

Psalm 23

Title: The Lord Is My Shepherd

Author and Date: David

Key Verse: Psalm 23:1

Outline

- A. Provision: the shepherd is my care-giver (verses 1-2).
- B. Direction: the shepherd is my guide (verses 3-4).
- C. Communion: the shepherd is my host (verses 5-6).

Notes

Title: “A Psalm of David.” See the notes on Psalm 3.

Verse 1: For the Lord as a “shepherd”, see Psalm 28:9; 74:1; 77:20; 78:52; and 80:1. David himself served as a shepherd when he was young (1 Sam. 16:11-13, 19; 17:34-35; Psa. 78:70-71). Israel’s kings and leaders were also known as shepherds (Isa. 56:11; Jer. 10:21; etc).

Verse 2: The shepherd makes sure the sheep have something to eat (“green pastures”) and something to drink (“still waters”).

Verse 3: The Lord restores the soul by using his law (see Psa. 19:7). The Lord guides and protects his own people “for his name’s sake”; that is, to bring glory to himself and show others that he is who he claims to be (see Ex. 34:5ff).

Verse 4: The “valley of the shadow of death” is a place of gloom, of dread or danger (see Job 3:5; Psa. 44:19; 107:10, 14). The psalmist may be referring to a severe illness or an attack from enemies (verse 5) that placed him in a situation near death. “Evil” here is a reference to calamity. “Rod” and “staff” are the working tools of the shepherd. The shorter “rod” (like a club) was used for protection against predators and the longer “staff” (like a walking stick) was used to guide and tend the sheep. The shepherd watches over the sheep in good times and in bad times (see Psa. 32:7).

Verse 5: The “cup” is a symbolic of punishment (Psa. 11:6) or the generous blessings of one’s life as it is here in this verse (see Psa. 16:5). Preparing a meal and anointing the head with oil (perfume) was an act of hospitality offered by the host (see Lk. 7:46). The Lord, the shepherd, not only provides the necessities of life (verses 1-4), but also the joys of life (verses 5-6).

Verse 6: The “house of the Lord” is a reference to the tabernacle (see Psa. 5:7; 26:8; 27:4-6).

Questions

1. What figure or metaphor does the psalmist use to describe the Lord (verse 1)?
2. What two things does the Lord provide for the psalmist (verse 2)?
3. What two more things does the Lord do for the psalmist (verse 3)?
4. Where does the psalmist walk and how does he feel when he is there (verse 4)?
5. What two more things does the Lord do for the psalmist (verse 5)?
6. What does the psalmist have all his days and where does he dwell for ever (verse 6)?

Applications for Today

1. The psalmist said with confidence: “The Lord is my shepherd” (verse 1). What is prophesied in Ezekiel 34:22-23? What does Jesus say he is to us (Jn. 10:11, 14)? What is said in Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 2:25 and 5:4, about Jesus? What is the role of an elder in the local church (Acts 20:28-29; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:2)?
2. The Lord meets our every need. We will not lack for anything good when the Lord is our shepherd (verse 1). What does the psalmist promise in Psalm 34:9-10 and 84:11? What does Jesus say his Father will provide (Mt. 6:28-33; 7:11)? What does Paul say God will supply us (Phil. 4:19)?
3. The psalmist was humble and obedient; willing to be fed and led by the shepherd (verses 2-3). It does us no good to have a shepherd if we are not willing to follow him. Am I a wayward sheep or a sheep that follows the shepherd? How does God lead us and guide us (Psa. 25:5; 119:105)?

43:3; 73:24; 143:10)? What must a Christian do with Jesus (Jn. 10:3-5; 1 Pet. 2:21; Rev. 14:4)?

4. It is important to walk in the “paths of righteousness” (verse 3). What and where are the “paths of righteousness” (Prov. 2:6-9)?
5. The psalmist lived without fear because the Lord was his shepherd (verse 4). How should a Christian live his life (Heb. 13:5-6; 1 Jn. 4:18)?
6. The Lord, our Shepherd, shows nothing but “goodness and loving-kindness” (verse 6). What do we receive from the Father above (Jas. 1:17)?
7. The psalmist spoke with assurance and confidence because the Lord was his shepherd: “I shall...” (verse 1 and 6). What do faithful Christians have in prayer (Heb. 4:16; 1 Jn. 5:14)? What do faithful Christians have in living (Heb. 3:6; 10:19, 35)?