep religious experiences helping us to sense the presence of God.<sup>168</sup> Bottomline: the lyrics we listen to matter, and they matter a lot.

One individual in the *Bible* is a prolific songwriter. He has a true penchant for writing lyrics of praise and worship. Amazingly, we have a record of his musical catalog (or at least part of it). The songwriter is none other than David. We know his musical catalog as the Book of Psalms.

**Did you know?** “A psalm is a song or poem used in worship. The word psalm comes from the Greek word *psallein*, which means “to pluck.” That word gave rise to *psalmos*, which means “a song sung to harp music.” (The strings on a harp are plucked, at least some of the time.) Finally, the English word psalm means “song” but usually refers to a sacred song regardless of what instrument it might be played on.”<sup>169</sup>

The poetic and lyrical nature of the psalms is lost on most of us today because we don't read in them in the original language, nor do we accompany them with the intended music as played on a lyre. Nevertheless, the words are what matter most, and we have those in our *Bible*.



Don't you just hate it when you're singing a song, and the artist gets the words wrong?

David wrote lyrics, crafted musical instruments, [1 Chronicles 23:3-5](#) played musical instruments, [1 Samuel 16:23](#) sang praises to the LORD, [2 Samuel 22](#) and even danced before the LORD. [2 Samuel 6:14](#) Basically, David was the most prolific music artist of the Old Testament. One commentator has nominated King David as the greatest songwriter of all time. <sup>171</sup> He's joking of course, but his reasoning is sound. Consider the following: <sup>171</sup>

- David penned at least 75 of the psalms.
- After 3,000 years, his songs are still on the charts.
- His works enjoy global distribution.
- They've been translated into hundreds of languages.

It should come as no surprise that #1 in our countdown is one of David's songs. Furthermore, it's probably no surprise which one of them it is. It is, undoubtedly, one of, if not *the*, best known passage in all the *Bible*.

**#1** "Psalm 23." King David. (c. 1000BC). This song uses shepherds and sheep as metaphors to provide encouragement, guidance, and comfort to people all over the world. <sup>172</sup> In fact, according to BibleGateway.com, of the top 100 verses viewed in 2024, the top 6 all come from Psalm 23 (23:4, 23:6, 23:5, 23:1, 23:3, 23:2).

Psalm 23 contains vivid imagery which is especially meaningful within the agricultural society in which David lives. We already established David's experience as a shepherd. A different psalmist puts an even finer point on David's credibility as a shepherd:

The Lord God chose David  
to be his servant and took him  
from tending sheep  
and from caring for lambs.  
Then God made him the leader  
of Israel, his own nation.  
David treated the people fairly  
and guided them with wisdom. [Psalm 78:70-72 \(CEV\)](#)

Speaking of Psalm 23, Charles Spurgeon, famous preacher from the early 1900s, shares this in his sermon titled, “The Good Shepherd”: “[Psalm 23] sounds like music [...] because it came from David’s heart. That which comes from the heart always has melody in it.” <sup>178</sup>

Let us take a close look at Psalm 23 so we can appreciate the cultural and spiritual meanings of its beloved lyrics. For your reading convenience, they’re listed here:

## Psalm 23 (NASB-1995)

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, <sup>a</sup> I shall not want. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>2</sup>HE makes me lie down in green pastures; <sup>a</sup>  
HE leads me beside quiet waters. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>3</sup>HE restores my soul; <sup>a</sup>  
HE guides me in the paths of righteousness  
For HIS name’s sake. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for YOU are with me; <sup>a</sup>  
YOUR rod and YOUR staff, they comfort me. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>5</sup>YOU prepare a table before me <sup>a</sup> in the presence of my enemies; <sup>b</sup>  
YOU have anointed my head with oil; <sup>c</sup> My cup overflows. <sup>d</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

David’s most famous song isn’t focused on the singer, by which I mean, it isn’t about *us* choosing the LORD as our shepherd. Just the opposite, in fact. It’s about how well he cares for us. In his wonderful

book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller, writes, “[...] Psalm 23 might as well be called, ‘David’s Hymn of Praise to Divine Diligence.’” When we break it down verse by verse, the LORD’s loving care is more evident than what many readers may realize.

## 23:1<sup>a</sup> The LORD is my Shepherd,

This is the theme of the entire psalm. <sup>174</sup> Notice the use of “is.” David doesn’t say “if” or “I hope so”, or “I think.” <sup>177</sup> Nor does he mention the need to earn his way into the relationship. As followers of CHRIST, we can be assured of our dependence upon our heavenly FATHER. <sup>177</sup>

Now consider the next word, “my.” David could have said, “He is the shepherd of the world and leads the multitudes as his flock,” but that’s not what he says. David says, he is *my* shepherd. If he is shepherd to no one else, he is a shepherd to me. <sup>1177</sup> Psalm 23 contains twenty-eight personal pronouns (my, I, you, he, etc.). This psalm speaks to the deep personal relationship David has with YAHWEH. Followers of JESUS can read it with this same level of intimacy.

The book of Psalms is jam-packed with metaphors describing GOD. Some psalms refer to HIM as king. <sup>175</sup> Others refer to HIM as rock, or shield, deliverer, refuge, or fortress, but here, David uses a more intimate metaphor—that of a shepherd. <sup>175</sup>

You and I might be inclined to picture a shepherd as resting in the shade, bored and casually plucking a lyre while sheep graze nearby with minimal supervision. While a shepherd’s life may be slow-paced, it most assuredly is *not* a life of ease. David spent the early years of his life as a



shepherd. <sup>174</sup> He knows very well the long hours of hard work that come with the occupation. The shepherd alone is responsible for the wellbeing of his flock. His roles include guide, protector, organizer, planner, rescuer, and physician. So, when David refers to GOD as his personal shepherd, he puts himself in the place of a sheep and declares GOD as the one who has assumed direct responsibility for David's wellbeing. In essence, David writes the lyrics of Psalm 23 as a "sheep's-eye view of GOD." <sup>¶175</sup>

David also understands the close bond that develops between a shepherd and his sheep. <sup>175</sup> his reference to GOD as shepherd, speaks to the bond between he and the LORD. The same bond is available to you and me. Sheep are defenseless, but the LORD assumes the role of our protector. Sheep are filthy due to the dirt that accumulates in their dense wool. <sup>174</sup> Our sinful nature makes us filthy before GOD. Shepherds may not bathe their sheep, but GOD is willing to wash us clean in the blood of his son, YESHUA. Our heavenly shepherd goes above and beyond any earthly shepherd!

Have you been washed in the blood of JESUS? If so, the LORD is your shepherd too. Do you think of him in that way? You will. Keep reading.

## 23:1<sup>b</sup> I shall not want.

Some translations render this as "[I shall not lack.](#)" Others render it as "[I have everything I need.](#)" I submit to you that "want" is the superior translation because it captures both meanings of the word "want." Pastor David Guzik explains it eloquently when he writes, "'I shall not want' [is] both a declaration and a decision." <sup>179</sup> It means <sup>(1)</sup> "All my needs are supplied by the LORD, my shepherd," <sup>179</sup> and <sup>(2)</sup> it also means "I have decided not to desire anything outside of what GOD wants for me." <sup>179</sup> This can be a tough one in light of our materialistic society, but it is so wonderfully liberating!

David is not referring to material resources. Psalm 23 in no way implies that a follower of CHRIST will live a life of financial or material abundance. Some of us are called upon to “experience lack of wealth or material benefits.” Such decisions are the LORD’s to make. It’s one thing to know that GOD loves us and cares for us. It’s another thing entirely to trust him when our resources are scant or, in our estimation, insufficient. True contentment comes when, despite our circumstances, we trust him to be a responsible shepherd (that is to care for us).

We might not have everything we desire, but we can trust our heavenly shepherd to provide everything we need.<sup>181</sup> For some believers (like me) this is a tough lesson to learn. I wrote most of this book over the course of several months in which I was unemployed. Tammy and I were living on 40% of our accustomed income. The LORD used that time to deal with me regarding the issue of trust—specifically my trust in him. And believe me: it was an extraordinarily tough and personal lesson. One I’m still in the process of learning more completely. This chapter is as much for me as it is for you. I can tell you this with certainty: GOD is good. All the time. He truly is the good and caring shepherd.

Oatmeal-raisin cookies that look like chocolate chip cookies are the reason I have trust issues.



## 23:2a HE makes me lie down in green pastures:

Phillip Keller, seasoned sheep rancher, tells us the nature of sheep is such that you can’t make them lie down until four conditions are met.

1. **Absence of fear.** If sheep sense a threat of any kind, they simply will *not* lie down. Escape is their only defense. If they’re afraid,

they remain upright, so they can run away from the threat. Anxious sheep will not lie down.<sup>176</sup>

2. **Absence of friction within the flock.** Sheep are highly social creatures. They are easily disturbed by conflict within the flock. Disturbed sheep will not lie down.<sup>176</sup>
3. **Absence of hunger.** If sheep feel like they need to find food, they will not lie down.<sup>176</sup>
4. **Absence of pests.** If unchecked, flies will torment sheep. Horribly so. Sheep pestered by flies will not lie down.<sup>176</sup>

The bottom line is sheep must feel free before they will lie down. They must feel free from anxiety, tension, parasites, and hunger. Furthermore, points out Keller, responsibility of meeting these four conditions falls on the shepherd. It is the shepherd who creates the conditions, making it possible for the sheep to lie in comfort, peace, and contentment. ¶176

**Something to ponder.** While researching for this chapter, I learn how the phrase “fear not” appears exactly 63 times in the *King James Bible*. I find this interesting because  $63 = 7 \times 9$ , and I know 7 to be the biblical number of completeness. Curious, I look up whether the number 9 is of any biblical significance. Turns out 9 is often associated with the notion of finality.<sup>184</sup> I don’t generally pay any attention to numerology, however, the LORD used this bit regarding 63 to impress upon me that his message of “fear not” is both complete (7; nothing more need be added) and final (9; not to expect him to keep repeating himself to me). Without a doubt he meant this message for me personally. I’m including here because I believe it might also resonate with someone reading this.

A responsible shepherd makes a plan to ensure his flock always has something to eat. Details of his plan vary with the season. During the spring, when there is an abundance of green, flocks typically graze near their shepherd’s home. After the grain is reaped, the poor glean portions left for them. After that, shepherds bring their flocks to graze on any remaining leftovers. Once those sources are exhausted, the shepherds



seek out remote sources leading their flocks as they go (e.g., And they went to the entrance of Gedor, even unto the east side of the valley, to seek pasture for their flocks. [1 Chronicles 4:39](#)). ¶<sup>158</sup>

By leading his flock to food, the shepherd prevents hunger among the sheep. By fending off would-be predators, the shepherd removes sources of fear. Keller explains that sheep-to-sheep rivalries are often dissipated by the approach of the shepherd, easing tension within the flock. A good shepherd is necessary for the well-being of a flock. (Later in this chapter, we'll learn how the shepherd deals with parasites as well.) By ensuring all four conditions, the shepherd "makes the sheep to lie down."

The symbolism here is obvious, is it not? We humans have the same concerns. We cannot be content as long as we're carrying the weight of anxiety. We cannot relax if we live under the strain of tension. Clearly, we have physical needs that must be met. Moreover, pests and parasites too are a serious concern. Again, we'll address them later.

A good shepherd takes full responsibility of these concerns and addresses them on behalf of his flock. JESUS told us he is our Good Shepherd. We would do well to consider his claim as complete and final.

## 23:2<sup>b</sup> HE leads me beside quiet waters.

It doesn't say he *drives* us to quiet waters, but rather he *leads* us to them. Western shepherds drive their flocks, often with the help of dogs.

<sup>185</sup> This isn't a bad thing, per se, but it's a very different approach. Middle Eastern shepherds, on the other hand, lead their flocks from the front. <sup>185</sup>

This is what David refers to in Psalm 23:2 when he tells us the LORD leads us. He doesn't send dogs to bark and nip at our heels, scaring us into compliance. He goes ahead of us, personally charting the proper course.

Sheep don't know the whereabouts of the next nutritious pasture. Likewise, they don't know the path to the closest source of clean water.

Left to their own devices, they might very well drink from polluted sources, making themselves sick. <sup>176</sup> Sheep may not know, but a diligent shepherd surely does. And that is precisely where he leads his flock.

This passage refers explicitly to “quiet” water. Other translations such as the [King James Version](#), describe the water as “still.” This is yet another nod to the nature of sheep. Sheep are hesitant to drink from moving water such as rivers and streams, preferring the still water of lakes and ponds. One obvious reason for their hesitance, again, comes down to the fact that they are easily frightened. However, in the case of running water, the critters’ concern is well-founded. If a sheep falls into water, its wool can become water-logged, thereby weighing it down. <sup>186</sup> A water-sodden sheep may find it impossible to avoid being swept away in the current of moving water. <sup>186</sup> A good shepherd knows this, of course, and keeps his sheep safe and sound, by leading them to quiet, still water.



“I’m right here, little one!”



“Follow me to the still water.”

The quiet, still nature of the water in verse 2 represents peace and rest. When we search GOD’S Word for references to water, we begin to recognize a wider perspective regarding the symbolism of water...

**Life.** <sup>187</sup> On the most basic level, water is necessary for life to exist. Water is, in fact, the very foundation of life. It was present at the very beginning, prior to the creation of any living creature. [Genesis 1:1-2](#)

Furthermore, when JESUS referred to himself as “living water,” He was using water also to symbolize spiritual life (i.e., eternal life). [John 4:14](#)

**Provision.**<sup>187</sup> Water is a physical need. Living creatures require water to live. When the Israelites wander in the desert after leaving Egypt (after Passover), they have a tremendous need for water. GOD miraculously provides the water. [Exodus 17:6](#) Water symbolizes GOD’s provision.

**Cleansing.**<sup>187</sup> Water is required for baptism. [Luke 3:16](#) Baptism itself is a symbol of the washing away of our sin. An Old Testament precursor to baptism is found in the account of Naaman who has leprosy. Elisha, the prophet, tells him to wash seven times in the Jordan River. After doing so, Naaman’s leprosy is gone. [2 Kings 5](#) Within the *Bible*, leprosy symbolizes sin.<sup>197</sup> So, here again, we see water as an agent of cleansing.

Granted, some of these symbols are from the New Testament, which didn’t exist at the time David wrote Psalm 23. Can we apply these same symbols to the second verse of Psalm 23? I believe we can. For two reasons: <sup>(1)</sup> The symbols all come from the Word of GOD. And <sup>(2)</sup> the GOD of the Old Testament is the same GOD of the New Testament. He doesn’t change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forevermore. [Hebrews 13:8](#) Thus, His Word is true, constant, and consistent.

During my research for this chapter, the LORD showed me something, something powerful regarding my time of unemployment. He used that period to “make me lie down.” He had freed me from the distraction of a job. He had led me to the still water, so I too could be still, to more fully know him as GOD [Psalm 46:10](#) It also gave me time to take in more of the refreshing, living water that springs forth whenever I write for His glory.

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I trust you’re enjoying these pearls of insight regarding David’s masterpiece song, “Psalm 23.” Believe me: there’s plenty more where

they come from. My personal favorites are still ahead, so keep reading, my friend, and prepare to be amazed.

## 23:3<sup>a</sup> HE restores my soul

Such a simple little statement. And yet when we consider it within the context of sheep, it springs to life with a level of impact I never anticipated. If you think sheep are merely a convenient symbol within the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, think again! It may have been penned by David, but as we're about to learn, it was very definitely inspired by GOD himself.

In order to fully appreciate this passage, let us first turn to a different psalm, Psalm 42, to be precise. In the last verse, we read, the following:

Why art thou **cast down**, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? [emphasis added] [Psalm 42:11](#)

One commentary explains the verse like this:

“  
In moments of deep despair, the psalmist reflects on his internal struggle, urging his soul to find hope in God despite overwhelming circumstances. This passage illustrates the common human experience of grappling with feelings of despondency while still holding onto faith.” <sup>188</sup>

So, Psalm 42 uses “cast down” as an expression of dejection, discouragement, or even downright hopelessness. Hold this thought while we consider a different type of “cast down.” Here again we turn to the marvelous insights of Phillip Keller, sheep rancher, bible teacher, and fellow master of metaphors.

