

Psalms 19-01-17a

This is Thursday, the 17th of January 2019. We continue our study in the Book of Psalms. We're taking a look at perhaps the most famous psalm in the Psalter tonight, Psalm 23.

There are, I think, some certainly special observations we're going to make tonight that you may not have run across before. There's always a tendency when you see something this familiar to think that the well-worn paths are not only safe but familiar and encouraging. But in looking at this psalm, especially in the Hebrew, there are some things that struck me that I'm going to share with you.

It doesn't mean that anything we have learned or understood in the past is invalid, but it does pique my interest to see some of the things that are here, looking at it at first blush in the words that David originally wrote. As we begin, let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, ask His blessing on our fellowship, our concentration, and the ministry of His Spirit so that these things will be helpful to us in the days ahead. Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful that You have given us the gift of Your Word with its manifold treasures, its wonderful power for encouragement and restoration and cleansing and enablement.

We thank You for the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit, which uniquely in this age enables us to not only see Your will, but be able to perform it and walk in those ways. We pray that as we look at this portion of Scripture tonight, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, help us to see not only what it means in the text and in the context, but what it means to us so that we can live in a way that is pleasing in Your sight and glorifies our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name.

Amen. Well, perhaps apropos, our schedule was slightly askew because there is a goat being birthed next door, and we got a call for aid that created a bit of a scramble, so Patty's over there assisting and finding out firsthand what it's like to bring a little baby goat into the world. And you can only imagine the experiences of Shepherd in David's day around sheep and goats and other animals of the flock and the herd.

Some of us in younger days were around for calves coming into the world or baby colts, foals, and it's something not quickly forgotten. It's one thing to see it on a film. It's something else to be present.

And in the wintertime, there's steam, and there's all kinds of things you just wouldn't expect. And it brings a reality to some of the things that we're going to look at tonight by way of imagery in Psalm 23. Normally, we read the psalm.

I think I'll save time since everybody knows it by heart, at least in its classic form, and we will dive right into our analysis of this wonderful pastoral metaphor, which is, in fact, talking about God's care for his own. It is metaphor in the sense that a shepherd is put for God, a sheep is put for his people, and the physical care that is detailed here represents the spiritual care that God

provides. And it's important to sort of line that up at the beginning and not begin to descend back into the literal and construe green pastures as physical provision and so on.

These things are clearly set side by side, but function in two different realms. So once you begin on the spiritual plane, you're going to stay there. Once you use physical things as an analogy, you're going to stay there.

And that staying there principle is something I want to plant as an idea in light of what's about to come. So in our first verse here, it simply says, A Psalm of David. And you get the idea that that's really all you need to know about the bona fides or the qualifications of the author.

Everyone knows David's career. He is introduced in Scripture as the one who is out keeping the flocks of his father. So if anybody is qualified to use this particular literary allusion in a meaningful way, it's David.

And it is profitable, perhaps, or certainly thought-provoking to dwell on the relationship as we did in the last Psalm between David and his future descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ. David is a shepherd. It's his first trade.

He, as a boy, grew up understanding it. He is eventually going to be the shepherd for the people of Israel in the sense of being the anointed king. But when you think about the Lord Jesus, his introduction to the public by John the Baptist is, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus was associated with shepherds and sheep at his birth. We've had fascinating studies in that regard, illuminated by some of the information that Alfred Edersheim has provided in terms of the professional shepherds who did nothing but keep what we might call today kosher flocks, whose destiny was sacrifice at the great altar in Jerusalem. And so these connections of shepherds and sheep, Jesus is the Lamb of God, but he is also the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.

And that intertwining of ideas is a powerful reminder of the dual role of both coming in rule and power and authority and coming in the form of a servant and in the likeness of men. And Jesus fulfills both roles. And one of the more valuable lessons I received as a young midshipman was, and this was explicitly communicated, that before we would be qualified to be officers and to lead in the Navy or in the Marine Corps, we needed to first know what it was like to serve and to be under authority.

