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A Psalm by David.

PSALM 23: 1 The LORD is my shepherd: I shall lack nothing.

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The Lord is the Pastor of his people; therefore it may be inferred that they shall not want, Psa 23:1. How he guides, feeds, and protects them, Psa 23:2, Psa 23:3. Even in the greatest dangers they may be confident of his support, Psa 23:4. His abundant provision for them, Psa 23:5. The confidence they may have of his continual mercy, and their eternal happiness, Psa 23:6.

There is nothing particular in the title; it is simply attributed to David; but as it appears to be a thanksgiving of the Israelites for their redemption from the Babylonish captivity, it cannot with propriety be attributed to David. Some think it was written by David in his exile, which is not likely; others, that he penned it when he was finally delivered from the persecution of Saul. I rather incline to the opinion that it was written after the captivity. The Chaldee seems to suppose that it was written to celebrate the goodness of God to the Israelites in the desert. It is a truly beautiful Psalm. Supposing it to have been written after the captivity, we see,

1. The redeemed captives giving thanks to God for their liberty.
2. Acknowledging that God had brought back their lives from the grave.
3. They represent themselves in Judea as a flock in an excellent pasture.
4. They declare that from the dangers they have passed through, and from which God had delivered them, they can have no fear of any enemy.
5. They conclude, from what God has done for them, that his goodness and mercy shall follow them all their days.
6. That they shall no more be deprived of God's worship, but shall all their days have access to his temple.

Verse 1

The Lord is my shepherd - There are two allegories in this Psalm which are admirably well adapted to the purpose for which they are produced, and supported both with art and elegance. The first is that of a shepherd; the second, that of a great feast, set out by a host the most kind and the most liberal. As a flock, they have the most excellent pasture; as guests, they have the most nutritive and abundant fare. God condescends to call himself the Shepherd of his people, and his followers are considered as a flock under his guidance and direction.

1. He leads them out and in, so that they find pasture and safety.
2. He knows where to feed them, and in the course of his grace and providence leads them in the way in which they should go.
3. He watches over them and keeps them from being destroyed by ravenous beasts.
4. If any have strayed, he brings them back.
5. He brings them to the shade in times of scorching heat; in times of persecution and affliction, he finds out an asylum for them.

6. He takes care that they shall lack no manner of thing that is good.

But who are his flock? All real penitents, all true believers; all who obediently follow his example, abstaining from every appearance of evil, and in a holy life and conversation showing forth the virtues of Him who called them from darkness into his marvellous light. "My sheep hear my voice, and follow me."

But who are not his flock! Neither the backslider in heart, nor the vile Antinomian, who thinks the more he sins, the more the grace of God shall be magnified in saving him; nor those who fondly suppose they are covered with the righteousness of Christ while living in sin; nor the crowd of the indifferent and the careless, nor the immense herd of Laodicean loiterers; nor the fiery bigots who would exclude all from heaven but themselves, and the party who believe as they do. These the Scripture resembles to swine, dogs, wandering stars, foxes, lions, wells without water, etc., etc. Let not any of these come forward to feed on this pasture, or take of the children's bread. Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd; the Shepherd who, to save his flock, laid down his own life.

I shall not want - How can they? He who is their Shepherd has all power in heaven and earth; therefore he can protect them. The silver and gold are his, and the cattle on a thousand hills; and therefore he can sustain them. He has all that they need, and his heart is full of love to mankind; and therefore he will withhold from them no manner of thing that is good. The old Psalter both translates and paraphrases this clause well: Lord governs me, and nathing sal want to me. In stede of pastour thare he me sett. "The voice of a rightwis man: Lord Crist es my kyng, and for thi (therefore) nathing sal me want: that es, in hym I sal be siker, and suffisand, for I hope in hymn gastly gude and endles. And he ledes me in stede of pastoure, that es, understandyng of his worde, and delyte in his luf. Qwar I am siker to be fild, thar in that stede (place) he sett me, to be nuryst til perfectioun." Who can say more, who need say less, than this?

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PSALM 23: 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

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#### Verse 2

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures - בְּנֵאוֹת דֶּשֶׁה binoth deshe, not green pastures, but cottages of turf or sods, such as the shepherds had in open champaign countries; places in which themselves could repose safely; and pens thus constructed where the flock might be safe all the night. They were enclosures, and enclosures where they had grass or provender to eat.

Beside the still waters - Deep waters, that the strongest heat could not exhale; not by a rippling current, which argues a shallow stream. Or perhaps he may here refer to the waters of Siloam, or Shiloah, that go softly, Isa 8:6, compared with the strong current of the Euphrates. Thou hast brought us from the land of our captivity, from beyond this mighty and turbulent river, to our own country streams, wells, and fountains, where we enjoy peace, tranquillity, and rest.

The old Psalter gives this a beautiful turn: On the water of rehetynge forth he me broght. On the water of grace er we broght forth, that makes to recover our strengthe that we lost in syn. And reheteis (strengthens) us to do gude workes. My saule he turned, that es, of a synful wreche, he made it ryghtwis, and waxyng of luf in mekeness. First he turnes our sautes til hym; and then he ledes and fedes it. Ten graces he telles in this psalme, the qwilk God gyfs til his lufers, (i.e., them that love him).

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PSALM 23: 3 He restores my soul. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

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Verse 3

He restoreth my soul - Brings back my life from destruction; and converts my soul from sin, that it may not eternally perish. Or, after it has backslidden from him, heals its backslidings, and restores it to his favor. See the old paraphrase on this clause in the preceding note.

