

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: PSALMS

Psalm 23

I. INTRODUCTION

A. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- *Sepher Tehillim* = ‘Book of Praises’

2. SEPTUAGINT—TWO TERMS

- *Psalmoi* = poems sung to musical accompaniment
- *Psalterium* = collection of songs—basis for it being called the ‘Psalter’

3. LATIN

- *Liber Psalmorum* = ‘Book of Psalms’

B. TYPE OF LITERATURE

1. PLACE IN HEBREW CANON

- One of eleven books in the ‘Writings’—*Ketuvim*
- **First** in *Ketuvim* order—after Psalms, Proverbs—before Song of Solomon and Ruth

2. GENRE

- One of **five poetic** books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

3. CATEGORIZED BY HEADINGS

- **116 Psalms** are preceded by **headings**—numbered as part of the first verse
- Categories According to Headings

- 57—are *mizmor* = ‘Psalms’ to be accompanied by stringed instruments
- 29—are *shir* = ‘Songs’
- 13—are *maskil* = contemplative ‘Poems’
- 6—are *miktam* = ‘Inscriptions’ or ‘Epigrams’
- 5—are *tepillah* = ‘Prayers’
- 1—is *tehillah* = ‘Praise’

C. PURPOSE

1. **POETIC COMPOSITIONS SET TO MUSIC—USED AS TEMPLE HYMN BOOK**
2. **DEVOTIONAL GUIDE FOR JEWISH PEOPLE**

D. AUTHORS

1. **DAVID**—wrote **75**
 - a. 73—attributed by headings
 - b. 2 more cited in NT as being by David
 - **Psalm 2**—see **Acts 4:25**
 - **Psalm 95**—see **Heb 4:7**
2. **ASAPH**—wrote **12**
 - a. One of three Levites David commissioned to lead worship in song—**II Chr 6:31-48**
 1. **Heman**—son of Joel—descended from Levi’s son Kohath
 - His line came through Levi’s great-grandson Korah
 - So he was also a ‘son of Korah’
 2. **Asaph**—son of Bechariah—descended from Levi’s son Gershon
 3. **Ethan**—son of Kishi—descended from Levi’s son Merari

- b. Performed at the dedication of Solomon's temple—**II Chr 5:12**
- 3. SONS OF KORAH—wrote **11**
 - a. Levite singers/composers of Kohath's line—through his grandson Korah—**II Chr 20:19**
 - b. Some Korahites were temple porters—handled baking pans for meat offerings—**I Chr 9:19**
- 4. SOLOMON—wrote **2**—**Psalms 72** and **127**
- 5. MOSES—wrote **1**—**Psalm 90**
- 6. HEMAN—wrote **1**—**Psalm 88**
- 7. ETHAN—wrote **1**—**Psalm 89**
- 8. ANONYMOUS—**47**

E. STRUCTURE

1. FIVE BOOKS

a. The Books

- **Book 1**—[41 Psalms] = 1-41
- **Book 2**—[31 Psalms] = 42-72
- **Book 3**—[17 Psalms] = 73-89
- **Book 4**—[17 Psalms] = 90-106
- **Book 5** = [44 Psalms] = 107-150

b. Each book ends with a **doxology** praising the Lord

1. The first four books end with a one or two verse doxology
2. Book Five—Psalm [150] serves as the doxology—for the entire Book of Psalms

c. Coordinated with **Torah** in worship

1. Torah was divided into **153 sections**—one section was covered in each worship service

2. 150 Psalms tracked alongside these sections
3. Each book of Psalms was used parallel with one book of Torah
2. BOOK ONE—Psalms 1-41
 - Most of the Psalms were by David—**38**
 - Tracked alongside Genesis in worship
3. BOOK TWO—Psalms 42-72
 - Most of the Psalms were by David—**18**
 - Several by Sons of Korah—**7**
 - **One** by Asaph
 - **One** by Solomon
 - Tracked alongside Exodus in worship
4. BOOK THREE—Psalms 73-89
 - Most of the Psalms were by Asaph—**11**
 - Sons of Korah—**3**
 - **One** by David
 - **One each** by Heman and Ethan
 - Tracked alongside Leviticus in worship
5. BOOK FOUR—Psalms 90-106
 - Most of the authors are anonymous
 - David wrote—**3**
 - **One** by Moses
 - Tracked alongside Numbers in worship
6. BOOK FIVE—Psalms 107-150

