



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 003: The Shepherd Psalm

Study Author: Michael Button

Read Psalm 23.

According to the superscription (the introduction), this Psalm was written by David. Though he later became a king, David spent his early years as a shepherd. He knew how much the sheep under his care depended on him, their shepherd, and he realised that he likewise depended on God's care.

vv 1-3 The Shepherd's provision. The Shepherd looks after the sheep's needs of sustenance, rest and refreshment. Read another reference to sheep in Matt 25:33 and to a fold (a flock of sheep) in John 10:16. The former is part of a parable in which Jesus calls those who look after the needs of others as "sheep" and those who ignore the needs of others as "goats". Can you see any connections between these passages and Psalm 23?

v4 The Shepherd's protection. Whether the "valley" depicts death itself or a dangerous, unpleasant experience, the promise in verse 4 is of the Shepherd's presence and care. A shepherd would use his rod to ward off enemies and his staff to bring straying sheep in line. What comfort might you gain from the Shepherd's presence when you are going through a hard time?

vv5-6 A royal welcome. The scenes of a feast, an anointing and an overflowing cup are all aspects of the Eastern custom of welcoming an honoured guest. Here they may suggest a jubilant welcome to God's house at the end of life's journey (compare this to Rev 19:9), but there are promises of the 'wine' of gladness and the 'oil' of joy for this life too. Read Psalm 104:15. How does this compare with John 10:10?

To think about: If I am a "sheep", how closely do I follow the Shepherd?

To dig deeper: (vv 5-6) In the final two verses the pastoral scene seems to give way to a welcome in a royal palace. But maybe the shepherd/sheep theme might still be applied. What do different commentaries say? What do you think?