

# Psalm 23

## - The Lord is my Shepherd -

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## Introduction

- ❖ “Like an old friend, many of us have known it since childhood. This is the psalm that we want to hear when we are stricken with grief ... and when our bodies begin to fail us. We welcome it from our hospital bed. We lean on it when we stand at the grave.”<sup>1</sup> In a footnote, Saleska adds: “So I usually do not try to paraphrase or reword the images in 23:1–4. Every attempt to do so seems inadequate. Nor do I need to pin down the situation that David is referring to. **The metaphorical language could apply to many episodes of his life. It doesn’t restrict our imagination; it kindles it.**”
- ❖ The Psalmist has a personal relation with the LORD as his shepherd. This is a unique use of the image. In almost all other instances where the image of the shepherd is used, the shepherd tends to a flock, the people of Israel (Old Testament) or the congregation of the church (New Testament). In Psalm 23, the individual is professing his faith and trust in the LORD, his shepherd.
  - There is one other instance of an individual when Jacob blesses his son Joseph: “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, **the God who has been my shepherd** all my life to this day” (Gn 48:15).
- ❖ The Psalm consists of two parts. The first part (verses 1-4) presents the LORD as the shepherd, and the second part presents him as a Royal Host.
  - A tentative conclusion might be that the Psalm depicts the LORD as King, shepherding his earthly representative, the anointed king like David, and inviting him to his table. This does justice to both parts of the psalm.

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<sup>1</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 413).

- At the same time, the meaning of Psalm 23 should not be limited to this situation, as is stated above. Everyone following the Good Shepherd will be comforted by these words and find rest, promise and joy.
- ❖ Psalm 23 is a prayer song of trust and thanksgiving. The Psalmist addresses the LORD directly in verses 4 and 5. The prayer is embedded. In this embedded prayer, he refers to “the valley of the shadow of death”, where “evil” might be hidden, and to “enemies.”
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Book of Psalms. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## Context

- ❖ The Book of Psalms belongs to the Wisdom literature. Psalm 23 belongs to the first book of Psalms (Psalm 1-41).
- ❖ The historical context in which Psalm 23 was composed is not known but can only be surmised based on the historical use of the shepherd imagery in the Bible and the Ancient Near East. This has a disadvantage and an advantage.
  - The explanation poses some difficulties such as what is meant by “the paths of righteousness.” Do these paths refer to upright behaviour or to the right way to follow?
  - This ambiguous meaning leaves room for personal application and appropriation in different personal circumstances.

## Form and structure

- ❖ Psalm 23 consists of two parts:
  - Wilcock comments: Psalm 23 is a “little masterpiece. It is a beloved Psalm: The Lord is described as *my shepherd*, and as nothing else throughout the six verses. Not surprisingly the simple but profound metaphor has often been taken to govern the whole psalm, so that all of it is about the relationship between shepherd and sheep.” “A closer look at the Psalm reveals a division in two or even three parts. **This**

study opts for two parts (23:1-4 and 5-6), where the second part governs also the first part.”<sup>2</sup>

- Part I. The LORD is my shepherd (verses 1-4).
- Part II. The LORD is my host (verses 5, 6).

| <b>A psalm of David.</b>   |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Part I. The LORD is my Shepherd</b>   |   |
| <p><i>Profession of faith (verse 1):</i></p> <p><i>The Lord is my shepherd (verses 2, 3):</i></p> <p><i>I trust you as my shepherd (verse 4)</i></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The LORD is my shepherd,</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3. I shall not be in want.</li> <li>4. He makes me lie down in green pastures,</li> <li>5. he leads me beside quiet waters,</li> <li>6. he restores my soul.</li> <li>7. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.</li> <li>8. Even though I walk</li> <li>9. through the valley of the shadow of death,</li> <li>10. I will fear no evil,</li> <li>11. for you are with me;</li> <li>12. your rod and your staff,</li> <li>13. they comfort me.</li> </ol> |
| <b>Part II. The LORD is my host.</b>   |   |
| <p><i>The Lord is my host: (verse 5)</i></p> <p><i>Assurance of faith: (verse 6)</i></p>   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. You prepare a table before me</li> <li>15. in the presence of my enemies.<br/>You anoint my head with oil;<br/>my cup overflows.</li> <li>16. Surely goodness and love will follow me</li> <li>17. all the days of my life,</li> <li>18. and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</li> </ol>   |

<sup>2</sup> Wilcock, M. (2001, Vol. 1, p. 86).