- David wrote—**15**
- **One** by Solomon
- The remainder were anonymous
- Tracked alongside Deuteronomy in worship

7. NUMBERING DIFFERS—FOLLOWING TWO TRADITIONS

- a. LXX AND Vulgate—and Roman Catholic tradition
 - Combine Psalms 9 and 10—into one Psalm
- b. Hebrew text—and Protestant tradition
 - Number Psalms 9 and 10 separately
- c. Causes difference in numbering after Psalm 10
- d. Further numbering differences

<u>Hebrew/Protestant</u>		<u>LXX/Catholic</u>
1-8	equal	1-8
9 and 10 are separate		9 is combined with 10
11-113	equal	10-112
114 and 115 are separate		113 combines 114 with 115
116		divides 116 into two— 114 and 115
117-146	equal	116-145
147		divides 147 into two— 146 and 147
148-150	equal	148-150

8. NINE ACROSTIC PSALMS

- 9—10—25—34—37—111—112—119—145

F. DATE OF COMPOSITION AND EDITING

1. WRITTEN OVER THE COURSE OF ABOUT 1000 YEARS

○ From Moses (1400/1600 BC)—to post exilic Psalms—in the 5th century BC

2. VARIOUS INDIVIDUALS COLLECTED AND EDITED THEM OVER TIME

- a. David—I Chr 15:16
- b. Hezekiah—II Chr 29:30
- c. Ezra—Neh 8

G. THEMES

1. PRAISE—WORSHIPING GOD FOR WHO HE IS—34

- a. General praise—18
- b. Special occasions—16
 - Victory
 - Processional—pilgrims approaching the temple
 - ‘Zion’ hymns—the presence of God in Jerusalem
 - Enthronement—the reign of God as Lord of the nations
- c. Pattern of Liturgy
 - Call to Worship
 - Praise of God’s attributes
 - Conclusion

2. LAMENTS—60 +

- a. Individual

- Unjust accusations against Psalmist
 - Penitence for personal sin
 - Illness or incapacity
 - b. Corporate/Congregational
 - In times of national emergency, invasion, defeat
3. THANKSGIVING—**16**
- a. Individual—**10**
 - b. Corporate/Congregational—**6**
4. ROYAL PSALMS—**9**
- a. Wedding—**1**
 - b. Coronation—**4**
 - c. Prayer before or after battle National victory—**4**
5. WISDOM—**8**
- How to live wisely and honor God
6. SALVATION HISTORY—**5**
- Accounts of God working out His redemptive purpose
7. TRUST—**10**
- Affirming confidence in God during times of crisis

H. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. PSALMS QUOTED MORE TIMES IN NT THAN ANY OTHER BOOK
 - **116** times—out of **263** OT quotations in the NT
2. JESUS QUOTED PSALMS ON 11 OCCASIONS—18 NT PASSAGES

3. THERE ARE 11 OTHER 'PSALMS' (SONGS) LOCATED IN OTHER OT BOOKS

- The Song of the Sea—**Ex 15:1-18**
- The Song of Moses—**Dt 32:1-43**
- The Song of Deborah—**Judges 5**
- The Song of Hannah—**I Sam 2:1-10**
- A Psalm of David—**II Sam 22:2-51—Ps 18**
- Job's Lament Psalms—**Job 3, 7, 10**
- Isaiah's Doxology—**Is 12:4-6**
- The Song of Hezekiah—**Is 38:9-20**
- Jeremiah's Lament Psalms—**Lam 3: 19-38 and Lam 5**
- Jonah's Prayer—**Jon 2:1-9**
- Habakkuk's Prayer—**Hab 3:2-19**

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

Psalm 23 A Psalm of David

1 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 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. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

My paraphrased version:

1 *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*

I belong to the Lord, who puts His life on the line for me.
I need nothing else; I am content.

2 *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

He supplies all my physical needs and keeps me safe.
I trust and follow Him; wherever He leads is best.

3 *He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

He renews my innermost being—the real me.
He keeps me close and shows me how to live in a way that honors Him.

4 *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.*

I will not worry. You walk beside me through every danger—even death and beyond
Your gentle but firm touch reassures me.
It guides me along the right path and rescues me from trouble.

5 *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

You ready me for life's battles; together we will prevail.
You bless me beyond measure.

