

# Psalm 23 - THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Jeraias 40, 11.

# PSALM 23 -- THE GOOD SHEPHERD

## 1A. INTRODUCTION

### 1b. The Beauty of the Psalm:

J. J. Perowne captures the beautiful essence of Psalm 23:

This Psalm breathes throughout a spirit of the calmest and most assured trust in God: it speaks of a peace so deep, a serenity so profound, that even the thought of the shadow of death cannot trouble it. Perhaps there is no Psalm in which the absence of all doubt, misgiving, fear, anxiety, is so remarkable; and certainly no image could have been devised more beautifully descriptive of rest and safety and trustful happiness, than that of the sheep lying down in the deep, rich meadow grass, beside the living stream, under the care of a tender and watchful shepherd. This feeling of confidence is expressed in three different ways: first, "I cannot (or, shall not) want;" next, "I will fear no evil;" lastly, "I will dwell in the house of Jehovah for ever" (*The Book of Psalms*, Vol I, 1878, 248).

### 2b. The popularity of the Psalm:

\*\*Psalm 23 is the best known of all the Psalms.

\*\*Psalm 23 can be applied by every believer.

\*\*Psalm 23 has brought comfort to untold millions in times of danger, distress or at death.

\*\*Psalm 23 has a message that is simple and yet profound.

\*\*Psalm 23 presents one of the most beautiful pictures of the Savior.

### 3b. The context of Psalm 23:

Psalm 22-24 are splendid examples of sacred Hebrew poetry:

--Psalm 22 represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd.

--Psalm 23 represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Great Shepherd.

--Psalm 24 represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd.

### 4b. The varied references to shepherds:

1c. Pagan kings were referred to as shepherds, e.g. King Hammurabi.

2c. Some pagan gods were spoken of as shepherds.

3c. Isaiah refers to the Messiah as the shepherd (Isa. 40:11).

4c. Jesus Christ claimed the title for Himself (Jn. 10:14).

5c. The New Testament writers used the title for Christ (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4)

## 2A. THE GOOD SHEPHERD: 1-5

### 1b. The shepherd provides for his sheep

1





v. 1-3a The Lord *is* my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.  
<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.

He provides all the necessities.

As David and the believer's shepherd, the Lord provides for His people's spiritual rest and nourishment.

1c. The shepherd provides still waters.

A sheep will not drink from running water.

2c. Christ brings rest to the believer.

Heb. 4:16-17

1 Peter 5:7

Matt. 11:28

A description of the shepherd and his sheep by W. M. Thomson is well worth quoting here. Thomson was a missionary for over 30 years in Palestine, and his description of biblical sites and customs in his famous volume, *The Land and the Book*, is without equal.

*"The Lord is my shepherd."* I notice that some of the flock keep near the shepherd, and follow withersoever he goes without the least hesitation, while others stray about on either side, or loiter far behind; and he often turns round and scolds them in a sharp, stern cry, or sends a stone after them. I saw him lame one just now. Not altogether unlike the good Shepherd. Indeed I never ride over these hills, clothed with flocks, without meditating upon this delightful theme. Our Saviour says that the good shepherd, when he putteth forth his own sheep, goeth before them, and they follow. John 10:4. This is true to the letter. They are so tame and so trained that they follow their keeper with the utmost docility. He leads them forth from the fold, or from their houses in the villages, just where he pleases. As there are many flocks in such a place as this, each one takes a different path, and it is his business to find pasture for them. It is necessary, therefore, that they should be taught to follow, and not to stray away into the unfenced fields of corn which lie so temptingly on either side. Any one that thus wanders is sure to get into trouble. The shepherd calls sharply from time to time to remind them of his presence. They know his voice, and follow on; but, if a stranger call, they stop short, lift their heads in alarm, and, if it is repeated, they turn and flee, because they know not the voice of a stranger. This is not the fanciful costume of a parable, it is simple fact. I have made the experiment repeatedly. The shepherd goes before, not merely to point out the way, but to see that it is practicable and safe. He is armed in order to defend his charge, and in this he is very courageous. Many adventures with wild beasts occur, not unlike that recounted by David (1 Samuel 27:34-36), and in these very mountains; for though there are now no lions here, there are wolves in abundance; and leopards and panthers, exceeding fierce, prowl about the wild wadies. They not unfrequently attack the flock in the very presence of the shepherd, and he must be ready to do battle at a moment's warning. I have listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage

beasts. And when the thief and the robber come (and come they do), the faithful shepherd has often put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case in which he had literally to lay it down in the contest. A poor faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedawin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending. Some sheep always keep near the shepherd, and are his special favorites. Each of them has a name, to which it answers joyfully, and the kind shepherd is ever distributing to such, choice portions which he gathers for that purpose. These are the contented and happy ones. They are in no danger of getting lost or into mischief, nor do wild beasts or thieves come near them. The great body, however, are mere worldlings, intent upon their mere pleasures or selfish interests. They run from bush to bush, searching for variety or delicacies, and only now and then lift their heads to see where the shepherd is, or, rather where the general flock is, lest they get so far away as to occasion a remark in their little community, or rebuke from their keeper. Others, again, are restless and discontented, jumping into everybody's field, climbing into bushes, and even into leaning trees, whence they often fall and break their limbs. These cost the good shepherd incessant trouble. (The quote is cited by C. H. Spurgeon in his *Treasury of David*).

3d. The shepherd restores the soul.  
Literally, he "brings me back," i.e. he brings the sheep back from distress.

"I shall not want" is best rendered, "I do not lack or need anything." God's provisions are adequate in quality and in quantity. The Lord's meets the believer's spiritual needs and in the process gives him the very best. When David speaks of having his soul restored, he rejoices in the fact that the Lord returns him to the proper spiritual state and physical condition by forgiving his sins and renewing his spirit (Psalm 31; 51).

2b. The shepherd guides:

**v. 3b He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.**

He leads in the path of righteousness:

- 1c. The Lord leads safely, whether through the glen (v.2) or the gorge (v. 4), to the correct destination.
- 2c. The Lord leads in the right way because His reputation is at stake. Christ said that He would lose none of His sheep given to Him by His Father (Jn. 6:36).

Isaiah 40:11 (*Isaiah/40/11*)

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,  
In His arm He will gather the lambs  
And carry them in His bosom;  
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.



3b. The shepherd protects:

v. 4 **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

The reason why David does not fear is because the Lord is with him. Here the focus changes from David talking about the Lord to talking directly to the Lord. It shows his confidence in the shepherd.

Although the Lord leads through some difficult places, no evil will come to His sheep.

1c. Traveling through the valley:

Perowne explains that difficult phrase:

Valley, or, rather, “deep cleft,” or “ravine;” horrid with frowning rocks and long, deathly shadows growing deeper and more chilling as the sun sank (*The Book of Psalms*, Vol I, 1878, 565).

Similarly, the Swiss/German commentator Duhm writes, “Because the poet knows himself to be guided safely, he wanders without fear in the ‘dark valley,’ that is, in the deeply cut wadi of the Judean limestone mountains, where the sun cannot penetrate and it is easy to stumble into the abyss” (D. Bernhard Duhm, *Die Psalmen*, 1922, 99, translated by M.K.)

Those of us who have been to Israel can easily picture such a crevice either at En Gedi or in Wadi Quelt.

“The valley of the shadow of death” has often been understood as the experience of death. This is certainly a valid application, but the interpretation necessitates a deep, dark, dangerous declivity.

C. H. Spurgeon in his *Treasury of David* quotes Samuel Lavington:

*“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”*

This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. “Yea, though I walk,” as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly walked with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. They dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not



walking *in* the valley, but *through* the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, we do but sleep to wake in glory (emphasis in the original).

Merrill F. Unger correctly notes the general application of the passage: "The valley of the shadow of death" includes not only the experience or near experience of death (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-53), but any "valley of deep darkness," when God seems to be far away and fear is most likely to appear as a frightful specter. In such exigencies, His presence is guaranteed the believer in order to rout fear" (*Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, 1981, 779).

