

**Names of God, IX, From Psalm 23, YHWH Who is Shepherding Me, June 23, 2019**

In this study of God's names, YHWH-Roi or "My Shepherd" says I need to be watched, cared about, provided for, protected, and stay righteous. This name begins Psalm 23, the most well known, beloved, and recited passage of the English Bible in the history of the English language. The Author, David was a shepherd of his father's flock before becoming a vicious warrior and then king of Israel, bringing them to be a world superpower. He named his God YHWH as the one shepherding him. God's a shepherd. Jesus would be, "The Good Shepherd." God likens taking care of sheep as His relationship with His people. Shepherds. Abel, murdered by Cain, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and King David, all shepherds, the prophet Amos was "The shepherd of Tekoa"



(Amos 1:1). Sheep. Good for clothes, milk, and meat. The emotional power of psalm 23 shows YHWH-Roi, cares, rests, leads, returns, uses force to protect and discipline, shows off, heals and sets apart, quenches thirst, is good and kind, and provides a place to live-- forever for His sheep.

Without exploiting them for produce of wool, milk, and meat. It's a different class of sheep, eh? The King James Version of this psalm goes thus:

***1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.***

We came to Romania after the communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu fell. He forbade Bibles and required atheism for any job above the level of street sweeper, ditch digger, or sanitation worker. People heard about bibles but never saw one. Their heart hunger to know God was everywhere. I was in a train compartment with 2 women who worked in advertising. I showed them my Romanian Bible, said I really wanted to hear a Romanian read Psalm 23 and if they'd favor me by doing so. I handed the Bible to one and she touched it like it was the Hope Diamond. She caressed the cover and pages open to Psalm 23. She began to read and after 4 words, *Domnul este pastorul meu*, she'd weep uncontrollably and pass the Bible to her colleague who could also only say a few words before gut weeping with no control and they continued like that passing the bible back and forth.



True, the nation was robbed of its spiritual roots, but later I realized that Romania is a shepherd culture, the *cioban*, has a mystical place in their reality. **Romanian shepherds live the hard life that shepherds did in Jesus' time. They are tough. They take it seriously. They wear the hide of sheep and look like one of them as they work. Jesus put on our hide when He came to serve us. He took our form and gave His life for us.**

The name YHWH-Roiy, as we know it, “The LORD is my shepherd” is filled with images from a shepherd who saw himself also as a sheep in YHWH’s flock, and what such sheep have from such a shepherd.

The following is my own more literal translation of Psalm 23. ***1 YHWH is shepherding me, 2 I will not be lacking. He causes me to lie down in green pastures besides still waters. 3 He returns my soul, he causes Himself to bring me in the righteous paths because of His name. 4 Yes, though I am walking in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil because of, YOU! WITH ME! Your club and your staff they comfort me. 5 You set up a table in front of those who are presently harassing me. You have anointed my head with oil. My cup, an overflow. 6 Surely what is good and steadfast love will pursue me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of YHWH for the length of days.***

### **1. A shepherd is one of God’s Professional activities.**

Jacob called Him “*The God who has been my shepherd all my life.*” (Genesis 48:15) in 49:24, God is “*The Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.*” Psalm 79:13, 95:7, and 100:3 all say that His people are the “*sheep of His pasture.*” Psalm 80:1 says, “*Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.*” And what about God’s own words? “*As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God*” (Ezekiel 34:31).



There are many many more. Jesus said this about Himself, “*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep*” (John 10:14-15) and “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given the to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one*” (John 10:27-30).

**2 . The sheep of YHWH talks about the Shepherd (verses 1-3). *1 YHWH is shepherding me, 2 I will not be lacking.*** The one who was being shepherded by God, lacked nothing. Literally it says Yahweh, the one *shepherding* me.” It’s not just a title that sounds pretty, it’s *what he does to and for me continually*. That person is rested, restored, fed and protected by the Lord. The person that complains of something lacking isn’t being shepherded by the Lord. ***He causes me to lie down in green pastures besides still waters.*** If that person is not at rest, yes, a continual Sabbath of the soul, that one is not under the shepherd in that moment. The rested soul has finally found what it’s looking for and can cast aside all stopgap solutions that make up for lack of peace. Humans use people, things; good and bad, rituals, habits, relationships and pleasures to fill what those things could never fill. Yet the human soul is restless. Fernando Pessoa said it for us, “My soul is impatient with itself, as with a bothersome child; its restlessness keeps growing and is forever the same. Everything interests me, but nothing holds me. I attend to everything, dreaming all the while. [...]. I’m two, and both keep

their distance — Siamese twins that aren't attached” (*The Book of Disquiet*).

