holy mountain, a type of heaven. The world may collapse, but God never will (cf. Ps. 46:5; Isa. 24:19; 54:10). In short, David draws his decalogue to conclusion with a benediction of eternal life upon the worshiper who by faith keeps these requirements.

God's salvation from human failure to keep these virtues and to abstain from these vices comes about through the obedience of faith in reliance on God's grace for forgiveness of sins for spiritual enablement.

3

"The Lord Is Christ's Shepherd": Psalm 23 as Messianic Prophecy

Douglas J. Green

THOSE WHO KNEW Al Groves well remember how much he loved the psalms. The Psalter was the cornerstone of his devotional life, a book he "lived in" and "lived out of" throughout his life. And those of us fortunate enough to have spent time praying with Al will recall how central the theme of "seeing Jesus" was to his piety. "Seeing Jesus" meant keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus or expecting to see him at work in our lives, and in Al's final days it took the form of a comforting and even joyful anticipation of meeting the Savior he loved face-to-face.

This essay is an exercise in Christian interpretation of the Psalter, and in particular an attempt to "see Jesus" in Psalm 23 in a fresh way. In combining two of Al's great passions—Christ and the psalms—I wish to honor the memory of my respected mentor, trusted colleague, wise friend, and godly brother in Christ, in a way that he would have appreciated.

Introduction: The Psalter as a Book of Prophecy

Is Psalm 23 a messianic psalm? In other words, does this much-loved poem belong to a small group of "prophetic" psalms that have "no direct

message of significance for the OT period" but "only predict the coming Messiah"?[1] First, it should be noted that many scholars do not even recognize the existence of this category of psalms. They argue that *at the level of their original composition*, even psalms traditionally defined as messianic-prophetic, for example, Psalms 2, 16, 22, 45, and 110, should be read as royal psalms, which make excellent sense in the historical context of Israelite theology in general and Davidic royal ideology in particular.[2] Furthermore, even those who argue for the existence of these original "direct prophecies" of the Messiah usually limit their number to fewer than fifteen,[3] with Psalm 23 rarely, if ever, categorized as a messianic psalm in this narrow predictive sense.

Nevertheless, since the time of the church fathers, Christians *have* engaged in a form of Christological interpretation of Psalm 23, reading its opening words, with Augustine, to mean that "my shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ" and interpreting the rest of the psalm accordingly.[4] This line of interpretation, which has (rightly) brought comfort to Christians through the centuries, can be regarded as "messianic" in only the most general sense. From a grammatical-historical perspective, the psalm describes Yahweh's relationship with Israel (or Israel's king, David). The Christological interpretation develops in various ways out of this original meaning. Trinitarian theology, with its incorporation of Jesus into the identity of Israel's God, Yahweh, makes it very natural—for Christians!—to understand the first clause to mean "Jesus is my shepherd." Moreover, this classic Christological approach also finds textual support from a number of NT passages that refer to Jesus as the shepherd of his people, with John 10:11 and Luke 15:4–7 being two prominent examples.[5]

My sense is that the undergirding rationale for this classic Christological interpretation of Psalm 23 is not so much that Jesus fulfills a direct

1. Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 67.

2. For example, Longman contends that "no psalm is exclusively messianic in the narrow sense" (ibid., 68). By this he means that no psalm, as originally composed, is purely prophetic, or messianic, in character.

3. For example, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. treats only eleven psalms (2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 68, 69, 72, 109, 110, and 118) as messianic (*The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 92–93).

4. Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 1–32*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine III/15*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2000), 244.