Phillip explains that sheep too can become “cast down.” Turns out, “cast down” is a phrase with which English sheep ranchers are all too familiar. And boy, do they wish that that weren't so.

A “cast down” or “cast” sheep is one that “has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself.” A cast sheep is a pitiful thing to behold. On its back, feet pointed at the sky, the wretched creature flails frantically struggling to stand, but to no avail. If you aren’t familiar with the concept, it may seem funny, but it isn’t. It’s a life-threatening situation. As the sheep lies there, struggling in fear, gases build up in the stomach. So much so the intestinal expansion can actually cutoff blood circulation to the legs. On a hot day, death can occur in mere hours. Even in cooler weather, several days is about as long as a cast sheep can survive. ¶176

So how does a cast sheep end up ... well ... cast? It’s not like it takes a bad spill bounding up and down on some kid’s trampoline. It typically goes something like this: a sheep lies on the ground in what amounts to a small dip or slight depression. The critter gets comfortable and stretches out to relax. That’s when it happens: the sheep’s center of gravity shifts suddenly, causing the animal to roll. If it rolls far enough, it ends up unable to get its feet back on the ground. The sheep panics, kicking wildly at the air causing it to roll even farther. At this point the sheep is hopelessly cast. ¶176



Now, lest you think this scenario is unlikely or rare, rest assured it is not. Sheep ranchers have to remain ever vigilant for cast sheep. Otherwise, the loss of sheep would be economically devastating. Sheep ranchers don’t count sheep to fall asleep. They count their sheep to know whether one is missing because a missing sheep might very well be off somewhere helplessly cast, in dire need of rescue. Another sign of a

possible cast sheep is the presence of vultures, which circle patiently waiting for cast sheep to die. ¶176

Some sheep are more susceptible to casting. Most cast sheep fall victim because they are heavy. Pregnancy, excessive fleece laden with mud and debris, and simply being fat are the primary factors that contribute to heaviness, and thus casting. Regardless of why a sheep becomes cast, it is fully reliant on the shepherd for rescue. A cast sheep simply cannot regain its upright stance without human intervention. ¶176

David writes Psalm 23 from the perspective of sheep. Is he thinking of cast sheep when he writes, “He restoreth my soul”? Maybe. Maybe not. I submit to you the LORD surely is as he inspires David to pen the words. I say this because, like sheep, we too can become cast. And, for the very same reasons, metaphorically speaking, that is. Consider the following scenarios which can lead to a person becoming spiritually cast.

**Being focused on comfort.** Ever catch yourself with an attitude of chronic “take-it-easy-ness.” You know, times where you just want to coast; to curl up in a cozy corner; to wallow in a comfortable place, where there is no hardship or cause for struggle. Ever been there? I know I have. You may not be kicking frantically in the air, but neither are you truly living to your full potential. A person in this position is not growing spiritually, and neither are they likely producing godly fruit. In this sense, they are cast.

The Christian life is not a bed of roses. In some areas of the world, it’s literally a matter of life and death. Even in places where this isn’t the case, life as a Christian is certainly not centered on comfort. On the contrary, at times the LORD subjects us to tests. Not to torment us, but rather to shape us and mold us into the person he created us to become. The lessons we learn during these times of testing, empower us to more effectively serve him; to reflect more glory to him. And ultimately, that’s why we’re here to begin with: to bring him glory, for He deserves all glory, honor, and praise.

There is no such thing as stasis in nature. An organism is either growing or dying. One way we “grow” is through having to navigate rough times, some of which are merely tests. That which does not kill me, makes me stronger. Remaining in comfort does nothing for personal growth.

**Being focused on worldly gain.** These are the people who get caught up in their own desires or material things. A person whose driving focus is accumulating wealth, power, or popularity is not likely to give much attention to that which GOD has in mind for them. They are so weighed down with the “mud and debris” offered by the world, they miss out on the inheritance promised by our CREATOR.

Things of this life are temporal. They don’t last. As they say: “You can’t take it with you.” If we waste our energy by making worldly things our ‘god,’ we offend the only *true* GOD. It is interesting to note that Israelite priests were forbidden from wearing wool in the inner court of the temple. <sup>176</sup>, [Ezekiel 44:17-18](#) Why? Because clothing made of wool material is heavy and thus exacerbates sweat, the odor of which is offensive. <sup>189</sup> Material. Offending GOD. How’s that for a metaphor?

Friendly advice: keep your fleece trimmed, and don’t let it get matted with dirt, debris, and/or smelly ol’ mud.

**Being focused on self-achievement.** Ever met a person “fat” with their own sense of accomplishment? These are the folks who consider themselves “self-made.” They enjoy success in business or their position and consider themselves as having “arrived.” This is a form of pride, and it is extraordinarily dangerous. There’s no such thing as a self-made sheep. Or man, for that matter. Afterall, pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. [Proverbs 16:18](#)

I am pleased to announce how  
supremely proud I am of my humility!

*This is Bill. Don't  
be like Bill.*



A cast sheep is in serious trouble. So is a cast person. A cast sheep needs a good shepherd to turn it over and help restore its footing. A cast *person* needs *the* Good Shepherd to help them “turn around,” and to restore their soul. Did you have any idea the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm contained so much insight?

## 23:3<sup>b</sup> HE guides me in the paths of righteousness for HIS name’s sake

Okay, I admit it. I’m a creature of habit. I always order my steaks medium rare, my nachos with jalapeños, and peanut butter & jelly spread at the universally accepted ideal ratio of 2.5:1. Neither the cook, the chef, nor the brand of restaurant make any difference. My choices remain the same. However, my dining habits, as obsessively habitual as they are, pale in comparison to the habits of sheep.

If left to their own devices, sheep tread the same trails, graze the same knolls, and proceed to pollute the same ol’ pastures. Without guidance, sheep turn trails to ruts, leave nothing but eroded soil on once green knolls, and contaminate pastures with parasites and disease. In so doing, they decimate their own food supply and become infested with worms. In short, untended sheep, become their own worst nightmare. ¶<sup>176</sup>

Keller tells us the way to avoid these issues is for the shepherd to keep his flock on the move. Don’t let ‘em stay in one area long enough to cause issues. You can judge a shepherd’s level of care simply by examining the grounds utilized by his sheep. In a very real sense, the shepherd’s reputation is at stake. If his pastures are over-grazed or if the general condition of his sheep is one of ill-health, he is not likely to be known as a diligent or competent shepherd. ¶<sup>176</sup>

Let us not ridicule the sheep for unwisely and habitually sticking to the same trails or for polluting themselves. <sup>176</sup> Do we not do the same sort of things? Isaiah calls us out on this very issue directly when he writes,



All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; ... [Isaiah 53:6](#)

Sheep ... the metaphor that keeps on a givin’.

Like sheep, people too can be creatures of habit. Left to our own devices, we tend to do our own thing. We watch, listen to, talk about, and participate in things of our own choosing. And while not necessarily *all* bad, many of our self-serving choices probably don’t line up with GOD’s intention for our attention.

Do we not stubbornly stick to unwise, unhealthy, and even sinful habits and behaviors? I can’t help but think of Paul. Such a stalwart of faith, and yet, he struggled with this very issue. We know so from his letter to the Romans:

For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. [Romans 7:15 \(NASB 1995\)](#)

Proverbs warns of the dangers doing our own thing:

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. [Proverbs 14:12, 16:25 \(NASB 1995\)](#)

Sounds pretty ominous, doesn’t it? It’s supposed to. GOD’s Word tells us in two places that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. [Psalm 111:10, Proverbs 9:10](#)



Prior to my study of the 23<sup>d</sup> psalm, I would read the verse 23:3 with an emphasis on his leading “me in the paths of righteousness.” But—and a big but it is—I submit to you that the most import part of verse 3<sup>b</sup> is not the beginning of it, but rather the end of it. The focus of the verse is not strictly about us making righteous choices. The primary focus is the part that says, “for his name’s sake.” You see, the focus of verse 3<sup>b</sup> is about him using us in a way that glorifies him. You may be thinking, *How’s that supposed to work? If the verse is really about his Glory, why doesn’t the verse say so?* Well, it does, actually. Stick with me while I share with you what I learned about verse 3 of the Psalm 23.

In verse 3<sup>a</sup>, he restores our soul, but he doesn’t then abandon us to wander around without guidance or direction. Just the opposite. he leads us “along a path that aligns with his will and purpose.” <sup>190</sup> He is the righteous one. His path, by definition, is the path of righteousness. This is the path that honors YAHWEH and reflects his character. “This is not the easiest path for us to follow, but it is the best path because it leads us closer to him.” ¶<sup>190</sup>

Sheep don’t understand the best path to follow. <sup>176</sup> They don’t know which path leads to safety, rest, and sustenance. <sup>176</sup> But the shepherd knows. In the same way, we humans don’t understand how to find the best path for our safety, rest, or provision. <sup>190</sup> We need him to show us the way. <sup>190</sup> YESHUA said, “**I am the way**, the truth, and the life... [emphasis added].” [John 14:6](#) We are but unwise sheep. For this reason, our loving, caring Shepherd offers to show us the way.

Shepherd ... the other metaphor that just keeps on giving.

Of course, we benefit when we follow our Good Shepherd. And here’s what else happens when we follow him: we become a positive example for others. We demonstrate the fruit of the spirit [Galatians 5:22-23](#) thereby revealing the character of CHRIST to the world. <sup>190</sup> When we follow him on the route of righteousness, we bring to public attention his reputation of

faithfulness, power, and of mercy. In short, we reflect glory to him by highlighting various aspects of his character. <sup>190</sup> We can only do this if we follow his lead along the path of righteousness.

In the original language of Psalm 23:3<sup>b</sup>, the word translated to “name” is “shem,” which means “character” or “reputation.” <sup>191</sup>



Our heavenly Shepherd wants to lead us on a path that magnifies his glory, and which brings us closer to him. This is what he desires. However, he never forces our obedience. We must choose to let him lead, to follow him. This means submitting to his authority by letting go of our own plans, desires, fears, and comfort. <sup>¶190</sup> It means:

“  
... living in obedience to his Word, seeking to honor him with our thoughts, words, and actions. Choosing integrity over convenience, faithfulness over compromise, love over selfishness, and standing for right even when it’s unpopular or costly. When we do these things, GOD is glorified through our lives.” <sup>190</sup>

The living conditions of a flock reflect upon the reputation of its shepherd. The same is true when it comes to our attitude, outlook, and our overall wellbeing. These all depend upon and reflect upon our Shepherd. Is JESUS CHRIST your shepherd? If not, rectify that right away. If he *is* your Shepherd, choose to follow his lead.

For his name’s sake.

As well as your own wellbeing.

Give your life to GOD. HE can do more with it than you can.

—D.L. Moody



## 23:4a Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for YOU are with me.

We're halfway through the song, and at this point the lyrics take a turn. No longer are we leisurely strolling behind our shepherd, grazing comfortably along the way to a nearby gentle stream. Quite the opposite, in fact. In this fourth verse, we find ourselves moving through hostile territory fraught with dangers, both real and imagined.

This verse also marks a shift in the way we address the LORD. Whereas the first three verses address him with “He,” starting here, in verse 4, we address Him with “You.” <sup>176</sup> This shift from second- to first-person is significant. This first-person form is more direct, intimate, more ... well ... personal. Ponder that for a moment. We are now addressing the CREATOR of the universe in the most personal way our language allows.

Because this verse includes the word “death,” it’s often quoted to console the loved ones of a recently departed person. Indeed, as Steve Farrar so correctly points out: “If you have lost a loved one, if you have lost a spouse, if you’ve lost a child, there is no valley deeper or darker than the death of a child.” <sup>193</sup> In the original language, the word translated as “death” refers to a deep, foreboding darkness. The term is used metaphorically and does not *necessarily* mean literal death. <sup>192</sup> It does, however, evoke the image of dark shadows in which gloom and peril lie waiting, lurking, looking for an opportunity to jump out and strike. <sup>192</sup> Isn’t



it interesting how GOD created sheep with an innate fear of shadows? <sup>13</sup>

When we consider the context of verse 4, David’s lyrics leap off the page with vivid imagery. In this case,

context involves the seasons. That's right. The time of year plays an important role in the life of a shepherd and his flock. This is true in the western world as well as in the Middle East. <sup>176</sup>

**Early summer**—When summer arrives, the shepherd begins moving his sheep to remote ranges. It's a leisurely migration as they gradually work their way up into the mountains. The slow, methodical trek leads to higher elevations and lower temperatures, and as the heat of summer melts the snow. The shepherd is careful to keep his flock well behind the receding boundary of ice. ¶<sup>176</sup>



**Late summer**—The sheep graze away munching in remote mountainous meadows. They are well above the tree line, where the grass is new, and the melting ice provides refreshing water to drink. ¶<sup>176</sup>



**Early autumn**—Light snows begins to accumulate on the highest ridges. It's time to start the migration back to lower elevations. ¶<sup>176</sup>

**Late autumn through spring**—Shepherd and flock are back at home base where they will remain through winter. In their absence, the local pastures have recovered. ¶<sup>176</sup>



A single shepherd, determined to care for every sheep in the flock. And during all that time spent migrating between altitudes, he and his flock have only each other for companionship. David alludes to this same level of intimacy when he refers to YAHWEH in the first-person, "You." <sup>176</sup> The sheep follow their shepherd even as he leads them through the valleys, the scary shadows, the uncertainties, the ever-present plethora of perils and hazards.

We dream of mountaintop experiences, but often forget that between every two mountains is a valley.



Falling rocks, flooded rushing rivers, poisonous plants, predators, severe hail—bear in mind these are sheep we’re talking about. They’re defenseless and prone to panic. They have absolutely no clue about what lies before them. The sheep may not know, but the shepherd does! He’s already made the same trek. He knows the safest path. He knows which rivers are prone to flood. He knows which pastures contain poisonous vegetation. He knows how to read the sky for warning signs of severe weather. He knows when to lead the sheep to shelter. ¶176

The life of sheep is fraught with danger. The shepherd leads them through. The sheep know not what lies ahead. The shepherd knows exactly what lies ahead because he has already been there. As long as the sheep follow the shepherd, they remain provisioned and safe.

The lesson for you and I is obvious, is it not? Life is full of uncertainties. Regretfully, many of us are quick to assume the worst. We worry and fret over outcomes that may or may not ever become reality. And still, we’re told not to worry:

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. [Matthew 6:34](#)

It’s one thing to read verses like this and to recognize them as warnings. It’s a whole different story to actually avoid worry. Believe me. I know all too well how easy it is to fall into the worry trap. I struggled with the self-inflicted wound of worry for a long time.

My breakthrough came while I was researching this very chapter. As I gained deep insight into David’s hit song, Psalm 23, I began to feel relief. You see, I’d already known I was part of JESUS’S flock, but I didn’t necessarily think of myself as a sheep with all the traits thereof. Eventually, I began to think of YESHUA as my personal shepherd, and myself as one of His anxious, clueless sheep. Today, I visualize JESUS, my Shepherd, out front, staff in hand, walking confidently. And there I am

scurrying along behind, following without questioning; merely trusting that JESUS knows where to go and how to get there.

The LORD and me are talking one day when I make a huge mistake. I respond to something he says by using the B-word (BUT). I'll never forget that conversation. Allow me to share an excerpt with you. Here it is word-for-word from my personal journal:

**Me:** "But LORD, the clock is ticking."

**LORD:** "I CREATED TIME. The clock was invented by man. Listen to Me."

**Me:** "Yes, LORD."

**LORD:** "My Word says to 'Trust Me, lean not on your own understanding, and acknowledge Me in all your ways. Then I will direct your paths.' It does NOT say when I will direct your paths; only that I will. I AM. You are not."