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.*

The Lord's kind generosity to me is never ending; I will share it with others.
I am certain I will live with Him eternally.

III. EXPOSITION

[See W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*]

1. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

a. Awesomeness—humbled by being under His Lordship

1. He is the majestic Lord of all creation!
2. Yet He chooses to be our personal Shepherd!

b. **Precious and Priceless**—in His sight

1. He **loves** us deeply—as any good shepherd loves His sheep
2. He has paid an enormous **price**—for His sheep

Jn 10:14-15—*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.*

c. **Problem**—of owning sheep

1. Sheep—take more care than any other livestock
2. Sheep—most helpless—most likely to stray and get into trouble
3. We—are like sheep!

Is 53:6—*All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*

d. **Mark**—of ownership

1. Sheep bear mark of master—permanent mark of ownership

➤ **Example: cutting owners mark—brand—into the sheep's ear**

2. Ownership in Old Testament

➤ **Example: Jewish slaves—ears punched with awl at doorpost—belonged to that house**

3. Do we live up to the **sign** of His ownership—bearing our **cross**?

2. **I SHALL NOT WANT**

a. Two aspects

1. God provides all we need
2. We are content with what He provides—not craving for what we don't need

- b. The key point—the Good Shepherd *always* cares for us
 - 1. Whether we *feel* content or not—whether or not we acknowledge Him
 - 2. The tireless Shepherd—*always* watches over His flock—never sleeps
 - 3. This should instill confidence—make us content—with God’s provision

Ph 4:11—*I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am*

- c. The problem—of discontented sheep
 - 1. Some sheep are **gadabouts**—the grass is always greener in the other pasture
 - 2. Never fully content—they always have another ‘want’
 - 3. They teach their lambs a bad habit—‘fence-crawling’
 - 4. They lead other sheep astray from the flock
 - 5. Like ‘carnal’ Christians—fence-sitters

3. **HE MAKETH ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES**

- a. Sheep lie down only—when four conditions are met
 - 1. No Fear—at peace—unafraid in their surroundings
 - 2. No Tension—sheep are social animals—must be free of friction with other sheep
 - 3. No Frustrations—not bothered by distractions of flies or parasites
 - 4. No Hunger—not worried about finding food

b. **Fear**

- Sheep are timid—easily frightened—panic easily
- Whole flock will immediately follow one panicked sheep
- Nothing calms them better than the sight of their shepherd in the field with them
- **Application**
 - Most of our fear is uncertainty about the unknown

- We need the calm reassurance that the Lord is present

c. **Tension**

- Social order—pecking order—among sheep is ‘horning order’
- Sheep establish dominance by butting others away from prime land—see [Ez 34:15-16, 20-22](#)
- Bullying causes tension/discontent—weight loss and irritability—detrimental to flock morale
- The shepherd’s presence makes all this stop—sheep stop this and lie down
- **Application:**
 - We all need to learn to ‘lie down’ before the Lord—and not struggle for preeminence

d. **Frustrations and Distractions**

- Flies and other parasites—like ticks—drive sheep to distraction
- Only remedy is constant care—which requires personal presence of the shepherd
- **Application**
 - When life’s irritations that ‘bug’ us—turn these worries over to Him and rest assured

e. **Food**

- Sheep flourish best in semi-arid climates—where pests are few
- But here food is scarcest—so it takes much work to prepare ground and provide food
- Lambs fill up quickly—they need to lie down and ruminate—not stay on feet foraging for food
- **Application**
 - Rest assured and content in God’s provision

Ps 4:8—*I will both lie down and sleep in peace because You alone O Lord make me to dwell in safety.*

4. **HE LEADETH ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS**

a. Role of water in sheep

- 70% of body is water—necessary for proper metabolism
- Lack of water causes—dehydration—tissue damage—weakness

- When thirsty—they roam looking for water—will drink from polluted sources
- b. Three sources of water in Palestine
- Dew on the grass
 - Deep wells
 - Streams and springs
- c. **Dew**
- Sheep can go months without drinking—if they have heavy daily dew
 - They graze early in morning—when dew is still present
 - Shepherd must be up early in order to get flock into pasture before dew evaporates
 - **Application**
 - We need to feed on God’s word and presence early in the day
- d. **Deep wells**
- Middle-eastern wells are dark and deep—require a lot of work to dig
 - Sometimes in inaccessible places
 - Require hand bailing to get water—hard work for shepherds
 - **Application**
 - Getting the most from God’s word is sometimes hard work—but very satisfying
 - We should be wells of provision for others
 - So we need to be filled with water—not be broken cisterns

