



In God We Trust

A Study of Psalm 23

For Openers:

- ◇ Have you had any funny encounters with animals?
- ◇ One thing I really want is...
- ◇ If I were to build my dream house, it would include...

For Your Information:

- ◇ Verse 1: Read Psalm 34:10 for another image of “wanting.” More significantly, read Deuteronomy 2:7 to see how God provided for Israel in the wilderness and Deuteronomy 8:9 for how this provision would continue in the promised land.
- ◇ Verse 2: Read Psalm 4:8 for another image of lying down in peace.
- ◇ Verse 2: Literally the Hebrew says, “waters of rest.” This may mean “still waters” or “quiet waters,” or it may mean “refreshing waters.”
- ◇ Verse 3: Literally, “He brings back my soul.” See 1 Kings 17:22; Psalms 19:7; 35:17; 116:7; and Job 33:3 for other instances of this phrasing to see what it might mean.
- ◇ Verse 4: Literally, “Even though I walk through the valley of deep-dark (*or* deep-shadow).” In Hebrew, the word does hint at something to do with death, and the word is sometimes used to characterize the world of the dead. Translators have rendered it with: “valley of the shadow of death,” “darkest valley,” “deepest darkness,” “valley as dark as death.”
- ◇ Verse 4: The “rod” was more like a club and was used in defending against wild animals. The “staff,” oftentimes pictured with some kind of hook on the one end, was a long stick used to guide the sheep and for support by the shepherd.
- ◇ Verse 5: The imagery in the psalm seems to change at this point so that God is now pictured as the gracious host preparing a feast. “Oil” was symbolic of rejoicing. To anoint someone’s head with oil was a sign of special favor and honor. Read Psalm 45:7-8; 92:10; Ecclesiastes 9:8; Luke 7:46. Some translations render the phrase as, “You honor me as your guest.” The picture of the cup overflowing is a sign of the host’s generosity.

Psalm 23:1 starts out with “The LORD is...” Did you ever notice how the word “LORD” is written? Note how it is written just a couple verses earlier in Psalm 22:30 which ends with “... about the Lord.” What’s going on here?

The difference in how the word looks is a way to indicate to English readers that a different Hebrew word is behind each one. When it is written as “Lord,” the Hebrew word is *adonai* which means “my lord” or “my master.” It is the word a slave would use to call his owner, but it is also regularly used in the Bible to refer to God. When it is written as “LORD,” the English is reflecting the sacred Hebrew name for God whose consonants are YHWH. (See Exodus 3:13-15.) Jews regarded this name to be so holy that they were not allowed to pronounce it. It became the custom when a reader of the Hebrew text came to this word to speak the word *adonai* instead. In order to remind readers of this custom, the vowels for *adonai* were written in with the consonants YHWH. In the 16th century, when the Hebrew text was translated into English, this composite word was rendered as Jehovah. (Keep in mind that Y and J are interchangeable as are W and V.) The best guess is that the divine name originally was pronounced Yahweh.

- ◇ Verse 6: Literally, “Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall pursue me...”
- ◇ Verse 6: The “house of the Lord” is a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem. There is some difficulty in the Hebrew which either is saying, “I will keep on returning to...” or “I shall dwell in...”
- ◇ Verse 6: Literally, “... for length of days.” Usually it means “long life,” but it can come close to meaning “forever” as in Psalm 93.5.

For Your Consideration:

- 1) Verse 1: The psalmist says, “The Lord is my shepherd...” What contemporary image would you use to describe the Lord’s relationship to you?
- 2) Verse 1: The second half of this verse could be translated in a number of different ways. Is there any difference between: “I shall not want,” “I shall not lack,” “I have everything I need,” “I will never be in need”?
- 3) Verse 2: Describe what your life would look like if you were dwelling in “green pastures” beside “still waters.”
- 4) Verse 3: How does your soul get depleted? What does it take to “restore your soul”?
- 5) Verse 3: Why is it significant that God would lead you in paths of righteousness *for his name’s sake*?
- 6) Verse 4: What dark valleys have you gone through in your life? What things helped you through them?
- 7) Verse 4: How has the “rod” of God protected you? How has the “staff” of God guided you? How do both of these aspects of God’s relating to you serve to “comfort” you?
- 8) Verse 6: Would you prefer to have “goodness and mercy” awaiting you wherever you go, or is it significant that they “follow” (or “pursue”!) you all the days of your life?
- 9) Verse 6: What does it mean for you to “dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long”? (Compare the translation of the *TEV* which says, “Your house will be my home as long as I live.”)
- 10) Put yourself in King David’s place and try to imagine what significance this psalm had for him. Now, keeping in mind how Jesus has been made known to us as the Good Shepherd, what significance does it have for you?



For Later:

- ◇ Memorize Psalm 23.
- ◇ Compare a few different translations of Psalm 23. How do the differences help you understand it better?
- ◇ Read John 10:1-30.