5. See James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 208; Patrick Henry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar, 2000), 43–44.

prophecy concerning the identity of Yahweh in his eschatological role as Israel's shepherd, but rather that there is an analogy between Yahweh's relationship with an individual Israelite, David, and Christ's relationship with individual Christians. This analogy then allows Christians to "apply" the "truths" about the relationship described in Psalm 23 to their relationship with Christ. A good illustration of this kind of "analogical" application of the psalm's grammatical-historical meaning comes from the conservative evangelical expositor James Montgomery Boice. Initially, he takes verse 1 to refer to "Jehovah" as Israel's shepherd, but he then moves in a decidedly Christian direction by insisting that it does not stretch this OT statement "to see Jesus as our shepherd and to apply the lines of the psalm carefully and in detail to ourselves."[6]

This way of reading Psalm 23 bears witness to a certain tension in Christian (or at least modern evangelical) interpretation of the Psalter. On one hand, the commitment to grammatical-historical interpretation means that the primary question we ask is, more or less, what did the psalm mean to its original author? With this hermeneutical tether in place, it is arguable that no psalms prophesy some distant messianic future because *every* psalm addresses the "here and now" of ancient Israel. Yet Christians have always read the Psalter "toward Christ," even in the case of psalms that do not seem to have overtly messianic content. That inclination is a hint that the grammatical-historical method offers, at best, a limited starting point for the interpretation of the psalms.

The grammatical-historical approach interprets the psalms in the context of their original composition. Yet we do not receive the Psalter's 150 psalms as stand-alone texts in their original compositional context; they come to us in an expanding interpretive and canonical context.[7] First, the individual psalms are part of a canonical collection, the Psalter, the final form of which is the result of a long editorial, or redactional, process that only reached its conclusion at some point in the postexilic period. In recent years, scholarly attention has focused on this redactional process and the role it plays in determining the meaning of individual psalms. Is the shape of the Psalter—the location and ordering of the various psalms, and especially

6. Boice, *Psalms 1–41*, 208.

7. Bruce K. Waltke, "A Canonical Process Approach to the Psalms," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, ed. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 3–18.

the location of particular psalms at the beginning and end of the Psalter, and at the "seams" between its five books—merely an accident of history, or is there an editorial intention behind this shape? And if this shaping of the Psalter is intentional (at least to some degree), then what theological agenda guided these redactors as they did their work? And more specifically, did these redactors operate with an eschatological agenda? In other words, was the Psalter edited in such a way as to encourage readers to interpret its constituent psalms no longer simply as prayers and hymns rooted in the experience of ancient Israelites but as prophecies of events at the climax of Israel's history? This is not the place to enter this complex debate, but a growing number of scholars now agree that "the final form of the Psalter has been shaped . . . as an eschatological-predictive text,"[8] or at least that this final form is *susceptible* to being read in a prophetic direction.[9] If this approach to interpreting the Psalter is adopted, then individual psalms that did not have an eschatological orientation *at the level of their original composition* may be open to an eschatological or prophetic reinterpretation in their new literary context, that is, *at the level of the Psalter's final form.*

Even if there is uncertainty concerning the intentions of the Psalter's redactors, it is clear that in the Second-Temple period many Jews did read the psalms in a prophetic and eschatological direction. In addition to some intriguing evidence indicating that the translators of the Septuagint read the Psalter in this way,[10] it is apparent that at Qumran the Davidic psalms (at least) were being read as prophecy[11] and that the Psalter had become a book of "eschatological psalmody."[12] In other words, Qumran understood historical David to be speaking, through the gift of prophecy, the words of the Messiah who was yet to come. David, once "Israel's singer of songs" (2 Sam. 23:1),[13] had become a prophet, and his book, the Psalter, was interpreted accordingly.

8. David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 198.

9. M. A. Vincent, "The Shape of the Psalter: An Eschatological Dimension?" in *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, ed. P. J. Harland and C. T. R. Hayward, VTSup 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 82.

10. See Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 479.

11. 11QPs^{a} 27:2–11 refers to the psalms in the following way: "All these he [David] spoke through prophecy which was given to him by the Most High God." See Gillingham, "From Liturgy," 483–84.