And so on our first training cruises in the Navy, the summer after our first year, we went to the fleet and were assigned to ships and stood enlisted watches and berthed in the enlisted quarters and tasted for at least a few weeks what it is like to be those who serve under the authority of officers, how distant it can be from the bridge down to the bowels of the ship where you dwell and work. And this perspective was designed to be beneficial to us once we were on the other side of the deck, so to speak. Well, the same is true here.

So as a psalm of David, David has been a shepherd and David has been the king. So he understands both the sheep side and the shepherd side of this comparison. He says, the Lord is my shepherd.

And the word shepherd is an interesting one. This is row A, and as I pronounce it, some of you will recall the oft-repeated point of Hebrew language, at least oft-repeated by me, that whenever you hear O-E in Hebrew, what does it mean? I call it the O-E infix. That's what they called it in my first-year Hebrew class.

It's the I-N-G in Hebrew, isn't it? It takes a verb and turns it into a noun with I-N-G on the end. So instead of to swim, you have swimming. Instead of to feed, you have feeding, the one feeding, the one who is perpetually engaged in this activity.

And so the verb from which this comes is the one that means to feed, to provide sustenance, to give you something to eat. And the primary function of a shepherd was to ensure that the flock could eat. So the Lord is the one feeding me.

That's the fullest picture of the shepherd. He isn't the one necessarily what is not in view. Although he does these things, he's not the one protecting.

It's not the one leading. It's not the one locking up and letting out. It is the one who ensures nourishment.

That's the root, core, fundamental meaning of shepherd in Hebrew. So the Lord is my sustainer. He is the one that ensures I have what I need to be healthy.

Remember what I said about we've got the physical analogy of sheep and shepherd and this represents spiritual things. So what kind of sustenance and what kind of feeding is God identified as providing here? What do you think? This is going to be sustenance for your spirit. This is going to be ideas, truths, promises, principles, doctrines, the content of God's Word that nourishes and sustains.

The Word of God is living and powerful. It does a lot of things. It's profitable for a lot of things.

That is what God provides as our spiritual shepherd, and David characterizes him in this way. The Lord is the one who provides me in my spiritual life what I need to thrive. He says, I will not want.

I will not lack. I will not fall short. I ask myself, why is this expressed with a negative? Why doesn't it say, I will have abundance or I will have more than enough? He says, I will not lack.

Why does he say it that way? The Lord is my shepherd. I will not lack. You almost get the idea that this is a response to a suggestion or an idea or a circumstance where one would be tempted to think, I don't have what I need.

Instead of just a confident expression of, I've just got bounties and heaps and piles of what I

need, the assurance here that David gives himself, the Lord is my shepherd, I'm not going to be missing something I need. And this is actually a more useful principle to dwell on, isn't it? Because we're tempted to think, as in Psalm 22, my God, where are you? Why have you left me? What is the assurance? God is my shepherd. He's not going to let me fall short.

He has taken upon himself my care and my provision, and he is not going to fail. And so expressing it in the negative here actually is an application almost in the face of the temptation to think that maybe there is a shortfall. Maybe a stitch has slipped or a train has failed to leave the station that's got my spiritual sustenance on it.

No. The one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds.

The one who knocks, it will be opened. And you will not lack. You will not lack for any good thing.

Remember Jesus in the New Testament in the Sermon on the Mount says, take no thought. Your Father knows what you need. What you will eat, what you will wear in the physical realm, but these speak even more fully to in the spiritual realm.

Your Father knows what you need. If you need encouragement and you're looking to him, he will provide it. If you need understanding and you look to him, he will provide it.

The key is are we looking in the right place for our assurance and for our security and for our sustenance. The Lord is my sustainer. I'm not looking to somebody else.

I'm not looking somewhere else. I will not lack. Verse 2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. This talks about not only that there is pasturage, but that it is lush. I saw an interesting thing called Equus something or other on PBS this past week, tracing the supposed evolution of the horse.

