

NO FEAR! PSALM 23 AS A CAREFUL, CONCEPTUAL CHIASM

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1. INTRODUCTION: IS PSALM 23 A CHIASM ?

Approaches to this psalm are legion: theologians, teachers, preachers, seminarians, linguists, free-lance writers, death-bed counselors, spiritual shepherds, and even a literal shepherd have all “looked” at Psalm 23.¹ Of course “looked” is euphemistic for interpreted; and so many have looked that a new angle does not seem possible or desirable. But although it seems every exegetical trend has been employed to unlock the secrets and sense of this psalm, somehow it has almost entirely escaped the chiasmic craze—until now (sadly or happily depending on the reader’s perspective). While I sympathize with those who are skeptical about literary license looking for chiasm at every turn in the biblical text, I have become convinced of the contextual and structural reality and intentionality of this literary device in Psalm 23.

The outline or literary structure of this psalm is a major issue over which interpreters continue to disagree. Leupold laments the psalm’s history of fragmentation by commentators;² but Craigie reminds his readers that its structure is “difficult to define with clarity or certainty.”³ Is there only one metaphor being employed by the psalmist (i.e., the shepherd) or are there two, three, or more; e.g., shepherd, guide, and host? Almost every approach imaginable has been tried in terms of an analytical and linear outline of one or more sections with one or more metaphorical images; but not that of a conscious and careful, conceptual chiasm. The unresolved confusion and conflict among commentators over this matter suggests that a new, non-linear, and more extensive explanation is necessary as a possible solution to the debate over this psalm’s intended literary form.

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2. INTERPRETATION OF PSALM 23 AS A CHIASM

2.1 *An Interpretive History of the Literary Structure Psalm 23*

To date only general and topical chiastic outlines have been hinted at on rare occasions,⁴ and a detailed metrical chiasm has been worked out;⁵ but not a detailed conceptual chiasm with a central, unrepeatd climax as the solution to the debate over this psalm's structure. These conceptually and structurally suggestive chiastic interpretations of Psalm 23 in its relatively recent and mostly scholarly literary history will be reviewed next, followed by the non-chiastic treatments.

2.1.1 *Chiastic Considerations*

Clarke's commentary (1976 edition) exhibits a chiasmus, although this pattern (A-B-B-A) is not mentioned per se as characteristic of the literary structure: provision (vv. 1-3), protection (v. 4), protection (v. 5), and provision (v. 6).⁶ Y. Bazaq's 1981 stylistic and structural analysis interpreted verse 4 as a center-point around which the rest of the psalm circles. A pattern of phonological and conceptual parallels was observed between verses 1 and 4, 2 and 5, and 3 and 6.⁷ The present proposal maintains the same verse (4) as the theological fulcrum or thesis of the poem; but otherwise sees a chiastic pattern of similarities in purpose between verses 1-2 and 6 and 3 and 5. Gerstenberger hinted at a chiastic nature for Psalm 23 in 1988 by saying that the final verse "returns to objective, confessional language," after explaining that it opens with a confessional.⁸ In 1990 L. F. Bliese selected Psalms 1-24 for study, seeking to show that intentional structural symmetry rather than randomness guided the psalmists. This author was satisfied that either metrical chiasmus (28 times) or metrical homogeneity (12 times) is clearly present in these psalms and should be expected in much of Old Testament poetry. In the former case (chiasmus) the lines of the poem or of each stanza of a poem (working from the outside to the center) have the same number of word accents successively. For Psalm 23 the chiasmic meter is 4655 6 5564:

- A (v. 1 = 4 beats)
- B (v. 2 = 6 beats)
- C (v. 3 = 5 beats)
- D (v. 4a = 5 beats)
- E (v. 4b = 6 beats) = a marked peak
- D (v. 5a = 5 beats)
- C (v. 5b = 5 beats)
- B (v. 6a = 6 beats)
- A (v. 6b = 4 beats).

