

TERM TWO PART TWO

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

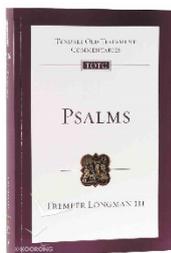
THE **PSALMS** ON SEASONS OF CHANGE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE

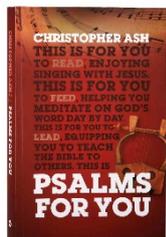
SERIES SUMMARY

PREACHING DATE	TITLE	PASSAGE
14/6/20	Understanding power	Psalm 2
21/6/20	Understanding our place	Psalm 8
28/6/20	Understanding our path	Psalm 23
5/7/20	Understanding our planet	Psalm 46
12/7/20	Understanding our Provider	Psalm 139

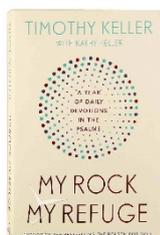
RESOURCES



Longman III, T. *Psalms* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)



Ash, C. *Psalms For You*



Keller, T. *My Rock, My Refuge: A year of daily devotions in the psalms*

STUDY THREE

UNDERSTANDING OUR PATH | PSALM 23

OVERVIEW

A Psalm of the King (23:0)

The subtitle reminds us that before this is *our* Psalm, it is a Psalm of God's Anointed King. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, King David speaks beyond his own experience and anticipates that of the anointed and awaited King Jesus. This dynamic is powerfully seen in Psalm 22, a companion to our present Psalm, whereby King David's suffering anticipates that of Christ on the cross.

Therefore Psalm 23 is *initially* David's song and *ultimately* Jesus' song. Though for those of us who have become united to Christ by faith, it becomes our song *also*. As Christopher Ash helpfully writes,

This is not the song of any isolated individual; it is the song of the representative head of the people of God. What God does for him, God does (implicitly) for the whole people of God of whom the king is the leader...What God does for his chosen king, he does for the people of the king. So, as we also are the people of the King – men and women “in Christ” – this blessing and comfort becomes ours too.¹

The Lord Is My Shepherd (23:1-3)

Whenever we see ‘The LORD’ in our English Bibles, the presence of the small caps denotes reference to the personal name for God, *Yahweh*. This name was revealed to Moses (Exo 3:14-15) in the context of God rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt and entering into a covenant relationship with them. This covenant is further developed in 2 Samuel 7:11-14, whereby Yahweh promises to place a descendent of David on Israel's throne forever. Thus the presence of God's personal name here is a reminder that David is speaking of and to the God of covenant love and faithfulness.

It is this God of love and faithfulness who is the King's shepherd. Though Yahweh's might is staggeringly great, his rule is benevolent and kind. The King can therefore sing with *confidence* that the Lord will bring him, and by extension God's people, into the place of plenty, rest and promised inheritance. Israel's past deliverance from Egypt bore witness to this (Deut 2:7; Exo 15:13).

God does all of this for his name's sake (v 3) – he brings glory to his name by remaining faithful to the promises of his covenant, whether they be issued to Abraham, Moses or David. And as those who are now God's people in Christ, we too can claim this promise of blessing and comfort -

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

(2 Corinthians 1:20)

Through Christ the King, The LORD is *our* shepherd too!

¹ Christopher Ash, *Psalms For You*, Psalm 23.

With the Shepherd through the Valley (23:4)

Though the LORD is David's shepherd, this does not exempt him from suffering. In fact, being the LORD's anointed predisposes him to suffering. For as we saw in Psalm 2 – 'The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed.'

Though referenced briefly here as the 'darkest valley',² Psalm 22 expands upon the suffering faced by the LORD's anointed. Yet as Psalm 22 culminates in trust and praise at the LORD's deliverance, so too does David here express confident trust in the LORD's protection and comfort. He gives two reasons as to why he will not fear even in deathly darkness – God is with him and God's protection is a comfort to him.

God's right paths for Jesus led him to and through the darkness of the cross so that we might become his forever. As a result, we know Jesus as our good shepherd (John 10:10) who will never leave us nor forsake us. Furthermore, if we live our lives following this good shepherd, it shouldn't surprise us if God's right paths for us similarly lead through dark places. Yet in those times we can share Christ's confidence in the comfort of the LORD's rod and staff, of which Craigie writes, 'the Palestinian shepherd normally carried two implements, a [rod] to fend off wild beasts and a [staff] to guide and control the sheep.'³ We can similarly expect to be protected by God and also guided and disciplined for our security.

Pursued by the Shepherd (23:5-6)

Here the metaphor of the LORD as shepherd pivots to that of the LORD as host. A banquet is prepared, the enemies are vanquished, the King is festively anointed with oil (cf. Luke 7:46) and richly served.

As the true King, Jesus shared King David's confidence in future victory when he endured the cross. He knew that God's covenant promise of rest would be fulfilled. Consider these words of Hebrews 12:2:

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The rest and rejoicing that Jesus experienced after his resurrection have been made available to us, who have placed our faith in Christ. As we anticipate the heavenly banquet secured for us by Christ, we can remain steadfast in joy and peace even in the presence of our enemies, for we know that our greatest enemies (sin and death) have been vanquished forever.

In fact, notice that though the LORD's anointed passes through the valley of the shadow of death, he is confident that it won't be his enemies who remain in pursuit,⁴ but rather the goodness and the covenant love of the LORD. Though adversaries or adversity might threaten to pursue us, we can know (and please pardon the canine metaphor) that there is a much larger hound chasing us down – not to savage us, but to lovingly lick us! In covenant love and goodness he will pursue us all the days of our lives until he chases us into his eternal presence forever.

² Or more traditionally and perhaps literally, 'the valley of the shadow of death' see also Job 3:5.

³ Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 207.

⁴ Follow seems to weak a translation of the original Hebrew *radaph*, which is used to instead describe pursuit. See for example Gen 14:14-15.

GETTING STARTED

1. What was the best break/rest/holiday you've ever had?

INTO THE TEXT

Read Psalm 23:1-3

2. What does this powerful metaphor convey about God's character?

3. Can you think of any other passages that similarly describe God as our shepherd?

4. To what extent can we claim the LORD as our own shepherd? (cf. Eph 1:3-5)

Read Psalm 23:4-6

5. How is the suffering of the LORD's anointed described in Psalm 22?

6. What brings comfort to the King in the face of adversity?

7. To what extent should we expect similar adversity and deliverance as we follow King Jesus?

8. How easy do you find it to share the King's confidence in God's goodness and love (v6)?

TAKE AWAY

9. Share with the group where you feel you are at presently – being given rest in the pastures, or being led through the valley?

10. Conclude with a member of the group praying Hebrews 13:20-21 over the group, particularly mindful of those in the midst of a dark valley presently