12. Ben Zion Wacholder, "David's Eschatological Psalter 11Q Psalms^{a}," *HUCA* 59 (1988): 41.

13. All quotations of Scripture in this chapter are from the NIV, unless otherwise indicated.

Even more clearly, and more importantly for Christian readers of the Psalter, the NT authors read the psalms in the same way: not merely as ancient Israel's inspired hymnody, but as prophecy, as *predictions* of events that would occur at the climax of Israel's history. Of course, the apostles differed from Qumran in that they placed Jesus and his people—rather than the Qumran community—at the center of these climactic events.

In Luke 24:44, Jesus states that "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and . . . Psalms." The obvious point is that Jesus understands the Psalter to be speaking prophetically about himself. Less obvious is the fact that in the Greek there is no definite article before "Psalms." According to Craig Evans, this means that "we do not have here an instance of the tripartite canon (i.e., the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), but only the first two divisions—the Law and the Prophets, the latter of which was understood to include the Psalms."[14] Elsewhere in the NT, the Hebrew Scriptures, including the Psalter, are referred to as "the Law [or Moses] and the Prophets" (e.g., Matt. 5:17; 7:12; Luke 16:16, 29, 31; Acts 13:15; 28:23; Rom. 3:21). This strongly suggests that in the first century AD, the Psalter was being read in connection with—or as an extension of—the prophetic books.

Furthermore, a careful study of the use of the Psalter in the NT would show that the apostles understood the psalms as prophecies concerning a future Messiah and his people.[15] Again, this is not the place to engage in such a study, so reference to a single text will have to suffice. In Acts 2:29–30, Peter explains his quotation of Psalm 16 by saying: "David died and was buried . . . But *he was a prophet* and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne." For Peter and the other apostles, David was as much a prophet as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the psalms that bear his name were read as predictions of eschatological events, now fulfilled in the story of Jesus and his followers.[16]

In light of this full-canon approach to psalms interpretation, it is appropriate to read the *whole* of the Psalter in a prophetic and eschatological direction. More specifically, *all* of the "Psalms of David" should be read

14. Craig A. Evans, "Praise and Prophecy in the Psalter and the New Testament," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr., VTSup 99; Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 551.

15. J. Samuel Subramanian, *The Synoptic Gospels and the Psalms as Prophecy*, LNTS 351 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 2.

16. Ibid., 15.

as messianic psalms that describe different dimensions of the life—and especially the suffering—of Israel's eschatological King. Therefore, instead of treating the small group of psalms that the NT "applies" to Jesus as a special group of direct prophecies of the Messiah,[17] I regard these psalms as the tip of a prophetic and messianic iceberg. It is not that the NT quotes *all* of a small group of messianic psalms. Rather, it quotes from a *few* of a very large group of messianic psalms.[18] In other words, the apostolic authors adopted not simply a general Christological approach to reading the Psalter, wherein Christ could be "seen" in the psalms, but more specifically a decidedly *Christotelic* approach, reading it in connection with Israel's great narrative of redemption, which from their perspective had reached its surprising climax (Greek *telos*, "end" or "goal") in the story of Jesus, the Messiah.

Reading Psalm 23 as a Messianic Prophecy

Against this background of a developing interpretive and canonical context, I propose a second type of Christological reading of Psalm 23, a Christotelic reading, which will stand alongside—but not replace—the traditional Christian interpretation that places Jesus in the role of Yahweh, the shepherd ("the Lord, Jesus Christ, is my shepherd"). I will read Psalm 23 as a messianic psalm, that is, a prophecy concerning the Messiah, and set out a Christotelic interpretation in which Jesus fulfills the role played by the psalmist David, the sheep. To arrive at this interpretation, it will be helpful to consider briefly how the psalm's meaning may have developed through the different stages of redemptive history and the growth of the canon. In this way, a psalm that originally described *David's* relationship with Yahweh ("Yahweh/the Lord is David's shepherd") came to be understood as a messianic prophecy ("Yahweh/the Lord is—or will be—*eschatological* David's shepherd") until finally, with the Christian affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled Israel's messianic hopes, the purely prophetic, forward-looking interpretation gives way to a Christological reading ("The Lord/God the Father is *Christ's* shepherd"[19]), with the psalm now understood as an abbreviated gospel narrative.

