

## Psalm 23

### Introduction and Theme

1. Referred to as a psalm of confidence or trust
2. It is probably the most popular and well-known Bible passage in the world, even among the unsaved
3. It is thought of as a funeral passage, likely because of one line—“**even though I walk through the valley of death...**”
4. This is a bit unfortunate because the psalm isn’t about death; it’s actually about life here and now—in fact, the psalm ends with a declaration about life!
5. Theme: Reliance on the LORD

### A. Structure and poetic elements:

1. Structure:
  - a) The psalm begins with an introductory claim (1)
  - b) Then provides the evidence for that claim (2-5)
  - c) Finally, it concludes with an affirmation (6)
2. Poetic Elements:
  - a. Synthetic parallelism (2<sup>nd</sup> stich adds details to the 1<sup>st</sup> stich)
  - b. Both two and three line parallelism (changes the tempo of the psalm)
  - c. Two extended metaphors:
    - 1) The Lord as a shepherd (1-4)
    - 2) The Lord as a host (5)
  - d. It also relies heavily on a ton of vivid imagery:
    - 1) Green pastures
    - 2) Quiet waters
    - 3) Paths
    - 4) A dangerous valley
    - 5) Rod and staff
    - 6) Banquet table
    - 7) Anointing of the head
    - 8) Overflowing cup

### B. Teaching

1. David declares his confidence in the LORD (1): “**The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.**” (synthetic parallelism—first stich presents a proposition; second stich adds extra details or expands the proposition)
  - a. He begins by calling the LORD his shepherd:
    - 1) The metaphor of the LORD as a shepherd and His people as sheep is used throughout the Bible and it was a metaphor right out of David’s culture; in fact, David was a shepherd himself:
    - 2) The primary responsibility of the shepherd is to protect and care for his sheep

- 3) He does this by not only protecting them from dangerous predators and poisonous plants, but by finding them appropriate pasture in which to eat and drink
  - 4) By referring to the LORD as his shepherd, David is reflecting on his trust in the LORD's provision and protection—two themes reflected in this psalm
- b. It is because he recognizes the LORD as his shepherd that he can confidently declare his trust in the LORD:
- 1) The NASB phrase **"I shall not want"** would be better translated as **"I lack nothing"** (as the NET and NIV) or **"I have what I need"** (as the HCSB)
  - 2) Because the LORD is his shepherd, David knows that he has everything he needs and lacks nothing
  - 3) This is a declaration of complete and total confidence and trust in the LORD
2. David reflects on the basis for his confidence (2-5)—three points:
- a. The first thing David reflects on is that the LORD his Shepherd PROVIDES for him (2-3):
- 1) He meets his physical needs (2): **"He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quite waters"** (synthetic parallelism—2<sup>nd</sup> stich adds details)
  - 2) He meets his emotional and spiritual needs (3): **"He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."** (more synthetic parallelism)
    - a) The word for soul here (nepesh) is used over 20 different ways in the OT, but here should likely be understood as that spiritual and emotional element of life
    - b) The word for restore is used in the polel stem which refers to returning or restoring something to its ideal state (according to Holiday's lexicon)—much like restoring a vintage car
    - c) The synonymous parallelism helps us see what causes David's soul to be restored—the Shepherd leads him in paths of righteousness
  - 3) In the same way, as the Good Shepherd Jesus provides for our physical, emotional and spiritual needs as well:
    - a) He promised to meet our physical needs: READ Matthew 6:25-34
    - b) He promised to meet our emotional needs: READ Philippians 4:4-9
    - c) He promised to meet our spiritual needs: READ John 4:13-14
- b. The second thing David reflects on is that the LORD his Shepherd PROTECTS him (4):
- 1) David used two line parallelism above and now changes to three line parallelism in verses 4 and 5 which changes the tempo of the psalm
  - 2) The Shepherd never leaves him so there is no fear (4a): **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."**
  - 3) The synthetic parallelism reveals to us just how the Shepherd is always **"with"** David—His presence is felt through His rod and His staff (4b): **"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."**
    - a) A shepherd carried two primary tools
    - b) The rod was like a club and was used to defend the sheep from predators
    - c) The staff (also called a crook because it had a large hook at the end) was used to guide and even rescue sheep if needed

The Shepherd's Crook in lifesaving—in the same way the Shepherd could use the staff to rescue his sheep if they wandered or strayed, or fell into a ditch or crevasse

- 4) In the same way, as our Good Shepherd Jesus protect us:
  - a) The Bible promises us that our salvation is secure in Christ: READ Romans 8:38-39
  - b) And, just like the shepherd's rod and staff comforted the sheep by guarding and protecting them and reminding them of his presence, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit does the same for us: READ John 14:23-26; 1 John 4:13
- c. The third and final thing David reflects upon is that the LORD honors him (5):
  - 1) David transitions from the metaphor of the LORD as a shepherd to the LORD as a banquet host:
    - a) Banquets were generally a time of celebration and thanksgiving
    - b) They were also thrown to honor someone, and that is the sense here where the LORD is the host and David is the honored guest
  - 2) Look at these three amazing word-pictures, each representing how the LORD honors David:
    - a) Table (5a): **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies"**—notice that the table is spread before David and in full view of his enemies; he is the honored guest
    - b) Anointing (5b): **"You have anointed my head with oil"**—a sign of blessing an honor
    - c) Overflowing cup (5c): **"My cup overflows"**—clearly a reference to abundance provided by the host to the guest of honor
    - d) This is another example of three line synthetic parallelism
  - 3) You may have never thought of this but did you know that just as the LORD honored David, He will actually honor those of us who have been born again and love and serve Jesus?
    - a) READ John 12:26 and 1 Peter 1:7
    - b) While David was speaking metaphorically, his words foreshadow an actual feast of the LORD at which we will all be honored guests—it's referred to as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (READ Revelation 19:6-9)
3. David concludes with an affirmation of God's goodness and faithfulness (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."** (a final example of synthetic parallelism)
  - a. David began this psalm with a declaration that because the LORD is his shepherd he would lack nothing
  - b. Here, he ends with an affirmation of two undeniable truths:
    - 1) The first is that the LORD's goodness and faithfulness would remain with him for the rest of his life
    - 2) The second is that he would remain in the LORD's presence forever
  - c. In the same way, we know that the LORD's goodness and faithfulness will follow us all the days of our lives, and that we will dwell with Him eternally:
    - 1) 1 Corinthians 1:9: **"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."**
    - 2) Hebrews 10:23: **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."**

- 3) 2 Thessalonians 3:3: **“The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.”**
- 4) 2 Timothy 2:13: **“[even when] we are faithless, he remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”**
- 5) Revelation 22:1-5