- ❖ Note the use of personal pronouns.
  - First-person: I
  - Second person: you (your);
  - Third person: he.
- ❖ An embedded prayer:
  - The conclusion might be justified that verses 4 and 5 are an embedded prayer of trust and expectation. The LORD as shepherd will bring his servant to the house of the LORD.

## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### Historical setting

- ❖ The historical setting is unknown.

### Genre

- ❖ Psalm 23 is a Psalm of Trust. Other Psalms of Trust are 11; 23; 27; 62; 63; 121; and 131.

### Parallellismus membrorum

- ❖ Parallellismus membrorum is a special feature of Biblical literature, especially of the Old Testament Wisdom Literature, i.e. The Book of Job, Psalms and Proverbs. It “is also present, although less prominent, in biblical prose. It can be defined as the repetition of the same or related semantic content and/or grammatical structure in consecutive lines or verses.”<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Bratcher and Reyburn note: “The reader of this psalm will search in vain for the typical type of parallelism in which the second line repeats and emphasizes similar words found in the first line. In fact, aside from verse 2, the line halves are very different in meaning and length. Furthermore there is a lack of symmetry, an absence of word pairing, of chiasmic patterns, of envelope figure—all of those features which tend to give a poem its particular shape. There is, on the other hand, an economy of words, a terseness of style.”<sup>4</sup>

### The Shepherd<sup>5</sup>

- ❖ **Ancient Near East**

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<sup>3</sup> See for more information: Berlin, A. (1992). *Parallelism*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.)(Vol. 5, p. 155).

<sup>4</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 230).

<sup>5</sup> Vancil, J. W. (1992, Vol. 5, pp. 1187–1188). *Sheep, Shepherd*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

- The image of the shepherd was widely used in the Ancient Near East. In Mesopotamia (nowadays Iraq) it was used to designate gods (Marduk) and kings (Hammurabi). "The king as a shepherd and as a representative of the gods was expected to rule with justice and to show kindness in counseling, protecting, and guiding the people through every difficulty." The people were thought of as a herd or flock.
- In Egypt,<sup>6</sup> the use of the shepherd's crook as an insignia of kings, princes, and chieftains was widespread. "The instrument symbolized the ruler's power and eminence, and especially the nature of his rule, the king's obligation to maintain order and justice (*maat*) in the land."<sup>7</sup>

### ❖ The Old Testament

- When Jacob blessed Joseph and his two sons, he professed that God "has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (Gn 48:15). After he said this, he blessed each of his sons personally. When it is Joseph's turn, he says: "because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of **the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel**" (Gn 49:24).
  - Psalm 80:1: "Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock."
- The tribes of Israel recognised David as a shepherd installed by the Lord to rule the people of Israel (2 Sam 5:7; see also Ps 78:71, 72).
- Not only David was installed as a shepherd, but also King Cyrus of Persia: "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please" (Isa 44:28).
- Especially in the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the political and spiritual leaders are addressed as shepherds. They did not tend the flock (Jer 23:22; Ezek 34:2). The LORD will install new faithful shepherds (Jer 23:24).
  - The Lord will shepherd his people (Ezek 34:11-16).
  - And there is the promise of the new shepherd: "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd" (Ezek 34:23; Ezek 37:24; **see also Mic 5:2-5**).

### ❖ The New Testament

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<sup>6</sup> In the Karnak temple, Amenhotep III (1411–1374) is called "the good shepherd, vigilant for all people" (*ARE* 2:365–66). An inscription at Redesiyeh calls Seti I (1313–1292) "the good shepherd, who preserves his soldiers alive" (*ARE* 3:86). At Karnak, an inscription by Merneptah (1225–1215) reads "I am the ruler who shepherds you" (*ARE* 3:243).

<sup>7</sup> Vancil, J. W. (1992, Vol. 5, p. 1188). *Sheep, Shepherd*. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.).