17. See Kaiser, *Messiah*, 92–94.

18. See Bruce K. Waltke, "Christ in the Psalms," in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 41.

19. This nontraditional line of interpretation has already been anticipated by Vern S. Poythress, *Science and Hermeneutics: Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations

Beginning at the grammatical-historical, or compositional, level, the psalm testifies to the Lord's faithfulness to David, by providing for his needs (v. 2) and bringing him through the threat of death (v. 4) into abundant life in the temple (vv. 5–6). To this basic structure we may add some details. First, Psalm 23 can be identified as a pilgrimage psalm.[20] It tells a story about a journey—not just any journey, but one that reaches its goal as the psalmist enters "the house of Yahweh," the temple in Jerusalem. More specifically, the psalmist's metaphorical journey passes through three spatio-temporal points: (1) it passes from a time and place of sufficiency and safety, depicted in the imagery of the pasturage in springtime (v. 2), (2) it moves into the quasi-exilic condition of life under the threat of death, portrayed as a descent into a deep ravine in the Judean wilderness during summer (v. 4), and (3) finally, after safely passing through the "valley of the shadow of death," the pilgrimage—or is it a return from exile?—ends in the temple in Jerusalem in early autumn at the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 5). This movement through space and time can be set out as follows:

v. 1a: Statement of Theme: Yahweh is my shepherd.[21]

v. 1b: First Implication: I do not lack (= "Life")

v. 2: Provision of Food and Water (Location 1: Pasturelands/Spring)

In pastures of spring grass he causes me to lie down;
Beside waters of rest he guides me.

v. 3a: Second Implication: He restores my life (Resurrection/Return from Exile)

v. 3bc: Theological Orientation (Yahweh's Faithfulness)

He leads me in paths of (*his*) righteousness[22]
for the sake of his reputation.

v. 4: From "Death"/Exile (Location 2: Wilderness/Late Summer)

of Contemporary Interpretation 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 154–56; repr. in Moisés Silva, ed., *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 523–24.

20. Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 132–42; Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, NIBCOT 11 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 123–24.

21. All renderings of Psalm 23 in this chapter are the author's own translation.

22. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 350.

(So) even when I walk in the valley of the shadow-of-death
I will not fear the danger
because you are with me.
Your rod and your staff—they calm my fears.
v. 5: To "Life Plus" (Location 3: Temple/Early Autumn—Feast of Tabernacles/Ingathering)
You arrange a banquet-table before me—
opposite my adversaries—
You have anointed my head with olive-oil.
My cup overflows.
v. 6: Extension of v. 5 (Return to the Temple)
Surely, (your) goodness and covenant faithfulness will pursue me
all the days of my life
and I will keep coming back into the house of Yahweh
for a lengthening of days.[23]

Read as a movement from pasturage to wilderness to temple, Psalm 23 gives specific expression to the most basic outline of the story of redemption. In its simplest form, this recurring "redemptive pattern" can be described in terms of the development "Good → Bad → Better." This can be restated in a variation such as "Life → Death → Abundant Life," "Promised Land → Exile → Restoration," or, even more broadly, "Eden → Exile from the Garden → New Jerusalem" and "Life → Death → Resurrection and Exaltation." This pattern will provide the framework for the different ways of reading the psalm.

In its grammatical-historical context, Psalm 23, as a psalm of King David, can arguably be further defined as a royal psalm,[24] but read as prophecy, it becomes a messianic psalm. "David" is no longer historical King David, but rather "eschatological David." In continuity with the grammatical-historical

23. For a detailed defense of my grammatical-historical interpretation of Psalm 23, see Douglas J. Green, "The Good, the Bad and the Better: Psalm 23 and Job," in *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse*, ed. Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton, and James W. Watts, JSOTSup 336 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 67–81.