The isolated central line or lines then become(s) its marked peak. In the latter instances (i.e., those of metrical homogeneity) the accents per line are the same throughout a given psalm, leading to a marked final (rather than central) peak.⁹

2.1.2 *Non-chiastic considerations*

In 1982 R. Ahroni wrote on the unity of Psalm 23, arguing against what is viewed as

forced attempts to show unity through emendations; and seeking to establish an imaginative conceptual and emotional unity. In line with, but more specifically than Bazaq,¹⁰ Ahroni identified verse 4b as the key thought around which the rest of the psalm revolves: the "rod and staff" representing God's justice and mercy.¹¹ R. S. Tomback reconsidered verse 2 the same year and used Mesopotamian backgrounds to explain this verse in a manner consistent with the master (lord) and shepherd of verse 1. While this study was not concerned with the overall structural implications of this interpretation, the chiasmic character of Psalm 23, which this current paper seeks to defend, depends on the close association of verses 1-2 and their collective disassociation from verse 3—in contrast to the modern tendency¹² to disregard the strong Masoretic disjunctive accent (*rebia mugrash*) of verse 1 (while inconsistently following it in verse 3) and thus create a bi-cola with verse 2a, leading to the need to harmonize the text by producing another bi-cola from verses 2b and 3a and yet another from verse 3b.¹³ In 1985 an essay by C. O'Connor on the structure of Psalm 23 appeared, taking into account the metrical system developed by M. O'Connor. Results were: (1) sixteen lines: 1b[1 line], 2a-b[2 lines], 3a-b[2 lines], 4a-d[4 lines], 5a-c[3 lines], and 6a-d[4 lines]; (2) two sections or stanzas of eight lines each: 1b-4c and 4d-6d; and (3) four strophes or paragraphs, each of related material, of four lines each—two per stanza: I. 1b-3a and 3b-4c, then II. 4d-5c and 6a-d.¹⁴ This still suggests a hinge purpose for verse 4 but splits its contents between 4c and 4d, making the former the close of section I and the latter the opening for section II. The verse is transitional as demanded by a chiasm but the development of thought as viewed by O'Connor is linear rather than cyclical, since the verses of each strophe are seen as related, or intra-related, but not inter-related with verses in other strophes. He offers few clues for a chiasm.

But chiasmic or other similar structures in Hebrew poetry in general and in the Psalms in particular (not Psalm 23 per se) were being noticed in the mid-1980s. J. Bazak spoke of concentric circles characterizing the shape of Psalm 25 and concluded, after an analysis of Psalms 25, 34, 37, and 145, that similar shapes were either synonymous or chiasmic.¹⁵ At the same time J. S. Kselman put forth a chiasmic interpretation of Psalm 101, one exegetical significance of which was to suggest that the question posed in verse 2b was answered by verse 8.¹⁶ Then P. Auffret questioned the traditional assumption of great literary artistry in Psalm 23. Yet his study, while noting previously overlooked structural features, was based on its traditional, linear two-part structure: verses 1-4 (part one) and verses 5-6 (part two).¹⁷ In the following year (1986) K. K. Sacon applied a literary-structural analysis to Psalm 113 and arrived at a chiasmic colometry.¹⁸ This supported the assumptions that Bliese would make four years later.¹⁹

Related to the relationship of verses 2 and 3, which issue has bearing on the chiasm proposed in this paper, T. M. Willis in 1987, while not concerned with the outline or structure of Psalm 23, argued grammatically for a thematic connection between verses 2-3a. These three cola describe three functions of a shepherd.²⁰ The next year M. S. Smith evaluated the traditional bi-partite outline of Psalm 23 and the attempts to reconcile the seemingly conflicting images of God as first a shepherd (vv. 1-4) and then as a host (vv. 5-6). He concluded that unity is found only in the psalmist's perspective of a spiritual journey, wherein verses 1-4 present what a pilgrim would see on a journey to the temple and verses 5-6 what happens at the end of his pilgrimage.²¹ In the same year Y. Mazor defend-

ed the traditional, gradual shift from shepherd to host (vv. 4-5) as a compliment to another, earlier and sudden shift (vv. 3-4) from sheep (believer) to Shepherd (God).²² Mazor claimed this results in an integrated, rhetorical unity that pictures God's grace through twin images of "the stern protector and the generous host."²³ By great contrast, also in 1988, D. P. McCarthy took a deconstructionist approach (à la Derrida), concluding that Psalm 23 contains inherent contradictions that account for the interpretive confusion that has characterized the scholarly study of these six verses to date.²⁴

