

PSALM 23 – Understanding who our Shepherd is through this Psalm

I truly believe we are heading for “dark times”, both economically and spiritually. It’s a time where it will become more and more difficult especially for believers. Standing strong for Christ will be very much dependent on having an intimate relationship with God, and knowing Him personally; Anchored to the One who is steadfast and sure. So, to really get to know our Lord, my encouragement to you today is to meditate on God’s word and ask him to reveal Himself to you; to speak to you through His Word and by His Spirit.

Our quest should be, as Peter put it in 2 Pet 3:18, that we may ... “*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*”

Main text: Psalm 23

... “*The Lord (Jehovah) is my Shepherd*” ...

As a young man David had been a shepherd, therefore, he fully understood the features and functions of a shepherd as he attributes them to His God.

But notice in particular, David uses the personal pronoun of possession ... “Jehovah is **my** shepherd”. As a man who walked in close fellowship with Jehovah, he knew very well the distinctive and individual attention, love and care of **his very own** Shepherd.

So, it is from this position and understanding, with deep feeling, that David wrote the 23rd Psalm, opening with the statement ... “*Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want*” ...

What is a shepherd? What does “shepherd” describe - especially in its connection with Jehovah?

It includes the following (and much more): He is the Feeder to provide, the Keeper to protect, Companion to cheer, Friend to help, Pastor to comfort, Herdsman to gather, Guide to lead and Judge to reward.

But the one predominant attribute David is conveying to us by using this title is the close and intimate relationship between the Shepherd and His flock. There is a tenderness and intimacy in this name like no other name used in the Old Testament to describe our Lord. He’s your personal Shepherd, close Companion and true Friend.

The Lord is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Chief Shepherd

Before we look more closely into Psalm 23 let us consider some other passages that relate to our Lord as “Shepherd”, and listen out for the intimacy involved between the Shepherd and His sheep:

John 10:1-18 **The Good Shepherd**

v 9-11 ... “*I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the **good shepherd**; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*”

Heb 13:20-21 **The Great Shepherd**

... *"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the **great Shepherd** of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever."*

1 Pet 5:2-4 **The Chief Shepherd**

... *"shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the **Chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."*

There is an important progression here:

John 10 – speaks of **REDEMPTION** – the **Good Shepherd** lays down His life for the sheep so that they could be saved and have abundant and eternal life. Through Him we are **redeemed**, brought back into relationship with the Father.

Heb 13 – speaks of **RENEWAL** – the **Great Shepherd** was raised up from the dead so that He could equip (**renew or realign**) us to do His will – in particular that by His resurrection life in us He can live through us and continue to feed and care for His sheep and reach the lost sheep.

1 Pet 5 – speaks of **REWARD** – the **Chief Shepherd** will return to **reward** those who have walked in union with Him and carried out His will in working in His pastures and caring for His sheep.

So, as we go through Psalm 23, we will see the Shepherd as one who **redeems, renews and rewards**.

Ps 22 precedes Ps 23

With this understanding of the Good, the Great and the Chief Shepherd let us go on to consider one more important progression, the one between Psalm 22 and Psalm 23.

Psalm 22 precedes Psalm 23 for a very good reason.

Ps 22 is a prophetic Psalm that speaks about the crucifixion of Christ at Calvary.

Ps 23 is the Psalm of the Shepherd.

We cannot enjoy the life and blessings of Ps 23 unless we first have experienced all that is included in Ps 22. The Lamb who was crucified must be received as our personal Saviour before He can be recognized, claimed and enjoyed as our Shepherd.

We as His sheep are those who were redeemed at infinite cost to the Lord when He was ... *as a Lamb led to the slaughter* (Isa 53:7). We are "His own sheep" because we have been recovered from the grips of Satan through Christ's shed blood – the sacrifice of the Lord Himself, the Lamb of God.

It is only after we, by faith, “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” that we are saved and come into personal and intimate relationship with Christ (Jn 3:16). And it is only then that we can experience Him as our Shepherd.

