

The Book of Psalms

- A COLLECTION of 150 ancient Hebrew poems, song lyrics, and prayers.
- WRITTEN by multiple authors over approximately 900 years beginning around the time of Moses in 1440 BC and continuing through the captivity in 586 BC in response to events in their lives. Later the whole community used them in praise and worship.
- KNOWN AUTHORS: David wrote 73 (49%), Asaph (a leader of David's choir) wrote 12 (8%), the sons of Korah wrote 9 (6%), Solomon wrote 3 (2%), Ethan and Moses each wrote one. 51 of the Psalms are anonymous (34%).
- MAIN THEMES include praise to Yahweh (I AM, the Lord God) and Elohim (God, Our Creator, All Powerful), God's power, forgiveness, thankfulness, God as King of all creation, Hope for the Messiah after exile, and deep grief and sadness as a response to evil.

Psalm 23

What does the Old Testament/Tanakh say about God as a Shepherd?

Oh, give ear, **Shepherd** of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth! Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power and come to save us! Psalm 80:1-2

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. Isaiah 40:11

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a **shepherd** keeps his flock." Jeremiah 31:10

Before we study verse 1 of Psalm 23...

- •Psalm 23 begins in Hebrew with the header "A Psalm of David." מְזְמָוֹר לְדָוִד
- •Some other psalms written by David begin in Hebrew with a different phrase...
 - ֹלְדָוֹד מִּזְמְוֹר "of David a Psalm."
 - Examples include Psalm 101, 110, and 139.

- Psalms 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 12, 13, 22, 23, 24, 27, 51, 63 and others begin with the phrase "A Psalm of David" מְזְמִוֹר לְדָוִד
- In Psalms containing לְדָוֹד מִּזְמָוֹר ("of David a Psalm") the Holy Spirit was upon David and then he sang and gave praise to God.
- In Psalms containing מְזְמִוֹר לְדָוְד (like Psalm 23), David was struggling with a crisis in need of God's help.
- David feels distant from God and wants to draw closer to Him, so he sings even when he does not feel God's Spirit.

Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

Psalm 23 in the Complete Jewish Bible

A psalm of David: Adonai is my shepherd; I lack nothing. He has me lie down in grassy pastures, he leads me by quiet water, he restores my inner person. He guides me in right paths for the sake of his own name. Even if I pass through death-dark ravines, I will fear no disaster; for you are with me; your rod and staff reassure me. You prepare a table for me, even as my enemies watch; you anoint my head with oil from an overflowing cup. Goodness and grace will pursue me every day of my life; and I will live in the house of Adonai for years and years to come.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want [lack]. Psalm 23:1



רְעָה raʿah Hebrew verb "to tend, pasture, to shepherd" roi Hebrew noun "my shepherd, my watcher"

What does David know about shepherds?

And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest [David], and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

1 Samuel 16:11

But David said to Saul, "Your servant was <u>tending his father's</u> <u>sheep</u>. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him." 1 Samuel 17:34-35

God being described in the Bible as a Shepherd is common, especially in Psalms. "Sheep" are the most commonly mentioned animal in the Bible, mentioned about 400 times (including the term "flocks") with "shepherd(s)" being mentioned about 100 times.

• Psalm 80:1

• Isaiah 40:11

• Micah 5:4

• Psalm 95:7

• Hosea 4:16

• Psalm 79:13

• Jeremiah 31:10

• Psalm 100:3

• Ezekiel 34:11-22

- Ezekiel 34:31
- Jeremiah 23:1

- But, a person calling God "my Shepherd" only occurs one other time in the Tanakh/Old Testament.
- Jacob, at 147 years old, gives his sons and grandsons a blessing.