- “The disciples of Jesus used the image to characterize the role and mission of Jesus. It begins when shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, the city of David, heard that the son of David was born, and angels announcing ‘peace’ to mankind (Lk 2:8–20; see also Ezek 34:23–25; 1 Sam 16:1, 12, 13; Jer 23:1–8; Mic 5:2–4). Jesus looked for the people of Israel as ‘sheep without a shepherd’ (Mk 6:34; Mt 9:35–10:6; 15:24; Lk 19:10; Ezek 34).
- In the gospel of John (Jn 10:1–18, 22–29), where Jesus’ concern for Israel is contrasted with the feigned care of other (spiritual) leaders. “As a compassionate and trustworthy shepherd, his mission and quality of leadership are marked by a willingness to die for the sheep” (Jn 10:11; see also 1 Sam 17:34–35 and Ezek 34:11–16, 23–24).”
- The apostles used the image of the shepherd to describe the work of the elders, who were expected to pattern their life and work after that of their chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:1–4; Heb 13:17, 20–21; see also Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 20:17, 28–29; 1 Tim 3:2; 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:5).

### Sheep

- ❖ Sheep are domesticated animals. Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve, was already a shepherd (Gen 4:2), tending his flock, probably although not mentioned, consisting of sheep and goats. “The dominance hierarchy of sheep and their natural inclination to follow a leader to new pastures were the pivotal factors in sheep being one of the first domesticated livestock species.” “If worked with patiently, sheep may learn their names.”<sup>8</sup>
  - See also John 10:3: “The watchman opens the gate for him (the shepherd), and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”

### The LORD and the covenant<sup>9</sup>

- ❖ God's character is revealed in the Psalms through several roles. Among these are creator, king/judge, covenant Lord, Father and shepherd (see above), redeemer/deliverer,
  - *Creator*. The LORD is “the maker of heaven and earth” (Ps 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3) by his spoken command (Ps 33:6; 148:5); it is the work of his hands (Ps 100:3; 138:8).
  - *King and Host/Judge* (Ps 23:5, 6). Because God is the maker of the universe, he is its true king (Ps 93:1; 95:3). He rules it with complete sovereignty, and there is nothing to threaten it, most of all, not the kings of this earth (Ps 2:4; 59:8 47:1–9). And as king, he is the one who assures that the proper order of things is maintained (Ps

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<sup>8</sup> Wikimedia Foundation. (2023, December 13). Sheep. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheep>

<sup>9</sup> This overview is based on: Oswalt, J. N. (2008, p. 249-250). *God*. In T. Longman III & P. Enns (Eds.).

89:14; 98:9; 105:7; Ps 146:7-9). See also “paths of righteousness,” which can refer to conduct appropriate within the context of the covenant.

- Psalm 23 is best understood and explained within the context of the covenant and a personal relationship within the covenant.
- *Father and Shepherd.* But beyond this covenant relationship, the Psalms depict Yahweh as one who plays an even more personal role in relationship to his people. He is the Father, who will take up his children when their earthly mothers and fathers forsake him (Ps 27:10; 68:5; 89:26). And as a shepherd, he takes care of his sheep.

## Exposition

### A psalm of David.

- ❖ This superscript can indicate two things:
  - David is the author of this Psalm (2 Sam 23:1).
    - David himself was a shepherd before he was anointed as the successor of King Saul (1 Sam 16:11; Ps 78:70, 71).
  - The Psalm belongs to the collection of Psalms, whose composition dates back to the time of King David and onwards.

### Verse 1 *The statement of faith*

- ❖ **“LORD”** = “יהוה”<sup>10</sup>: The NAME of God which is especially related to the covenant.
  - The LORD as King (1 Sam 8:7; especially Psalm 10:7; 24; 29:10; 45:11; 84:3; 95:3; 98:6; also Isa 33:22; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; Jer 46:18; Sef 3:15; Zech 14; Mal 1:14).
- ❖ **“Shepherd.”** See for more information above.
  - The same image is used in Isaiah 40:11:
  - "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."
    - Kidner remarks: “In the word *shepherd*, David uses the most comprehensive and intimate metaphor yet encountered in the Psalms, preferring usually the more distant ‘king’ or ‘deliverer’, or the impersonal ‘rock’, ‘shield’, etc.; whereas the shepherd lives with his flock and is everything to it: guide, physician and protector.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Kidner, D. (1973, p. 127).