Then, as our Shepherd, He holds Himself responsible for our safety and eternal security which He assures us of in Rom 8:31-39.

The Nature, Character and Attributes of the Lord, our Shepherd, expressed in PS 23

V1: ... **“The Lord is my shepherd”** יהוה **“Jehovah”** – is derived from the word ‘havah’ which means “to be”, “being”, or “exist” and refers to the self-existent God of Creation. The “I AM” as revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The one who always was, who is, and who will always be. The Alpha and Omega. The consistent, immutable, unchanging God who is before and above any other, the authority above all authorities.

Havah is very similar to the Hebrew word chavah – which means “to live” or “life.” The self-existent One is Life and the source of all life (Jn 14:6). He is our shepherd. Right now, **He ... IS ...your ... shepherd!**

V1: ... **The Lord is my Shepherd** **“Jehovah Ro’eh”** – is derived from the root word ra’ah which means “tend”, and “satisfy needs”. He is your **very own Shepherd** who tends and satisfies you. He looks out for you and cares for you more than you can ever imagine. Whatever the need you may have – He is the answer. Your security is found in Him.

John 10:11 ... *“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”.*

John 10:27-28 ... *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand”.*

Now David goes on in the rest of this Psalm to expand on Who this Shepherd is, and what He is to you and me, His sheep, and how He cares, provides, protects, leads and encourages us.

V1: ... **“I shall not want”** because He is **“Jehovah Jireh”** – my Provider. Jireh is simply a form of the verb “to see”. **Provide** is simply the verb of this word and **provision** the noun of seeing beforehand. Gen 22 is the place of first mention of Jehovah Jireh, where God **saw beforehand** and **provided** Abraham with a lamb for a burnt offering in the place of Isaac.

Eph 1:3-4 ... *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”*

2 Pet 1:3 ... *“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness”.*

What more could we ask for! Whatever your need, turn to Him, call on Him, He longs to provide for you. He’s calling you to see and know Him as your provider. *“I do not and shall not want.”*

V2: ... **“He makes me lie down in green pastures”** because He is **“El Shaddai”** – the All Sufficient One. “Shad” means “breast”. As a baby lies in its mother’s arms and feeds from her breast it takes in all

the nourishment, antibodies and sustenance it needs for healthy living. For a sheep, “green pastures” speak of nourishment and sustenance. Our Shepherd who is El Shaddai is sufficient for all our needs, whether they be physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. He is the answer to our needs.

If you think your need is too big or even impossible, get this: The place of first mention is Gen 17:1-2 where God speaks to Abram ... *“I am God Almighty (El Shaddai); walk before Me, and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly”*. This is where a 99 yr. old man and a 90 yr. old woman (way beyond childbearing) were promised a son and a resulting multitude of offspring. Nothing is impossible with El Shaddai – your Shepherd. He longs to meet your every need. He is sufficient for every and any situation.

V2: ... *“He leads me besides **quiet waters**”* because he is **“Jehovah Shalom”** – the Lord our peace.

Heb 13:20-21 ... *“Now the God of peace (Jehovah Shalom), who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen”*.

Two things of note in Ps 23:2 about the quiet (peaceful) waters:

Firstly, the Hebrew word “shalom” means “complete” or “whole” (most often translated as “peace”), and the root from which “shalom” comes (שלם) is connected with verbs such as “le HaShlim” which means *“to fulfil that which is lacking”* and “leShalem” which means *“to make a payment”*. Also linked is the word shalem which means *“complete or sound.”* So, in our passage our Shepherd, “Jehovah Shalom”, is the One who “makes a payment” (which He did at Calvary in laying down His life to pay for the penalty for our sin) which “fulfils that which is lacking” (fulfils the justice of God) and thereby brings us to completion, soundness and peace. Peace is the absence of any lack. It’s being “complete.”

Secondly, sheep do not like to drink from turbulent or fast running waters. They fear falling in and being swept away to drown. If there is turbulence in your life, turn to the Great Shepherd - Jehovah Shalom - and He will lead you in His peace and will restore peace within you. In Him alone is Peace. Rest in His quiet presence and drink deeply from the streams of living water.