But something that you don't immediately think of, although you may have these facts uncoordinated in your mind, is horses have teeth kind of like some rodents that never stop growing. Their teeth just keep on growing all through their life. Why is that? Because grasses are very rough.

They call this kind of stuff roughage. But they are so rough that they're like sandpaper to teeth. And if horses' teeth did not continually grow, they would quickly wear down to nothing and you'd have these little mumbling horses around with puckered lips and nothing to chew with, trying to gum their food.

And so, happily, their teeth keep on growing. And they can chew this very abrasive food and there's no problem. Their teeth are always going to be there.

Secondly, unlike cows and many other herbivores, they have a unique digestion that allows

them to eat this kind of food and then instantly burst into flight and run away. There's a few other animals this way that are prey animals. And one of the things it tells you that horses have the ability to flee predators as a part of their equipment is this digestion that will quickly turn what, for other animals, is kind of a heavy load.

Athletes about to run a race don't eat a salad. They eat something that will convert to quick energy. They eat carbs, right? Well, grasses are not usually a source of quick energy.

But for horses, they are because their digestion quickly breaks it down into something that they convert into flight and speed. And they're uniquely equipped for their habitat and their life and so on. And the same with sheep.

So when it says that the shepherd is going to lead the sheep in green pastures, this is, of course, a commonly visited metaphor in Scripture. In the dream that Pharaoh had back in Genesis 41, out of the river come seven cows, fine and looking fat, and they fed in the meadow. That verb, feed, is the one that shepherd comes from.

The row A comes from that verb, that they are feeding. And when you have places in the Psalms, Psalm 100, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Or Psalm 95, 7, he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

And then it goes on to say, today if you will hear his voice, and that's what's quoted over in Hebrews, harden not your hearts, but that today if you will hear his voice comes from Psalm 95, verse 7. Well, this notion of the people pictured as sheep is, as I say, scattered throughout Scripture. Ezekiel 34, if you remember when we went through Ezekiel and talked about the evil shepherds and their abuse of the people in not providing that spiritual sustenance, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, thus says the Lord God to the shepherds, woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, should not the shepherds feed the flocks. And you have a clever interplay between the shepherds of Israel meeting their own physical needs instead of fulfilling their function of meeting the people's spiritual needs.

And that goes throughout Ezekiel 34. So, the green pastures are full of this lush grass, and it's not just adequate grass, it is lush and verdant grass. And he makes me lie down in these green pastures, and this lying down is something we're going to be coming back to soon in one of the parts of the psalm that I'm going to suggest we might change.

But this rich abundant grass of springtime is referred to, you can put next to green pastures, Deuteronomy 32. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as rain drops on the tender herb and as showers on the grass. And so, you have in Deuteronomy 32.2 a more or less direct parsing of this particular metaphor, this lush grass.

And to lie down means to spend some time. You're not like the disciples walking through the field of grain grabbing a quick handful and moving on. You lie down.

This suggests contemplation, spending time in reflection and in spiritual digestion, if you will, of

this verdant spiritual nourishment. And so, David affirms here that the truth of God is important in his life. He spends time thinking about it and God provides enough that he can feed on it to his heart's content.

He can stay there as long as he likes and he's never going to run out. So, the word of the Lord is an inexhaustible supply and we know that to be true ourselves. You come to the second line here and it says, He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. And the verb here means to guide with the idea of taking you to a place of refreshment. To bring you to, for example, in Isaiah 49.10 Talking about the future kingdom.

They shall neither hunger nor thirst. Neither heat nor sun shall strike them. For he who has mercy on them will lead them.

Even by the springs of water he will guide them. Isaiah 49.10 And water, of course, goes without saying as a source of life. It is used throughout Scripture.

Old Testament and New. Prophecies of the Old Testament. Prophecies of the Millennial Kingdom.

Prophecies of the Kingdom of the Father. The water of life that Jesus talked about. Out of his innermost self will flow rivers of living water.

