

Highlights from the Psalms

Psalm 23: 4-5

March 21, 2021

Introduction: As we move into the second half of the Shepherd's Psalm the pronouns change. They go from He and me to You and I. This suggests the intimacy between the sheep and the Shepherd. As the springtime of the year unfolds, the shepherd moves his sheep to higher ground; into the high summer meadows, and the trek is dangerous were it not for the watchful care of the shepherd.

I. The Valley of the Shadow of Death

- A. The best way to the high mountains is by way of the canyons and gullies where there is plenty of water
- B. It is also the path of danger where treacherous ground and lurking predators abound
- C. Only the presence of the shepherd can calm and protect the sheep

II. Your Rod and Your Staff

- A. The shepherd carries the most rudimentary and simple tools
 - 1. In these days it is likely a rifle slung on the back and a staff
 - 2. In simpler cultures the rifle is replaced with a rod
- B. It is the rod that defines the power and the lethal authority of the shepherd against all enemies (His protection)
 - 1. Moses' rod
 - 2. God's Word (the sword of the Spirit)
- C. It is also the rod that brings discipline to the sheep who stray and the shepherd uses it to count their number (Ezekiel 20: 37)
- D. The staff brings comfort
 - 1. With it the shepherd leads and guides the sheep
 - 2. With it the shepherd communicates closeness as they walk along together
 - 3. With it the shepherd rescues the sheep in trouble
- E. The staff is a symbol to David of the Spirit of God

** It is these 2 tools of the shepherd:
the rod and the staff that bring comfort to the sheep **

III. A Table among Enemies

- A. The table is a *mesa* or *tableland* where the sheep may feast in the high country
- B. The shepherd prepares these mesas by removing the poisonous plants that would harm, even kill the sheep
- C. It is also around these tablelands that predators lurk, waiting for the shepherd to be distracted so a sheep might be stolen

IV. Anointed with Oil and Overflowing Cup

- A. Summertime is *fly time* as insects torment the flock
- B. The shepherd rubs the oil on the face and skin to drive away the tormentors—thus the sheep can graze quietly and peacefully again
- C. Oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit
- D. Scab is an especially pernicious problem about the face. As sheep rub their heads together they spread the disease. We, too, must guard against contaminating one another with humanistic thoughts
- E. In the chill of the storms the shepherd offers the brandy and water mixture, even as Jesus offers the *cup* in His blood to save and warm our souls

Conclusion: The Good Shepherd is both Provider and Protector. He attends to our every need. He guards us from the predators of life.

*Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Verse 6

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