24. See John H. Eaton, *Psalms*, Torch (London: SCM, 1967), 76–79; John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 2nd ed., The Biblical Seminar (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1986), 36–38; Michael Goulder, "David and Yahweh in Psalms 23 and 24," *JSOT* 30 (2005): 463–73.

meaning, the psalm now predicts that Yahweh will be faithful to his promise to protect and preserve his Messiah at every point in his life's journey. Given the movement from images of restfulness to a darker, more threatening image of "the valley of the shadow of death," and finally to a picture of restoration, victory, and abundance in the Lord's presence, Psalm 23 establishes the outline of Messiah's story. His final destiny will be glorious: a return to the abundance of Eden in the Lord's temple, with (defeated) enemies arrayed before him (v. 5). Before this climax, however, Messiah must pass through the valley of the shadow of death—perhaps a brush with death, or some deathlike condition (e.g., exile). In other words, Messiah's story will conform to the pattern "Life → Death → Life Plus."

The final interpretive step is to engage in a Christotelic reading that builds on the grammatical-historical and prophetic interpretations of the psalm but ultimately conforms to what actually happened in the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

I take the opening words of the psalm ("Yahweh is my shepherd") to be a short monocolon that functions as a title or introductory statement of the theme developed in the rest of the poem. Throughout his pilgrimage, David finds Yahweh to be true to his promise to "be with" him, first by providing for his daily needs (v. 2), summarized by the statement "I do not lack" (v. 1b), and second, by rescuing him from the threat of death and bringing him into a life of blessing (vv. 4–5). This latter dimension of Yahweh's faithfulness is summarized in verse 3a by the statement "He restores my life." Moving beyond David, and reading the psalm as fulfilled prophecy, the metaphor of sheep and shepherd also provides an accurate picture of the relationship that Jesus enjoyed with his heavenly Father. While the NT does not use shepherd-and-sheep imagery to depict *this* relationship, it is fair to say that in *his* pilgrimage, in *his* life, death, and resurrection, Jesus finds Yahweh—the LORD, his heavenly Father—to be *his* faithful shepherd, the One who provided for *his* daily needs and restored *his* soul by rescuing him from death. In other words, the gospel, from beginning to end, is a story of how "the LORD was Christ's shepherd."

The psalm's metaphorical journey begins in the springtime in the pasturelands to the east of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the liminal zone between the grain-producing land of the Judean highlands and the wasteland of the Judean wilderness. This is "ordinary time" in the life of the sheep: when the shepherd leads them to fresh spring grasses and pools of water remaining

from the winter rains (v. 2). This is that stage of the pilgrimage that can be brought under the rubric of "I do not lack" because the shepherd provides the psalmist's daily needs. But this section can also be reread as a prophecy of Yahweh's sustaining of the Messiah: fulfilled in such stories as Luke's account of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness: "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread" (Luke 4:3). Jesus, of course, chooses against the way of self-trust, and chooses instead to trust in his Father to give him each day his daily bread (Luke 11:3). This episode provides a window on the life of Messiah Jesus: in the ordinariness of life—in the pasturelands of springtime, as it were—he discovered that the Lord, his heavenly Father, was the shepherd who supplied his needs, allowing him to say, "Because the Lord is my shepherd, nothing do I lack."

In my grammatical-historical reading of Psalm 23, I take the words "He restores my life" (v. 3a) not as the conclusion of verse 2 but as a short summary of what will transpire in the following narrative of verses 4 and 5: Yahweh will "restore" the psalmist's life by bringing him safely through the threat of death (v. 4) into the blessed life described in verse 5. I can give the rest of verse 3 only passing mention by offering this paraphrase: "Yahweh leads me in paths of *his* righteousness, paths where he fulfills *his* obligations to the psalmist-sheep and does so in order to maintain his reputation as a covenant-keeping God." Read Christotelically, the Lord's fidelity to Jesus, his Servant-Sheep—especially seen in raising him from the dead—is the ultimate witness to his reputation as a faithful God.