For all of us, who are always busy, busy, busy, working and serving, we must also remember that rest, composure and meditation is essential. We need to take time out now and again and step aside from the flurry of activity and learn to rest in the Lord and be refreshed by His peace, so that we can hear His still small voice, get direction and labour more efficiently and effectively for Him.

V3: ... *“He **restores my soul**”* because He is **“Jehovah Rophe”** – the Lord your Healer. He is the Great Physician who heals our bodies and our souls.

After the Israelites had been redeemed from the grips of Pharaoh – saved from the death plague by the blood of the lamb on the lintels and door posts - and led out of Egypt towards the Promised Land, the **very first** name by which God revealed himself to the Israelites in the wilderness was “Jehovah Rophecha”

which means “I am the Lord that Heals you”! That’s the priority he places on healing and the wellbeing of His people!

The first mention of this name is found in Ex 15:26. The water had run out; they came to the waters of Marah and could not drink because it was bitter. God told Moses to throw a certain tree into the water and it turned the water sweet and potable. The tree is a type of the cross of Christ. He is our Healer who turns bitterness into sweetness.

If you are in need of a touch of healing – whether it’s a physical, mental or emotional healing you need – turn to your Shepherd – “Jehovah Rophe” the Lord your Healer. And He will “restore you”.

V3: “He guides me in the **paths of righteousness for His name’s sake** – for He is “Jehovah Tsidkenu” – the Lord our righteousness, and He is “Jehovah M’Kaddesh” – the Lord who sanctifies you.

Sanctification has two parts to it:

Firstly, God sanctifies, or separates, us to Himself. It was His plan from before the foundation of the world that we would be separated unto Him in Christ in order that we could be holy and blameless before Him Eph 1:4 ... *“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”* He did this by sending His Son to take our place on the cross, that we may be saved. Heb 10:10 ... *“By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”* He is Jehovah M’Kaddesh, the Lord who sanctifies. He is Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness.

Secondly, we have a part to play in our ongoing sanctification. He separates unto Himself, makes us righteous with His righteousness; He takes up residence in us (Col 1:27 ... *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”*), and He has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us to lead us in righteousness. God has given us a free will. He tells us to be holy (1 Pet 1:16) and to renew our minds to operate in accordance with His character (Rom 12:2 ... *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is”*). But, having given us a free will, He does not force us to walk in righteousness and holiness, but that is His will for us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our part is to choose to submit to the Holy Spirit as He leads us in righteousness. In John 17:17, Christ praying to the Father said ... *“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”* We can do our part by allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us and lead us in accordance with the Word of God.

With these two names for our Lord in mind, listen to God’s Word in the following scriptures:

It is in Jeremiah where the name Jehovah Tsidkenu is first mentioned.

Jer 23:3-6 ... *“Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the Lord. Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and*

righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness' (Jehovah Tsidkenu)."

1 Cor 1:30 ... *"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."*

2 Cor 5:21 ... *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

Eph 5:8-9 ... *"for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)."*

If we heed His voice as expressed in His word and follow Him who is the Word, if we listen to the voice of His Spirit, if we obey and follow Him, our Shepherd – he will lead us in righteous ways.

If you have strayed from His paths, disobeyed and not heeded His voice – turn to him, confess your sin ... *"for He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).*

V4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for **You are with me**" – for He is "**Jehovah Shammah**" – which means "Jehovah is there".

This name appears in the last verse of the Book of Ezekiel. This was years after the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed and the people taken captive. Israel was in captivity in Babylon and both spiritually and nationally in the lowest ebb of its history. Israel's spirit was broken; they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept for there was no apparent hope in sight. Then Ezekiel prophesies of the new and glorious city and Temple characterised by righteousness, justice and holiness and of how the glory of Jehovah would fill this new place and His presence would dwell and abide there forever. And the name of that city is "Jehovah Shammah" – "the Lord is there".