In 1989 C. Gilead gave another approach to the standard double-stanza division of Psalm 23. Each stanza was observed to contain three stichs and a conclusion, to be distinguished from the introduction and conclusion of the entire poem. Its literary and linguistic substance and style were seen as a result of influence from the shepherd's hymn via the contemporary Jeremiah.²⁵ The same year witnessed the publication of van Uchelen's 1989 article in which he sought to solve the problem of the diversity of interpretations of this psalm's imagery and structure by looking for linguistic features that could provide empirical evidence to point out the proper path to understanding the text. Structurally, however, he still speaks of two different metaphorical halves.²⁶ Noteworthy for the purposes of this present article is van Uchelen's conclusion that verse 4 (for grammatical reasons) provides the key to the basic meaning of Psalm 23. This study's proposed chiasm centers on this verse as the main and unparalleled point of the psalm as well. Finally in the most recent (1999) return to Psalm 23 exegesis, Robinson adds little new for structural studies, presenting it as a unity of two parts, vv. 1-3 then vv. 4-5. Verse six is deemed a conclusion.²⁷

2.2 An Interpretation of the Literary Category of Psalm 23

Psalm 23 should be viewed as an "Extended Confession of Trust," in form-critical terms.²⁸ The Praise psalm flows in principle from the vow of praise, which is a typical feature of the classic and complete Lament psalm. In practice it comes from the reality of release from ruin and its resulting resolve to recognize God's goodness and greatness before others. Once saved the psalmist swears that public and vocal testimony will be given as praise before the congregation. Likewise the standard petition section of a Lament can lead to a single psalm devoted to prayer. So the confession of trust section found in many or most laments gives rise to an externally but not existentially independent psalm, which (like the 23rd, for example) is categorically an extended Confession of Trust in Yahweh as a certain savior and sustainer of life. This is a confession to Yahweh that the psalmist still believes that He is his only true source of strength, sustenance, and safety. Logically and functionally and necessarily this comes before the psalmist has experienced God's present promise and provision of victory, when it looks like defeat or death is possible or even probable. Based on the consistent character of God and conduct and commitments on behalf of the psalmist and other believers in the past, the psalmist determines to hang onto Yahweh as his only help, even if he fears the situation is hopeless.²⁹

2.3 A Summary of the Debate over the Structure of Psalm 23 and the Significance of a Solution

A major difference in interpretive approaches has been over how to explain the last third of the psalm (vv. 5-6), where the poet shifts to imagery which seems to have nothing to do with shepherds and sheep, at least on the surface. Some, therefore, try logically

to explicate the visual changes from pastures (vv 1-3) to a dark or deadly predicament (v. 4) to being pampered before enemies and eternally protected (vv. 5-6). But others try to show how the entire context of the psalm maintains a connection to the theme of sheep and shepherd. Leupold's 1959 observation is still apt:

Then there is the matter of the unity of the psalm or the unity of the figure employed by the psalmist. Some, the majority, perhaps, find only one figure, that of the shepherd. Of a slightly more recent date is the interpretation that finds two figures, that of the shepherd and that of the host. Others insert a third between the two, the guide. Others, giving special thought to v. 6, devise some kind of a fourth figure. By this time one is compelled to admit that the beautiful little psalm has been pretty sadly fragmented.³⁰

