

## International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: Hebrew Poetry, Psalm 23

Poetry as an art form predates written text. The earliest poetry is believed to have been recited or sung, employed as a way of remembering oral history, genealogy, and law. Poetry is often closely related to musical traditions., [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_poetry)

*What are some traditions of poetry in your country?*

*What are some of your region's most famous poetry?*

*What do you like about poetry in general?*

Hebrew poetry does not rhyme as Western poetry often does. Instead words should balance in a sentence. Sometimes a second phrase repeats in a similar way what the first phrase means. For example, Psalm 8:4 says, "What is a human being that you are mindful of him, / the son of man that you care for him?" Other times the second phrase contrasts with the first. Psalm 37:21 "The wicked borrows and cannot pay back; / but the righteous is generous and gives." Still further, the second phrase can add another concept to the first. "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him; / to all who call upon Him in truth" (Psalm 145:18).

King David, who was a shepherd in his youth, wrote this poem based on his experience. The poem is an extended metaphor describing God as a shepherd and the believers as sheep. A metaphor is a concept that is suggested by a concrete illustration. For example the Lord is not a literal shepherd, but He acts like a shepherd.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,

<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.

*Put the main thought of this poem in your own words.*

*What do you like about this poem?*

Verse 4 suggests a change in thought from how the Shepherd daily cares for the sheep to how he protects the sheep from danger.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk  
through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

*What do you think the words, “the valley of the shadow of death,” is referring to?*

The rod was a short, stout stick that the shepherd used to strike at an enemy or also to help in counting the sheep. The staff was a pole with a bend at the end so that the shepherd could grab the sheep by the neck. The shepherd used both of these tools to protect the sheep.

*What do you think is the main thought in this verse 4?*

*How would these words bring the reader comfort? How does it affect you?*

Now the psalm seems to change metaphors to a banquet.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.

Verse 5 pictures the wonderful care from God the believer enjoys even when the enemy is near. David had often felt needy in the wilderness when Saul pursued him, but the Lord always provided for him. He remembers God’s help. The table, oil, and cup speak of God’s protection and goodness. “The House of the Lord,” might be thought of as household, belonging to the Lord’s family.

Restate verse 5 and 6 in your own words.

How does Psalm 23 describe God?

Why do you think this Psalm is one of the most quoted and best loved Psalm?