

The 23rd Psalm
Bible study
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This Psalm is of course, The Shepherd's Psalm, and is a familiar one to most.

David, the author of this Psalm and poem was drawing upon his own, personal experience of being a shepherd in the hills of Bethlehem. Historians believe he wrote this in his youth at approximately 16 years of age.

Let's begin by understanding the long standing, frequent, and well accepted practice of comparing sheep and humans.

Throughout history rulers and kings were considered shepherds of their nations and kingdoms. The people were considered his sheep.

These Bible verses show us that as well and further develop the thought by saying that God/Jesus is our shepherd and we are his sheep.

Psalms 100:3 – “Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”

Isaiah 53:6 – “We all, like sheep have gone astray.”

Psalm 78:52 – “He brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the wilderness.”

Jeremiah 50:6 – “My people have been lost sheep.”

Ezekiel 34:11 – “I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”

Matthew 10:16 – “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”

Luke 12:32 – “Fear not little flock...”

John 10:11 – “I am the good shepherd.”

1 Peter 2:25 – “You were straying like sheep but have now returned to the Shepherd.”

So when David wrote the poem, he was writing as a shepherd with a loving understanding of his own flock of sheep AND with the grateful admission that he, himself as a sheep, was lovingly tended to by The Lord, who was his shepherd.

Let's get the meat from these Hebrew words and their meanings in this psalm. (the phrases I want to spend time on).

v.1 – The Lord is my **shepherd** = H7462 “ra’ah” = to associate with, to be a friend. To pasture, graze, feed.

I shall **not want** = H2637 “chacer” = to lack, be without, decrease, be lacking. By implication – to fail.

v. 2 – He makes **me lie down** – H7257 “rabats” = stretch oneself out, lie down; be stretched out

He **leads me beside quiet waters** – H5095 “nahal” = to lead to a watering place or station & cause to rest there. To lead or bring to a station or goal.

v. 3 He **refreshes** my soul – H7725 “shuwb” = return or turn back

He **guides me** along the right path – H5148 “machah” = lead, guide; transport

v. 4 **though I walk** – H3212 “yalak” = to go, depart, proceed

rod – H7625 “shebet” = stick (for punishing, writing or fighting)

staff – H4938 “mishenah” = support of every kind

comfort me – H5162 “nacham” = to be sorry, console oneself, repent, regret, be comforted

v. 5 **prepare a table** – H6186 “arak” = to set in a row, arrange, put in order (battle with oneself)

anoint my head with oil – H1878 “dashen” = to be fat, prosperous

v. 6 **follow me** – H7291 “radaph” = to be behind, follow after, pursue, run after

I will dwell – H3427 “yashab” = to dwell, remain, sit, abide

The precious, tender, reality of these verses demonstrate the Lord’s patient, conscious, willful, loving and strong care for us- his sheep.

Allow me to expand – **Debbie’s Psalm 23 transliteration:**

The Lord is a friend to me, and he gently walks with me while I slowly graze.

I am totally provided for and lack absolutely nothing I need. Failure is not an option.

He makes me stretch out and lie down (being happy and satisfied).

He walks ahead of me and will always lead me to his goal or watering place, where I will find rest.

There he renews and turns back my weariness, allowing new strength to return to me.

Again, walking ahead of me, he leads me, sometimes carrying me along the right path.

Though I may depart or walk from the path

His rod is there to correct me, even fighting for me,

And his staff never leaves me unsupported. He is always there to guide and defend me.

This constant supervision and provision comfort me even to the point of making me sorry and regretful for my wandering.

When needed and in the face of threats and enemies, he arranges and puts in order all I need.

He equips a fully laden table for me to help me fight the battle within myself.

He makes me prosperous.

He promises goodness and love will always have my back.

And I will live forever with him, not just in this pen on this planet.

I am overwhelmed by all the things that these verses tell us The Shepherd does for his sheep.

It is the initiative and responsibility of the shepherd to tend to his flock. The sheep do so very little, and what little they do, is oft times a blunder, needing the shepherds rescue.

Here are some interesting characteristics of sheep. These reveal more insight as to why they are so dependent on the shepherd.

- * Sheep have a strong instinct to follow the sheep in front of them. Whether on a good or bad path. Off a cliff or into water. It is hardwired into sheep without them thinking.
- * Some species of sheep have “wool blindness” where the wool around their face prohibits them from having any peripheral vision.
- * Sheep have poor depth perception; shadows and dips in the ground cause them to balk.
- * A sheep’s wool will grow forever. (some breeds) without their annual shearing.
A sheep in one year can produce between 2 and 30 pounds of wool.
One pound of wool will make 10 miles of yarn
One sheep who wasn’t sheared for 6 years produced enough wool for 20 men’s suits
- * Sheep are susceptible to diseases such as parasites when they are mismanaged or not sheared
- * They have horizontal slit-shaped pupils which provide excellent peripheral vision fields of 270-320 degrees
- * Yet, they have poor eye site
- * They have excellent hearing and can recognize their shepherd’s voice when called
- * Sheep are not able to right themselves if they fall on their back
- * They find safety in numbers and get agitated when separated
- * Sheep are social creatures and require the presence of 4 – 5 other sheep when grazing in order to maintain their visual link to each other
- * Sheep have a flocking instinct that allows them to move in large numbers
- * Sheep experience emotions similar to humans – fear, loud noises, anger, rage, despair, disgust, boredom and happiness
- * Sheep wag their tails like dogs and form bonds with their shepherd

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Lord. Help us to depend on and follow you.