A selective survey of commentaries from past to present will quickly reveal this confusion. Leupold (1959)—as one would gather from his comment above—takes a unified shepherding approach which explains each part of the psalm as stating something the Shepherd provides.³¹ VanGemen in 1991 followed the typical bipartite shepherd-host division (the Lord is my shepherd, vv. 1-4; and the Lord is my host, vv. 5-6).³² He also notes three opposing works in regard to the subject of vv. 3-4: Thierry (1963) and Briggs (1952), who see this passage as being about people, and Willis (1987), who relates it to the three tasks of a shepherd for his sheep.³³ Merrill (1965) and Eaton (1965) both give them a royal meaning.³⁴ Briggs sees people being treated as guests in three ways: with God as their shepherd (vv. 1-3a), guide (vv. 3b-4), and host (vv. 5-6).³⁵ Clarke (1979) somewhat artificially applies the shepherding metaphor throughout the psalm. He also forces the text into ten available and alliterated resources for God's human sheep (which heightens the dubious quality of his analysis): rest (v. 2), refreshment (v. 2), restoration (v. 3), regulation (v. 3), rescue (v. 4), reassurance (v. 4), reception (v. 4), rejoicing (v. 5), retainers (v. 6), and residence (v. 6).³⁶ Craigie (1983) recognizes the two-fold shepherd-host arrangement as the consensus; but observes at least two other valid metaphorical patterns: (1) the unity of the shepherd motif throughout (*à la* Koehler) and (2) the lack of metaphor at all in vv. 5-6 (*à la* Vogt, who takes these verses literally as a sacrificial banquet, which is also the psalm's setting).³⁷ Kidner (1973), as well, accepts the double metaphors of first the shepherd and then the friend. The shepherd by definition incorporates the functions of "guide, physician and protector."³⁸ In terms of Gattung criticism Gerstenberger gives the outline of this so-called "song of confidence" in three parts, as (1) confessional statement, vv. 1-3; (2) affirmation of confidence, vv. 4-5; and (3) expression of hope, v. 6. Against most modern analysts he believes the psalm is structured according to liturgical needs.³⁹

When Keller turned in 1970 to his naïve exposition of v. 5, his experience with watching shepherds compelled him to see the "table" which is being prepared by the shepherd as the "tablelands" where sheep graze. Linguistically, therefore, Keller's basis for maintaining sheep as the subject of v. 5 is erroneous; even if the basic idea is correct.⁴⁰ Numerous commentators, for similar or distinct reasons, are comfortable with the complete characterization of this psalm in shepherding imagery. Another example is Maddux's 1965 unversified outline, which is typical, as Keller, of the many popular and published, but

oversimplified, treatments of Psalm 23: the Shepherd's care; the Shepherd's redemption; the Shepherd's presence; the Shepherd's protection; and the Shepherd's dwelling place.⁴¹ While some scholars also argue for the shepherding motif throughout Psalm 23, others wonder how such imagery can reasonably be applied to sheep. As Kidner says parenthetically, "The attempt to sustain the first metaphor [i.e., the shepherd] . . . would turn it through a full circle, picturing men as sheep which are pictured as men—with their table, cup and house—which is hardly a profitable exercise."⁴² As a final example, Alden (1974) followed the shepherding theme consistently through the fourth verse, and then noted there are multiple metaphors in verses 5-6.⁴³

If the present analysis is correct, the reason for the changes in imagery is to be explained by the symmetric demands of the chiasmic principles and parallels of the ancient, eastern poetic mind and not by the dictates of western, analytic and systematic thinking imposed on poetic literature, which has led to the false expectation of some type of outline for the psalm in two parts (i.e., I. vv. 1-4 and II. vv. 5-6) and the need to try and justify the transition from flock to feast.

2.4 *The Chiasmic Structure of Psalm 23 Exhibited*

The charts that follow represent visually the conclusions reached in this examination of Psalm 23 pertaining to its chiasmic characteristics. It seemed best to allow the reader to view the structure of the psalm suggested by this study, as a frame of reference, before explaining the exegetical details used to support it.

2.4.1 *The Text of Psalm 23 as a Chiasm*⁴⁴

- A 23:1 Yahweh is my shepherd; [therefore] I shall not want.
 23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.
 B 23:3 He restores me: He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
 a Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 C (23:4) b I fear no danger, for you are with me;
 a' your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
 B' 23:5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
 A' 23:6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I
 shall dwell in the house of Yahweh my whole life long.

As an inclusio God's personal name, Yahweh, is used in the beginning and ending verses. In terms of content both of these chiasmic boundaries emphasize God's constant and certain care. The Sovereign Shepherd of souls provides spiritually for His people abundantly and appropriately.