**3 He returns my soul, he causes Himself to bring me in the righteous paths because of His name.** One who departs from the righteous path has wandered from following the shepherd's lead. So we invent justifying solutions for our choices to depart from what we know is right, but without any inner satisfaction. But it's not possible to follow the righteous path if He doesn't make it happen, as a partner with one's own will to do so.

### **3 . The sheep of YHWH talks to the Shepherd (Verses 4-6).**

**4 Yes, though I am walking in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil because of, YOU! WITH ME!** David moves from talking of YHWH, the one shepherding him to YHWH. His first declaration is freedom from fear, even fear of evil and death when he walks through the valley of its shadow because of the presence. The greatest thing in the life of God's sheep is His presence: **thou art with me.** It is also a prophecy of Jesus, **“Immanuel, which means, God is with us”** (Matthew 1:23). It's a statement that loneliness disappears, for those who make the transition to a spiritual existence with YHWH shepherding.

**Your club and your staff they comfort me.** What is usually translated rod, from *shebet* in Hebrew, is also a spear shaft or a club. It is the rod of iron in Psalm 2:9 by which the Messiah maintains order. The sense of the word is that it is punishing, vicious, and deadly. It's possible to see this weapon as that which the shepherd uses to protect sheep from enemies, a bat, club, or fighting or striking rod. The *staff*, from *Mehenah* in Hebrew is often translated as “support” (Isaiah 3:1) but it's also disciplinary. It is what Elisha had his servant lay on a dead child till he rose him from death. This word more than often points to the cross. As a guiding staff. David said that both of their protection gave him comfort-- *nacham*, a word of deep feeling, sorrow, regret, but most often in the intense verb form, deep comfort as in Isaiah 51:3. The one God is shepherding will receive inner comfort way below the surface of emotional immediacy.

**5 You set up a table in front of those who are presently harassing me. You have anointed my head with oil. My cup, an overflow.** David tells YHWH, **“You will set up a table,”** is confidence in conflict. What is usually “in the presence of my enemies” literally says *in front of those who are* (presently) *harassing me.* He tells God “You'll do this, show them you take care of me, even though now they're bothering me. The one who is being shepherded by YHWH has that kind of confidence in conflict. He moves from future to past saying, **“You have anointed my head with oil.”** Of course it's a picture of the Holy Spirit. He will be fed, has been anointed, and the cup is full.

**6 Surely what is good and steadfast love will pursue me all the days of my life** David claimed that the character of God will chase him. Goodness and constant kindness are followers. When YHWH is shepherding a person He fulfills a purpose for the individual, not reacts punitively or with pleasure to one's surface behaviors.

**and I will dwell in the house of YHWH for the length of days.** Then David, being shepherded by YHWH makes his great declaration that looks to the future in eternity. Eternity in the house of YHWH. Eternal life makes living doable. Without eternal life, **“eat and drink for tomorrow we die”** (1 Corinthians 15:32). With eternal life I can risk life serving God and others. I can live for a higher purpose even if I am robbed of time on earth, possessions, positions, accomplishments, freedom or breath. You can kill a

person with eternal life, but you can't *really* kill that person. Rob that person of something and you may have delayed but never taken away what's been given. This goes to the core of the Christian message: one must decide if eternity is a myth or reality. If a myth, then life has a different purpose and most have a suffering existence that will never fulfill them. If eternal life is real then finding it, its purpose, and how to live it is of existential importance.

Ancient Middle Eastern Shepherds' jobs required they suffer. They spent nights outdoors in all weather, and risked their lives. The Good Shepherd suffered much and gave His life. This is a promise we need for left to ourselves, "***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all***" (Isaiah 53:6). A shepherd has to seek the lost. Our shepherd came "***to seek and to save the lost***" (Luke 19:10). YHWH-Roiy, is shepherding, his sheep speak *about Him*; provision, rest, restoration, and righteous leadership and speak *to Him*; about conquering fear of death and evil, His presence, His protection and support, confidence in conflict, anointing, and eternal life. He did it with a great twist in the shepherd saga: *The shepherd became a sacrificial lamb!* John 1:29-- The prophet John the Baptist said it: "***Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!***"