There is the river that flows from the throne of God. So, this spiritual refreshment is not just comfort. It is essential to vitality.

It is essential to life itself. And these are waters that are restful. There is a verb in Hebrew, nuach.

It's like ruach, except it starts with an N. And it means to rest. To take pause. To refresh.

To renew. To charge your batteries. And so if you turn that into a noun, you put a maim in front of it, an M. You take a verb and turn it into a noun a couple of different ways.

You can make it a participle by using the OE vowel form. Or you can put a maim in front of it. And this is a plural.

A feminine plural. So, it is waters of restfulness. There are multiple kinds of rest in this water.

It's a plural. So, this suggests, as often, plurals in Hebrew are intensives. They are signs of completeness, fullness, overflowingness.

You have instead of El, you have Elohim. Talking about the almost incomprehensible fullness. Well, these rests are in the plural.

And the feminine plural is often in the intangible world. So, this is comfort. Now, how many

times are we making our way through a turbulent world? Turbulent circumstances.

Things that upset us, that tax us, that stress us. And we would love to find peace. We need the peace that passes understanding.

Jesus said, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives. It's a supernatural peace.

That's what David is talking about here. These springs, these freshens of water are not just still themselves. They provide, they promote restfulnesses.

Rest in body, rest in soul, rest in mind, rest in heart. Complete rest, complete refreshment. And this genitive tells you the quality of the waters.

So, you may know, I know there's a book that's been very popular and it's fascinating to read, A Shepherd's View of the 23rd Psalm. And he points out in there that the flocks back in this day were typically watered around noon. And you can see examples of this with Moses and Midian.

And to anticipate the heat of the day, they would sort of tank up the flocks with water so that they wouldn't heat stroke. The Mediterranean climate there has always been warm in the afternoons and particularly so in the summer. So, they would water them at least once a day, usually around noon.

And the water was used not only to drink, but also for washing the exterior, for getting animals wet. This would clean them. This could cleanse them if they had wounds, walking through the briars or nipping one another or gashing a foot against a sharp rock or whatever.

Coming to the waters was a place of restoration and cleansing as well as refreshment, taking the water in internally, also externally. And this is another one of those restfulnesses. It provides something on the inside.

It provides something on the outside. And even today, you find that anybody that starts to treat a wound, if you have a choice between a bottle of water and a bottle of alcohol, which one do you want? This abrasion where I took the outside layer of my skin off, please use the water and not the alcohol. It's soothing.

We're made of water. We're what, 94% water? And we're homogenous with it. We take to it.

So many times the Old Testament will talk about waters that are not still having the opposite effect. You know, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, and the waters are casting up mire and dirt. That's not the kind of water God leads his people to.

You have Isaiah 43, verse 2. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.

Flame and turbulent waters are put side by side for stressors. Isaiah 28, 2. Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring them down to the earth with his hand. The very first form of universal destruction we ever had on the earth was not fire, it was water.

2 Samuel 5, verse 20. When David goes to Baal-perizim and defeats his enemy there, and he says, The Lord has broken through my enemies before me like a breakthrough of water, like a dam breaching its banks. And he's the one who named the place Baal-perizim, and the Lord of breakthroughs.

Calm water, on the other hand, represents cleansing and spiritual restoration. In Leviticus, you have the use of water for ritual purification and cleansing, whether you are a priest or a common Israelite. Throughout the scripture, you find these ritual purifications.

You take water and you wash clothes. You take water and you wash your skin or your body. Water washes some of the blood and such off of the priests themselves.

You have the bronze laver that is filled with clean water, and that's a place of cleansing. So, not only does God refresh and restore the inner man, but he will also refresh and restore our outward demeanor, the way we treat one another, the spiritual face that we present and the actions that we perform in our fellowship with one another. You think about, you know, why do we bathe? I stood next to a guy yesterday who had not bathed any time, probably in my lifetime, from appearance and aroma.