*Note: This is only a short excerpt of the overall conversation. Furthermore, the emphases (capitals and underlining) are exactly the way he gave it to me.*

I learn a lot from that conversation. A portion of what I learn applies to our discussion regarding worry. At the time of the conversation, I'm concerned (spelled W-O-R-R-I-E-D) about my job situation; more specifically, my lack of one. Here's the thing though, he created time. This means he exists outside of time! He isn't bound or limited by time. He is on the outside of time, 'looking in.' if you will. Our Shepherd is the ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, the first and the last. He sees the beginning and the end. [Revelation 22:13](#) He has the perfect vantage point to see all of time from one end to the other—past, present, and future—*your* future!

Have you ever tried to eat a clock? It's very time-consuming?



Our heavenly Shepherd sees the storm clouds before they gather. He knows the enemy's schemes before they're concocted. He knows where the river will flood before springtime melts the snow. He knows the choicest pastures before the grass even germinates. Not one of our circumstances catch him off guard. Not one of our needs is lost on him. We need only to trust him.

Trust him like the Good Shepherd he is. And like the sheep we are.

Look again at the excerpt from my journal. Notice how YAHWEH refers to himself as "I AM." He does this same thing in the *Bible*. When GOD appears to Moses as a burning bush, he gives instructions to Moses. Moses then asks of the LORD, "When they ask who sent me, what shall I say is his name?" Check out the LORD's response:

"I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you." [Exodus 3:14](#)

The references to "I AM that I AM" may seem like an odd way for the LORD to refer to himself. Nevertheless, he is quite deliberate about it. The question is: What does he mean by "I AM?" *Bible* commentaries pretty much all agree on the matter. My personal favorite, Matthew Henry, tells us the phrase means that the GOD of the *Bible* is self-existent and fully self-sufficient.<sup>194</sup> He needed no outside influence to come into being. He needs no outside influence to maintain his existence. Whereas the greatest man in the world might say, "By the grace of GOD, I am *what* I am." The LORD, alone, can say, "I AM *that* I AM."<sup>194</sup>

Ponder that for a moment.

There is no equivalent for GOD except Himself.<sup>196</sup> David Guzik shares a fascinating perspective on the phrase: About as close as we can get to stating an equivalence to GOD, is to write, GOD = love. And while, in a manner of speaking, this is true, it is *not* also true to state, love = GOD. As good as love is, GOD is infinitely more. There is no equivalent to GOD.<sup>¶195</sup>



You may be wondering what all this has to do with Psalm 23:3. Only everything. The next time you face a dark valley, remember these truths:

- You aren't alone, the Shepherd is with you.
- You don't have to know the way. You merely have to know the one who *does* know the way.
- The Shepherd knows your past, your present, and your future. He knows your circumstances. And he knows how and when to bring you out to the other side.
- Be a sheep. Follow the Shepherd's lead. Listen to his voice. If you're not sure how, check out volume 3 in the *Critters for Christ Series*. Download it free from [AhaUniversity.com](http://AhaUniversity.com).

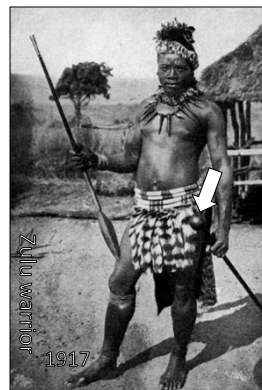
## 23:4<sup>b</sup> YOUR rod and YOUR staff, they comfort me.

Two things no self-respecting ancient shepherd would be without: his rod and his staff. So, just exactly what are a rod and staff? Why are they so important to shepherds? And what's the difference between the two? And perhaps more germane to the chapter at hand, why does David feature them in the lyrics of Psalm 23?

### The Rod

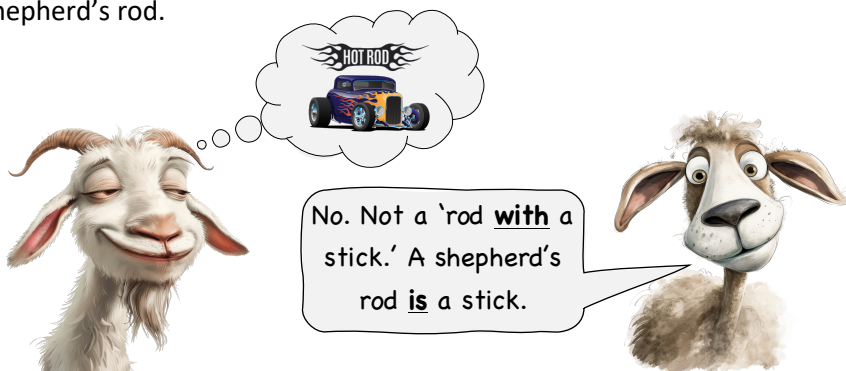
A shepherd's rod is a hardwood stick with a roundish 'ball' carved on one end. It's fashioned out of hardwood. A shepherd's rod is very similar to a *knobkerrie*, which is a weapon carried by certain tribal warriors in Africa.<sup>176</sup> If you look closely, you'll see a knobkerrie in the left hand of the man shown to the right.

Now, it goes without saying, that a shepherd is a far cry from a warrior. Bear in mind, however, much of a shepherd's life is spent alone. He's on his own to defend both his flock and himself. He



needs a weapon so he can fulfil his role as defender. His rod is that weapon. Keller, a native of South Africa, observed first-hand how native shepherds, select, whittle, and carve their shepherding rods. Young boys practice for many hours, learning to throw their rod over great distances with tremendous accuracy.<sup>176</sup>

The rod has other uses as well. There are, in fact four, aspects of a shepherd's rod.



## The Rod is a Symbol

In the hands of a skilled shepherd, the rod serves several purposes. As we shall see, each of these purposes is a vital aspect of responsible shepherding. As such, a shepherd's rod stands as a symbol of his strength, power, and authority.<sup>¶176</sup>

Way back in the Book of Exodus, YAHWEH inquires of Moses, "Hey, Moses, what's that in your hand?" [Exodus 4:2](#) "A rod," replies Moses. A little later on, GOD sends Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh to request the ruler let the Israelites leave Egypt. GOD instructs them to throw the very same rod on the ground in the presence of Pharaoh, and it will become a serpent.

Still later in Exodus, YAHWEH commands Moses to tell the people to move forward [toward the sea in front of them], and to stretch his rod out over the sea. When he does, YAHWEH parts the sea so the Israelites can escape the Egyptian pursuit. The sea parts, the Israelites cross, the sea crashes down, and the Egyptians drown. [¶Exodus 14](#)

In yet another episode, YAHWEH tells Moses to hold the rod and speak to the rocks, commanding them to bring forth water. Moses strikes the rock, and water flows, in the *desert*, no less! [Number 20:8-11](#) Moses's disobedience angers the LORD. Moses was supposed to speak to the rocks, not *strike* them. Despite the man's disobedience, the rocks do as they are commanded, and refreshing water springs forth right there in the middle of the desert! Such is a testament to GOD's authority (symbolized by the rod).

Notice what these episodes have in common. Here's a hint: In the first episode, GOD says to Moses, "... go *tell* Pharaoh..." In the second, GOD says to Moses, "... *tell* the people to move forward..." In the third, GOD tells Moses, "... *speak* to the rocks..." GOD gives Moses the words to say as he holds the rod. GOD gives Moses the authority to speak on his behalf. Note that GOD's authority is in the words, *not* the rod. The rod is merely a symbol of the authority of GOD's word! GOD's word, the Word of GOD, the *Bible*—are, in effect, his rod! Pretty cool, huh? ¶<sup>176</sup>

David's beloved song tells us our Shepherd has the authority to steer the flock; to lead us; to direct our paths; in the dark; amidst the shadows; and through times of severe weather and uncertainty. Furthermore, his authority is final. No one outranks the Shepherd who watches over us.

How comforting is that?

### **The rod is an instrument of discipline**

At times, the shepherd uses the rod to "correct" the behavior of a sheep. It's not uncommon for a sheep to begin straying from the flock. The observant shepherd throws his rod to just the right spot near the wayward critter, thereby startling it into rejoining the group. He may do the same to prevent a sheep from veering into poisonous vegetation. ¶<sup>176</sup>

Sometimes, a certain individual sheep must be protected from its own poor choices. The animal isn't aware of the dangers that lie ahead. It cannot possibly comprehend the future ramifications of its own

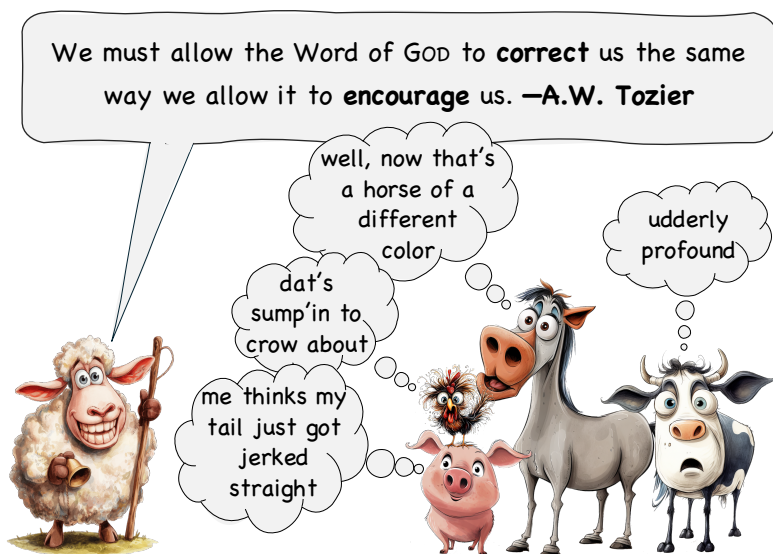
erroneous choices and behaviors. But the shepherd surely does. The shepherd cares for his sheep; loves them even. His love for them compels him to correct them for their own wellbeing.

Is this not an apt metaphor for our own lives? We too make poor choices, both intentional and unintentional. Seldom do we have any idea the outcomes our choices set into motion. Choices we make today, affect our lives (and often the lives of others) in the future. The effects may be short term, long term, or even eternal. Keller reminds us, "It is the Word of GOD that comes swiftly to our hearts, that comes with surprising suddenness to correct and reprove us when we go astray." ¶176

GOD's Word, the *Bible*, stirs our conscience, convicts us into correcting our wayward choices and behaviors, those which cause us to veer from GOD and his will for our life. GOD uses his Word to discipline us. The Word of GOD truly is his rod.

Follow his lead. Embrace his discipline. He knows and wants the best for us. We should find this comforting.

Should.



## The rod is an instrument of examination

If you will recall, back in an earlier chapter, we discuss how ancient Israelite shepherds periodically corral their flocks, and then let the sheep exit one at a time, passing “under the rod” (page 127). The purpose being to subject his sheep to careful inspection, to make sure each individual member of the flock is healthy and free from injury.

Cuts, sprains, illness, and bugs all contribute to a sheep’s anxiety and discomfort. Injuries, disease, and parasites are not always easy to spot underneath a sheep’s fleece. Thus, it is necessary for the shepherd to part a sheep’s fleece so he can inspect it thoroughly. ¶176

The LORD uses his ‘rod’ much the same way in dealing with us. To the degree that we allow it, his Word parts our fleece, so to speak. His Word digs in beneath the facade we put on for the world to see. His Word examines beyond the superficial; calms our fears; treats our hurts. We do well to welcome this process. Afterall, our Shepherd has our best interest in mind. He has specific plans for every individual in his flock.

YAHWEH desires to direct our paths. Even through the shadows. Perhaps *especially* through the shadows. Oftentimes, we lack the necessary preparation for the upcoming leg of our journey. Afterall, those are some tall mountains in front of us. This is where the Shepherd’s discipline comes in. We need the correction brought about by his rod. It’s a process of continual refinement. When we submit to his discipline, he can bring us to the next level in our journey. He already knows the best way for that to happen.

How comforting is that?

## The rod is an instrument of protection

The shepherd uses his rod for defense, defense of the flock as well as defense of his own self. In biblical times, predatory animals such as wolves, lions, and bears pose significant threats to sheep and shepherds alike. David personally slays both lion and bear in his role as shepherd.

[1 Samuel 17:34-36](#) He no doubt has these experiences in mind when he sings of the Great Shepherd's rod and staff. What comfort David feels knowing the Shepherd is vigilant in the defense of his flock.

JESUS too, uses the rod of GOD to 'slay' a predator. The *Bible* refers to the devil as "a roaring lion walking about seeking whom he may devour," <sup>1</sup> [Peter 5:8](#) When the devil comes to JESUS in the wilderness to tempt him, JESUS fends off the devil's attacks by quoting GOD's Word. He uses his 'rod' to defeat the attacking lion! [Matthew 4:1-11](#) David uses his shepherd's rod to defeat natural predators. JESUS uses the Great Shepherd's rod (i.e., GOD's Word) to defeat a *supernatural* predator.

With these insights we begin to understand why David finds comfort in GOD's 'rod.' The best part is, as members of the LORD's flock, we have the very same comfort available to us.



## The Staff

Let us now turn our attention to the shepherd's staff. You will sometimes see the terms 'rod' and 'staff' used interchangeably among various translations of the *Bible*. Even the two translations I rely on for my research differ. Take Exodus 14:16, for example. Whereas the *King James Version Bible* uses 'rod,' [Exodus 14:16 KJV](#) the same verse in the *New American Standard Bible* uses 'staff.' [Exodus 14:16 NASB \(1995\)](#) For reasons I won't elucidate here, it is my firm belief the King James Version is

generally superior to all other English translations (the only exception being the *Schocken Bible*, which has not, as of this time, been translated for all 66 books of the *Bible*).

Translations aside, the fact remain that a shepherd's rod and a shepherd's staff are two very different tools, employed for very different tasks. Verse 4b makes this perfectly clear: "Your rod *and* Your staff, *they* comfort me." They are two different items, separate and distinct. There must be reason a David mentions both. There is. And what a reason it is.

The staff is a tool for managing sheep, and sheep alone. Cows, horses, pigs, chickens—the staff has no value in dealing with these kinds of critters. Sheep, on the other hand, have needs which are unique to sheep. Shepherds meet these needs, in no small degree, through careful employment of a long slender stick with a hook or 'crook' on one end. Such a stick is referred to as a 'staff.' ¶176



Dogs have owners.  
Cats have staff.

No. No. No. Not  
that kind of staff.



### The Staff is a Symbol

In the previous section, we learned how shepherds use the rod to discipline, examine, and protect, thus the rod symbolizes GOD'S Word. In contrast, the staff is used to convey intimacy, guidance, and consolation. The staff symbolizes the Spirit of GOD (i.e., the HOLY SPIRIT). A diligent shepherd is faithful to care for his sheep. Likewise, the Great Shepherd is faithful to tend to his sheep (you and me).

### The staff is an instrument of intimacy

Imagine a large flock of sheep many of which are birthing lambs around the same time. In a large flock, a newborn lamb can become separated from its mother amidst all the confusion. The observant

shepherd notices this happening and he steps in to rescue the separated lamb. He must be careful though. A mother sheep uses her sense of smell to identify her newborns. If she detects the shepherd's scent on her lamb, she may reject the little guy altogether. The shepherd knows this, so he catches the newborn in the crook of his staff, gently lifts it, and ever so carefully, relocates it to a safe spot next to its mother. ¶176

This entire process is a touching portrait of intimacy. The shepherd demonstrates intimate awareness of his flock when he notices the mislaid lamb. He demonstrates intimate knowledge of his flock by knowing to which ewe the rescued lamb belongs. Furthermore, the shepherd fosters intimacy between the ewe and her newborn by rejoining the two.

A shepherd using his staff to rejoin a newborn lamb to its mother—what a beautiful metaphor of the HOLY SPIRIT in action.