2.4.2 *The Themes of Psalm 23 as a Chiasm*

When the previous chiasmic scheme of the verses of Psalm 23 is translated into a thematic statement for each step of the chiasm, the following results:

- A Complete provision (1-2)
 B Purposeful Restoration (3)
 a Our need for rescue (4ai)
 C (4) No need for fear: b How to wait for rescue (4aii)
 a' His ability to rescue (4b)
 B' Purposeful Renewal (5)
 A' Continual provision (6)

2.5 The Chiastic Significance of Psalm 23 Explained

2.5.1 The Metrics of the Hebrew Text

The Masoretic major poetic disjunctive accents will be shown as used in Psalm 23 with the MT.⁴⁵

- : (silluq) לא אחסר // (*rebia mugrash*) יהוה רעי (1b)⁴⁶ A
 : (silluq) בנאות דשא ירביצני (*athnach*) עלמי מנחות ינהלני (2b) // (2a)
 // (*athnach*) נפשי ישובב (3a) B
 : (silluq) ינחני במעגל־צדק (*rebia mugrash*) למען שמו (3b)
 // (*pazer*) גם כִּי־אלֶךְ בגיא צלמות (4ai)
 (athnach) לֹא־אִירָרַע // (*rebia magnum*) כִּי־אַתָּה עֲמִדִי (4aii) C
 : (silluq) שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ (*rebia mugrash*) הִמָּה יִנְחֲמֵנִי (4b)
 (athnach) תַּעֲרַף לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן // (*rebia magnum*) נִגְדַּ צָרִי (5a) B'
 : (silluq) דִּשְׁנָת בַּשֶּׁמֶן רִאשִׁי (*rebia mugrash*) כּוֹסֵי רוּיָה (5b)
 (athnach) אֶךְ טוֹב וַחֲסֵד יִרְדּוּנִי // (*dechi*) כִּלְיָמֵי חַיִּי (6a) A'
 : (silluq) וּשְׁבַתִּי בְּבֵית יְהוָה (*rebia mugrash*) לְאַרְבַּע יָמִים (6b)

Next the Masoretic major poetic disjunctive accents will be shown as used in Psalm 23 with an English translation:

- A (1) Yahweh is my shepherd (*rebia mugrash*); //
 I shall not want [for adequate care] (*silluq*).
 (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures (*athnach*); //
 he leads me beside still waters (*silluq*).
 B (3) He restores me— (*athnach*); //
 He leads me in the right paths (*rebia mugrash*), //
 to protect His reputation (*silluq*).
 ai If I might wander into the deepest,
 darkest valley (*pazer*), /
 C (4) aii I fear no danger (*rebia magnum*); //
 for you are with me (*athnach*); //
 b Your rod and staff (*rebia mugrash*), //
 they comfort me (*silluq*).
 B' (5) You prepare a table before me (*rebia magnum*); //
 in the presence of my enemies (*athnach*). //
 You anoint my head with oil (*rebia mugrash*); //

my cup overflows (*silluq*).

A' (6) Surely goodness and grace will follow me (*dechi*) /
all the days of my life (*athnach*);

and I will dwell in the house of Yahweh (*rebia mugrash*), // a long time (*silluq*).

As the above treatments of the text of Psalm 23 demonstrate, this present study rejects the decision of some translators and textual emendators to "correct" the Masoretic Text by re-arranging v. 3a as the final part of a tricolon along with v. 2a-b⁴⁷ or as part of a bicolon with 2b.⁴⁸ The latter makes an artificial division between 2a and 2b and forces v. 1 into the role of the initial parallel member of a bicolon comprising vv. 1-2a.⁴⁹ All these approaches require the translator to disregard the punctuation of the Masoretic Text. In this case the text makes good sense and probably the best sense if the MT versification and accentuation are faithfully followed. This means, of the current and most popular English versions, the NKJV⁵⁰ presents and preserves the best organization and punctuation of Psalm 23, in light of the premises and proofs of this paper.

