

TEXTUAL ISSUES PSALM 23

Psalm 23. *I may be a sheep, but I have the Shepherd.* YAHWEH THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY is my boss, my master, my owner, my guide. Therefore, I need nothing but Him; He provides everything I need and want. Here's why:

- ⌘ My boss makes me rest where there is plenty of peace, quiet, security. My soul gets tired; then, He leads me to sources of enrichment which do not confound me, but truly restore me.
- ⌘ On my way in life, there are many paths, but my Master shows me paths which lead to being close to Him, for His glory, for His honor, for His reputation.
- ⌘ Yes, there are times when I must walk through dark valleys, valleys with the veritable shadow of death encircling me. Yet, I fear not death, nor evil, for You my Friend [see John 15:12-17] are with me. I find comfort in the strength of Your power and Your guidance. Your rod protects; Your staff guides.
- ⌘ Even though I am compelled to fellowship with my enemies, I am anointed with Your blessing, so much so that I am overwhelmed with Your presence—my cup indeed overflows.

So? Your love, Your goodness will be my protection, all my life; You will pursue me. Thus, I will live within the LORD GOD YAHWEH'S home, forever.

- Q Why did the CHRIST create [Colossians 1:16] sheep? [Hint Isaiah 53:6]
- Q According to the Psalmist, who is the writer's "shepherd?" So?
- Q What is it that you want that you have not received from the Shepherd? Why is it that you still want "that?"
- Q What is it that you need that you have not received from the Shepherd? Why is it that you need "that?"
- Q Why does YAHWEH THE LORD GOD provide green pastures, quiet waters, soul restoration?
- Q Why does He guide you in paths of righteousness? [Hint: read the rest of verse 3.]
- Q Why is even the darkness of death an illegitimate source of fear? Why is there no fear of evil there? What is God's rod? His staff? Provide specific examples in your life—otherwise, you're not listening to HOLY SPIRIT!
- Q Why do you have enemies? Why does the Lord God "spread a table for you" in their presence?
- Q What is the solution for a table spread in the midst of enemies? What is this "oil that anoints?" Why so much? It is the Lord God being wasteful with His resources?
- Q Why then will your life here, and later, be filled with the love and goodness of the LORD GOD YAHWEH ALMIGHTY? [Hint: verses 1-5; note in verse 6, He *pursues* us. יִרְדָּפֵנוּ, 7291, yir-də-pū-nî]

PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, [or *through the darkest valley*] I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and love will follow [i.e., "pursue"] me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

ADVANCED BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR PSALM 23⁸

Psalm 23 A profession of joyful trust in the Lord as the good Shepherd-King. The psalm may have accompanied a festival of praise at “the house of YAHWEH” (v. 6) following a deliverance, such as is contemplated in 22:25-31 (see 7:17). The psalm can be divided into two balanced stanzas, each having four couplets (a couplet is one line of Hebrew poetry): (1) stanza one: vv. 1-2a,2b-3a,3b-c,4a-c (v. 4a-b is metrically a half-couplet); (2) stanza two: vv. 5a-b,5c-d,6a-b,6c-d. The triplet in the middle (v. 4d-f) is then a centering line, focusing on the Shepherd-King's reassuring presence with his people. It serves as a transition between the two stanzas, concluding the shepherd-sheep motif of the first and introducing the direct address (“you”) of the second. The psalm is framed by the first and last couplets, each of which refers to “the LORD;” i.e., YAHWEH ALMIGHTY!

23:1 *shepherd*. A widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, and also in Israel (see 78:71-72; Isa 44:28; 23:1-4; Micah 5:4). For the Lord as the shepherd of Israel see 28:9; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Genesis 48:15; Isa 40:11; Jer 17:16; 31:10; 50:19; Eze 34:11-16. Here David the king acknowledges that YAHWEH is his Shepherd-King. For Jesus as the shepherd of his people see Jn 10:11,14; Heb 13:20; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 7:17.

Note: Preceding the celebration of Jesus of Nazareth's birth as the CHRIST, knuckleheads will often speak of “shepherds” as lowly folk. Remind them, and yourself, that textual evidence from the Scripture itself contradicts this cute, but wrong, interpretation. Even secular kings were considered shepherds for their subjects (see Saul as “shepherd” in 2 Samuel 5:2 or the many “shepherds” for Israel—see Jeremiah 3:15). “Shepherd” had positive connotations, then and now. Don't trade cute for truth.

23:3 *restores my soul*. Revives me, refreshes my spirit (see Psalm 19:7; Ruth 4:15; Pr 25:13; La 1:16). *for his name's sake*. The righteousness of YAHWEH'S servants bring honor to the YAHWEH'S reputation (see 1Ki 8:41-42; Isa 48:9; Jer 14:21; Eze 20:9,14,22).

23:4 *rod*. Instrument of authority (as in 2:9; 45:6; Ex 21:20; 2Sa 7:14; Job 9:34); used also by shepherds for counting, guiding, rescuing and protecting sheep (see Lev 27:32; Eze 20:37). *staff*. Instrument of support (as in Ex 21:19; Jdg 6:21; 2Ki 4:29; Zec 8:4). *comfort me*. Reassure me (as in 71:21; 86:17; Ruth 2:13; Isa 12:1; 40:1; 49:13).

23:5 In the ancient Near East, covenants were often concluded with a meal expressive of the bond of friendship (see 41:9; Ge 31:54; Ob 7); in the case of vassal treaties or covenants, the vassal was present as the guest of the overlord (see Ex 24:8-12). *anoint my head with oil*. Customary treatment of an honored guest at a banquet (see Lk 7:46; see also 2Sa 12:20; Ecc 9:8; Da 10:3).

23:6 *goodness and love*. Both frequently refer to covenant benefits (see 6:4); here they are personified (see 25:21; 43:3; 79:8; 89:14). *follow*. Literally, “pursue.” *dwell in the house of YAHWEH forever*. The Hebrew for this word often translated “forever” [לְאַרְבָּעַת יָמִים, yom le-ro'-ek, 3117 & 753] suggests “throughout the years.”

⁸Adapted, corrected, and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV © 1996.