**HOLY SPIRIT and the unbeliever**—Placing the lamb in the presence of its mother represents the HOLY SPIRIT's role of drawing unsaved sinners to JESUS. His purpose is to reconcile individual relationships with the CREATOR. The shepherd is gentle and avoids leaving his scent on the lamb so the mother will accept it into her care. Similarly, the HOLY SPIRIT draws a person to JESUS gently without forcing them to believe, to confess the Gospel as truth. If they do choose to believe the truth of the Gospel, our loving FATHER accepts them into his flock.

**HOLY SPIRIT and the Believer**—Another role of the HOLY SPIRIT is to encourage existing Believers into closer fellowship with both CHRIST, and with other Believers. To quote the *Bible*, “And the SPIRIT and the bride [i.e., Believers] say, ‘Come!’” [Revelation 22:17](#) ¶176



The sheep herder has intimate insight into the wellbeing of his flock. Likewise, the HOLY SPIRIT draws us gently into an intimate relationship with the One True GOD.



## The staff is an instrument of guidance

Sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd.<sup>185</sup> [John 10:27](#) Recall also how sheep are followers by nature. Indeed, Middle Eastern shepherds depend on these traits of sheep to lead them from the front.<sup>185</sup>

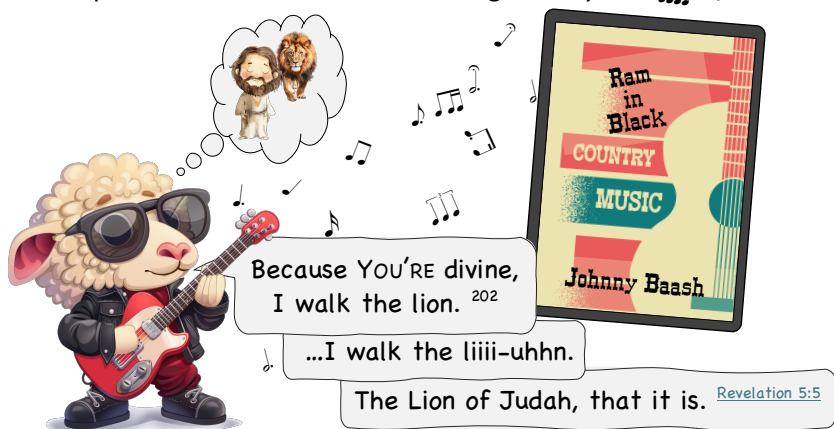
Despite these endearing qualities, sheep have a habit of wandering off. Even the *Bible* refers to their wayward behavior. [Isaiah 53:6](#), [1 Peter 2:25](#) The behavior is common enough to be featured in one of JESUS's parables. [Matthew 18:12-14](#) Perhaps more than any other domesticated animal, sheep require guidance. But why? What would motivate an individual sheep to veer away from the flock? Turns out there are multiple reasons. Among them are the following ...

**Sheep stray to get a better 'look' at something.** Back in the first chapter, we discussed how sheep have fantastic peripheral vision. This advantage comes at a cost though. The tradeoff comes in the form of nearsightedness. When it comes to seeing directly in front of them, sheep are virtually blind. If a sheep feels compelled to examine something in front of it, the creature must move in very close to the subject of interest. In the process of moving closer for a better look, a sheep might end up wandering away from the flock.<sup>¶198</sup>

Have you ever lost your spiritual focus? I know I have. Career, family, leisure—it's easy to get caught up in the stuff of everyday life. Before we realize it, we begin to stray from the most important thing of all: the relationship between us and our FATHER in Heaven. Poor focus causes us to lose 'sight' of our ultimate purpose: to bring glory to the one true GOD.

**Sheep stray because they don't walk in a straight line.** Here's another reason sheep go astray (and this reason may surprise you): Sheep don't walk in straight lines. Instead of walking straight, they wind back and forth in a generally forward direction. If you recall, sheep can see nearly all the way around themselves, and with slight turns of the head, they can see directly behind.<sup>p12</sup> Recall, also, that sheep are nervous and wary by

nature. They need to keep watch for dangers sneaking up from behind, but it would be difficult to keep turning their head back and forth at the same time they walk.<sup>198</sup> By walking along a path that winds back and forth, they can “observe their backside first with one eye, then the other.”<sup>199</sup> The impracticality of walking a straight line makes it easy for sheep to become disoriented and to “go astray.” 🎵 🎵



Sheep aren't the only ones who walk along winding paths. Sometimes, Believers do the same sort of thing. We waste entirely too much effort dwelling in the past, looking behind us, if you will. It is true that our past choices create circumstances we have to live with in the present. But here's what else is true: the LORD has plans for you, and those plans are in the future, not in the past. Check out his position on the subject. Here's what he tells us through Isaiah and Solomon:

Do not call to mind the former things,  
Or ponder things of the past.  
Behold, I will do something new,  
Now it will spring forth;  
Will you not be aware of it?  
I will even make a roadway in the wilderness,  
Rivers in the desert. [Isaiah 43:18-19](#)

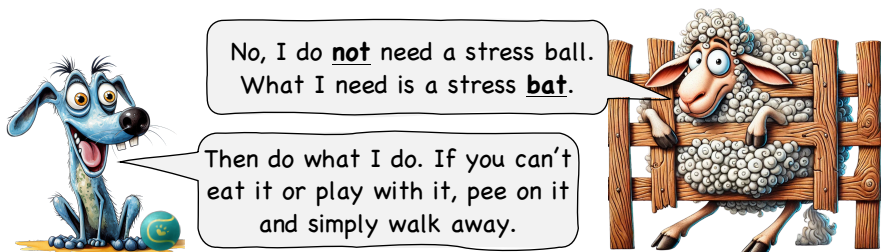
Trust the Lord with all your heart, and don't rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all you do, and he shall direct thy paths. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#)

In summary, GOD is already at work in our future, and if we trust him and acknowledge him in all our ways, he will direct our paths accordingly. I don't know about you, but that sounds like a great plan to me!

**Sheep stray to increase their personal space.** Spoiler alert: despite all the attention sheep receive in this book, they are *not* actually people. Sheep do, however, need a certain amount of 'personal' space. If a sheep feels crowded, it might very well flee. It all comes down to how safe it feels. The area in which a sheep feels safe at any given moment is referred to as its "flight zone." Remember: at the first hint of a threat, sheep run. And when one runs, others follow suit. The risk of stampede is very real. A sheep's flight zone is its personal space. It gives the critter room to begin running without getting trampled by other members of the flock. Sometimes, a sheep will expand its flight zone to the point it ends up separated from the flock altogether. ¶199

Am I the only one who has done this same thing? There've been times I've allowed myself to withdraw from the LORD. Not intentionally, and never out of anger. It has to do with an area of personal weakness. Without getting too specific there is a nagging concern I drag around. Occasionally, this concern mushrooms into soul-crushing stress. During these times of struggle, I tend to withdraw both socially and spiritually. I'm not proud of the fact, just being transparent.

I'm happy to report that with the Shepherd's guidance, I'm gaining victory over those dreadful monsters of anxiety and worry. The Word tells us not to worry. [1 Peter 5:6-7, Matthew 6:25](#) I know this of course, but knowing and doing are two very different things. As of this writing, I still have a ways to go, but I now know the key. More on that later.



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Now, we know some of the reasons sheep go astray. So, what's the shepherd to do when one of his sheep does stray from the flock? He employs his trusty staff, of course. A shepherd can change the direction of a sheep simply by tapping the animal lightly on its side with the tip of his staff. He can use this same technique to encourage sheep to move through a gate or to traverse a detour in the path.

Sometimes, the situation calls for slightly more active measures. Imagine a sheep that strays from the flock and slips into a crevasse.<sup>200</sup> The shepherd might recover the animal by hooking the curved end of the staff around one of the creature's legs and lifting it back to safety.<sup>200</sup>

Yet another kind of situation arises when a particularly stubborn sheep decides to resist the shepherd's prompting. A wise shepherd knows a sheep can exert more strength when its head is pointed forward.<sup>201</sup> While the shepherd refuses to harm the sheep, he must take control. One technique is to hook the curved end of the staff around the sheep's neck and pull its chin up.<sup>201</sup> This allows the shepherd to direct the sheep as needed.<sup>201</sup>

Just as a sheep herder uses his staff to guide his flock, so too does the Great Shepherd use his staff (the HOLY SPIRIT) to guide his sheep. I'm grateful for His guidance because, like the sheep herder's flock, I need his guidance desperately. I especially need his guidance regarding how to trust him in a certain area of my life. And he provides the help I need by showing me the key. (In my case, the key to overcoming anxiety and worry).



The secret to overcoming worry is ... drum roll, please ... *trust*. It all comes down to trusting the LORD. This may seem superficial or cliché even. Rest assured it is neither. You see, at the time of this writing, the LORD has been dealing with me for a year regarding my trust in him. I trust him fully for my

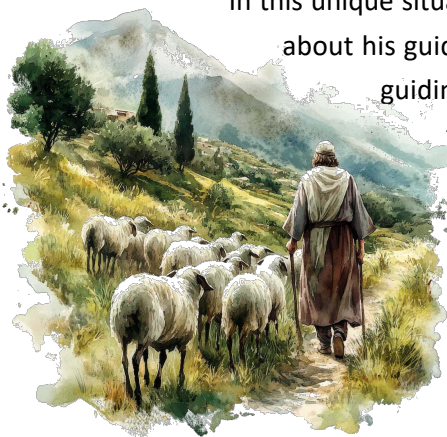
salvation. I trust completely that he knows and wants what's best for me. But there's this one area of trust I struggled with greatly. I'm fully aware of my need to trust him. He makes this abundantly clear when he ...

- Leads Tammy to text me a certain pair of daily devotionals.
- Highlights an explicit message in the background of a movie.
- Draws my attention to a LinkedIn message which leads to a WhatsApp conversation with a pastor in Nigeria whom I never met.
- He tells me directly as I journaled one of our conversations.

Clearly, I had work to do in the area of trust. But how? Well, this is where it gets interesting because, turns out, what I needed was a multipronged approach. <sup>(1)</sup> The first thing he tells me to do is make a list of verses that talk about trusting him. Then read through those verses every day. <sup>(2)</sup> Daily encouragement from Tammy. She texts me reminders every day to trust our Good Shepherd. <sup>(3)</sup> The book you are reading, most especially this very chapter on Psalm 23. As I research and write, he is revealing himself to me in ways I've never experienced. Those revelations are magnifying my trust in him. <sup>(4)</sup> Finally, a simple suggestion by a good friend who is well-aware of my 'trust issues:' "Russ, just ask him to help you trust him." *Now, why didn't I think of that?* Simple, but profound. I'm still working on my issue, but these four measures have caused massive growth in this humble anxious sheep.

I'm explaining all this as an example how the staff serves as an implement of gentle guidance. Let me tie it all together for you. I'm writing this very sentence on the afternoon of Saturday, May 10, 2025. I've been working on this chapter for over a month. I think about the research and the revelations herein constantly. Earlier this week, on Monday at 5:20am, I'm praying while driving to the office. I'm literally asking the Great Shepherd to order my steps, to "direct my path." And that's when he brings it all into focus and perfectly together for me. I'll do my best to explain what he conveyed to me in my thoughts:

*That's what I've been doing. You call me the "Great Shepherd." I am the Great Shepherd and I gently tap my staff on your side. That's how I direct your path. You wrote about how my staff represents the HOLY SPIRIT. And it does. My SPIRIT gently prods you. That's how I keep you on track. What you describe in the book is one of the ways I guide my sheep.*



In this unique situation, the LORD uses my research about his guidance to reveal how he has been guiding me. Furthermore, he reveals this to me as it's happening! The sheer elegance of his divine orchestration speaks to me in a way I'll never forget. The nature of the experience makes his involvement obvious. Oftentimes, though, the HOLY SPIRIT guides us in ways we

might not recognize as him; at least not initially. Consider the following:

- You're driving in a heavy rainstorm when 'something' tells you to slow down and change lanes. You no sooner do so when a massive tree collapses onto the road in front of you. <sup>203</sup>
- You're being encouraged to endorse a business contract. The deal looks good on paper, but for some reason you feel unsettled about the affair. You eventually decline the offer, and two days later news comes out about the other party's history of fraudulent business practices. <sup>203</sup>
- Like sheep, we can sometimes be stubborn. Have you ever felt in your gut there's something in your life that needs to change (quitting a bad habit, for example). The HOLY SPIRIT has a way of working on a Believer until they relent. This is a form of guidance.

- Perhaps at times you've been stubborn in the opposite way. Maybe you feel a prompting to do something, but then hesitate to act on that prompting. Case in point, consider the following episode from my own life:

One day I pull into a café/convenience store. Sitting at a counter looking out the front window is a 20-something young man. His expression is one of deep concern or worry. He just sits there staring out the window. I feel the HOLY SPIRIT prompting me to speak to him. The sensation is strong, but my stubbornness is stronger. (At least initially it is.) The longer I sit in my car, the stronger the sensation becomes. Finally, the HOLY SPIRIT overpowers my stubbornness.

I walk into the café, approach the guy, and say, "Excuse me, sir."

He looks up at me skeptically from his seated position, and says, "What's up?"

"I'm not sure why, but I'm supposed to ask you a question. [dramatic pause] Do you know JESUS?"

"Yes," comes his terse reply.

"I don't mean do you know who he *is*, but do you *know* him, personally?"

"Yes. I've been a Christian for years."

My conversation with Matthew ensues from there. I pray with him and share as I felt led by the SPIRIT. Tears stream down both our faces.

The point is the HOLY SPIRIT guides me to that situation in that moment of time. Then, I, the stubborn sheep as I am, attempt to stay on my own path by disregarding the Shepherd's 'instructions'. He has a different plan. He takes the hook of his trusty staff, orients it around my neck, and gently, yet firmly (and thankfully, figuratively), forces my head back, just as a sheep herder will do with his own stubborn sheep.

Here's the bottom line: the shepherd's staff represents the HOLY SPIRIT, and one of his roles is to guide us, which he does with diligence, gentleness, and firmness.

### **The staff is an instrument of consolation**

Shepherds use their staff to soothe and reassure their sheep. Perhaps the most touching example of this is one described by Keller. Imagine a shepherd walking beside one of his favorites. His staff held lightly against the sheep's side. The touch of the staff is light enough to be felt by the sheep, but not so heavy as to cause discomfort. It's as if the two are walking "hand-in-hand." The sheep enjoys this individual attention from the shepherd. This special treatment is a source of great consolation for the sheep, allowing it to feel secure, cared for, and at ease. ¶176

The HOLY SPIRIT consoles his sheep in much the same fashion. His very presence allows us to feel secure, cared for, and free from worry. While we can't see the HOLY SPIRIT, he makes his presence felt...

**Through His Word** <sup>204</sup>—He speaks to us as we read his Word. <sup>204</sup> "When we read the Bible, we are literally encountering GOD's thoughts on paper." <sup>205</sup> In so doing, his truth permeates us on a spiritual level. This empowers us to face life's challenges. <sup>205</sup>

**Through other people** <sup>204</sup>—The HOLY SPIRIT uses other people to speak to us. It might be a family member, a friend, or even a complete stranger (as in the case of using me to speak to that young man in the café). <sup>205</sup> Several times, through the years, he has used Tammy to convey his direction or instruction to me. If I'm not listening well enough (or at all), he uses her to get through to me. On such occasions I have overwhelming peace regarding the matter; a level of peace only he can provide.

**Through direct communication** <sup>205</sup>—Once we learn to hear his voice, we can discern him speaking directly to us. Volume 3 in this series explains how. Complimentary downloads available at [AhaUniversity.com](http://AhaUniversity.com).



**Through other means** <sup>205</sup>—GOD speaks to us through other means as well. Nature, our conscience, circumstances, prayer—he has multiple communication channels available. We can count on him to use the appropriate one for the situation at hand.

Regardless of how the LORD chooses to communicate with us, no matter how he makes his presence felt, his presence is enough. We can (and should) take great consolation from knowing he is with us during the storm just as he is during the calm. The Shepherd loves his sheep. He keeps his staff, his HOLY SPIRIT, not merely resting against our side, but inside of us as we walk side-by-side, virtually hand-in-hand. How touching is that? Is it not the ultimate consolation?