"Soul restoration" is marked by a movement from negative to positive conditions. To state the obvious, the negative is described in verse 4, "the valley of the shadow of death," the second spatio-temporal point on the psalmist's pilgrimage. Metaphorically, he has left the pasturage and traveled farther east—in an "exilic" direction—into the deep ravines that cut through the Judean wilderness and run down to the Dead Sea. While it is not explicitly stated, I set this verse in late summer. The wholly negative character of this place is emphasized in three ways: it is, forebodingly, "the valley of the shadow of death," it is a place where danger (literally, "bad") threatens (probably in the form of wild beasts and precipitous cliffs), and finally, it is a place of fear.

Verse 5 (read in concert with verse 6), on the other hand, provides the counterpoint to verse 4 and marks the destination of the psalmist's pilgrimage, which can also be analyzed as a return from exile. The journey from

the pasturage through the wilderness now reaches its goal in "the house of Yahweh," the temple in Jerusalem. Judging by the banquet imagery of verse 5, the movement from spring to summer ends in early autumn at the great harvest festival—the Feast of Tabernacles/Sukkot (Ingathering)[25]—the pinnacle experience of salvation for ancient Israelites. The threat of death gives way to life, or more accurately "life *plus*," since the quality of the life of verse 5 (the banquet table and overflowing wine) far exceeds that of verse 2 (grass and water): from the bare necessities to abundance, from plain fare (for a sheep!) to banquet richness. The "bad" that threatens the psalmist in verse 4 gives way to God's pursuing "good," in verses 5 and 6. The fear of death is replaced by sabbatical rest as the psalmist's enemies are subdued. This is what it means to have one's "life (or soul) restored": it is being led from death (or in this case, the threat of death) to "life plus" (the abundant life of sabbatical rest).

Even in their grammatical-historical context, verses 4 and 5, with their images of escape from the threat of death and (possibly) return from exile, tell an incipient resurrection story. Read prophetically, these verses echo the story of the Isaianic Servant as they depict the Messiah's journey through some kind of suffering, which will subsequently change into his enjoyment of the blessed life, and more specifically to an eschatological banquet. It must be admitted, however, that the psalmist does not actually die—"the valley of the shadow of death" is not death itself—so it is difficult to see how even a prophetic interpretation of this psalm can transform it into a prediction of the actual *death* and subsequent bodily *resurrection* of the Messiah. Nevertheless, Christotelic exegesis cannot be satisfied with either a grammatical-historical or a prophetic interpretation of Psalm 23, although it is indebted to both. If Jesus Christ is indeed the *telos*, or goal, of Israel's story, and more specifically the fulfillment of the OT's messianic prophecies—including the Psalter understood as a prophetic book—then Christian interpretation of the OT must be an exercise in reading backwards, of rereading earlier texts so that their meanings cohere with what God has actually done in history in Jesus Christ.[26]

Adopting this approach means that I read Psalm 23:4–5 as a prophecy of the *death* and *resurrection* of Christ, even though these verses, in either

25. Mark D. Futato, *The Book of Psalms*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 7 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009), 103.

26. Francis Watson, "The Old Testament as Christian Scripture: A Response to Professor Seitz," *SJT* 52 (1999): 229–30.

their earlier grammatical-historical or prophetic sense, do not directly predict these specific events.[27] Christ's death and resurrection "expand" the earlier meanings of these verses. Psalm 23, read from an original (postexilic) prophetic perspective, looks *forward* with an expectation that the coming Messiah would in some way walk into the valley where death metaphorically casts a shadow. But read from a Christotelic perspective, we discover that eschatological David actually keeps walking . . . into the *next* valley, into Death's own valley. Psalm 23:4 should be reinterpreted as a prophecy of the *actual* death of Messiah, and not a metaphorical death (like exile), or being under the threat of death. In short, when we read Psalm 23:4 in this Christological manner, we should no longer hear the word *shadow*! Likewise, verse 5 becomes a way of speaking about Jesus' resurrection and exaltation to "life plus" at the right hand of the Father and depicts the welcome that Jesus receives as he reenters heaven as the risen and exalted King. "The house of the LORD" in verse 6 no longer refers to the temple in Jerusalem. Implicit in every Christian reading of this verse is the idea that the temple was merely a sign pointing forward to the reality of God's heavenly dwelling and ultimately to the eschatological reality of heaven on earth.