Jer 2:13—*For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

- e. **Streams and springs**
- Freshest—purest—fullest source of water

- Rare in the Middle East—only the shepherd knows where to find them
- Not raging sporadic torrents—only after rare rainfall—rushing through the wadi
- But calm waters—that run deeply—and slowly—not disturbing the sheep
- Also—not polluted pools—but ‘living’ water
- **Application**
 - The best source—the Shepherd Himself—who *is* the ‘living water’

Jn 4:14—*Whoever drinks of the water that I give him shall never thirst; but the water I give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.*

5. HE RESTORETH MY SOUL

a. ‘Cast’ Sheep—need to be restored

- ‘Cast’ Sheep = English expression for sheep on its back that cannot get up
- Accidentally rolls onto back and cannot regain footing
- Flails away—will die soon, if shepherd does not rescue it
- Some sheep do this regularly—especially when pregnant
- Hot weather—can die in a few hours
- Cool weather—can stay in this position for days
- Predators and buzzards watch for ‘cast’ sheep
- Shepherds constantly count flock—make sure one is not lost and ‘cast’ somewhere
- Background for Jesus’ parable about the ‘one and 99’

b. **Application**

1. God cares for us more than any human shepherd—and *wants* to restore us
2. We must be careful—take preventative measures—to prevent habitual falling

I Cor 10:12—*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

6. HE LEADETH IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE

a. **Problem 1**—sheep are **destructive** creatures of habit

- They will ruin land—by overgrazing and fouling
- Must be managed intensely—more than other livestock—cannot be left on their own

b. **Remedy 1**

- Keep the sheep on the move—from pasture to pasture—in rotation
- **Follow the shepherd**—he knows his land—where—when—how to feed them best

c. **Problem 2**—sheep **follow other sheep**—out of habit

- One stray sheep can lead the whole flock astray
- Where the rest of the flock goes—all will follow—mindlessly

d. **Remedy 2**

- Be a Nonconformist—follow the Good Shepherd—not the crowd

e. The *Paths of Righteousness*

- Righteousness—is walking in close relationship with God
- Jesus not only leads us on the path—He is the path

Jn 14:6—*I AM the way, the truth, and the life . . .*

7. **YEA THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH
I WILL FEAR NO EVIL**

a. Cycle of Feeding

- Shepherds take sheep to upper meadows in spring/summer—return to valleys for fall/winter
- Must go through mountain valleys to get to upper meadows

b. [Mountain] Valleys of Shadow of Death

1. Death is not always a certainty—but ever a possibility

2. Dangers that ‘shadow’ sheep in mountain valleys

- Predators lurk in rocks of cliffs
- Violent spring storms of sleet and snow
- Flash floods
- Avalanches

3. The Shepherd walks ahead and leads—encounters same dangers—protects

c. **Application**

1. The Shepherd knows the way—the **safest** path—He has walked this way before

2. Having walked through the shadows—we are enabled to **help others** walk it too

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come
Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

3. Pathway to Higher Ground—eventually goes through **death**

- The Good Shepherd has walked that way too
- Woody Guthrie’s 1963 song—is partly true—but fundamentally flawed!

**You gotta walk that lonesome valley,
You gotta walk it by yourself,
Nobody here can walk it for you,
You gotta walk it by yourself.**

**There's a road that leads to glory
Through a valley far away,
Nobody else can walk it for you,
They can only point the way.**

**I'm gonna walk that lonesome valley,
I'm gonna walk it by myself,
Don't want to nobody to walk it for me,
I'm gonna walk it by myself.**

8. **THY ROD AND THY STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME**

a. The Shepherd’s Rod

1. Made of sapling
2. Club end = portion nearest the root—rounded—shaped to fit his hand
3. Weapon—to protect self and flock
4. Symbol of shepherd's authority—strength and power—extension of his arm
5. Used to discipline wayward sheep
6. Used to count the sheep
 - Sheep passed under rod to be counted *and* inspected for health and their own good
 - Used to push apart wool and examine the skin underneath—making sure sheep is healthy
 - Prevents 'pulling the wool' over the shepherd's eyes
 - Inspection done for the long-term good of the sheep

b. The Rod—scriptural symbolism

1. Symbolizes God's word and power—extension of His authority
2. Also symbolizes God's discipline—to warn us away from danger and sin