He [Jacob/Israel] blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day," Genesis 48:15

Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolici

- Jacob had experienced difficulties in life. He had to flee at a young age when Esau wanted to kill him [Genesis 27], had trouble with his uncle Laban [Genesis 29], had to encounter his brother's army when he returns home, his wife dies, his son Joseph goes missing and Jacob thinks he is dead. He learns 22 years later that Joseph is alive after they travel to Egypt due to a famine in the Land. He has to uproot himself at age 130 and move to Egypt [Genesis 46].
- Jacob, looking back, says that God had his best interests in mind and protected Jacob during hard times. It was all for the good.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

Psalm 23:1

- "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want/lack."
- •I wander away because I ignore the shepherd
- I wander away because I feel something is lacking
- In reality, the shepherd provides everything the sheep needs
- The sheep need the shepherd more than they need anything else

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



- This environment is the perfect life for a sheep.

 Lying in green grass is what sheep want to do. They don't want to move. After traveling to waters of tranquility, they understand why they needed to move and they are happy.
- Transitions are hard on all of us. Sometimes we choose them and sometimes they choose us. They are never easy. We have been happy in our green pastures but the shepherd had other plans for us and we are on the move again.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

- It is often only after we have arrived at the next destination do we look back and understand. The shepherd moves the sheep from green grass to still/quiet waters... from what is beautiful and pleasing to the senses to tranquility and peace. Like sheep, when we are happy in our beautiful green pastures, we don't want to change or go anywhere.
- Transitions are hard. They can be confusing and uncomfortable. But the Lord is our Shepherd and the Shepherd knows best.

Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

Psalm 23:2

- "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters."
- I don't need to wander away to find fulfillment, God the Shepherd will lead me and provide for me.
- •I don't need to wander out of fear because God the Shepherd knows my fears and will minister to me in the midst of my fears.
- First blessing = spiritual nourishment

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Psalm 23:3



- Not everything was perfect before. Something needs to be restored.
 Something was broken or lost. David recognizes that his soul was not where it should have been and the Lord brought him back.
- Restore in Hebrew is **yeshovav** יְשׁוֹבֶב. It appears 12 other places in Tanakh, it means to turn something around, to give it a new direction.
- Ezekiel 39:1-2 "And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; and I will **turn you around** יְלֵשְׁבַבְּחָיֹךְ , drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel."
- Jeremiah 8:5 "Why then has this people, Jerusalem, **turned away** in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return."
- Sheep say... I was happy eating the grass and drinking the water and I did not even know I was lost. But, the Shepherd came to me and turned me around. He sent me in a new direction (He restored my soul). He led me through the paths of righteousness.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

- The word for "path" in Hebrew is magal מַעְגָל .
- This word means entrenchment, a round-about route, a long path, a detour. The Shepherd turned me around and then I wasn't even sure where we were going. The path may have been confusing to me but the Lord was doing this all for His name's sake.
- Before, I was not living for Him, I was living for me. I was not where I needed to be. He turned me in a new direction and I began to travel a new path. I did not know what was ahead, but the Lord had a plan for me. He restored my soul and led me to fulfill my potential for Him, not for me.

Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Psalm 23:3b



23:3 L-ma'an shemo > "for the sake of his name"

- Psalm 106:8 uses the same phrase in the context of salvation from Egypt.
- ~ The reason for Israel's redemption is rooted in this idea.

Nevertheless He [Yahweh] saved them [Israel] for **the sake of His name**, that He might make His power known. Psalm 106:8

Psalm 23:3

- "He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."
- I wander away when I feel like no one cares about my hurts
- I wander away because I think I know a better path
- I wander away because I am more concerned about my name's sake (glory, honor, prestige, applause, comfort) than His name's sake
- Second blessing = spiritual restoration
- Third blessing = spiritual guidance

Spiritual Restoration

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit." Psalm 51:12

- בושׁ shoob in Hebrew means to turn back, return, restore; bring back (a previous right, practice, or situation); reinstate; return to a former condition or position; repair or renovate. give (something stolen or removed) back to the original owner.
- When sheep wander, the shepherd restores.