Verse 1 (ignoring the superscription attributing the psalm to David; which is a later but reliable editorial insertion) should be taken alone as a "synthetic"⁵¹ bicola and not as the first colon of a bicola with verse 2a as the second, parallel member or line. The reasons are that the MT employs: (1) most importantly, a strong disjunctive accent (*rebia mugrash*) above the Hebrew word (*rō'y*) meaning "my shepherd," and (2) notably, the *silluq* with *soph pasuq* after "want" (*'ehsār*) indicating the end of the verse. In effect this verse briefly states the theme of the psalm, and should be read with verse 2, which is the beginning of the chiasmic poem per se and corresponds to verse 6. Another alternative, better yet than separating 2a from 2b in order to make v. 1 and 2a a bicola, would be to see vv. 1-2 as a "tricola" (monocolon plus bi-cola). This alternative approach still, however, has to ignore the strong disjunctive in v. 1 to make it a monocolon; so the most consistent treatment is to take vv. 1 and 2 together as two lines of bicola, which provide the first level of the chiasm, linking a short thematic preface (v. 1) with the initial thought of the following five verses. This finds its counterpart in v. 6, which is rather lengthy anyway, as a balance to vv. 1-2, and ends with thoughts of "ever dwelling" (v. 6b) as a fitting mirror image of "never wanting" (v. 1b). Either way vv. 1-2 comprise the first chiasmic level.

Whether verse 1 is a monocolon or bicola, the parallelism of verse 2 should be retained as a bicola ending with the *silluq* of that verse, as in the MT, and not restructured to include 3a to produce either a bicola of v. 2b with v. 3a or a tricola of vv. 2a-3a. A very strong disjunctive accent (*athnach*) divides verse 2 into a pleasing and productive bicola: "He makes me lie down in green pastures//He leads me beside still waters," followed by the sign ending a verse. While MT versification is not automatically absolute, the text makes good sense as it stands, probably the best sense as this discussion will defend. The seeming bases for altering the sense of the MT here are the assumptions of a necessity: (1) to parallel vv. 3a with 2b (because of the arbitrary decision to parallel vv. 1 and 2a) and/or (2) to parallel v. 3a with verse 2 because of a shared theme and since 3b can stand alone, theoretically, as a "synthetic"⁵² bicola. However, as will be developed below, the meaning of v. 3a fits as well if not better with the rest of verse 3 as with verse 2. Verse 3a is separated from 3b by another *athnach* and then 3b itself has two parts created by the strong but less strong *rebia*—the same

but only accent of verse 1b, following the non-original superscription in 1a. Therefore verse 2 should be identified as a synonymous bi-cola and verse 3 with its major dichotomy after 3a as: (1) probably, a tricola composed of a monocolon (v. 3a) followed by a "synthetic" bicola (v. 3b); or (2) possibly, as a synonymous or synthetic bicola. These options for verse 3 compare and contrast as follows:

He restores me://
 He leads me in right paths,/
 for His name's sake.
 (or He restores me [in righteousness, for the sake of His reputation];//
 He leads me in right paths, for His name's sake).

As already noted, a chiasm based on the meter of Psalm 23 has been proposed by Bliese: A:4, B:6, C:5, D:5, E:6, D':5, C':5, B':6, A':4. This scheme of nine elements was based on a verse distinction of, respectively, verses 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 6a, and 6b. The present study recognizes a different versification for the thematic chiasm: 1-2, 3, 4, 5, 6 but still finds the same center. Based on this latter scheme and on one beat per word (counting words joined with *maqeph* as one beat), the parallelism and meter of Psalm 23 may be analyzed as follows: A:10, B:6, C:12, B':10, A':10.

Verse	Parallelism	Meter	Total Beats
A (1b)	"synthetic" bicola	2:2	
(2a-b)	synonymous bicola	3:3	10
B (3a)	monocolon	2:	
(3b)	"synthetic" bicola	2:2	06
for 3a-b	"synthetic" bicola	2:4]	
C (4ai)	monocolon	4:	
(4aii-b)	"synthetic" bicola	4:4	12
B' (5a)	"synthetic" bicola	3:2	
(5b)	"synthetic" bicola	3:2	10
A' (6a)	"synthetic" bicola	4:2	
(6b)	"synthetic" bicola	2:2	10

If the parallelism is split as bicola at *athnach* only, a clear A-B-C-B'-A' chiasmic pattern also emerges for this psalm, with verse 4 having a unique meter and, therefore, consciously constructed as the center of the psalm:

Section	Verse(s)	Metric Pattern	Total Beats
A	1-2	4:6	10
B	3	2:4	06
C	4	8:4	12
B'	5	5:5	10
A'	6	6:4	10

