



26. Psalm 23's Valley

Psalm 23 begins, *“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”* The comforting words of verse 4 are just as familiar, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.”* I’ve heard those verses at most of the funerals I’ve attended. I’m sure you have too. Actually, that’s about the only place I’ve heard those words.

But think about the context into the next verses, *“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me ... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”* Does that sound like Heaven to you? A shepherd’s rod and staff are used for discipline, rescue, and protection. And the table-lands that a shepherd prepares for his sheep are the summer feeding mesas. To reach their lush green grasses, the shepherd

guides his sheep up treacherous pathways and through shadowy dark valleys.

The shepherd had to prepare those mesas for his sheep ... had to reduce the physical dangers of animal burrows and poisonous plants. Once the sheep arrived, they were in the presence of real enemies that could prey on them. The shepherd continually wards off those enemies. That's not Heaven. There are no enemies in Heaven.

Psalm 23 isn't about death and Heaven. It's a picture of our Shepherd's care, discipline, guidance, and protection, as we climb toward the table-lands of spiritual maturity ... until as Ephesians 4:13 says, we all "*attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*" That's Psalm 23.

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