

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
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Messianic Trilogy: Part Two Psalm 23 — The Shepherd King

1.0 Introducing Psalm 23

- Psalm 23 is “the pearl of Psalms” and “the nightingale of the Psalms.”— C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 1:353 and Henry Ward Beecher, in “Life Thoughts,” cited in *The Treasury of David*, 1:357.
- This psalm is the middle of the three psalms in this trilogy:

Psalm	Psalm 22	Psalm 23	Psalm 24
Person	Servant	Shepherd	Sovereign
Ministry	Suffering	Providing	Reigning
Time	Past	Present	Future
Symbol	Cross	Crook	Crown

- Edward Irving: “at forty-two, his gaunt gigantic frame bore all the marks of age and weakness. His face was wasted, his hair white, his voice broken, his eyes restless and unquiet. As November drew to its close his feebleness increased, till it was evident that his life was rapidly passing away. His mind began to wander. Those who watched at his bedside could not understand the broken utterances spoken in an unknown tongue by his faltering voice. But at last it was found that he was repeating to himself in Hebrew, Psalm xxiii., ‘The Lord is my Shepherd.’ It was with something like its old power that the dying voice swelled as it uttered the glorious conviction, ‘Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.’ The last articulate words that fell from his lips were, ‘If I die, I die unto the Lord, Amen.’ And with these he passed away at midnight on

December 7th, 1834.” — Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life*
(London: John Murray, 1904), 12.

2.0 Reading Psalm 23 (NAU)

23:1 A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.

23:2 **He makes** me **lie down** in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.

23:3 **He restores** my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for **You are with me;**
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

23:5 **You prepare** a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.

23:6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And **I will dwell in the house of the LORD** forever.



3.0 Understanding Psalm 23

3.1 Outline

- I. The Shepherd (vv. 1-4)
- II. The Sheik (vv. 5-6)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “The LORD is”
 - The present tense of this phrase is due to context. The Hebrew here has no verb — it must be supplied in the English translation. See verse 6, “all the days of my life.”
 - The LORD is the focus of the psalm.
- v. 1 “my shepherd”
 - “Shepherd” is also a biblical title for kings: 2 Samuel 5:2; Ezekiel 37:24.
 - Sheep are totally dependent upon the shepherd for direction, health, provision, and protection.
 - Note other psalms where the Lord is depicted as a shepherd:
 - Psalms 28:9; 80:1
 - Psalm 95:7 (see v. 3)
 - Note the New Testament use of “Shepherd” as a title of Christ:
 - John 10:11-15



- Hebrews 13:20
- 1 Peter 2:25
- 1 Peter 5:4
- Revelation 7:15-17
- **v. 1** “I shall not want”
 - The future tense is questionable.
 - Note “The LORD is.”
 - Hebrew verbs have no tense of their own — tense is derived totally from the context.
 - Cf. NJPS (“I lack nothing”) and NLT (“I have everything I need”).
 - “The focus of the word ‘want’ is not so much on the idea of ‘desiring’ something as on ‘lacking’ something needed.” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 432.
 - What do the sheep have?
 - Rest (v. 2)
 - Life (v. 3)
 - Guidance (vv. 2, 3)
 - Safety/Security (v. 4)
- **v. 3** “He restores my soul”
 - This phraseology in the Old Testament can refer to repentance and conversion or it can refer to relief and refreshment.
 - “My soul” can mean the same thing as “me.”
 - “In our context the two senses evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be.” — Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 110.
- **v. 4** “the valley of the shadow of death”
 - *The shadow of death* “may very well be a compound noun meaning ‘the deepest darkness’ and describes life-threatening situations in precarious terrain where the flock would be exposed to attack.” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 84.
 - “It is important to note that ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ is as much God’s right path for us as the ‘green pastures’ which lie beside ‘quiet waters.’ That is, the Christian life is not always tranquil nor, as we say, a mountain-top experience. God gives us valleys also. It is in the valleys with their trials and dangers that we develop character.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 1:211.
 - Although this dark valley is not limited to death, death is one of the difficulties that might be faced there.