- ❖ **“to be (not) in want” = “חָסֵר”**: **to be devoid of.**<sup>11</sup> These instances might serve as background:
  - Deuteronomy 2:7 (Dt 8:2-4, 9; Neh 9:21):
  - "The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, **and you have not lacked anything.**"
  - Psalm 34:10:
  - "The lions may grow weak and hungry, **but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.**"
  - What does the Psalmist need?
    - Rest; guidance; refreshment of the soul; comfort; goodness, and lovingkindness.

### **Part I (verses 2-4) *The Lord is my Shepherd***

#### Verse 2-3

- ❖ The Psalm is based on the image of the shepherd tending his sheep. See above.
- ❖ **“He makes me lie down in green pastures,**
- ❖ **he leads me beside quiet waters,**
- ❖ **he restores my soul.”**
  - The first two lines depict a resting place for sheep and explain verse 1: I shall not be in want: **“green pastures”** and **“quiet waters.”**
    - **“quiet” = “מְנוּחָה”**: local: a) **resting place**. It is also used for Canaan as dwelling place for Israel (Dt 12:9; 1 Ki 8:56; Isa 11:10; d) dwelling place of God (Isa 66:1; Ps 95:11; 132:8, 14).<sup>12</sup>
      - Psalm 23:5, 6 refer also to the dwelling place of the LORD.
      - This is also a safe place to lie down and rest. The Shepherd will keep watch and protect.
  - **“soul” = “נַפְשִׁי”**: "could refer to the speaker’s physical health and life. It could also refer to his life’s circumstances or his spiritual and emotional life—restored hope

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<sup>11</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 338).

<sup>12</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 600).



and restored joy for his soul. In Psalm 19:7, it is YHWH's Torah that restores the life of the speaker."<sup>13</sup>

- "restore" = "שׁוּב": to refresh, restore the soul (Ps 23:3), literally "to bring back liveliness, vitality" (referring to Kraus, *Psalms* 338).<sup>14</sup>

- This implies that the Psalmist needs refreshment, physically and spiritually.

❖ "paths of righteousness" = "בְּמַעַלְלֵי צְדָקָה": **salvation, well-being**: — in construct state of noun: expressions: saving.<sup>15</sup> The Greek translation gives: "righteousness."

- "Paths of righteousness" "can mean 'correct paths,' that is, the paths that are right for me to go in my life. It may also mean 'paths that lead to/continue in righteousness,' that is, ways of living and believing that are consistent with and maintain the righteous relationship that YHWH has established with the psalmist, his righteous standing by grace and through faith."<sup>16</sup> This accords with the view that the LORD as sovereign King leads the individual who is a righteous king or an overseer in the church.
- Psalm 5:8:
- "Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies— make straight your way before me."

❖ "For his name's sake."

- Bratcher and Reyburn give an overview of possible translations:<sup>17</sup> "The phrase 'on account of his name' occurs also in Psalm 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11. It means in the first instance 'for the sake of his reputation.'" They refer to the New Jewish Bible and the New Jerusalem Bible, and Dahood: 'as befits his name'. Other translations include: 'bringing honour to his name.' Today's English Version "has taken 'name' here to stand for Yahweh's reputation as one who keeps his promises." "And Taylor comments: 'The good shepherd will not be false to himself.'"

#### Verse 4

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<sup>13</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 410).

<sup>14</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1431).

<sup>15</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1005).

<sup>16</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 410).

<sup>17</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 233).

- ❖ **“Even though I walk.”** It must be noted that the shepherd leads his sheep also through “the valley of the shadow of death.”
- ❖ **“The valley of the shadow of death.”**
  - For an overview of translations and interpretations, see Bratcher and Reyburn<sup>18</sup> The Greek translation (Septuagint) translates the word “valley” as “the midst” (“in the midst of total darkness”). “The shadow of death” means elsewhere simply darkness (see Ps 44:19; 107:10; Job 3:5; 10:22; 12:22; 16:16; Isa 9:2). It can also be taken as a compound, meaning “darkness of death” (so the Septuagint). Most modern translations avoid the word “death.” These translations paraphrase “dark valley”, “the valley of deep darkness”, “the dark valley”, and “the darkest of all valleys.” The New English Bible has “a valley dark as death.”
  - Saleska notes: “The prophets often describe situations of hopelessness, defeat, grief, unbelief, trouble, and so on, in terms of darkness. For example, ‘Though I have fallen, I rise again; though I sit in darkness, the LORD is my light’” (Micah 7:8; see also Isa 50:10).<sup>19</sup>
- ❖ **“evil” = “עַוְוָה”:** danger, harm, injury. He doesn’t fear evil because the shepherd is with him. He will protect and guide him through the dark valley.
- ❖ **“with me” = “אִתִּי”:** “there are 41 passages in the Old Testament in which one man or several affirm that Yahweh (or God) was ‘with him, thee, me, them, you, us.’”<sup>20</sup>
  - “This is the real central statement of trust. God is present with his mighty protective power.”<sup>21</sup>
  - What does it mean that the LORD is with someone or with the people?
    - Deuteronomy 2:7: “The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.”
- ❖ **“your rod and your staff”**
  - The **“rod”** was used to drive away wild animals, like the lion and the bear (1 Sam 17:36). The **“staff”** was used for support in walking.