Ez 20:37—[In prophesying the restoration of Israel, God promised]—*I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.*

c. The Shepherd's Staff

1. Used only by shepherds—only for sheep—not by any other herder for any other animal

2. Purposes

a. To draw sheep closer together

- ▲ Newborn lambs to ewes—without touching them with human hands
- ▲ Drawing sheep close to the shepherd for inspection

b. To guide sheep

- ▲ Gently touching them—to point them in right direction
- ▲ Extension of shepherd himself—sheep like this contact from/with the him

- c. To rescue sheep that are in trouble
- d. The Staff—scriptural symbolism
 - While the rod symbolizes God’s Word/Authority—the Staff symbolizes His Spirit
 - Church tradition—the shepherd’s staff—symbolizes pastoral care by the bishop

9. THOU PREPAREST A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MINE ENEMIES

- a. The ‘tableland’ of alpine meadows = mesa for summer grazing
- b. The shepherd prepares this ‘table-land’
 1. Scouts ahead—for best pastures
 2. Prepares stations with salt and minerals—cleans waterholes
 3. Schedules feeding rotation between pastures
 4. Hunts and eliminates predators—the ‘enemies’
- c. Christ has prepared a Table for us
 1. Paid the price of admission—with His atonement
 2. NT word picture = the Lord’s Table—communion

10. THOU ANOINTEST MY HEAD WITH OIL, MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

- a. Annual feeding cycle
 - From the safety of the valley
 - Out to local green pastures
 - Beside still waters
 - Up through mountain valleys
 - To the summer table-lands
 - Then back to the valley

b. Three reasons to ‘anoint’ sheep

1. Summer is ‘fly’ time

- Especially the dangerous ‘nose-fly’
- Shepherds anoint sheep with ointments to stave off flies
- Keller uses linseed oil—sulphur—and tar

2. Summer is ‘scab’ time

- Highly contagious microscopic parasite that gets under skin
- Remedy—apply ointment—or dip whole animal
- In Palestine—the used olive oil mixed with sulphur and spices

3. ‘Mating time’—late summer and early fall

- Battles between males for ewes—can be fatal
- Remedy—grease heads/noses with axle grease—makes them glance off each other

c. My cup runneth over

1. In the Fall—as they return from summer pastures—sheep are at their strongest
2. Well-grazed—parasites diminish—they begin their return home

d. **Application**

1. Anointment as a sign of blessing and consecration for service
2. Anointment of the Holy Spirit—represents the abiding presence of God

11. **SURELY, GOODNESS AND MERCY WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE**

a. God’s kindness and grace—pursue us

1. We prosper—not because of our own works—but because God blesses us

2. We have life—not because we deserve it—but because of God’s grace
3. His mercy is—never ending

Psalm 136—[26 verses—26 times—it says:]—*for His lovingkindness is everlasting.*

Dt 7:9—*Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and his lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.*

b. ‘**Goodness and mercy**’—should also follow in our wake

1. Sheep can be the most destructive of livestock—without good management
2. But with good management—they can be highly beneficial
 - a. Their manure is best balanced of any livestock—when properly scattered it benefits the soil
 - b. Their habit of resting on highest ground redeposits minerals washed away there
 - c. They eat almost any kind of herbage, many noxious plants, and help control them

3. **Application**

- Do ‘goodness and mercy’ follow us wherever we go?
- Do we bless and benefit others—or curse them?

12. **AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER**

- a. This is the Lord’s eternal household—His heavenly homestead
 1. Where the Good Shepherd guides and returns us home
 2. Not just a place—but also the **flock itself**—safely home
 3. The **whole flock**—**united** with One Shepherd

Jn 10:16—*I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice, and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*

4. New Testament picture—our Eternal Home

➤ The Good Shepherd prepares the place for us—*My Father's house*—**Jn 14:2**

b. This reaffirms **verse 1**—“The Lord is my Shepherd”

1. The psalmist submits joyfully and permanently to the Shepherd as Lord
2. His house is where I want to live forever—never desiring to leave it
3. Submitting to His household sovereignty—management—and way of life

c. There is only one way to enter this house—His sheepfold—**Jn 10**

1. By responding to the voice/invitation of the Good Shepherd
2. By entering through Him—He is the Door