

# Psalm 23: The Good Shepherd



Psalm 23 (22) (Mode 3. 3....12 / 4.....271)

Part One. Exodus journey (23:1-4)

We are on a journey. God, like a shepherd, is looking after us, guiding us to pasture, and to the oasis where we can slake our thirst and find rest. When the time comes to move on, we know that God is with us. When darkness falls and we cannot see, we listen for the familiar sound of the shepherd's staff as it strikes the firm earth and the rocks, and when we are straying we feel the familiar touch of the rod, directing us along the right path.

With such care we are confident that we will not stray or lag behind. We are being led and protected by the Shepherd. We trust that we will want for nothing. We are on the right path and with a God who is faithful.

Psalm 23 took on an extra dimension of meaning at the time of the return from exile in Babylon:

‘Say to the prisoners, “Come out,” to those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves.” They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them’(Isaiah 49:9-10).

## You, Lord, are my shepherd.

‘You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron’( Psalm 77:20).

‘He led out his people like sheep, and guided  
them in the wilderness like a flock’(Psalm 78:52).

‘Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead  
Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon  
the cherubim, shine forth’(Psalm 80:1).

‘He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep’(Isaiah 40:11).

‘I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply’(Jeremiah 23:3).

## I want for nothing.

‘Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing’(Psalm 34:10).

‘Let nothing disturb you;

let nothing dismay you:

all things pass;

God never changes.

Patience attains all.

The one who has God

lacks nothing:

God alone suffices’(Teresa Poesias 30).

You give me rest in green pastures.

‘My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places’(Isaiah 32:18).

‘Jesus ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass.’

(Mark 6:39; see John 6:10).



## Ezekiel 34:13-16

‘I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the water courses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.’

You lead me to tranquil waters  
to revive my drooping spirit.

‘O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
my whole being thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land  
where there is no water’(Psalm 63:1).

‘I stretch out my hands to you; with all my being  
I thirst for you like a parched land’(Psalm 143:6).

‘As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my whole being longs for you, O God.  
All that is within me thirsts for God,  
for the living God. When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?’(Psalm 42:1-2)

‘Those who drink of the water that I will give them  
will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will  
become in them a spring of water gushing up to  
eternal life’(John 4:14).

‘Let the one who believes in me drink. As the  
scripture has said: Out of his heart shall flow rivers of  
living water’(John 7:38).

You guide me along the right path.

You are true to your name.

‘With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I have become a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn’(Jeremiah 31:9).

Though I should walk in death's dark valley  
I fear no evil. You are with me.

‘Even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you’(Psalm 139:12).

‘I will be with you’(Exodus 3:12).

Your rod and your staff give me comfort.

‘The Lord will comfort Zion;  
he will comfort all her waste places,  
and will make her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the Lord;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song’(Isaiah 51:3).

‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices’(Luke 15:4-5).

‘Jesus said to them: You will all become deserters; for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee’(Mark 14:27-28).

‘You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls’(1Peter 2:25).

‘I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away’(1Peter 5:1-4)



## Part Two. Entrance into the Promised Land (23:5-6)

We experience ourselves as fugitives, banished from the community, but welcomed by God into the protection and hospitality of God's home.

In God's home we enjoy the comfort of a banquet, yet there is still need to keep moving. We are pursued by enemies, but God gives us his own Goodness and Kindness as escort. They will go with us, and so God will be present with us on the journey to the sanctuary which awaits us.

You prepare a banquet for me  
in the presence of my enemies.

‘They spoke against God, saying, ‘Can God spread a table in the wilderness?’(Psalm 78:19).

‘Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table’(Proverbs 9:1-2).

You prepare a banquet for me  
in the presence of my enemies.

‘You who thirst, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food’(Isaiah 55:1-2).

You anoint my head with perfume;  
my cup overflows.

‘Your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you’(Song of Songs 1:3).

‘On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear’(Isaiah 25:6).

Surely your goodness and kindness will watch over me  
all the days of my life.

My whole life long

I will dwell in the house of the Lord.

‘In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to  
prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a  
place for you, I will come again and will take you to  
myself, so that where I am, there you may be  
also’(John 14:2-3; see also John 17:24).