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Who knew verse 4<sup>b</sup> of Psalm 23 contains so much meaning? I certainly had no idea when I began working on this chapter. Let us recap:

The rod is an implement of discipline, examination, and protection. It represents GOD's Word. The staff is an implement of intimacy, guidance, and consolation. It represents GOD's Spirit (the HOLY SPIRIT). Looking at these we see that God:

- Corrects our behavior as necessary.
- Examines us for opportunities to refine our attitudes and behaviors, thereby bringing us closer to him.
- Defends us from predators, some of which we can't even see.
- Draws us into intimate fellowship with our HEAVENLY FATHER.
- Provides guidance to keep us on the path he has charted for our life.
- Consoles us by making his presence felt.

When we consider these carefully, we begin to see the many ways in which the LORD orchestrates our well-being. Our Shepherd cares. HE really, really cares. From this, we should draw immense comfort. YOUR rod and YOUR staff, they comfort me. Indeed, they do. They really, really do.

## 23:5a You prepare a table before me ...

My wife, Tammy, is a gift from the LORD. She takes marvelous care of me, our sons, and our pups. Among her many expressions of love is her good ol' southern home cookin'. Baked ziti topped with a crust of extra Mozzarella, chicken-fried steak with 'mash taters' and gravy, salmon croquettes with from-scratch Tartar sauce—yes siree, Tammy really knows how to lay a table full of delectable deliciousness. I'm sitting here drooling just thinking about her, I mean, her *cooking*, her cooking!

I have no idea whether sheep drool, but here's what I do know: David is a responsible young shepherd. He takes his responsibilities seriously, which means making sure his sheep have plenty to eat. And a big part of their feeding is preparing a "table" for them.

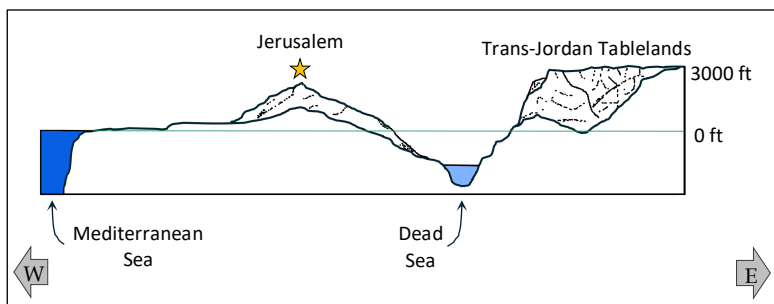


Laughter is brightest where food is best. Especially when there's tacos.

You see, a good shepherd doesn't simply lead his flock to a new pasture and say, "Have at it guys!" No, no. That wouldn't be responsible at all. A diligent shepherd scouts ahead to determine which locations are suitable for heavy grazing and which ones should be limited to lighter grazing. <sup>176</sup> He notes the presence of any poisonous vegetation and either plucks it or adjusts his path to avoid it altogether. <sup>176</sup> The responsible shepherd looks for signs of wolves, lions, and bears, and takes any necessary precautions. <sup>176</sup> He identifies the most suitable locations for rest camps. <sup>176</sup> Sources of drinking water are equally important. So, you see, a good shepherd takes great care to prepare a "table" for his sheep. His work is never done. Here's the surprising part: the reference to "table" isn't entirely symbolic. In one respect, it's quite literal.

As we're about to learn, the term "table" is a beautiful choice of words for the lyrics in Psalm 23. The word translated as "table" in Psalm 23:5 refers not merely to a surface from which to eat, but such a surface upon which a meal is already prepared and spread out.<sup>208</sup> It can even mean an animal hide laid out on the ground.<sup>217</sup> Dinner is served, my fleecy friends!

**Geography**—If you recall, verse 4 begins with, "Yea, though I walk through the valley ..." [Psalm 23:4](#) In that verse the shepherd is leading his sheep up into the mountainous highlands. Along the way they encounter elevated flat regions. These geographical features are known as plateaus, or "tablelands."<sup>206</sup> Tablelands are often found in various parts of the biblical landscape.<sup>206</sup> These areas are important to the biblical narrative because they provide "settings for historical events, agricultural activities, and symbolic meanings."<sup>207</sup>



East-West Cross-section of Trans-Jordan Tablelands

When David refers to a "table" in verse 4, he could very well be thinking of the tablelands, which makes the word a double reference (literal and figurative). How cool is that? But wait! That's not all. Tablelands in North American and European sheep ranges, are referred to as "mesas." Mesa is Spanish for—you guessed it—table.<sup>176, 209</sup> And ... the African language of Kiswahili has its own word for table: mesa!<sup>176</sup>

Modern day Israel, Syria, and Jordan all have large areas of tablelands. In ancient times, Gilead, Bashan, and Moab, all near the Jordan River, are known for their lush pastures situated on elevated tablelands.<sup>207</sup> These areas serve as "rest areas"<sup>206</sup> on journeys to even higher elevations.

At 3,000 feet above sea level, the tablelands of David's world are remote and difficult to reach. Nevertheless, as an energetic and aggressive shepherd, David puts in the effort to prepare them for his beloved sheep.<sup>176</sup> Using this context, the "table" of Psalm 23:5 may be considered a literal table.

**Ancient tradition**—In ancient Middle Eastern cultures, hospitality is a serious matter. It is, in fact, considered by many to be a sacred duty.<sup>147</sup> This is because they believe that guests are sent to them by GOD.<sup>147</sup> Consider the reaction of Abraham and Sarah when the three guests approach their tent. [Genesis 18:2-7](#)

Let us now take the notion of hospitality to the next level. Imagine you live in ancient Israel. Imagine also that you wish to reconcile relations with a quarrelsome neighbor. You will likely invite them to share a meal with you. Sharing a meal to reconcile differences is a very old tradition among cultures in that part of the world.<sup>210</sup>

This same tradition is honored by ancient kings. One monarch invites another to share a meal so they can settle their differences. These are lavish affairs. The guests arrive to see a feast laid out before them. Food and drink are on full display atop sprawling tables. Of course, the appointed food tasters must ensure the feast isn't tainted. Assuming no one keels over from poisoning, the host and guest can build trust in hopes of resolving the original conflict.<sup>¶1210</sup>



Royal feast



Not so royal feast

All those tables covered in dishes of fantastic food and goblets of delicious drink make me think of another such meal. It's a meal with zero percent chance of tainted food, and 100% chance of extravagance and abundance. And the best part: you and I are invited! I am, of course, referring to the wedding supper of the LAMB. [Revelation 19:6-9](#)

The parallels between ancient Jewish marriage customs and YESHUA's work on the cross are undeniable. (Regretfully, we haven't the space to delve into that subject here. Refer to source 211 for more info.) Here are the parts that matter to our discussion: <sup>(1)</sup> Such weddings are extravagant affairs. <sup>(2)</sup> They are hosted in the home of the groom's father. <sup>(3)</sup> The wedding guests gather at the feast, but do not, initially, partake of the meal. <sup>(4)</sup> First, the couple consummates their union (privately, of course). <sup>(5)</sup> Only then does the public celebration begin. And boy, does it ever. The entire group, the couple, their families, and the guests "feast and make merry for seven days"! ¶<sup>211</sup>

Imagine how much more lavish will be the marriage supper of the Lamb compared to earthly feasts. Afterall, it takes place in Heaven. Let's unpack what we've learned to see how all this talk about feasts and food relates to Psalm 23:5<sup>a</sup>.

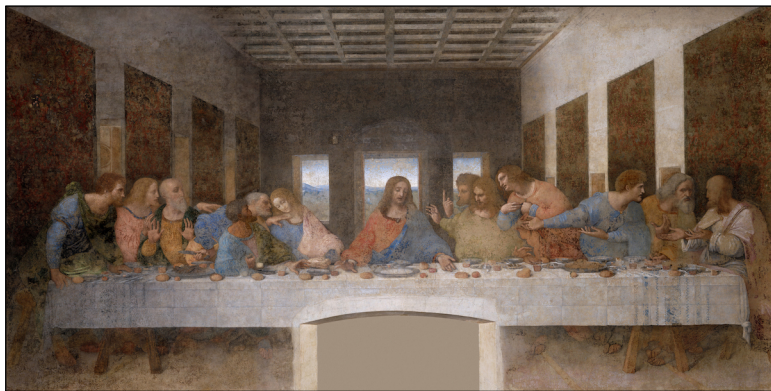
We already established that the Shepherd in Psalm 23 is GOD, our FATHER in Heaven. [Matthew 6:9](#) We have also established that within Psalm 23 we Believers are his "sheep." The earthly father of the groom hosts the marriage feast in his home. Likewise, our HEAVENLY FATHER hosts the marriage supper of the Lamb in his home (Heaven). Just as a shepherd prepares an earthly "table" upon which his sheep feast, the Great Shepherd prepares a table for us in Heaven. Imagine the scale of that feast!

In a similar vein, let's consider the ancient custom whereby kings reconcile their differences by sharing feasts. Multiple verses in the *Bible* refer to JESUS as the "King of kings." [Revelation 17:14](#) If earthly kings can reconcile relationships with each other over a shared meal, how much more can the King of all reconcile his relationships with us? By the shed

blood of JESUS, we can be fully reconciled with our CREATOR. In fact, the central theme of the entire *Bible* is the theme of GOD reconciling the relationship between HIMSELF and man. The King of kings is none other than the Good Shepherd. So, by using the symbology of Psalm 23: we see that the Shepherd who prepares a table for his flock remains ever ready to bring his stray sheep back into the fold.

The LORD showed me these parallels to share with you. However, please understand I'm not suggesting David wrote verse 5 as a reference to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then again, maybe the LORD intended the metaphor even if David did not. Either way, it's something interesting for us to ponder.

**The last supper**—The “last supper” is the common name referring to the last meal JESUS has with his disciples prior to his crucifixion. As described on page 31, the meal is the annual Passover meal. Thanks to the art of Leonardo Da Vinci, this is the mental image most of us have of the “last supper”:



Notice the table. That long, long table. We have no historical record describing the actual table, so we don't know the true size, but I think we can agree if it really sits thirteen adults, it's a good-sized table, indeed.

This is the meal where JESUS likens the bread to his body which will soon be “broken” (i.e., executed). Breaking the bread apart for

emphasis, YESHUA says, “... this do in remembrance of Me.” [Luke 22:19](#) And just like that he institutes the sacrament of Communion. JESUS goes on to explain how the wine is a symbol of his blood which is soon to be shed during his execution.

“THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.”

Many churches have a Communion table in their sanctuaries, literally imprinted with these very words. The Communion table is also known as the LORD’S Table. Let us never take these words of our LORD for granted. When we come to the LORD’S table to partake of Communion, it is to contemplate the sacrifice of CHRIST, to meditate upon the heavy price he paid on our behalf.

If Tammy hosts a dinner party, rest assured she plans it in meticulous detail. Even so, despite her best efforts, something will fall short of perfection. A shortage of ice, a missed water spot on one of the glasses, a tiny stain on the tablecloth—others may not notice, but the imperfections are there. Not so with GOD. Nothing escapes him. When we read about him preparing a table, we can be sure those preparations are planned, meticulous, and perfect. <sup>213</sup> [Exodus 25:23-30](#) Literally perfect.

The LORD prepares a table for us. The table he prepares represents provision, protection, and reconciliation with him. The LORD’S Table reminds us of what CHRIST did to make reconciliation with GOD possible. This reconciliation is vital because only through it are we rescued from the “clutches of Hell.” <sup>213</sup> GOD has prepared for us a table, a one-of-a-kind table. Before we take a seat though, we should consider the cost of his preparations, the indescribable suffering he endured.

Put down the devices. Pick up the joy. Family dinner is where screens take a break and hearts take the spotlight.



In ancient societies, it was honor to be invited to a person's table. "To be invited to the King's table was a great honor. To be invited to GOD's table is the ultimate honor." <sup>217</sup> Therefore, when you approach the LORD's table, do so with a clean heart. Confess your sin to the LORD. Unburden it all. Every. Last. Bit. GOD's table is clean. Let not your unclean heart defile the table he has so pains-takingly prepared. Tesh Njokanma sums this beautifully when she writes,

"We should approach this table God has prepared for us free from sin, with no un-confessed sin in our lives. When God prepares a table, it is a very clean table. [...] Everything is clean and pure because it is a Holy table set with a Holy meal. And so today if you want to come to the table of the Lord, [...] ask God to remove every sin, every filthy garment from your life so you can come to the table of the Lord and feast from the abundance in God's house and drink from His river of delight (Psalms 36:8)."

<sup>213</sup>

The Great Shepherd loves his flock. he cares greatly about our well-being. He works constantly on our behalf. He prepares a table for us. We do well to look more closely for the evidence thereof. Pay attention to the "little things," happenstances that perhaps are not so happenstance, coincidences that aren't coincidences at all. Ask the Shepherd to help you fully appreciate his table preparations.

He prepares a table for me, indeed.

Psalms 23:5 provides for us yet another marvelous example of the genius of David's lyrics. I suspect the metaphors I'm suggesting extend beyond the ones intended by David. Afterall, neither the Book of Revelation nor the Last Supper existed at the time David penned his famous song. But let us remember that GOD is the one who inspired David's lyrics. And he operates outside of time. He doesn't merely know the future. He's already there. Isn't it just possible he inspired the metaphors completely unbeknownst to David? Form your own conclusion.

You already know mine.



The only exercise some people get is when they jump to conclusions.



## 23:5b ... in the presence of my enemies

We just learned several things a diligent shepherd does to prepare a “table” for his sheep. Among them is keeping an eye out for signs of predators. Certain animal Tracks, telltale dens, even the appearance of certain scat lying about—the observant shepherd stays on the lookout for clues indicating potential trouble for his flock.

In certain areas of Palestine there’s an additional sign of trouble the shepherd must look for: small holes in the ground. Now, these holes aren’t very big, only a couple of inches in diameter. Nor are they out in the open, where they are easy to spot. Very often, they are hidden beneath ground-level vegetation. ¶<sup>193</sup>

Now, it isn’t the holes themselves that spell danger for sheep. The danger stems from what might be lurking down below the surface in the darkness of the holes: *Atractaspis engaddensis*.<sup>215</sup> This is a scientific name translating to “burrowing asp of the mountains.”<sup>214, 215</sup> The common name for the creature is “Israeli mole viper,” so called because they burrow holes like moles.<sup>215</sup> Also, like moles, they spend much of their lives in the holes they burrow.

The Israeli mole viper is a snake found primarily in the desert.<sup>215</sup> Unfortunately for sheep, however, it is also commonly found in areas near water and rich in vegetation (particularly in the vicinity of the Jordan River).<sup>215</sup> Now snakes don’t eat sheep, so why do mole vipers pose such a threat? It all comes down to the mole viper’s feeding habits.

You see mole vipers are what you call *ambush predators*.<sup>215</sup> They lie in wait down in burrows waiting for some hapless rodent or lizard to near the burrow's entrance.<sup>215, 216</sup> These vipers hunt by heat. And here's where it gets sticky: heat-seeking vipers don't know the difference between the body heat of a sheep and that of a mole rat.



Mole rat



Israeli mole viper

To the Israeli mole viper, heat is heat. So, when this sneaky snake senses body heat, it charges quickly up to the entrance hole and ... **BAM!** It's a lightning quick strike; made all the quicker because of a unique trait. The mole viper is the only snake in Israel that can strike with its mouth closed.<sup>216</sup> It does so by exposing one of its fangs without opening its mouth.<sup>216</sup> Then, by orienting the fang to the side, the viper is able to stab its prey with a sideways jabbing motion.<sup>216</sup>

Now, imagine, if you will, that you're a sheep grazing in the lush vegetation near a quiet stream. You're nose down, chomping away at the juicy green goodness of the tall, slender grass. Mmmm, mmmm. Then, out of nowhere: Pow! Ouch! *Something just stabbed my snout! What was that thing?* Within minutes, your heart rate begins to slow. Imperceptibly at first, then not so imperceptibly. Slower ... slower ... slower ... until finally you find yourself grazing once again; this time in the loveliest pasture of all, that great 'pasture in the sky' where the grass is luscious, the water clear as crystal, and vipers nowhere to be found.