- **v. 4** “You are with me”
 - Note the switch from “He” to “You.”
 - “We are never so conscious of the presence of God as when we pass through life’s valleys.” — James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 1:211.
 - See Genesis 26:24; Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:5, 9.
 - See Deuteronomy 2:7 – “For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing.”
 - See Psalm 91:15.

- **v. 4** “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”
 - The rod was the shepherd’s defensive weapon to be used against wild animals (cf. 1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Samuel 23:21). It was a short instrument like a mace.
 - The staff was the shepherd’s crook employed to control the sheep.

- **v. 5** “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”
 - For application, see Romans 8:31-39.

- **v. 5** “You have anointed my head with oil”
 - In the ancient Near East oil was used to eliminate lice by “smearing the hair with oil; this treatment prevented oxygen from penetrating the head and caused the lice to suffocate.” — Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 74.

- **v. 5** “My cup overflows”
 - The banquet has an abundance of food and drink — the wine never runs out.

- **v. 6** “will follow me”
 - “Follow” could more accurately be translated “pursue.” It is not a passive kind of action — it is aggressive.
 - God’s goodness and steadfast love aggressively pursue His people. These things are not something that just happens like a happy accident.
 - See Romans 8:26-32.

- **v. 6** “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”
 - “The traditional Hebrew text reads, ‘I shall return in the house of the LORD,’ which may be a compressed way of saying, ‘I shall come back again and again to be present in the house of the LORD.’” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 85.

- “The house of the LORD” couldn’t be the Temple in David’s time — it had to be a reference to the Tabernacle.
 - 1 Samuel 1:7, 24
 - 2 Samuel 12:20
- “Forever” is literally, “for length of days.”
 - Psalm 93:5 = “forever.”
 - Lamentations 5:20 = “long time” (no more than 70 years).
 - See immediately preceding parallel: “all the days of my life.”
- Worship of God is the center of godly living. See Hebrews 10:25.

Summary of Parallels in Psalm 23

Metaphor	SHEPHERD	SHEIK
Location	Open field	Tent
Instruments	Rod & staff	Goodness & loyal love
Scene	Pasture, water, restoration	Table, ointment, wine
Adversity	“the valley of the shadow of death”	“my enemies”

4.0 Singing Psalm 23

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| <p>1 The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; He leadeth me
The quiet waters by.</p> <p>3 Yea, though I walk through death’s dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For Thou art with me, and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.</p> | <p>2 My soul He doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E’en for His own name’s sake.</p> <p>4 My table Thou hast furnished
In presence of my foes;
My head Thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.</p> |
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5 Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God’s house forevermore
My dwelling place shall be.
— Scottish Psalter, 1650; William Whittingham and others

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
To lie in green pastures I go.
He leads me beside the still waters
He guides me, restoreth my soul.
Though I walk in the vale of death’s shadow,
I fear not with You at my side.
Thy rod and Thy staff, they do comfort me
Through the veil of death, God is my guide.
- 2 God prepareth a table before me
In the presence of my deadly foe.

He anointeth my head with fine oil.
My cup, with His love, overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life on this earth.
I will dwell in my Lord's house forevermore.
Death's passage is but my new birth.

His Sheep Am I

In God's green pastures feeding by His cool waters lie,
Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I.
All the sheep of His pastures fare so wondrously fine,
His sheep am I.



Waters cool, (In the valley)
Pastures green, (On the mountain)
In the evening walk my Lord and I. (In the evening walk my Lord and I.)
Dark the night, (In the valley)
Rough the way, (On the mountain)
Step by step, my Lord and I. (Step by step, my Lord and I.)

In God's green pastures feeding by His cool waters lie,
Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I.
All the sheep of His pastures fare so wondrously fine,
His sheep am I.

— Orien Johnson (melody and lyrics)

5.0 Praying Psalm 23

- Lord, You are my Shepherd—lead me in paths of righteousness. [vv. 1, 3]
- Thank You for meeting my needs. [v. 1]
- Lord, pursue me with Your goodness and steadfast love. [v. 6]
- Show me how to live for You today. [v. 6—all of the psalm, actually]
- Thank You for making me Your sheep. [vv. 1, 3]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 23

- The Son of God, as our Shepherd, cares for us and provides for us.
- We need to live for the Lord every day of our lives.