

**The Lord
Shepherding His Sheep**

Psalm 23

Joel Beeke



EP BOOKS

(Evangelical Press), Registered Office: 140 Coniscliffe Road,
Darlington, Co Durham DL3 7RT

admin@epbooks.org

www.epbooks.org

EP books are distributed in the USA by: JPL Books,
3883 Linden Ave. S.E., Wyoming, MI 49548

order@jplbooks.com

www.jplbooks.com

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First published 2015

Revised and expanded from an earlier book *Jehovah Shepherding His Sheep*

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN: 978-1-78397-144-2

Scripture references are from the King James Version

With heartfelt appreciation for
Larry and Linda VanBeek
faithful friends, always kind and self-denying,
lovers of Christ-centered preaching;
many thanks for all the truck loads of books
and trips you made to numerous conferences
all over America to sell Reformed literature with me.

Contents

Preface	7
Psalm 23	9
Introduction	11
Part 1	
<i>Psalm 23:1 “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”</i>	
1 The Shepherd-Lord	17
2 Who Lacks Nothing?	33
3 How the Lord’s Sheep Shall Lack Nothing	45
4 Why and When the Lord’s Sheep Shall Lack Nothing	59
Part 2	
<i>Psalm 23:2 “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”</i>	
5 The Shepherd’s Gift of Divine Rest	75
6 The Shepherd’s Refreshment	93
Part 3	
<i>Psalm 23:3 “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”</i>	
7 The Shepherd’s Restoration for the Diseased and Downcast	107
8 The Shepherd’s Restoration for the Wandering Sheep	121
9 Unrighteousness Uncovered and Righteousness Imputed	135
10 The Shepherd’s Righteousness to Sanctify and Preserve	149

Part 4

Psalm 23:4 “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

11	The Shepherd’s Protection and Spiritual Growth	165
12	The Shepherd’s Protection and Spiritual Courage	179
13	The Shepherd’s Companionship	193
14	The Shepherd’s Comfort	205

Part 5

Psalm 23:5 “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.”

15	Divine Provision	219
16	Divine Anointing	233
17	Divine Joy And Liberty	245

Part 6

Psalm 23:6 “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

18	God’s Gracious Pursuit	261
19	At Home with the Shepherd	275
	Notes	289

Preface

Scripture abounds with illustrations of shepherds and sheep, which are metaphors for the loving care of Christ for His people. The Bible speaks of sheep 176 times, lambs 164 times, and shepherds 80 times. No shepherd-sheep image, however, is as well-known as that of Psalm 23. Though three millennia have passed since the sweet singer of Israel first sang about the shepherding care of God, this psalm still proclaims profound truths and invaluable lessons. The psalmist uses the shepherding practices of biblical times to illustrate the spiritual communion between the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and His flock, the living church of God.

This book is based on a series of sermons preached thirty-five years ago and was subsequently published as my first book, titled *Jehovah Shepherding His Sheep*. That book has been reprinted several times over the years, but I have long desired to shorten, edit, and in certain parts, rewrite those sermons. *The Lord Shepherding His Sheep* is the result of that desire. My original desire for the book, however, has not changed: I offer this book with the conviction that reading Christ-centered, Reformed, experiential sermons frequently serves as a means of blessing for God's sheep. My aim is to bring glory to God, to edify believers, and to help lost lambs find the Good Shepherd.

I would like to thank Pamela Hartung, Ray Lanning, Paul Smalley, and Phyllis TenElshof for their editorial assistance. You have made this a better book than it would have been without your able work. And without my dear wife Mary generously allowing me (without complaint!) to work long hours on writing projects for the sake of Christ's kingdom, this book would never have been published in its present form. I pray that these chapters bear eternal fruit for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, "that great shepherd of the Sheep" (Hebrews 13:20).

Joel R. Beeke

Psalm 23

1. *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
2. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
3. *He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*
4. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*
5. *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*
6. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Introduction

Psalm 23 is a deeply spiritual meditation. It is a jewel unsurpassed in richness and beauty. It is no wonder that there is no more familiar passage in all of Scripture than this psalm. For countless people it is one of the first portions of Scripture committed to memory in childhood.

The widespread familiarity of Psalm 23, however, can also be dangerous. Millions of ungodly people take its words lightly upon their lips while knowing nothing of the Great Shepherd described in this psalm. They are ignorant of Christ's work as Savior and Shepherd that is woven throughout its verses. And in their lack of knowledge, they have claimed a jewel that does not belong to them. By often repeating this psalm, many self-proclaimed Christians have also abused its words to such an extent that no separation is made between the natural and the spiritual, between common and saving grace, or between sheep and goats.

Even God's flock can take Psalm 23 for granted. Lacking the application of the Holy Spirit, the psalm's sublime truths and experiential depths remain hidden. However, when properly applied, Psalm 23 reveals the highest, deepest, widest, and most glorious experiences into which God leads His people this side of heaven.

For them, Psalm 23 serves as a *pilgrim song*. As God's pilgrims journey through the Vanity Fair of this world, oppressed by internal and external enemies, they look to Psalm 23 for courage. In the hands of the Holy Spirit, the psalm is a balm to soldiers wounded on the battlefield of free grace, a key to unlock the chains of spiritual prisoners, and honey to brighten the eyes of weary saints.

The melodious harp strings of Psalm 23 will never fall silent. Charles Spurgeon aptly said, "I will venture to compare it also to the lark, which sings as it mounts, and mounts as it sings, until it is out of sight, and even then is not out of hearing These are celestial notes, more fitted for the eternal mansions than for those dwelling below the clouds."¹

Psalm 23 also serves believers as a *personal creed*. F. B. Meyer says a thinker who was challenged to declare his creed replied by quoting Psalm 23, then added,

That is my creed. I need, I desire no other. I learned it from my mother's lips. I have repeated it every morning when I awoke for the last twenty years. Yet I do not half understand it; I am only beginning to spell out its infinite meaning, and death will come on me with the task unfinished. But, by the grace of Jesus, I will hold on to this psalm as my creed, and will strive to believe and live it; for I know that it will lead me to the cross, and guide me to glory.²

For believers Psalm 23 is a creed of victory. Every word asserts that God is and provides all that His people need. Sovereign grace rings through every syllable.

Finally, Psalm 23 helps believers experience *profound communion* with God. It becomes at times a spiritual Holy of Holies. Through this psalm, believers commune with God the Father, find reconciliation through the blood of the redeeming Shepherd, and receive the Spirit's grace to rest in the triune God. For them, Psalm 23 is more than a spiritual oasis in the desert, more than a refuge on which all the

storms of life break, and more than a rock of safety and blessedness. It is holy ground.

Child of God, when you begin to understand this psalm in the light of the work of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, may the God of all grace become for you a pilgrim song, a personal creed, and a Holy of Holies! May it become not only a soul-captivating psalm, but also a soul-conquering one, so that unbelief no longer intrudes between your soul and Christ. Instead, by God's grace, may faith triumphantly set Christ between your soul and all else. May you fall before God in humility, be grounded in Christ as the only firm foundation, grow in the grace and knowledge of the Great Shepherd of your soul, and experience a foretaste of heaven on earth. In turn, your heart will well up with joy and exclaim, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

I also pray that the unsaved who attempt to shepherd themselves as they journey to eternity be given a deep impression of what they are missing. May an unquenchable flame of yearning rouse their souls to need, find, and follow the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.