Right now, if you are at low ebb, if "darkness" surrounds you and there seems no hope in sight, let me remind you of:

1 Cor 3:16 ... *"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you".*

Heb 13:5 ... *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."* Because He is "Jehovah Shammah."

Not only that, but David goes on to say: **"Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"**

Zech 11:7 ... *"And I took for myself two staves: the one I called **Favour** and the other I called **Union**; so I pastured the flock".*

Union is derived from a word meaning "chords". So, union speaks of being bound together. So put this into the context of Ps 23 and we see that not only is our Shepherd Jehovah Shammah – the Lord is there – right in you and with you – but He pastures or tends for you with His **favour** surrounding you as a shield and He is **bound together** with you and will never leave you or forsake you!

No matter the darkness of your valley. No matter the hopelessness of your situation. Know this and be encouraged: Jehovah Shammah – your Shepherd - is right there with you! ... *“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27)*. Turn to Him, let Him comfort you and bring you hope.

V5: **“Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”** – He is **“Jehovah Nissi”** – Jehovah our Banner.

The place of first mention of this name is in Ex 17:15. The water had run out; the people were hungry. Hunger and thirst tormented the people, and they began to question whether God was with them or whether he had abandoned them. The Lord provided water as Moses struck the rock and water came out. Then the enemy, the Amalekites attacked them, but the Lord helped Moses and his men to defeat the Amalekites. And so we read in Ex 17:15 ... *“Moses built an altar and named it (Jehovah Nissi) the Lord is My Banner.”*

Song of Sol 2:4 ... *“He has brought me to His banquet hall, and His banner over me is love”*.

The banquet follows the battle where the successful leaders and victorious troops are entertained and feasted, while captives bound in chains watched on knowing their fate was imminent. He prepares a table in the presence of our enemies so that we can remind Satan and his hosts that he is a defeated foe and that we are the victorious because of the victory Christ won for us at Calvary. In Christ we stand and enforce the victory. This is where we remember and shout out the truth that:

Isa 54:17 ... *“No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me,” declares the LORD*”

2 Cor 2:14 ... *“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.”*

V5: **“Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows”** – for he is **“Jehovah M’Kaddesh”** – “Jehovah Who sanctifies”.

1 Thess 5:23 ... *“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”*.

The Shepherd may have used oil to pour on the wounds of an injured sheep to heal them. But listen to this footnote found in the Amplified Bible that provides a wonderful explanation: “It was customary in hot climates to anoint the body with oil to protect it from excessive perspiration. When mixed with perfume, the oil imparted a delightfully refreshing and invigorating sensation. Athletes anointed their bodies as a matter of course before running a race. As the body, therefore, anointed with oil was refreshed, invigorated and befitted for action, so the Lord would anoint His “sheep” with the oil of the Holy Spirit, Whom oil symbolises, to fit them to engage more freely in His service and run in the way he directs, in heavenly fellowship with him”.

Also, in the Levitical system anointing with oil was one of the rites practiced when sanctifying or setting apart a priest or king for his office.

So, putting these facts together we get:

1 Pet 2:9 ... *“for you are a chosen race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”*

The outcome – ongoing and final blessing assured by Our Shepherd

V6: *“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever”.*

The word translated “lovingkindness” comes from the Hebrew word **TON Chesed** which means – *“to devote oneself entirely to the needs of others.”* That is what God has done in Christ, given everything of Himself for our benefit and salvation! His lovingkindness will follow us all our days!

This Psalm makes it clear to us that if we **begin** with “the Lord” as our Shepherd, continue through life following Him and giving heed His voice that He will take care of us no matter what we face and assures us that we will **end** up dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. He is **El Olam** the eternal God. He does not change. We begin, continue and end in the Lord our Shepherd, El Olam, the Eternal One.

Remember – the sheep that stay closest to the Shepherd get the most and the best attention!

May we all with confidence say **“The Lord is my Shepherd”**.

Rev 7:9-17 ... *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”*

*“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be **their shepherd**, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes”.*

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” ... Amen!