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<sup>18</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 233). See also for references to the different translations.

<sup>19</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 411).

<sup>20</sup> Preuss, H. D. (1977, Vol. 1, p. 454). אִתִּי. In G. J. Botterweck & H. Ringgren (Ed.), & J. T. Willis (Trans.).

<sup>21</sup> Kraus, H.-J. (1993, p. 308).

❖ **“to comfort”** = “נַחַם”: to encourage.

- Bratcher and Reyburn note: “The verb 'to comfort' means here to provide assurance, security, safety.” Other translations of the Bible have: They “give me courage”, “reassure me”, and “fill me with confidence.”<sup>22</sup>

## **Part II (verses 5-6) *The Lord as the Host***

### Verse 5

❖ **“You prepare a table before me.”**

- The table fellowship with the LORD means to say: I invite and protect my guest, which is now demonstrated also to his enemies.<sup>23</sup> Don't foster evil plans towards him.
- Kidner points to the fact that: “to eat and drink at someone's table created a bond of mutual loyalty, and could be the culminating token of a covenant.”<sup>24</sup>
- See for a contrast Psalm 78:19: “They spoke against God, saying, ‘Can God spread a table in the desert?’”

❖ **“in the presence of my enemies.”**

- The psalmist is honoured by the LORD in front of his enemies. These enemies are not specified.

❖ **“You anoint my head with oil.”**

- **“anoint”** = “משח”: anoint, a symbol of festivity and joy<sup>25</sup>
  - Compare Psalm 45:7: “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

❖ **“my cup overflows.”** Also a symbol of festivity, joy and blessing.

### Verse 6

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<sup>22</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, p. 233-234).

<sup>23</sup> Kraus, H.-J. (1993, p. 308).

<sup>24</sup> Kidner, D. (1973, p. 130).

<sup>25</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 206).

- ❖ **“Surely.”** This translates a particle “that gives emphasis to what follows; it can be rendered “I am certain (or, sure) that.”<sup>26</sup>
- ❖ **“goodness and love will follow me”** (ESV: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me”)
  - **“goodness”** = “בִּטְחָן”: *welfare, prosperity, happiness.*<sup>27</sup>
  - **“love”** (ESV: “mercy”; NASB95: “lovingkindness”; NLT: “unfailing love”) = “רַחֲמִים”: **joint obligation** between relatives, friends, host and guest, master and servant; closeness, solidarity, **loyalty**;<sup>28</sup> in God’s relationship with the people or an individual, **faithfulness, goodness, and graciousness.**<sup>29</sup>
  - **“follow”** = “רָדַף”: to **pursue, follow after; metaphorically, to pursue.**<sup>30</sup> In a negative sense, this verb is used to describe the effect of a curse:
    - Ezekiel 35:6:
    - "therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I will give you over to bloodshed and it **will pursue you**. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed **will pursue you**."
    - Deuteronomy 28:45:
    - "All these curses will come upon you. They **will pursue you** and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you."
    - In the positive sense, the verb describes the result of following the good shepherd in the "paths of righteousness":
    - "He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake (verse 3).
    - Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life" (verse 6).
- ❖ **“all the days of my life”** as long as I live.
- ❖ **“and I will dwell in the house of the LORD.”** God’s people celebrate their fellowship with him<sup>31</sup> and serving him day by day.

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<sup>26</sup> Bratcher, R. G., & Reyburn, W. D. (1991, 235).

<sup>27</sup> Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977, p. 375).