Spiritual Restoration

"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." Psalm 19:7

"If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored" Job 22:23

Do you need to be restored by and to the Lord today?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Psalm 23:4a



- In all relationships, sometimes we feel closer and sometimes we feel further apart. I can express my feelings about someone, my love for them, by thinking about them, by talking about them, by praising those things about them that make me love them.
- But, sometimes I want to be in their presence, to have one-on-one time with them. Sometimes I need to be with them.
- A life of faith is filled with talking about God, with praising Him, with sharing Him with others. Then, something can happen in our lives that makes us need to speak to Him. To call on Him in prayer... to speak TO the Lord, not ABOUT the Lord.
- In verse 4, there is a transition. The first 3 verses were ABOUT the Lord "He." Verses 4-6 are spoken TO the Lord "You."
- The reason for this transition is clearly stated in the beginning of the verse "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." The dark times of our lives draw us into a life of prayer. They call on us to speak to God directly, to experience a face to face relationship with Him.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki



23:4 B-gey tsalmaveth > "in the valley of deep-darkness"

- Tsalmaveth is a compound noun from maveth "death" + tsal "shadow".
 The phrase basically denotes the idea of utter darkness and impenetrable gloom.
- The opposition (or evil) symbolized by this term is rendered irrelevant and impotent by Israel's God,
 who manipulates tsalmaveth at will
- He who made the Pleiades and Orion and changes deep darkness [צֵלְמָוֶת tsalmaveth] into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord [Yahweh] is His name. Amos 5:8
- "Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep **darkness** [צַלְמֶוֶת tsalmaveth]?" Job 38:17
- Yet You have crushed us in a place of jackals and covered us with the **shadow** [צַלְמָוֶת tsalmaveth] **of death**. Psalm 44:19
- There were those who dwelt in darkness and in the **shadow** [צֵלְמָוֶת tsalmaveth] **of death**, prisoners in misery and chains, because they had rebelled against the words of God and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Psalm 107:10-11

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4b



Rod is Hebrew shevet שֵׁבֶשׁ

- A stick that disciplines a sheep if it strays away from the path
- Gives guidance and keeps it in the right direction, even if that guidance causes pain
- "For whom the Lord loves He reproves" Proverbs 3:12a

Staff is Hebrew mishenet מְשֶׁעֶנֶת

- A walking stick, a cane, something that provides support, to prevent stumbling
- Life is not always easy. When we are in the valley of shadow of death, God is guiding us with the rod and the staff (it might be painful) and catching us when we fall. But we fear no evil because the Shepherd is with us.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

Psalm 23:4

- "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me"
- I wander away because I feel alone
- I wander away because fear overcomes me
- I can trust You the Heavenly Shepherd when evil attacks because You are with me, You never leave me
- Your rod and staff are used to guide and correct me. Sometimes discipline hurts, but discipline from the Heavenly Father is an act of love and protection.
- Fourth blessing = protection

Source: Bible Knowledge Commentary

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Psalm 23:5a

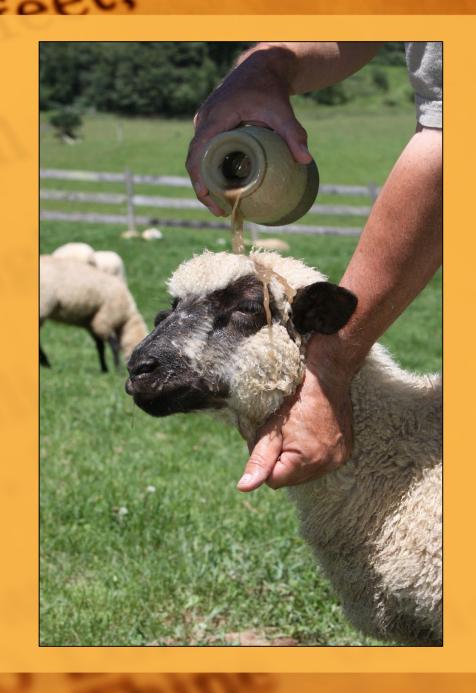


- Imagery of "setting the table" appears two other times in Tanakh/Old Testament
- Isaiah 21:5 They set the table, they spread out the cloth, they eat, they drink; "Rise up, captains, oil the shields,"
 - Isaiah rebukes the people for honoring and worshipping false gods – the prophet calls that "preparing a table" before them
- Psalm 78:19 Then they spoke against God; they said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"
 - God provided for all the needs of the people of Israel in the wilderness
- The phrase "setting a table" means building up and giving honor and meeting needs