And you realize what a blessing it is to have that cleansing, not just for your own benefit, but for your concert and your concord with others, to be approachable, to be able to speak the truth to others in love. You want your outer man cleansed as well as your inner man. You want to be consistent.

There is a lot going on here when God not only makes us lie down in green pastures to give us sustenance and to fill us with good, but he takes us to the water. And this is life-giving, life-restoring. It is cleansing.

You get the idea by extension that this would include cleansing of our sins. Our bodies having been washed with water is over in Hebrews, as we come before God. Our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Remember that? As you come before God. So that pure water is a gift from God, and he's the one that takes us to it and provides it. And this is summed up in the final clause of this verse, he restores my soul.

And I would actually move the beginning of verse 3 down a line, but this is okay. The next line is, he restores my soul. He restores my nefesh.

The word restore here is shuv, S-H-U-V S-H-U, soft B in Hebrew. And shuv, the root meaning of

it is to return. It's the word for repentance.

It's the thing for turnaround, to return. To have gone in one direction and then to turn. The active meaning of it is to turn a thing.

Shuv, turn around. I took a journey, I turned around, I came back. I re-turned.

And so you could say, well, he turns my soul. But this is the polel, which is a fancy way of saying, that it's talking about, it's an imperfect participle, so to speak. And God is in the habit of refreshing, restoring, renewing, recharging our nefesh.

We inevitably run down, we inevitably tire. There is entropy in our system. And God reverses that.

He restores is a good translation, but there's a fulsomeness there. What does it mean to restore your soul? Well, what happened to my soul that it needs restoration? It gets worn. It gets nicked and cut and damaged.

There are bruises. There is road dirt. What did Jesus do in the upper room in this regard? Remember when he wrapped a towel around his waist and knelt and washed the feet of the disciples in water? And Peter says, Lord, you're not going to wash my feet.

And you know the story. Jesus said, if I don't wash your feet, you have no portion with me. You have no part with me.

And so Peter says, well, in that case, give me a bath. And Jesus says, no, you don't need a bath. You just need this road dust washed off your feet.

It is maintenance, not baptism. You're not renewed to salvation here. You are restored.

You are brought back to a clean and functional state, an acceptable state. And as I have done for you, Jesus said, you should do for one another. Forgive and forget the things that tend to divide and separate and cause us to stand away, as I did with the gentleman in the orange overall suit that for whatever reason didn't have access to a bath, either by choice or by circumstance.

And I felt bad having to take an extra step away. But there is that which divides and separates us. And in Jesus' example and exhortation, we are to ensure that none of that is due to us.

So he restores. He returns, refreshes, and renews our nefesh. And nefesh in Hebrew means more than soul.

When God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, he became a nefesh hayyim, a living soul. But the breath in his nostrils wasn't merely for his soul, was it? It was his entire being. He became a living being.

And nefesh, very often in the Old Testament, basically means your life, a living, breathing entity. You're a nefesh. You're in the game.

You're on the field. You're not on the bench. You're not asleep.

You're not some future gleam in somebody's eye. You are around. You are living.

You are functional. And your presence in life, what people see and hear, what you think and do, that's your nefesh. It's your presence, your life.

And God, David says, restores, refreshes my self. And we know that this is our best self. This is our spiritual maturity, our spiritual strength.

The overcoming and the rebuilding and the renewal that God has done inside us gets torn down. Sometimes we tear it down ourselves. Sometimes it gets torn down by circumstance or by other people.

God rebuilds. Bricks are falling off the tower. Sticks them back up there.

He turns, returns, restores my life, David says. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. He leads me in the paths of righteousness.

So what has God done so far? He has provided nourishment. He has provided refreshment and cleansing. He has provided renewal and restoration.

You see those three things? As a shepherd, the one feeding, he's provided the green pastures, which is sustenance and energy that we can take on board and make use of. There is refreshment and cleansing and restoration and renewal beside the still waters. Now there is guidance.

He leads me to particular places. He is taking me somewhere. I am traveling.