Reading Psalm 23 in this way opens up a rich and complex perspective on the death of Christ. Viewed through the lens of Psalm 23 (and verse 4 in particular), the crucifixion can be seen as the moment when Jesus boldly asserts in the face of death itself, "I will not fear because my heavenly Father is with me." Of course, at this point, my Christotelic interpretation seems to have hit an immovable obstacle, precisely because God the Father was *not with* Jesus in his death, as proved by Jesus' cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" quoting from the immediately preceding Psalm 22! Nevertheless, we may find a side path around this barricade by asking whether God abandoned Jesus on the cross. I suggest that the answer is both yes *and* no. For Matthew and Mark, the answer is clearly yes, since they both record Jesus' words of abandonment (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Luke, however, paints a quite different picture. He omits the cry of dereliction; instead, Jesus' final words in Luke are more appropriate for a man experiencing God's comforting presence in death: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Also of interest is Luke 22:43, which

27. Similarly, Psalm 16, which in its original, compositional context speaks "merely" of *protection from dying*, is read expansively by Peter as a prophecy of Messiah's *rescue out of death* (i.e., resurrection) (Acts 2:25–31).

records that during Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane, "an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him." Again, this datum is omitted from Matthew and Mark, and I suggest that it is part of Luke's distinctive portrayal of the passion of the Messiah. For Luke, Jesus goes to his death comforted by the confidence that his Father *was* in fact with him![28] In other words, Psalm 23:4, interpreted Christotelically, can be read as the words of the Lukan Jesus: "Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil. I entrust my life into your hands for you are with me; I trust you to restore my soul [i.e., raise me to life]."

We cannot here attempt an explanation for these two perspectives on Jesus' experience of God in his final moments. Somehow the Father was *both* absent from and present with Jesus on the cross. We should not be surprised by this paradox. It has its origins in the Psalter, where Psalm 22 ("God has abandoned me") and Psalm 23 ("God is with me") sit side by side as two equally true expressions of David's experience of God in times of deep distress.

We come at last to the final verse of the psalm—a verse that I have refrained from commenting on until now. My translation of the Hebrew ("*and I will keep coming back into* the house of Yahweh *for a lengthening of days*") departs significantly from the received tradition. Some brief observations on two elements in this verse are in order. The traditional (KJV) translation ("*I will dwell* in the house of the LORD") is not based on the MT (*weshabtî*) but on the LXX (which assumes *weshibtî*, lit. "and my dwelling [will be]"). I find it difficult to read the MT's *weshabtî* in any other way than as a *weqatal* (or *waw* consecutive plus perfect) form of *shûb* ("return, come back"). Additionally, the final words of the psalm do not speak of *eternal* life: the Hebrew can be literally translated as "for a lengthening of days" and simply refers to a long life. From a grammatical-historical perspective, the MT of verse 6 does not depict the psalmist living in the temple forever. Rather, it expresses the expectation that he will experience the blessing of a long life and the happy prospect of making pilgrimage to the temple year after year to enjoy the blessings of Sukkot, described in verse 5. Verse 6, in effect, casts the psalmist back to verse 2 to commence the pilgrimage all over again.

28. Maarten J. J. Menken, "The Psalms in Matthew's Gospel," in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 79, also cites John 16:32 ("Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me") as further evidence of an early Christian tradition, in which "Jesus' closeness to God, even in his passion," coexisted with a tradition that emphasized the fact that he was abandoned by God.