<sup>28</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 336).

<sup>29</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 337).

<sup>30</sup> Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W., Richardson, M. E. J., & Stamm, J. J. (1994–2000, p. 1191).

<sup>31</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 417-418).

- “house of the LORD” might be paraphrased “in the presence of the LORD.” If the house of the LORD would refer to the temple or the Tabernacle or the afterlife in heaven,
- ❖ “forever” extends “all the days of my life.”

## Application

### Remark

- ❖ Saleska remarks: “The relationship between 23:5–6 and 23:1–4 does remain somewhat ambiguous.
  - Psalm 23:1–4 can be a description of our present experience but also a promise of the age to come,
  - and Psalm 3:5–6 can be a promise of the age to come but also a description of the here and now.”<sup>32</sup>
- ❖ But when we see the Psalm against the background of the LORD as King and as the good shepherd, then both parts fit together. In the first part, the LORD is shepherding his anointed one as his earthly representative as king over Israel (David). In the second part, the LORD receives his anointed king at his table. And this king serves the LORD in his house, where he dwells day by day, and goodness and mercy will follow him (benefiting the people).
  - An interesting passage in Hebrews (3:1-6) can shed some light upon this proposed explanation:
  - “Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. **Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house**, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.”

### How to preach?

- ❖ Try to relate this Psalm to the daily life of the believer. The believer needs rest, comfort, and encouragement, especially during the difficult episodes of life.

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<sup>32</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 416).

## Praise

- ❖ Praise the LORD as our King and Shepherd. This praise must be extended to Jesus Christ, the good shepherd (Jn 10:11)
  - He gives rest. He restores our souls. He protects and guides us also when we face difficulties (dark valleys).
  - Christ as the good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11).
    - “For the Lamb at the centres of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17).
  - The rod and the staff can also be compared with the word of God or the voice of the shepherd (Jn 10:3-5).
- ❖ **COMPLETE DEPENDENCE.** AUGUSTINE wrote: “When you say, ‘The Lord is my shepherd,’ **no proper grounds are left for you to trust in yourself.** SERMON 366.2.33
  - “David, rather than asserting *his own control*, believes that consolation is found by giving up control and submitting to the leading of Another who has our best interests at heart. This Shepherd promises that all will be well with us. He gives us everything we need.”<sup>34</sup>

## For the sake of his name

- ❖ Stress the faithfulness of the LORD.

## I shall not be in want

- ❖ Of rest (Mt 11:28), guidance, protection against evil, comfort, new strength: hope, love, wisdom, grace, mercy, goodness, lovingkindness.

## Trust and Prayer

- ❖ “**For you are with me.**” is the central theme of this Psalm. See also Matthew 28:20: “And surely **I am with you** always, to the very end of the age.”
- ❖ Pay attention to the fact that the prayer (Ps 23:4, 5) is found in connection with “the valley of the shadow of death,” “I will fear no evil,” and “my enemies.”
  - Prayer is necessary. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,” the good shepherd.

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<sup>33</sup> Blaising, C. A., & Hardin, C. S., red. (2008, p. 178).

<sup>34</sup> Saleska, T. E. (2020, p. 414).

- Remember: Faith and Trust eliminate or reduce Fear!

#### You prepare a table before me

- ❖ In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ has prepared his Lord's Supper for his congregation.

#### I will dwell in the house of the LORD

- ❖ Live in close relationship and in communion with the LORD to serve him. See Hebrews 3:2-6.

#### Pastors (Shepherds)

- ❖ The apostle Paul wrote: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, **and some to be pastors and teachers**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:11, 12; Ac 20:28).
  - Reflect upon: "The LORD as shepherd / Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd <> pastors (shepherd) <> the flock (congregation)."
    - Especially reflect upon "the paths of righteousness."
      - 1. 'correct paths,' that is, the paths that are right for me to go in my life or in guiding the congregation.
      - 2. 'paths that lead to/continue in righteousness,' that is, ways of living and believing that are consistent with and maintain the righteous covenant relationship with the LORD.
  - Goodness and mercy (love) will follow and turn out to be a blessing for many others.

#### False shepherds

- ❖ Scripture warns at several places for false and unfaithful shepherds see Ezekiel 34:1-10.
  - Some people promote themselves as shepherds: populist leaders, areligious leaders.

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