2c. The defense against danger: Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. David continues the shepherd image by associating God's protection with "a rod and a staff."

1d. The rod:  
The word comes from a verb, "to smite, slay"  
Lev. 27:31—the rod used for counting sheep  
Ez. 20:37—the rod used for chastising Israel.

2d. The staff:  
The word comes from the verb "to lean, support" and was used for support as well as protection (Zech. 8:14; Isa. 36:6).

The *Bible Background Commentary* shows the meaning of these interesting terms.

The rod was a club worn at the belt, while the staff was a walking implement that doubled as a weapon in time of need (1 Sam. 17:35) and guided and controlled the sheep. These were traditional tools of the shepherd, as is shown already in a cylinder seal inscription of the third millennium. (2000, 524).

The Lord our shepherd protects us from danger, clearly indicated in passages such as Col. 3:3 and 1 Peter 5:8.

While Psalm 23 accents the properties of a true shepherd, in John 10 Christ relates the marks of His true sheep:

- 1 They know their shepherd
- 2 They know his voice
- 3 They hear him calling them each by name
- 4 They love him
- 5 They trust him
- 6 They follow him



4b. The shepherd sustains in the midst of enemies:

**v. 5a You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies**

The scene has shifted from the Lord as shepherd and as guide to that of His being a host.

Allen P. Ross highlights the significance of the banquet scene:

According to customs, the honored guest was safe because the host was obliged to protect the guest at all cost. Sitting down to eat and drink in the midst of danger from enemies is a marvelous picture of safety and security. David is saying that God provides food and safety for His people (*A Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1, 2011, 567.)

5b. The shepherd-host honors the believer: **v. 5b You anoint my head with oil**

The anointing of the guest speaks of festivity and joy. David indicates that the Lord is the source of his joy in that He welcomes him, provides food for his needs, grants comfort and refreshment, highlighting the physical provision of the Lord in his life.

6b. The shepherd-host makes our life overflow with abundant blessings:

**5c My cup runs over.**

David explains “my cup is filled to the brim.” An interesting observation is worth citing here in the “sermon notes”:

Another reason for rejoicing lies in the picture of a cup that has been made to overflow. In those days, when a guest was sitting with his host in the evening drinking, the host would often rise and refill the glasses. If the host came and only filled the glass half full, it was the host’s way of saying, “*The evening is over, it is time for you to leave.*” If, however, the host came by and filled you cup full, he was saying, “*I am enjoying your company and I would like for you to stay with me for a while longer.*” Well, when the Lord filled David’s cup, He caused it to overflow. The Lord was saying, “*David, I sure do enjoy your company and I hope you will continue to abide with Me!*” (emphasis in the original).

### **3A. THE SAINT’S RESPONSE: 6**

**v. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

1b. The saint’s assurance:

David is assured that goodness and mercy, literally, God’s “good” and “loyal love” would pursue him vigorously all the days of his life. This is a fitting summary of the Psalm as David is assured, and so is any believer, that God only gives him the very best and keeps His covenant “loyal love” promises forever.

2b. His aspiration:

David desired to be in the house of the Lord forever, literally, “for the length of days.” The title “house of the Lord” refers to any place God revealed Himself and was worshiped, whether a place in the country where the Lord appeared (Gen. 28:17) or the tent of meeting (1 Sam. 1:7). It is a place of fellowship with and worship of the Lord where the faithful could be taught God’s Word. There they would find forgiveness and restoration. There they would learn of His protection, learn of His righteous guidance. They would pray and praise for His protection and provision.

The last phrase literally means “for length of days” meaning as David had opportunity, he would go to the place where God would be worshiped and associate with the worshipers and in effect made this the most beautiful Psalm to be used by worshipers as they worshiped the Lord.