I'm not just in the sheepfold. I'm not in the safety of a corral. He is taking me somewhere.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. The word here for tracks of righteousness really slowed me down this past week. If I was going to guess, and anybody with a smattering of Hebrew, maybe a semester or a year of Hebrew, if you say a path or a way, there is a Hebrew word that immediately comes to mind, and it has come into our modern parlance as a man's name, and it is Derek.

Derek is the way. It's used back when God encourages the Israelites to teach their children when they rise up and when they are traveling, in the way, the Derek. Over and over again, dozens of times, perhaps hundreds of times, it's used in the Old Testament, Derek as the way.

This is not the way of righteousness. He doesn't lead me in the street or the way of Tzedek. This is a word which is ma'agel, ma'agel, M-A-A-G-E-L.

And the reason I'm slowing down on this a little bit is you would be greatly surprised to see how the first occurrences of this word are translated, because they occur contemporaneous to David writing this psalm in 1 Samuel. And in the first case, it is David who is traveling to see King Saul. In fact, both of these occurrences are contact between David and Saul.

The first one is in 1 Samuel. You remember the story of Goliath. It's in the 17th chapter of 1 Samuel.

It gives all the details of Goliath facing the armies and their fear. And in verse 12, David is the son of Jesse. He's got seven brothers.

The three oldest sons had gone to follow Saul to the battle. David is the youngest. And so in verse 17, Jesse says to his son, David, take now for your brothers an ephah of this dried grain and these ten loaves.

Run to your brothers at the camp. Take these cheeses. Now, verse 19, Saul and all the men of Israel were in the valley of Elah fighting with the Philistines.

So David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with the keeper, took the things, went as Jesse had commanded him, and he came to the camp as the army was going out to the fight and shouting for the battle. He came to the camp. The word camp there is our word.

He didn't come to the path. He came to the camp. He got to the camp just as all of the soldiers were coming out to the fight and shouting for the battle.

Mahegel. The second time we see this is a few pages over. Turn to 1 Samuel 26.

Remember when David is a fugitive and David is betrayed. His location is given to Saul. So Saul arose in verse 2 of 1 Samuel 26, went to the wilderness of Ziph had 3,000 chosen men with him, 3 elephants.

To seek David in the wilderness, Saul encamped in the hills of Aquila, which is opposite Yeshiman by the road. David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. David therefore sent out reconnaissance teams and understood that Saul had indeed come.

So, verse 5, this is our verse. David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped, and David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the Mahegel, within the camp, with the people encamped all around him.

Saul bedded down in the camp, and everybody else placed their stuff around him in the camp. So if this is a place where you encamp, where you have your tent and your stuff, and you leave it there while you go out to battle in 1 Samuel 17, or the king lays down there to go to sleep and everybody encircles him at night in 1 Samuel 26, other places where this word is used and translated path are actually helpfully illuminated by seeing that it is really a place of staying, not

a place of traveling. Do you see that? That it's not a track.

Sometimes in the lexicon it says it's a track or a trench. David came to the entrenchment. Saul laid down in an entrenchment.

Nobody who's ever spent time in the field is going to make their bed in a trench. Trust me. What's the first thing that's going to happen if there's any kind of wetness or rain? You're going to be the first guy washed out of sight.

You don't camp, you don't put your bed in a depression or an entrenchment. You find some high ground. Even if there's no rain in the forecast, you get a better breeze up there.

It's hot and stuffy down in a depression or in a trench. Nobody does that unless you're ordered to because you're having to sleep in a fighting hole. There are plenty of other places where this word is used, but let me just suggest one to you.

Turn to Psalm 17, 5. Back in our Psalm 23, you can just flip a few pages back to Psalm 17. We have here, concerning the works of men in verse 4, by the word of your lips, I have kept away from the paths of the destroyer. Uphold my steps in your paths, that my footsteps may not slip.