"I will keep coming back into the house of Yahweh" does not reflect the traditional translation of this verse, but is a good rendering of its grammatical-historical meaning. Nonetheless, it does not "work" Christologically. Once Christ ascends into the *heavenly* house of the Lord, he stays there (Heb. 1:3b); he does not return to earth and make annual pilgrimages back to heaven! Accordingly, whether the LXX reflects the better textual tradition or not is beside the Christological point. "I will dwell" may or may not be a good translation of the original Hebrew, but it is an excellent translation of the gospel. Read in the light of the story of Jesus, the Messiah, we must follow the LXX: the eschatological David has been brought from the valley of death into the heavenly house of the Lord, to *reside* there!

I can make a similar interpretive point even more strongly with respect to the final words of the psalm. Even when read from a postexilic prophetic perspective, all that the Davidic Messiah can expect is a *long life* after his brush with death. But read from a Christotelic perspective, then the right interpretation, if not the right translation, of the Hebrew *is* "forever" because God has in fact granted Messiah Jesus a lengthening of days *that stretches out into eternity*. So in the end, while the KJV tradition ("I will dwell in the house of the LORD *for ever*") may not be quite true to Hebrew grammar, it is true to the grammar of the gospel!

Conclusion

Psalm 23, read as a fulfilled messianic prophecy, tells the story of Jesus Christ from the perspective of God's shepherd-like care for him: in life, through death, and on to glorious entry into the heavenly temple. Moreover, it tells the story of those who have been united to Christ by faith. Jesus' story has become our story; his pilgrimage has become our pilgrimage. In the end, this alternative Christological reading of the shepherd psalm should bring the same encouragement to Christian readers that comes to them through the traditional Christian interpretation. "The LORD" (understood as God the Father) "is Christ's shepherd" transposes easily—by virtue of our union with Christ—into "the LORD is the Christian's shepherd." In fact, we face the valley of (the shadow of) death without fear because God has already brought the lead Sheep from his great flock safely through that dark valley. Because the Great Shepherd has led Jesus from the valley of death to the Temple Mount, he will provide the same death-defeating, life-restoring protection to all who follow in Jesus' tracks.

4

Ecclesiastes according to the Gospel: Christian Thoughts on Qohelet's Theology

Peter Enns

ECCLESIASTES IS A VERY difficult book to interpret. This is not only the case with individual verses here and there, which are shrouded in mystery or complexity (although, in either Hebrew or English, the meaning of what Qohelet[1] says here and there is plain enough). Rather, the real difficulty with Ecclesiastes is what the book as a whole is saying. This is a discussion that has been active since at least the first century AD in Jewish circles, and is still very evident today.

For example, for nearly any OT book, you can ask any ten reasonably informed people about its contents, its basic story line. To use Genesis as an example, these different people might emphasize different aspects of the

1. *Qohelet* is the name given to the main speaker of the book of Ecclesiastes. In some translations this name is rendered *Preacher* or *Teacher*, but both of these are highly interpretive and of questionable value. Along with most other scholars, I simply prefer to leave his name as is. For a discussion of the name and its meaning, see Peter Enns, "Ecclesiastes," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 121–32; Tremper Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–2.

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P&R PUBLISHING
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Eyes to see, ears to hear : essays in memory of J. Alan Groves / edited by Peter Enns, Douglas J. Green & Michael B. Kelly.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-59638-122-3 (pbk.)
1. Bible. O.T.--Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Bible. O.T.--Theology. I. Groves, J. Alan. II. Enns, Peter, 1961- III. Green, Douglas J., 1953- IV. Kelly, Michael B., 1965-
BS1171.3.E94 2010
230'.0411--dc22

2010016527

To Libbie, Alasdair, Rebeckah, Éowyn, and Alden:
Thank you for sharing so much of your husband and father with so many.

To Al's students:
May you have "ears to hear and eyes to see Jesus."