Now, imagine you're a shepherd guiding your flock to a fresh pasture. It's near a quiet stream. The grass is tall and wet with morning dew. Your

sheep are gonna love it! You can hardly wait to lead them to it. However, your number one priority is the wellbeing of your flock. So, before you trudge over to that fresh pasture with your sheep following, you must first prepare the pasture. Tall grass, nearby water—this here is viper territory.

First, you stay the flock, so they don't follow you. Only then do you approach the pasture. You walk the area, using your staff to part the grass as you go. You're looking for telltale signs of those pesky mole vipers: small, circular holes in the ground. *There's one right there.* You take a small bottle from your scrip. <sup>p128</sup> Inside the bottle is hog oil. You apply the oil to the burrow entrance. The oil serves two purposes: <sup>(1)</sup> It makes it impossible for the snake to raise itself from the hole because the skin of the snake can't get traction in the oil. If the snake can't rise from its burrow, it can't strike your sheep. <sup>(2)</sup> Sheep are put off by the scent of hog oil. As they graze, nose to ground, and then get a whiff of the hog oil, "they turn immediately to another direction." ¶1212

You diligently examine the entire pasture, applying oil to every viper entrance you see. Only then do you lead your flock to the fresh pasture. They are safe now. Having thus performed your duties, you have prepared a table for your sheep in the presence of their enemies.

Literally.

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Hog oil provides an effective defense against mole vipers. Those pesky snakes attack unsuspecting sheep, but their efforts are futile because they can't get past preparations made by the shepherd. Notice, however, the mole vipers are still present. Still attempting to attack. Still trying to wreak havoc. Still trying to harm the shepherd's flock.

It's much the same way for you and me. Our heavenly Shepherd offers to protect us. We should not, however, expect him to completely eradicate all of our enemies. Trials, opposition, and spiritual battles are part of life. The good news is GOD is on his throne. He is large and in charge! He is our

Shepherd. We are his flock. We are in the best possible care. Karen O'Reilly sums up this truth nicely when she writes,

“God's provision and care are not diminished by these adversaries. By preparing a table for us in their presence, God demonstrates His power and sovereignty over our enemies. It symbolizes His ability to protect us and grant us peace in the midst of turmoil, assuring us that no matter what we face, He is with us.” <sup>218</sup>

In David's case this plays out literally. Have you ever noticed how many of the psalms contain references to conflicts and battles? Of the 150 psalms



in our *Bible*, David authors 75 of them.

<sup>170</sup> When you consider the long list of enemies in his life, it's no wonder so many of his lyrics mention conflict. David dispatches both lions and bears in defense of his flock. [1 Samuel 17:34-36](#) He singlehandedly slays Goliath, the Philistine giant. [1 Samuel 17:31-54](#) King Saul tries to kill him outright. [1 Samuel 19:10](#)

Throughout David's reign as king, he wars with several foreign nations. <sup>2</sup>

[Samuel 8](#) Even David's own son, Absalom, rebels and attempts to usurp the royal

throne. [2 Samuel 15:1-12](#) David has no shortage of enemies, all of whom threaten his very life. And in every case, GOD delivers him. Not only does David survive; he *thrives*. This theme resonates throughout the psalms. Surely, David has this very theme in mind when he pens the words, “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.”

David's conflicts occur in the physical realm, by which I mean during the course of his natural life. I believe, however, Psalm 23:5<sup>b</sup> refers also to conflicts within the supernatural realm.

## Myth busters

All this talk about sheep, shepherds, and snakes, brings us face to face with several misguided myths. Before proceeding we must dispel these untruths. The reasons will become clear later.

**Myth #1: Sheep have a natural immunity to snake venom.** False. <sup>220</sup>

Most species of sheep are highly resistant to the venom of pit vipers (but not hole vipers). <sup>221</sup> And while, a few might survive a pit viper attack, such an incident can still cause a lasting injury. <sup>220, 222</sup> Moreover, snake venom varies between species. For this reason, sheep are vulnerable to attacks from other kinds of snakes. <sup>221</sup>

**Myth #2: Sheep blood is, itself, an antivenom.** False. Raw sheep blood has no special properties enabling it to address the effects of snake venom in a victim. Sheep blood, however, is a vital component in the manufacture of snakebite antivenom.

**Myth #3: The antivenom created from lamb's blood is more potent than antivenom produced from the blood of an adult sheep.** False. Case in point: Blaen Farm in Wales raises 2,000 sheep specifically for the purpose of cultivating snake antivenom. Out of all those sheep, not one of them is a lamb. <sup>¶223</sup>

Facts. The ovine immune system generates a wide range of antibodies. When sheep are immunized with *small, nonlethal* doses of snake venom, it triggers the production of venom-specific antibodies, which counteract the effects of the targeted species of venom. These antibodies are extracted into a serum. This serum is what doctors administer to snakebite victims as antivenom. <sup>¶219</sup>

Due to the sudden injection of a large volume of venom, sheep typically die from snake bites unless they receive timely medical attention. The sheep's immune system simply cannot deal with the sudden injection (and large amount) of venom quickly enough for the sheep to survive.

Now, follow me if you will, back to the Book of Genesis. As we make our way there, keep in mind the meaning of “genesis”: origin, creation, or beginning.<sup>224</sup> In our case all three apply.

Chapter 3 of Genesis describes the account in which Satan appears as a serpent and tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Afterward, YAHWEH curses *both* the serpent and Satan ...

- a {
- 14 The Lord God said to the serpent,  
“Because you have done this,  
You are cursed more than all the cattle,  
And more than any animal of the field;  
On your belly you shall go,  
And dust you shall eat  
All the days of your life.
- 15 “And I will put enmity (open hostility)  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed (offspring) and her Seed;  
He shall [fatally] bruise your head,  
And you shall [only] bruise His heel.”
- b }
- ([Genesis 3:14-15](#))

- a. These lines pronounce YAHWEH’s curse upon serpents (i.e., snakes as a whole). They shall live out their lives crawling on their bellies and eating dust. Furthermore, women and snakes shall have open hostility toward each other. If you’ve ever wondered why so many women are disgusted by snakes, this is the reason.
- b. In these lines, GOD addresses Satan directly, pronouncing a curse upon the forked-tongue deceiver. Eve is the mother of mankind. As such, JESUS is her descendant, so he is among her human “Seed.” (Thus, the capitalization of “Seed.”) GOD is prophesying JESUS’S future victory over Satan. YESHUA will defeat Satan

("fatally bruise your head"). In contrast, Satan will inflict only minor injury to JESUS (**only bruise** his heel).

YAHWEH is the ALPHA AND OMEGA, the Beginning and the End. He operates outside of time.

And he knows.

All the way back in Genesis, he knows. Genesis. Origin. Creation. Beginning.

He knows from the very beginning. Even as creation is still fresh, YAHWEH knows Satan will tempt and that man will sin. And still, GOD loves man enough to provide for him a way out. That way out has a name. His name is JESUS, YESHUA, the Lamb of GOD. [1 Peter 1:17-20](#)



Satan took his best shot. He struck with the venom of deceit, but the blood of the Lamb provides the antidote. The blood of YESHUA has within it the capacity to neutralize the deadly venom of sin.

The Lamb. It always comes down to the Lamb.

Our table is prepared indeed. What an amazing Shepherd we have!

## 23:5c YOU anoint my head with oil.

This is my favorite section of the entire chapter. The metaphors are so vivid and so perfectly aligned with the truths therein, merely thinking about them leaves me awestruck. To set the stage—or rather the *table*—let us return to the sheep herding expertise of Phillip Keller.

The summer months typically find shepherds leading their flocks to higher elevations.<sup>p162</sup> Lower temperatures provide partial relief from the heat, and the fresh pastures offer abundant sources of food. Toss in a gentle mountain stream for good clean drinking water, and, as a sheep, you've got it made!

Well, almost.

Despite the picturesque scene, not everything is well and good in the neighborhood. The warmth of summer brings with it a certain scourge.

Bugs.

Not the creepy, crawly varieties, but rather the ones with wings. Mosquitoes, gnats, flies—all seemingly joined forces in a common mission: to make sheep miserable. And of all the flying pests that plague sheep, the absolute worst are the nose flies.<sup>¶176</sup>





Now, when you're talking about nose flies troubling sheep, "plague" is *not* too strong a word. Nose flies are detestable little things. They buzz incessantly around the heads of sheep looking for an 'opportunity.' An opportunity, that is, to deposit their eggs on the damp surface of some poor sheep's mucous membranes. ¶<sup>176</sup>

Once deposited, the eggs hatch into nasty little worm-like larvae. Hold on. Stay with me, friend; the fun is just getting started. These larvae crawl *not out*, but *up* the nasal passages and into the sheep's head, where they burrow into the flesh. This is bad news for the sheep because the burrowing causes both extreme irritation and severe inflammation. Keller describes the sheep's reaction to the misery inflicted by nose flies: ¶<sup>176</sup>

"[They] deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts, or brush. They will rub them in soil and thrash around in woody growth. In extreme cases of intense infestation, a sheep may even kill itself in a frenzied endeavor to gain respite from the aggravation. Often, advanced stages of infection from these flies will lead to blindness." <sup>176</sup>

Imagine the fear that arises in a flock when nose flies begin to hover nearby. Some sheep become frantic. Others outright panic. They stomp and run around unpredictably; anything to escape the dreaded flies. Some sheep may run so much, they literally drop dead from exhaustion. Others separate from the flock to hide in the nearest natural shelter. In all the chaos, sheep may avoid eating altogether causing unhealthy weight loss. Mothers may cease to produce milk for their lambs. The whole affair is fraught with abject misery. ¶<sup>176</sup>

A good shepherd won't standby idly while nose flies devastate his flock. A good shepherd knows exactly what to do, and he comes fully prepared to do so. At the first sign of the dreaded nose flies, the shepherd reaches into his scrip <sup>p128</sup> and pulls out a small vial of oil. Now this is no ordinary oil. Nor is it the hog oil used to fend off hole vipers. It's a special concoction, a mixture of olive oil, Sulphur, and some particularly potent spices. <sup>206</sup>

That good shepherd takes some of this special oil and rubs it onto the heads of his sheep. Those pesky flies, you see, can't tolerate the oil. The flies are repelled by the smell. Isn't that ironic? (Flies repulsed by the smell of Sulphur and spices. You just can't make this stuff up.) Ironic or not, it works!

Once the oil is applied, the flock settles down immediately. No more agitation, aggravation, or annoyance from airborne infestation. With the flies repelled, the sheep can once again eat contentedly and lie down to rest peacefully. ¶176

So, now we know why the sheep herder puts oil on the heads of his sheep. But why does David bother to mention it in his song ("YOU anoint my head with oil...")? Why is it important for David to mention YAHWEH anointing his head with oil? There are a couple of reasons; one symbolic and the other literal.



### David's symbolic anointing

Remember: the lyrics of Psalm 23 place David in the position of a sheep. Obviously, David doesn't mysteriously morph into a woolly ovine. The reference is merely symbolic, it's a metaphor. With this in mind, let's have another look those pesky nose flies. Might they too serve as a symbol?

You bet they do.

The *King James Bible* lists 32 different labels and names for the enemy of GOD (devil, deceiver, etc.). <sup>225</sup> In his hatred for GOD, the devil does anything he can to cause misery, heartache, and worse. To that end, the devil blinds non-Believers to the truth of the Gospel. [Acts 26:18](#) Moreover, he does everything in his power to render Believers ineffective in their faith.

Man is sinful by nature. [Mark 7:21](#) This sinful nature is innate. We're born with it; nothin' we can do about it. Faith in CHRIST rescues us from the penalty of our sin. Nevertheless, we remain imperfect, and inevitably mess up and sin again. [John 1:8-10](#) The enemy attacks us by using our own sinful tendencies against us.

The devil's strategy to trip us up can start either with our desires or with our thoughts. The two are closely related. At times, he puts thoughts in our mind, which feed on sinful desires we already have. Other times he might do the opposite by forming thoughts in our mind that, if we dwell upon them, hatch into sinful desires. ¶<sup>226</sup> Consider this example:

During [the last] supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon*, to betray Him [...] [John 13:2](#)

We know that Judas is a thief (taking money from the disciple's treasury). [John 12:6](#) Moreover, he lies about being concerned for the poor. In short, Judas is a lying, greedy thief. Clearly, he isn't genuinely interested in following JESUS. His mind and heart are occupied with his own self-interests. All the devil has to do is intensify and direct Judas's own sinfulness. ¶<sup>226</sup>

The very same thing is true of you and me. The devil attacks us in our mind. If he manages to get traction there, he can "influence our emotions, decisions, and ultimately our actions." <sup>227</sup>

Imagine ... the devil hovering around our heads, looking for an opportunity to deposit sinful thoughts, where they hatch and creep and crawl and burrow, inflaming us, causing pain, confusion, self-destructive behaviors, and perhaps worst of all—causing us to separate from our Good Shepherd.

Very much like those pesky nose flies attacking sheep.

It's a powerful metaphor is it not?

Hold on. It gets even better.

Do you remember reading how the *King James Bible* has 32 different names for the devil? Well one of those names is Beelzebul, [Luke 11:15](#) which is a linguistic variation of Baal-zebul. [2 Kings 1](#), 228

Care to guess the meaning of Baal-zebul?

Wait for it ... wait for it ... wait for it ... “Lord of the flies!”

Baal-zebul, the devil, the one who torments us by laying the eggs of sinful thoughts into our head, is referred to as “Lord of the Flies.” 227

You can’t make this stuff up.

Only by the grace and the power of the HOLY SPIRIT can we overcome our sinfulness. [Philippians 2:5](#) tells us, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” In keeping with the metaphors of sheep and flies, one insightful blogger writes,

“We need to learn to think like Jesus—to see things as He did. That’s only possible when we allow the Holy Spirit to anoint our minds with His oil. [This] is not something that happens overnight. It’s a daily process. Just as a shepherd regularly anoints his sheep, we need that anointing constantly. Every day, when you wake up, ask the Holy Spirit to protect your mind. Don’t let the enemy’s flies get into your head.” 227

Disappointments, worries, fears—it’s easy to get overwhelmed with the negative stuff of life. When we submit our mind to the HOLY SPIRIT anxieties give way to peace; fears give way to joy; disappointments give way to hope and optimism. The storms dissipate. The flies continue to buzz, they have a hard time landing. The HOLY SPIRIT doesn’t merely protect us. He also strengthens us. He makes us to lie down contentedly in luscious green pastures. 1227

Did you know that in the *Bible*, the HOLY SPIRIT is often represented by oil? [Isaiah 61:1](#) Do you see the sheer genius of Psalm 23? Clearly, David is a brilliant musician, however his inspiration comes from the Shepherd. The same Shepherd who anoints David’s head with oil in verse 5.

Let us run to the Shepherd so he can anoint us too.

On the head.

With the oil of the HOLY SPIRIT.

Sometimes, my mind is like a web browser: 19 tabs are open, 3 of them are frozen, one of them displays a virus warning, and I have absolutely no idea where the music is coming from.



### David's literal anointing

The first time David is anointed as king of Israel, he's still a young lad tending his father's sheep. GOD sends Samuel to anoint David as the future king. <sup>y</sup> He anoints David's head with oil poured from a horn. [1 Samuel 16:13](#) We know he pours it on David's head, because that's how he anoints Saul back when GOD chose Saul to be the first king. [1 Samuel 9:15-17, 10:1](#)

Sometimes, what *isn't* said carries as much meaning as what *is* said. Sometimes, what isn't said, carries even *more* meaning. Samuel's anointing of David is a prime example.

The next page includes a screenshot of the passage in which Samuel anoints David. It's from the 1995 translation of the *New American Standard Bible* as displayed on BibleGateway.com. For the purposes of our discussion, just about any translation will do.