In the paths of righteousness - במעגלי צדק bemaleley tsedek, "in the circuits" or "orbits of righteousness." In many places of Scripture man appears to be represented under the notion of a secondary planet moving round its primary; or as a planet revolving round the sun, from whom it receives its power of revolving, with all its light and heat. Thus man stands in reference to the Sun of righteousness; by his power alone is he enabled to walk uprightly; by his light he is enlightened; and by his heat he is vivified, and enabled to bring forth good fruit. When he keeps in his proper orbit, having the light of the glory of God reflected from the face of Jesus Christ, he is enabled to enlighten and strengthen others. He that is enlightened may enlighten; he that is fed may feed.

For his name's sake - To display the glory of his grace, and not on account of any merit in me. God's motives of conduct towards the children of men are derived from the perfections and goodness of his own nature.

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PSALM 23: 4 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.

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Verse 4

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death - The reference is still to the shepherd. Though I, as one of the flock, should walk through the most dismal valley, in the dead of the night, exposed to pitfalls, precipices, devouring beasts, etc., I should fear no evil under the guidance and protection of such a Shepherd. He knows all the passes, dangerous defiles, hidden pits, and abrupt precipices in the way; and he will guide me around, about, and through them. See the phrase shadow of death explained on Mat 4:16 (note). "Thof I ward well and imang tha, that nouter has knowyng of God, ne luf or in myddis of this lyf, that es schadow of ded; for it es blak for myrkenes of syn; and it ledes til dede and il men, imang qwam gude men wones: - I sal nout drede il, pryve nor apert; for thu ert with me in my hert, qwar I fele thu so, that eftir the schadow of dede, I be with the in thi vera lyf." - Old Psalter.

For thou art with me - He who has his God for a companion need fear no danger; for he can neither mistake his way, nor be injured.

Thy rod and thy staff - שבטך shibtecha, thy scepter, rod, ensign of a tribe, staff of office; for so שבט shebet signifies in Scripture. And thy staff, ומשענתך umishantecha, thy prop or support. The former may signify the shepherd's crook; the latter, some sort of rest or support, similar to our camp stool, which the shepherds might carry with them as an occasional seat, when the earth was too wet to be sat on with safety. With the rod or crook the shepherd could defend his sheep, and with it lay hold of their horns or legs to pull them out of thickets, boys, pits, or waters. We are not to suppose that by

the rod correction is meant: there is no idea of this kind either in the text, or in the original word; nor has it this meaning in any part of Scripture. Besides, correction and chastisement do not comfort; they are not, at least for the present, joyous, but grievous; nor can any person look forward to them with comfort. They abuse the text who paraphrase rod correction, etc. The other term שׁען shaan signifies support, something to rest on, as a staff, crutch, stave, or the like. The Chaldee translates thus: "Even though I should walk in captivity, in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil. Seeing thy Word (מימרך meymerach, thy personal Word) is my Assistant or Support; thy right word and thy law console me." Here we find that the Word, מימר meymar, is distinguished from any thing spoken, and even from the law itself. I cannot withhold the paraphrase of the old Psalter though it considers the rod as signifying correction: "Sothly I sal drede na nylle; for thy wande, that es thi lyght disciplyne, that chasties me as thi son: and thi staf, that es thi stalworth help, that I lene me til, and haldes me uppe; thai have comforthed me; lerand (learning, teaching) me qwat I suld do; and haldand my thaught in the, that es my comforth."

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PSALM 23: 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over.

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Verse 5

Thou preparest a table before me - Here the second allegory begins. A magnificent banquet is provided by a most liberal and benevolent host; who has not only the bounty to feed me, but power to protect me; and, though surrounded by enemies, I sit down to this table with confidence, knowing that I shall feast in perfect security. This may refer to the favor God gave the poor captive Israelites in the sight of the Chaldeans who had grievously treated them for seventy years; and whose king, Cyrus, had not only permitted them now to return to their own land, but had also furnished them with every thing requisite for their passage, and for repairing the walls of Jerusalem, and rebuilding the temple of the Lord, where the sacrifices were offered as usual, and the people of God feasted on them.

Thou anointest my head with oil - Perfumed oil was poured on the heads of distinguished guests, when at the feasts of great personages. The woman in the Gospel, who poured the box of ointment of spikenard on the head of our Lord (see Mat 26:6, Mat 26:7; Mar 14:8; Luk 7:46), only acted according to the custom of her own country, which the host, who invited our Lord, had shamefully neglected.

My cup runneth over - Thou hast not only given me abundance of food, but hast filled my cup with the best wine.

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PSALM 23: 6 Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the LORD's house forever.

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Verse 6

Goodness and mercy shall follow me - As I pass on through the vale of life, thy goodness and mercy shall follow my every step; as I proceed, so shall they. There seems to be an allusion here to the

waters of the rock smitten by the rod of Moses, which followed the Israelites all the way through the wilderness, till they came to the Promised Land. God never leaves his true followers providential mercies gracious influences, and miraculous interferences, shall never be wanting when they are necessary. I will dwell in the house, ושבתי veshabti, "and I shall Return to the house of the Lord," for ever, לארך ימים leorech yamim, "for length of days." During the rest of my life, I shall not be separated from God's house, nor from God's ordinances; and shall at last dwell with him in glory. These two last verses seem to be the language of a priest returned from captivity to live in the temple, and to serve God the rest of his life.