Interestingly, in verse 4, you have a different word than you have in verse 5. In verse 5, where it is translated, Uphold my steps in your paths, that's our word, ma'agel. In verse 4, we have a completely different word, but in English, they're both translated the same. So in verse 4, by the word of your lips, concerning the works of men, I have kept away from the arkot, which is the feminine plural for a path or a road.

It's a perfectly good word. A-r-a-k-a-r-a-c-h. And this is a way or a path.

David could easily have used this word if that's what he meant in Psalm 23, the one that's in verse 4, but instead he uses the one that means and suggests an encampment, which is in the next verse. And if you want to do a word study on this with a Strong's or something, I encourage you to do so. It's a fascinating study.

But we don't have time for it this morning. Let me just say that if you want to look at the Strong's number for ma'agel, it is 4570 in Strong's. And it's illuminating to look at the way it is used, especially in Proverbs, which of course is also contemporaneous with David.

So what's the upshot here? Why do we care about this? Why am I agonizing over this word? Well, we're fixing to go to our break, and let me leave you with this. He leads me in the encampments of righteousness. What's in an encampment? Other people, right? How many lone sheep are there out there with a shepherd and a single member of the flock? What is our metaphor here? This is the gathering place for the group.

There's a perfectly good word for camps as well. Mahanaim is the place of the tents, but he doesn't use that either. This is the word that talks about the group and where the group stays.

And he leads me in righteous groups. He associates me with righteousness in groups. So if you're looking for encouragement from Scripture that you need healthy, righteous Christian fellowship, look no farther.

And it's sadly, I think, been overlooked. It's interesting, if you look at Ma'agel and its root, Egel, without the M in front, is the word for calf. Golden calf, calves with the oxen and the calf as a sacrifice and so on.

Egel is calf. Ma'agel is from a calf. What do you get with calves? Well, you don't have calves out there by themselves, do you? If there's one lost sheep or one stray calf, somebody's got to go get it.

Remember the rejoicing of the man who goes out after he's got the 99 in the Ma'agel, but he goes out and finds the other one and brings it back? Well, that's, I think, what is in view here. He leads me in the encampment of righteousness. Why? Doesn't this make good sense? For his name's sake, the righteous hear the voice of the shepherd and they know him and they follow him, right? They are called by his name.

We belong to him. For his name's sake, we're identified with the shepherd. Oh, that's David's flock.

Those are the flocks of Jesse. Remember when Saul had to go find the mules of his father? They were called by that father's name. For his name's sake, he is going to ensure that everybody gets in the fold.

It's a fold of righteousness. And that's his reputation. That's his name.

These are mine and I'm not letting anything happen to them. I keep them together. They benefit and they are comforted not only by food, not only by water, but by the presence of those around them.

There's no better way to keep herd animals and flock animals happy than to make sure they are in a flock. And it's a sad thing to see an animal that's designed to be a herd or a flock animal all by itself. Even dogs are happier when there's another dog.

They're pack animals. Cats are not that way. Perfectly happy cat being by itself.

But if you've got goats or sheep or cattle or horses or other animals, they derive comfort and peace and they thrive in the presence of their kind. Well, what kind are in this particular camp, this particular flock? The righteous. And God will lead us to the camp of the righteous, to the assembly place of the righteous for his name's sake.

It benefits us. Well, something to think about, something to chew on while we take our break when we come back, we're going to finish this psalm. And let me leave you with a final thought.

Many times, if you start with a particular figure, it's passing strange if you suddenly shift away

from the figure without warning and without reason. This is a pastoral psalm that talks about the shepherd and the sheep, right? The title of the thing is, the Lord is my shepherd. And yet, what happens in verse 5? Even the valley and the rod and the staff in verse 4 still pertain, you know, the rod and the staff, these are shepherd's implements that benefit and guide the sheep.

Does anybody set the table for a sheep? We just suddenly leave the sheep thing behind. We've developed it, he's exported it, he's exploited it. All of a sudden, we're setting a table.

Well, there is an answer for this, and that's what we'll look at when we come back from the break.