What follows is from the brilliant imagination of Pastor Jeremy Fisher of Community Life Church (c|Life), Northeast Texas. I was unable to locate Fisher's sermon as a primary source. A close friend saw the sermon personally and recounted it to me.

### David Anointed

12 So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the

Verse 13 tells us after David's anointing, <sup>(1)</sup> The HOLY SPIRIT came upon David, and <sup>(2)</sup> Samuel left. What happens next? Hint: **not** verse 14! See that space between verses 13 and 14? **That's** what happens next!

And what do you think took place during that space of time? David went back to tending his father's flock that's what. Only this time he's different. The HOLY SPIRIT is "on" him. Verse 13 specifically tells us, "[...] from that day forward." The HOLY SPIRIT never leaves David! He's back in the field; just him and his sheep and the HOLY SPIRIT.

Under the influence of the HOLY SPIRIT, David returns to caring for the sheep. He leads them to green pastures and to still waters. Can't you just see 'im picking up rocks and using his sling to skip 'em out over the water? Can't you picture him relaxing in the cool of the evening playing his flute?

And the whole time, the HOLY SPIRIT is "on" the young shepherd in a "mighty" way, training him for his life's mission. David is learning how to lead the nation of GOD's people with the same care and concern he has for his sheep. He is learning to slay giants by slinging rocks. He is learning to compose music and to write lyrics, culminating with Psalm 23. So, what happens between verses 13 and 14? David learns to be a leader, a warrior, and a poet. All in the service of the LORD.

And all because David was anointed with the HOLY SPIRIT.

Samuel anoints David by pouring oil on the lad's head. Understand though, this is merely an outward expression, a ceremony for the benefit of witnesses. The actual anointing takes place when the HOLY SPIRIT comes upon David. So, what does it mean to be anointed by the SPIRIT OF GOD? It means the HOLY SPIRIT empowers you to carry out the mission GOD has set before you. ¶<sup>229</sup>

When one accepts the truth of the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, they are, at that moment, transformed. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) One aspect of this transformation is being anointed with the HOLY SPIRIT. [1 John 2:27, John 14:26, John 16:13](#) GOD has a plan for your life. The anointing of the HOLY SPIRIT is there to enable you to accomplish this plan.

Of course, there's more to it than that. GOD has huge plans for David's life, but did David have any specific insight into those plans at the time of his anointing? We can't know for certain, but I have my doubts. So, what's all this stuff about anointing mean for you and me?

1. Know for sure that you're in right standing with GOD. If you haven't already done so, accept the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST as truth (he lived a sinless life, he died to pay the cost of your sin, he was buried, and on the third day, GOD raised him from the dead).
2. Know that the HOLY SPIRIT resides within you. *"Now, He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge."* [2 Corinthians 1:21-22](#)
3. Know that as a child of GOD (i.e., one of his sheep), your purpose is to glorify GOD. [Isaiah 43:7](#) He is our CREATOR, so he gets to decide our purpose. He made that decision even before creation. We are here to glorify him.
4. Know that even though we share the same purpose, the way we go about it, can vary wildly. The method a person uses to glorify GOD is their 'calling.'

Some people have callings which are more “traditional” types of ministries—preaching, healing, music, and evangelism, just to name a few. My personal calling is teaching, primarily through writing. Even my earlier books—which focus on people skills—include explicit verbiage glorifying our CREATOR.

**Author’s note:** It's important to know your calling, and it isn't necessarily obvious how to discover it. I can't tell you there's a single surefire strategy to determine your calling. What I can do is share some useful ideas that might very well help you to uncover your personal calling. Regretfully, there isn't space to include them here. Interested readers are invited to [email me](#). Tell me you want to uncover your calling and ask for a copy the “Lesson of the Forest Turkey.” I'll send a complimentary copy, no strings attached.

So, you're reconciled with YAHWEH, and you've been anointed with the HOLY SPIRIT. Now what? Two suggestions:

1. Ask GOD to lead you. I like to pray through Proverbs 3:5-6:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
And do not lean on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He will make your paths straight. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#)

Don't merely repeat it. Study it, understand all of it, meditate upon it. Then pray. Ask GOD to help you acknowledge him in all your ways. Throughout the day. The *Bible* contains many verses like this one. Do an online search for “verses GOD directing my path.” Make a list of the ones that resonate with you. Read the list *out loud* daily.

2. Learn to hear and recognize GOD's voice. Then simply have a conversation with him about your calling, your purpose, how to proceed, etc. Hearing GOD's voice is a subject all to itself. *Critters for Christ* vol. 3 explains how. Download a complimentary copy from [AhaUniversity.com](#).



David has upon him a mighty anointing of the HOLY SPIRIT. As a Believer—as a member of the Great Shepherd’s flock—you are anointed by the very same SPIRIT. The question is: Are you making use of that anointing? The SPIRIT OF GOD is not to be wasted you know. Furthermore, it’s never too late to begin in earnest.

He is our Good Shepherd. We are his sheep.

He anoints our head with oil.

Please sir, may I have another?

—**Oliver Twist**



## 23:5d My cup overflows.

The meaning of this line is generally agreed upon and we’ll get to it soon enough. Before we discuss its meaning though, let us peek into the context of the phrase because the backstory of scriptures always adds richer, deeper meaning to the text.

If you poke around online, you’ll find multiple opinions regarding the context of the phrase, “My cup overflows.” Many of them are variations of a suggestion, none of which cite primary sources. In a court of law, they would be considered “hearsay.” And while they make a good story, I’m not so sure they’re based entirely on fact. After much digging, I believe I uncovered the genuine context of the line, “My cup overflows.”

My research led me to an 1840 book by a Dr. Samuel Burder, titled *Oriental Customs*. It’s a collection of firsthand observations made by credible sources who traveled Asia and the Middle East. Burder comments upon these observations, by <sup>(1)</sup> describing their respective cultural contexts, and <sup>(2)</sup> applying them to related *Bible* texts. What I found in Burder’s book is short and simple, but it’s absolutely beautiful when applied to the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm.

First of all, note that when we examine the sentence structure, we see that “My cup overflows” is not a separate sentence at all. Check out verse 5 in its entirety:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup overflows. [Psalm 23:5](#)



The placement of the period tells us the overflowing cup and the anointing of the head are part of the same sentence. The cup and the anointing are in some way related to each other. Turns out, they both are customs of hospitality. As mentioned previously, visitors are highly esteemed in Middle Eastern cultures. <sup>p185</sup> Even random travelers are met with tremendous generosity.

Imagine you live in a large tent a few miles from the nearest town. You have just returned to camp with your modest flock of sheep. A stranger approaches your dwelling. He’s sweaty and dusty from walking a great distance in the heat. *Excellent*, you think, *a guest sent by GOD!* Bound by culture and tradition, you seat the stranger in the shade of your tent. After ensuring his comfort, you dart into the inner partition of your tent. You return in a flash, with an item in each hand: a small jar and a container of your best wine.

You take the small jar, and pour from it a generous measure of oil, expensive spikenard oil. You anoint your guest with the oil. <sup>230</sup> Spikenard oil (aka *pure nard*) is what Mary uses to clean Jesus’s feet in [John 12:3](#). It is known for its potent fragrance. <sup>231</sup> The anointing demonstrates love and respect. <sup>230</sup> (And dare I suggest it also masks the odor of the sweaty guest?)

Next, you pass a drinking cup to your guest, and pour wine into it. And pour some more. And then more. And you keep pouring until the cup overflows with the much-needed, thirst-quenching liquid. <sup>230</sup> By overflowing the cup, you are, in essence, telling the visitor, “*As long as you remain here as my guest, you shall have an abundance of everything.*” <sup>230</sup>

While we can't know for certain whether Burder's description explains David's reference to the overflowing cup, the circumstantial evidence is compelling:

**Longstanding tradition.** The etiquette of hospitality in Middle Eastern cultures has origins dating back for centuries, easily back to the time of David.<sup>230</sup>

**Combination of gestures.** Burder's description includes both anointing with oil and the overflowing of a cup. This is the same combination David describes in verse 5.

**Generosity.** Burder's description depicts tremendous generosity on the part of the host. The Shepherd in David's psalm is none other than the LORD himself. His lavish generosity towards us is well-established.

**Nothing is asked of the guest.** The host described by Burder asks nothing of his guest. Our Shepherd cares for his sheep out of love and compassion, not because he expects the sheep to compensate him.

**Did you know?** Despite fundamental differences in their respective beliefs, Jewish and Arabic cultures share striking similarities regarding rules of hospitality. Within the Arabic Bedouin culture, guests are served three cups of coffee in sequence. Each serving has a specific name and meaning.<sup>232</sup>

**Pessimist:** "The cup is half empty."

**Optimist:** "The cup is half full."

**Realist:** "The cup is the wrong size."

**Child of God:** "My cup runneth over."

Today is one of those days where even my coffee needs a coffee!



Now that we have the context of “My cup overflows,” what does it actually mean? The cup symbolizes a multitude of ideas. The following list summarizes some of the various symbols. The summary is based on a teaching by Dr. Don Jennings.<sup>233</sup>

The cup reveals the **generosity** of the Shepherd. He offers to lead us, care for us, and to provide for us. He even went so far as to sacrifice his only begotten SON for us. His abundantly generous nature is on full display for all who seek.

The cup reveals the **more-than-sufficient** sacrifice of the Shepherd. He needs nothing from his creation.<sup>234</sup> His is independent, self-sustaining, and self-evident.<sup>234</sup> Recall how he told Moses to refer to him: I AM. He is the ALPHA AND THE OMEGA; the beginning and the end. There is no other God before Him, and we need none other but him. We can rely on him for everything we need to navigate life.

To the Shepherd’s sheep (me and you), the cup represents **refreshment**. We have an innate thirst that can only be quenched with spiritual refreshment. As his sheep, we “thirst after righteousness.” [Matthew 5:6](#) Only one source of spiritual water provides the refreshment we crave. It’s the one about which Paul writes, “[...] and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was CHRIST.” [1 Corinthians 10:4](#) In keeping with the theme of refreshing spiritual water, consider these:<sup>1233</sup>

- The last guarantee in the *Bible*: “[...] I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.” [Revelation 21:6](#)
- The last invitation in the *Bible*: “[...] let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes to take the water of life without cost.” [Revelation 22:17](#)

Our Good Shepherd always has a full cup for his sheep!  
—Dr. J. Don Jennings

To the Shepherd's sheep, the cup also represents **rejoicing**.

<sup>233</sup> In Middle Eastern etiquette of hospitality, an overflowing cup means, *"As long as you remain here as my guest, you shall have an abundance of everything."* "As long as you remain" denotes a duration without end. If we think of this as a symbol of eternity, we recognize the profound implication of David's iconic line, "My cup overflows."

Think back now to YESHUA's words during the last supper and the overflowing cup takes on even more meaning:

"[...] when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" [Matthew 26:27-29](#)

JESUS is telling the disciples that his blood is going to be shed on their behalf (and yours and mine too!). Doing so will make it possible for them (and us) to be with him in eternity. Now, *that's* an overflowing cup! Let all the sheep rejoice!

The  
tomb is  
forever  
empty.

My cup  
is  
forever  
full.



## 23:6 <sup>a</sup> Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, <sup>b</sup> and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

There aren't a lot of surprises in this verse. You get the basic idea from reading it at face value. A few noteworthy comments include...

- **Surely.** Whatever follows is irrefutable and certain.
- **goodness and mercy.** Charles Spurgeon differentiates these succinctly when he writes, "Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins." <sup>235</sup>
- **will.** Here, we see a shift in the tense of David's words. He now refers to the future along with the present ("*is* my Shepherd" vs "*will* follow").
- **follow.** An alternative translation of "follow" is "to pursue" or "to chase." <sup>23</sup>
- **all the days of my life.** This refers to David's natural life.

Verse 6a can be paraphrased like this: "Because you, LORD, are good, pleasing, and valuable, and because you love me so faithfully, I am certain you will be with me all my life." <sup>237</sup>

The second half of the verse, 6<sup>b</sup>, is interesting because there's more to it than meets the eye. Charles Spurgeon offers a beautiful explanation.

Spurgeon begins by reminding us of another verse: "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever." [John 8:35](#) It's important to understand these, so let's break it down. In the first-century Roman world, slaves were property and as such, they "had no permanent place in a household." <sup>238</sup> Their positions were temporary and insecure. <sup>238</sup> In contrast, Jewish laws governing inheritance and family matters hold sons in high regard. A Jewish son—especially the eldest son—has a secure and lasting position within the household. <sup>238</sup>

Paul tells us how Believers in CHRIST are no longer slaves but sons. This makes us spiritual heirs to the LORD. [Galatians 4:7](#) So, the verse in John emphasizes the security and permanence we have as children of GOD. <sup>239</sup>

In summary, Believers (members of the Shepherd’s flock), have the rights and benefits of divine inheritance. With this thought in mind, let’s unveil Spurgeon’s analysis on verse 6<sup>b</sup>. Paraphrasing from the perspective of Believers:

As long as we walk this Earth, we will be at home with the one true GOD. The entire world is his house to us. When we ascend into the upper chamber (i.e., as we pass and move on to Heaven), the company we keep will not change, nor shall the houses in which we live. We will simply ‘relocate’ to the upper story of the house of the LORD forever. <sup>¶1235</sup>

Spurgeon’s point is that, as heirs to CHRIST, we already have full rights to our mansions in Heaven. Our position is secure and permanent.

Forever.

And there you have it: Psalm 23, unpacked. Only six verses. Six verses jam-packed with life-changing truths. Here’s a quick recap of the themes found within it: <sup>240</sup>

Text	Theme
I shall not want	Provision
He makes me lie down	Rest
He leads me to still waters	Guidance
He restores my soul	Restoration
I will fear no evil, for you are with me	Protection
Your rod and your staff comfort me	Correction
You anoint my head with oil	Prevention
My cup overflows	Abundance



Given all we’ve learned, I think we can agree the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm deserves its number 1 spot on the “Top 7 Heavenly Countdown.”

My Shepherd fulfills my needs. Materialism offers nothing to me. I want only that which the Shepherd wants for me. My access to him is free and available; no tickets to purchase; no stairways to climb; no zeppelins to ride. Just tune to his voice and let him lead.

My Shepherd deserves all glory and praise. Me jammin' to a "gospel vibe," ain't gonna do it. The true Gospel is where it's at. And because of that Gospel, my "Hallelujah," is one of genuine worship.

I can do all things through my Shepherd who strengthens me. [Philippians 4:13](#) But, I can do nothing without him. My Shepherd alone, knows exactly what I'd be without him—one messed up sheep, wandering aimlessly astray; that's what'd I be.

My Shepherd is the source of life. Indeed, it is he who breathes the breath of life into Adam. He knows when I shall draw my last breath. He is omniscient and omnipresent. Nothing escapes him, not the straying lamb, nor the falling sparrow. [Matthew 10:29-31](#) Every breath I take, he is watching me, protecting me, and providing for me.

The tomb is empty! My Shepherd is no longer in it! he is alive and living at the right hand of GOD. [Romans 8:38](#) We too shall live forever, but despite the wishes of a certain songwriter, it won't be in the absence of authority. My Shepherd is the final authority, and I couldn't be happier about it. [Psalms 103:19](#)

My Shepherd does more than merely take care of me. He *loves* me. He always will because he never changes. [Hebrews 13:8](#) I can almost hear him singing so now. Listen! Do you hear it? Shhhh, this is my favorite part: "...*Will forever love you. I forever, 'ever love you.*"

My Shepherd leads me down the correct path. Along the way, I encounter green pastures, still waters, and at times, scary dark shadows. But, regardless of the situation, I can always count on my Shepherd.

The LORD is my Shepherd.