- Lord, you provided for all my needs (you built me up) in the presence of my enemies
- "in the presence of" in Hebrew is neged בֶּלֶּד which really means "against" or "opposite"
- You gave me strength and honor and courage to battle against my enemies, against the forces of evil
- The shepherd protects the sheep and provides
- The sheep does not serve the shepherd
- The sheep does not have a sense of mission and purpose in life
- Sometimes we are lost and we stray, but this verse says there can be growth in our relationship with God. He pulls us back to Him and gives us responsibility and strength and anointing so we can do battle with forces of evil and have victory, for His sake.

 Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5b



You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5b

- Why would shepherds pour olive oil on the head of the sheep?
- The cure for treating his sheep from certain parasites and flies was anointing their heads, faces, noses and ears with a combination of oils and other remedies. The shepherd was anointed the sheep's head with oil to bring comfort and healing and peace. A ewe would bash its head against fences and walls because flies were driving her bonkers. But after her "anointing," she was contented and at peace because the shepherd anointed her. https://shepherdingtalk.com/you-anoint-my-head-with-oil
- The Heavenly Shepherd cares about ALL our needs and looks to bring us comfort.

Psalm 23:5

- "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"
- I don't need to wander in search of provision because You will provide
- Even when my enemies are close, my God is closer
- The Shepherd knows my needs and meet my needs
- My cup of love, grace, hope, joy, salvation are not simply full, they overflow [רְנָיָה râvayah... saturation]
- Fifth blessing = provision

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

Psalm 23:6

- David describes a trouble-free life, no suffering, no evil
- David describes a life of only goodness and lovingkindness
- This life is different than life in the valley of the shadow of death and the pursuit of his enemies
- How can "only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life"?
- Notice that David uses the phrase "dwell in the house of the Lord" in another psalm... Psalm 27:4.

Source: Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

"dwell in the house of the Lord"

- One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: **That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, t**o behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. Psalm 27:4-5
- David thanks God for sheltering him, saving him from fear and harm
- The "house of the Lord" is the place of safety, where I am in the Lord's presence. When I am there, I have nothing to fear.
- To truly dwell in the house of the Lord, to live in His presence, we have to know that He is with us all the time. We are always in the presence of the Lord. Both the overt blessings and the difficulties are a gift from God. He is the Shepherd who leads us to where we need to go.

- Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." John 10:11
- Psalm 23:6 promises eternal life for the sheep (followers/disciples) of Messiah Jesus, the Good Shepherd
 - How do I find the way to eternal life in the Lord's House?

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." John 10:27-28

• How is that eternal life in the Lord's House provided to us?

By the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus the Shepherd

Blessings given by God the Shepherd to His sheep

- 1. "He makes me lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2)
 - * spiritual nourishment
- 2. "He restores my soul" (v.3)
 - * spiritual restoration
- 3. "He guides me in the paths of righteousness" (v.3)
 - * spiritual guidance
- 4. "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (v.4)
 - * spiritual protection
- 5. "You have prepared a table before me" (v.5)

Source: Bible Knowledge Commentary

* spiritual provision

How much does God want to bless His sheep? "my cup overflows"

Follow the "10 Commandments for Sheep"

- 1. Stay close to the Shepherd, don't wander away.
- 2. Listen for His voice and only His voice.
- 3. Hear and obey [shema] His commands.
- 4. Go where He tells me.
- 5. Help the other sheep.
- 6. Stay alert and watch for danger.
- 7. Be always thankful to the Shepherd.
- 8. Remember the Shepherd is smarter and wiser than me.
- 9. Learn the corrective, guiding lessons of the rod and the staff.
- 10. Trust Jesus the Good Shepherd to provide the way to eternal life.

Putting
Psalm 23
Into
Practice

On Father's Day... How can Dads love their children like the Heavenly Shepherd loves us?

- Just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.
 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12
- Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. Psalm 103:13
- A Dad's greatest goal... "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." 3 John 1:4