

The LORD is my Shepherd: PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd,

I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside quiet waters.

³ He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

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.

The life of a shepherd: We know nothing about shepherds. We probably imagine a shepherd sleeping all day under a tree while the sheep graze on a hill. No time for sleeping! Sheep required constant care. The shepherd led his sheep out of the village in the morning and wandered the hills and valleys looking for grass and water. He walked several miles a day. Constant vigilance was required to protect the sheep from predators. David had killed lions and bears protecting his sheep (which gave him the skill to kill Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:34-37. "Goliath's just a big target and his head's a big bullseye. I can't miss!"). The shepherd called and collected his sheep and returned to the village in the evening. Shepherd is the perfect metaphor for God's constant care of this faith children.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Is this Psalm applied to God the Father or God the Son? The only title for God in Psalm 23 is LORD (YAHWEH). This Psalm is applied to God the Father. (I will show at the conclusion of this message how it is applied to God the Son.)

Psalm 91 had four majestic names for God: Elyon, Shaddai, Yahweh, Elohim. In Psalm 23 Yahweh is compared to a lowly shepherd. He is "Yahweh/Adonai Ro'i."

David was not the first to refer to God as a shepherd; Jacob did (Genesis 48:15-16). God is called the "Shepherd of Israel" (Psalm 80:1).

Shepherd in Hebrew is derived from a verb *ra'ah* that means “to feed or to keep (to protect and take care of).” It is also thought to derive from a word meaning *friend, re'a*.

Analogy: The LORD is my shepherd is like saying “The President of the US is my father (Barron Trump).” One of the most powerful leaders in the world keeps me safe and takes care of all my needs.

“I shall not want” means “I lack nothing.” It is derived from a Hebrew verb which means to be lacking in something that will cause failure. So, God provides everything we need. The Shepherd of Israel provided everything the Hebrews needed as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Ex. 16:18; Deut. 2:7: “These forty years in the wilderness the Lord your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.”

Psalm 34:8-10: *Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!*

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

⁹ *Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,*

for those who fear him have no lack!

¹⁰ *The young lions suffer want and hunger;*

but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

This includes physical (what my body needs), emotional (what my soul needs), and spiritual needs (need for salvation). Many people try to satisfy their soul thirst with cheap, artificial substitutes. “I shall not want” also means the Father-Shepherd satisfies my soul thirst.

“I shall not want” refers to the provision for our spiritual need of salvation.

God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac, but provided a lamb as a substitute. Abraham gave God a name. Genesis 22:14: So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.” “The Lord will provide” = *Adonai Yireh*. We have no spiritual want or lack because Christ’s sacrifice is complete.

Literal/Expanded Translation: Yahweh is my friend who feeds me and takes care of me and I will not be lacking in anything and I will succeed.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

“Quiet waters” doesn’t mean stagnant water like a pond. Sheep are not afraid of swift currents or waterfalls. It means “a quiet place to rest.” The emphasis is on REST. It really means God leads me to a place with abundant water where I can rest or take a break.

This reminds me of hiking overnight to the bottom of the Grand Canyon with my daughter. On the mile hike back to the top in almost 100 degree heat we found cold water and a place to rest.

Literal/Expanded Translation: I will lie down to rest in a pleasant and beautiful home that is filled with fresh food from the soil. He will protect and sustain me as he gently leads me over to a quiet restful place by the water.

He restores my soul.

In the quiet place of rest my soul is restored.

Restore: The verb *shub* can mean to return or retreat, in the sense of going back to somewhere you have been before. This is like going on a personal or church retreat. The purpose is to slow down, refocus, and “catch your breath.”

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*. It is the “breath of life” that God breathed into Adam and Eve at creation. Genesis 2:7: *The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*

We live in a time of fear with coronavirus pandemic and empty shelves at Kroger’s. The body may be healthy while the soul is troubled and fearful. Listening at all the news about the virus is like running a hard race and being out of breath. (If you get the virus then you will be out of breath.) We need to “catch our breath.” We need to restore our souls. Recite Psalm 91. Focus on the Shepherd’s protection.

Our *nephesh* is not just our life, but the seat of our appetites. God makes us hunger and thirst for righteousness and He satisfies us with His presence. In a quiet place of rest my soul is restored. The quiet place of rest that restores my soul begins every morning with a cup of coffee, prayer and Bible reading.

Our nephesh is the seat of our emotions. When the Shepherd restores our souls he gives us joy and turns our weeping into dancing. He displaces fear with confidence in his faithfulness.

Nephesh also occasionally refers to our mental acts, our thinking and our knowing. When God restores our souls our thinking becomes clear and we begin to understand things – situations and circumstances – in a new way.

The LORD-Shepherd of 23 restores our souls, binds up our wounds, heals our sicknesses, and gives strength in place of weakness.

Literal/Expanded Translation: God will return my breath to me and I will be restored.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Literal/Expanded Translation: He will return my breath to me and I will be restored. He will guide me down the well-worn paths in the correct direction because this is his character and reputation.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

Even though I walk through the valley of Wuhan coronavirus death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Literal/Expanded Translation: In addition to all of this when I travel through a deep dark narrow gorge covered in the shadow of the dead, I will not be afraid of the bad things because you are beside me, your staff of correction and your walking stick of support, they give me a sigh of relief and I am consoled

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

You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Literal/Expanded Translation: You will put in order and arrange a meal spread out on the table in front of my face, boldly showing this in front of my enemy that is pressing in on me: you will anoint my head with perfumed olive oil, all of my holdings and possessions will abundantly overflow to fill my needs.

Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Literal/Expanded Translation: It is a sure thing that bountiful and beautiful things and kindness will chase after me all the days of my life: I will remain and settle down in the palace of Yahweh a very long number of days.

JESUS is our Good Shepherd: John 10:1-18. Psalm 23 is about what Jesus the Good Shepherd does for his sheep. We are his sheep. If you believe in Jesus Christ then you are his sheep.

Psalm 22 describes how the Good Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. Jesus quoted Psalm 22 during his crucifixion (Matthew 27:46).

Psalm 23 describes how the Good Shepherd cares for his flock of sheep.

John 10: ¹¹ *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.* ¹³ *He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.* ¹⁶ *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*