## Sheep: basic, plain, ordinary.

## The Wrap-up

A lot like us. The truth is you and I are also pretty basic creatures. I mean how fancy can we be if we come from dust, and depend on blood composed of 70% saltwater? <sup>242</sup>, [Genesis 2:7](#)

Sheep are utterly defenseless. They have no fangs, horns, or claws with which to fight. They can't dig holes, climb trees, or escape via water. They can't screech, howl, or bellow a frightful growl. About the only thing they can do is run from trouble, but even that they can't do very quickly.

In many ways, we too are defenseless. Some folks have fangs, but the only venom they inject is of the verbal variety. We can dig, but not without a shovel. Some of us do growl ferociously, more likely the result of a caffeine deficiency than a wolf attack. We can run, but all too often, we run *toward* trouble rather than away from it.

Sheep may lack in defense, but they surely have a potent offense; a potentially offensive *smell*, that is. Fleece matted with dirt, debris, dung—they have a powerfully offensive odor, indeed. As do we. We so often run toward sin, rather than away from it. To the LORD's nostrils, the stench of death (i.e., sin) is a stark contrast to the aroma of righteousness. [2 Corinthians 2:14-15](#) Sin stinks, and unredeemed sinners have upon them the stench that comes with it.

At least sheep *do* have superb vision. Well, ... sort of. They have a wide field of view. So, when it comes to spotting trouble behind them, they excel. This perspective comes at a cost though; their vision isn't so keen when they look at things before them. Forward focus, they lack.

Do we not also share this same trait with the sheep? Too much of the time we spend with our head turned looking back over our shoulder. We might be longing for times gone by or lamenting those times ever occurred. Either way it distracts our vision from the proper direction.



This New Year's Eve, I'm gonna stay up well past midnight. Not to welcome the new year, but to make sure this one is over.

Sheep *do* have a stellar sense of hearing. Every clang or clatter, every unexpected noise, anything unfamiliar to their sensitive ears, sets off the sheep's internal alarm bell. They can't help it. It's simply a natural reaction to stress-related hormones.

Here too, we share traits with sheep. All too often we assume the worst about a thing. We hear a negative rumor and are all too willing to take it as ominous fact. We let negative thoughts fester into doubt, distress, or depression. The more we listen to those worrisome thoughts, the worse the situation seems to be. There are two aspects to our sense of hearing: external (what we hear with our ears) and internal (what we 'hear' in the form of thoughts and internal dialog). Both affect our perspective *and* both affect our sense of wellbeing.

Sheep are, by nature, followers. They flock together, typically very closely. Afterall, there is safety in numbers, and when you have no natural defense, all help is welcome.

Here again, people demonstrate their similarities to sheep. It is a well-established fact that most people follow the crowd.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, we follow our own selfish desires. Then to make matters even *worse*, we follow temptations into the welcoming arms of sin. Our tendencies to follow the wrong things, lead only to sin, shame, and sorrow.

Hair styles aside, people are very much like sheep. It's not a coincidence, you know. Here's something else sheep and people have in common: they're both creations of the same Designer. Design implies

purpose. Thus, there must be a link between sheep and people. And there is. Now, I won't pretend to know the mind of our CREATOR. I am, however, comfortable declaring that YAHWEH created sheep knowing he would use them to illustrate at least these two things: <sup>(1)</sup> man's predicament regarding his sin, and <sup>(2)</sup> YAHWEH's solution to that very predicament.

The LORD knows prior to creation, that man will sin. Initially, Adam and Eve enjoy a perfect relationship with YAHWEH. But the duo's sin changes that. Sin breaks the relationship. Man is unable to restore the relationship. The wages of sin is death, man is **without defense**. He is utterly incapable of defending himself. With sin, comes the **odor thereof**, a stench in the nostrils of the betrayed CREATOR. Adam and Eve realize they have disturbed their relationship with GOD. Imagine how they replay over and over in their minds their fateful choice. But **looking back** won't reconcile their severed relationship. If only they hadn't **followed the temptation** to challenge YAHWEH. Imagine the shame they feel.

But YAHWEH is as merciful as he is mighty. He knows of Adam's future choice to sin even before breathing life into the man. YAHWEH creates man for fellowship, but he knows beforehand that once man sins, fellowship will no longer be possible. So, with divine foresight, YAHWEH initiates a plan. Not merely *a* plan, but a plan so audacious, so unexpected, so counterintuitive, it can come only from the mind of the CREATOR himself. And the central figure of this plan? A sheep; a lamb to be specific.

Imagine that.

Adam and Eve do not meet *the* Lamb, but they do meet his representatives because after they sin, YAHWEH clothes them in the skin of sacrificed lambs. As they watch the first sacrifice in horror, they receive an object lesson regarding the true cost of sin. They learn the necessity of sacrifice in order to pay for sin. But lambs are of limited effectiveness, so sacrifice must be repeated. Sheep are raised to fulfil the need. Adam

and Eve live long lives, but they pass without meeting *the* Lamb this side of eternity.

Many years later, Abraham displays remarkable faith and obedience. YAHWEH tells the man his descendants will be too numerous to count. [Genesis 15:1-5](#) YAHWEH goes on to tell Abraham how all nations are going to be blessed through his descendants. [Genesis 18:17-18](#) This, of course, is a prophecy regarding the coming SAVIOR, aka YESHUA, aka the Lamb.

Abraham is so sure of the prophecy, he believes that even when he obeys YAHWEH's instruction to sacrifice Isaac, YAHWEH will resurrect Isaac so the prophecy can be fulfilled. YAHWEH, of course, is against human sacrifice, so he intervenes thus sparing Isaac's life. Instead, YAHWEH provides a sheep for sacrifice in the form of the tangled ram.

And after all the drama of the near sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham stills looks to the future for the Lamb of GOD. This is evident in the name Abraham assigns to the location: JEHOVAH-JIREH, meaning "The Lord Will Provide." This is recorded by Moses over 400 years *after* Abraham's death.

Moses continues to use future tense, indicating that at the time of Moses, the Israelites were still anticipating the appearance of the Lamb. Fast forward to the time of Passover. The Lamb still has not yet appeared, but YAHWEH is dropping hints like crazy. YAHWEH issues extraordinarily specific instructions regarding the first Passover.

The condition of the lamb, what time of day to slay the lamb, how to mark the door posts with blood from the lamb, how to prepare the meal of lamb, how to dress while eating the lamb, even what emotions to experience as they eat the lamb—so many instructions, so many details, and every one of them a symbol related to *the* Lamb, the Lamb of GOD.

And still the Lamb has not appeared.

And then.

And then, finally, a young woman is chosen to give birth to YESHUA. Her name is Mary. While the birth is natural, her pregnancy is *not*. Out of necessity, the pregnancy is *supernatural*.

Sin is passed through fathers. If YESHUA's father is human, YESHUA will be tainted by sin. The Lamb of GOD, however, must be without blemish, perfect in every way, which means *without* sin. For this reason, Mary is impregnated supernaturally by the HOLY SPIRIT. This allows YESHUA to be born as a man, yet completely without sin. Exactly as prophesied.

Thirty years after YESHUA's birth, John the Baptist reveals him publicly as the Lamb of GOD. For three years the Lamb performs miracles as proof of his divine nature. Some people believe him. Some do not.

Eventually, he is crucified on the cross. He goes voluntarily, with no objection, as gentle and innocent as a lamb being led to its slaughter. He is buried for three days after which, GOD raises him from the dead. Hundreds of detailed, specific prophecies fulfilled to the letter, hundreds of historical documents, hundreds of eyewitnesses, an untold number of miracles—there are many reasons to believe.

From the first page to the last, the entire *Bible* is a coordinated, cohesive, cogent revelation of the Lamb, the Lamb who was, who is, and who will be forevermore.

The Lamb is my LORD and my SAVIOR.

He is my protector. I need no other defense. He paid the debt for my sin. I am by no means perfect; I still sin, but I've been redeemed so I no longer give off the stench thereof. He leads me. To the degree I follow him, I avoid running headlong into the welcoming arms of sin.

I look forward to my time with the Lamb, both in this life and in the next. With my eyes fixed on him, I no longer look back with regret.

I know him and I hear his voice. He is my Shepherd.

I am a sheep. A dirty, near-sighted, helpless, defenseless creature, prone to fear, anxiety, drowning, and straying from the appointed path. But I have a Shepherd. A Shepherd who cares for me, protects me, nurtures me, loves me, leads me, and when necessary, rescues me.

My Shepherd is the Lamb. The one who created sheep, is the Shepherd, the same Shepherd who became the Lamb. The Shepherd put on sheep's clothing and took our place.

The Shepherd rescued his flock by himself becoming a Lamb. How wonderfully elegant is his plan!

And *that's* what's up with all the sheep.

What a beautiful expression of limitless love.



Behold, the Lamb of GOD,  
who takes away the sin of the world.  
— John 1:29

## Appendix 1 The Passover Lamb was Unblemished <sup>100</sup>

Peter, having firsthand knowledge of JESUS, said of him: “but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood of Christ.*” [1 Peter 1:19](#) Peter goes on to write, “who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats [...]” [1 Peter 2:22-23](#) The word translated as “unblemished” means morally unblameable.

Jewish leaders scrutinize JESUS continuously. They remain on the lookout for him to slip up in his teachings, especially the times when he speaks in a synagogue or the Temple. High-ranking religious leaders subject him to adversarial interrogations. Again, their purpose is to catch him making a mistake for which they can discredit him. [Luke 11:53-54](#) At one point, JESUS challenges them with, “Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe me?” [John 8:46](#) None of his detractors are able find fault with JESUS or his teachings.

Judas, the one who betrayed JESUS, declares JESUS as innocent. [Matthew 27:3-4](#)

Pilate declares JESUS as innocent. [Matthew 27:24](#)

Pilate’s wife declares JESUS as innocent. [Matthew 27:19](#)

One of the Roman soldiers present at the crucifixion declares that JESUS is who he claims to be, the SON OF GOD: [Mark 15:39](#)

One of the two criminals crucified beside JESUS, recognizes JESUS’s innocence. [Luke 23:40-41](#)

GOD himself expresses his approval of JESUS on two different occasions. [Matthew 3:17, 12:18](#)

**Did you know?** GOD takes a rib from Adam and from it he creates Eve (his bride). [Genesis 2:21-22](#) JESUS’s side was pierced between the ribs, and his blood makes possible the creation of the Church (those believing in him for salvation). The Church is referred to as the “bride of Christ.” [Revelation 21:9](#)

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<sup>a</sup>[https://youtu.be/Wh1VU-\\_OF98](https://youtu.be/Wh1VU-_OF98)

<sup>b</sup><https://www.chick.com/products/tract?stk=1&ue=d>

<sup>c</sup> Journaling sessions are how I talk to and hear from the LORD. See [Critters for Christ vol. 3](#) for an explanation of how you can do the same.

<sup>d</sup> While GOD (the FATHER), JESUS, and the HOLY SPIRIT are distinct persons, collectively, they are the same singular GOD. While the Bible is plain on this point, it stops short of explaining it in terms we can fully understand given our limited capacity to understand.

<sup>e</sup> “Imprinting is when a lamb forms an intensely strong bond with the animals it interacts with as a newborn. Through the bond, the lamb will have a strong trust and attachment to this animal or human.” <sup>9</sup>

<sup>f</sup> The Isaiah prophecy says his name will be Immanuel (not JESUS). Isaiah was referring to his character, not the child’s literal name. This is evidenced in subsequent writing by Isaiah. Excellent explanation [here](#). <sup>38</sup>

<sup>g</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaRpeMT1tjQ>

<sup>h</sup> In Jewish thought, a day begins at sunset rather than sunrise. So, in this scenario, what we think of as Thursday night, is early day Friday, or Passover. <sup>43, 44</sup> There are those who believe Jesus was crucified on Thursday rather than Friday. The chapter on Passover explains why Friday is indeed the day of crucifixion.

<sup>i</sup> This is a documented medical condition known as hematidrosis. It can result from extreme distress such as that brought on by “facing torture.” <sup>46</sup>

<sup>j</sup> The first time a sheep is sheared, the sheep might object by kicking its feet, squirming, and/or urinating. The same sheep may squirm some during its second shearing. By its third shearing the sheep remains as relaxed as a “rag doll.” <sup>¶244</sup>

<sup>k</sup> Abram is 75 years old when God calls him to leave his homeland. [Genesis 12:4](#) He is 86 when Ishmael is born, which is prior to the rightful heir, Isaac. The episode regarding the stars occurred sometime in between. [Genesis 17:1-2](#)


<sup>l</sup> There are several clues as to Isaac’s age at the time of this episode. Curious readers might enjoy [this article](#) (source 69).

<sup>m</sup> Abraham has another son, Ismael, born prior to Isaac. However, while “[...] Ishmael was his son, he was a son by his maid, by his concubine, and not by his wife; Isaac was his only legitimate son, his only son by his lawful wife Sarah; the only son of the promise [...]” <sup>72</sup>

<sup>n</sup> Most translations of [Genesis 22:11](#) refer to “the angel of the LORD,” however, we can be certain that it is indeed GOD himself. This is made clear in [the next verse](#) when the speaker refers to himself in first-person. Notice also, the use of the definite article in verse 11. It’s not merely *an* angel, but rather *the* angel. We may infer that God’s appearance takes the form of a man, but we do not know this for certain.

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<sup>o</sup> Jesus fulfills [Genesis 12:3](#). Genealogy from Abraham to Jesus is documented in [Matthew 1:1-7](#).

<sup>p</sup> While the *Bible* does not explicitly specify a precise location of Isaac's near sacrifice, it is reasonable to infer the site is on Mount Moriah. 

<sup>q</sup> The thicket is often described as having thorns. However, I was unable to find a credible source to corroborate the inclusion of thorns. If you know of one, please forward it.

<sup>r</sup> Yeah, yeah, I know. These aren't the original lyrics. And furthermore, why is "Am" capitalized? It's a nod to the future when Moses asks God, "Who shall I say sent me?" God answers with, "I AM WHO I AM." Read on, my friend. I write as inspired, and when he inspires, it's always with specific intent. ☺

<sup>s</sup> Despite the explicit nature of [Exodus 12:40](#), due to another, less explicit, passage in Exodus 6:16-20, there is some disagreement as to how long the Israelites lived under Egyptian oppression. Many Jewish scholars calculate the duration as 215 years. I lean to the argument for 430 years. Curious readers are encouraged to learn more here <https://bible.ca/manuscripts/Bible-Chronology-variants-theological-interpretation-Old-Testament-Book-of-Exodus-12-40-long-short-sojourn-430-or-215-years-Israel-Egyptian-slavery-textual.htm>

<sup>t</sup> Some teach the 'selection' of Jesus as the Passover Lamb is symbolized by the people of Jerusalem greeting him with cries of "Hosanna!" ("please save us!") when he enters the city. However, that takes place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. God's instruction to Moses is to select the Passover lamb on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. I believe Jesus is 'selected' on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan when the priests—enraged by Jesus's cleansing of the temple—begin to plot his execution. This aligns with accounts in Luke and Mark. It also places both the crucifixion and the slaying of Passover lambs on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. It is further corroborated by the explanation in sources 99 and 115. Either way, we are talking about a parallel between the Old Testament and the New. As such, the point is not critical to the Gospel of Jesus CHRIST, who is unequivocally the Passover Lamb. If you know of another way to reconcile the 10<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan with the selection and crucifixion of Jesus, as God's Passover Lamb, I urge to pass it along.

<sup>u</sup> I'm not one to be dogmatic as to whether the weekly day of rest should be Saturday or Sunday. This sentence reflects the Jewish perspective, which fits the context of the paragraph.

<sup>v</sup> Being composed of three words, it helps us to precisely identify the same usage elsewhere in the Bible.

<sup>w</sup> This is for the current year of 2024, but it provides a reasonable point of reference.

<sup>x</sup> Paraphrased to avoid copyright infringement

<sup>y</sup> David is, in fact, anointed as king three different times prior to taking his seat on the throne. The anointing performed by Samuel is the first. For a wonderful summary, including scripture references, visit <https://www.jimandjanean.com/home/2023/4/18/davids-three-anointings>.