#### 4A. A SUMMARY

Interestingly, the Psalm reflects many of the main titles of Jehovah God. It would be well to give a listing at this point:

1. **Jehovah-Rohi – v. 1 – The LORD My Shepherd** *“The Lord (Jehovah) is my shepherd.”*
2. **Jehovah-Jireh – v. 1 – The LORD Will Provide** *“I shall not want.”*
3. **Jehovah-Shalom – v. 2 – The LORD My Peace** *“He leads me beside still waters.”*
4. **Jehovah-Rophe – v. 3 – The LORD My Healer** *He restores my soul.”*
5. **Jehovah-Tsidkenu – v. 3 – The LORD My Righteousness** *“the paths of righteousness.”*
6. **Jehovah-Shammah – v. 4 – The LORD Is There** *“Thou art with me.”*
7. **Jehovah-Nissi – v. 5 – The LORD Our Banner** *“before me in the presence of my enemies.”*
8. **Jehovah-M’Kaddesh – v. 5 – The LORD My Sanctifier** *“Thou anointest my head with oil.”*
9. **Jehovah-El Elyon – v. 6 – The LORD Most High** *“The house of the LORD forever.”*

<http://theapprovedworkman.blogspot.com/2006/04/psalm-23-lord-is-my-shepherd.html>

A fitting summary of the Psalm is found again by Allen P. Ross “The righteous desire to be in the presence of the Lord, where they will feed on the Word, find spiritual restoration, be guided into

righteousness, be reminded of His protective presence, receive provision from His bounty and be joyfully welcomed by Him” (*A Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 1, 2011, 571)

The Lord’s goodness and guidance, His protection and provision, should motivate us to appreciate our security in Him and maintain our fellowship with Him.







Wadi Qelt,  
9 miles East of  
Jerusalem

The LORD is my Shepherd I lack nothing  
He makes me lie down in great pastures  
He leads me beside quiet waters  
He refreshes my soul  
He guides me along the right paths  
For his name's sake  
Even though I walk through the darkest valley  
I will fear no evil for you are with me  
Your rod & staff comfort me  
You prepare a table before me  
In the presence of my enemies  
You anoint my head with oil  
My cup overflows  
Surely your goodness will follow me all the days of my life  
I will dwell in the house of the Lord

## PSALM 23

*God our shepherd.*



My Shepherd is the living Lord;  
Now shall my wants be well supplied;  
His providence and holy word  
Become my safety and my guide.

In pastures where salvation grows  
He makes me feed, he makes me rest;  
There living water gently flows,  
And all the food's divinely blest.

My wand'ring feet his ways mistake,  
But he restores my soul to peace,  
And leads me, for his mercy's sake,  
In the fair paths of righteousness.

Though I walk through the gloomy vale  
Where death and all its terrors are,  
My heart and hope shall never fail,  
For God my Shepherd's with me there.

Amidst the darkness and the deeps  
Thou art my comfort, thou my stay;  
Thy staff supports my feeble steps,  
Thy rod directs my doubtful way.

The sons of earth, and sons of hell,  
Gaze at thy goodness, and repine  
To see my table spread so well  
With living bread and cheerful wine.

How I rejoice when on my head  
Thy Spirit condescends to rest!  
'Tis a divine anointing, shed  
Like oil of gladness at a feast.

Surely the mercies of the Lord  
Attend his household all their days;  
There will I dwell to hear his word,  
To seek his face, and sing his praise.

5/20/2020

### ***Psalm 23***

**Words:** Isaac Watts

♪ C.M.

- 1 My Shepherd will supply my need:  
Jehovah is His Name;  
In pastures fresh He makes me feed,  
Beside the living stream.
- 2 He brings my wandering spirit back  
When I forsake His ways,  
And leads me, for His mercy's sake,  
In paths of truth and grace.
- 3 When I walk through the shades of death  
His presence is my stay;  
One word of His supporting grace  
Drives all my fears away.
- 4 His hand, in sight of all my foes,  
Doth still my table spread;  
My cup with blessings overflows,  
His oil anoints my head.
- 5 The sure provisions of my God  
Attend me all my days;  
O may Thy house be my abode,  
And all my work be praise.
- 6 There would I find a settled rest,  
While others go and come;  
No more a stranger, nor a guest,  
But like a child at home.