As seen v. 3 may be analyzed as either a monocolon with a synthetic bi-coloa or as a synthetic bi-coloa in which the first line (3a, extant as only a monocolon) assumes a similar or related section of line 2 (3b) following "He leads me" for completion of its thought. "He leads me" of line two would be parallel with "He restores me" of line one. If intended as identical or very similar sentiments then this verse of poetry could be seen as synonymous rather than "synthetic." Either way—as synonymous or synthetic, or two, three, or four stanzas of poetry—if the first line (v. 3a) is a shortened corruption or creation based on an originally intended longer version (echoing or enhancing 3b), then the metrics would come out closer to 8 or 10 beats, rather than 6, which would more closely parallel the 10 beats of verse 5, its chiasmic counterpart. In addition the metric patterns 4:6 in the opening vv. 1-2 and 6:4 in closing v. 6 provide an inclusion for the chiasmic poem and together make a 6-4-4-6 chiasm.

For an alternative approach, if one combines 4ai with v. 3 the outcome is 10 beats, leaving 8 beats for 4aii-b as the center or peak, and creating a perfectly balanced a-b-c-b'-a' metrical chiasm of 10-10-8-10-10 beats (vv. 1-2, 3-4ai, 4aii-b, 5, 6). This outcome is pleasant but it flies in the face of the weak *pazer* accent at the end of 4ai, treating it as a strong disjunctive. But if the MT accents are viewed as usually reliable while not absolute guides, then in this scenario, the result is a much longer B element (vv. 3-4ai) which would be seen as a monocolon of 2 beats (v. 3a) followed by a bicola of 4:4 beats (vv. 3b-4ai). The C unit (v. 4aii-b) or apex would be a bicola of 4:4 beats (or alternatively two bicola of 2:2 and 2:2 beats) which fits together well, perhaps synonymously: "I fear no danger for you are [your protection is] with me! // I fear no trouble for] your rod and your staff comfort me!" Verse 4ai also goes well with the preceding verse 3: "He restores me: // He leads me in the right paths to protect His reputation // in case I might wander into a deep, dark valley." When in this scheme 4aii-b is taken as the center section, as with the previous proposal, it also reflects a micro chiasm within the macro chiasm of the entire psalm, although in this case a-b-b'-a' (instead of a-b-a'). Still the main idea includes God's presence which excludes all fear:

A	I fear no danger (<i>rebia magnum</i>)	2 beats
	B for you are with me (<i>athnach</i>)	2
	B' your rod and your staff (<i>rebia mugrash</i>)	2
A'	they comfort me (<i>sillug</i>).	2

No chiasm of the parallelism in Psalm 23 is observable. The first chart above of the metrical chiasm has the advantage of showing the three parts of v.4, which themselves can be seen to present an a-b-a' chiasm of 4-4-4 beats. There is in addition another way to view verse 4, the fulcrum section of this poem. Verse 4aii, which has been presented as the central theme around which the psalm rotates and the central phrase around which this verse revolves (making a chiasmic verse within a chiasmic psalm), also demonstrates its centrality in another fashion.

The first phrase of this sentence ("I fear no danger"; v. 4aii- α) fits well with the preceding and initial clause of this verse (4ai), while the second phase ("for you are with me"; v. 4aii- β) fits with the following and concluding clause/sentence (v. 4b). This highlights v. 4aii

as the point around which the other parts of v. 4 rotate and from which they depart. In 4a_{ii}, the first phrase, "I fear no danger," is in line with the preceding statement and pronoun "even though I might wander into a deep, dark valley." And, although followed by the *athnach* (a disjunctive pointing back), the second phrase of v. 4a_{ii}, "for you are with me," is in keeping with the following sentiment and pronoun "your rod and staff, they comfort me." Perhaps this is why the *rebia magnum* is used with the former phrase and the *athnach* with the latter. The *athnach* marks the end of a complete thought, yet the last part of that thought ("for you are with me") has to do double duty for what is before and after. Therefore 4a_{ii}- α has a strong pause before moving on to 4a_{ii}- β . And together these two phrases provide the fulcrum and foundational theme of Psalm 23: "I fear no danger; for you are with me!" Psalm 23 calls the reader to a fearless life, and uses a creative and carefully constructed chiasm to do it conceptually, metrically, and dramatically.

2.5.2 The Mechanics and Meaning of the Hebrew Text

Level A, A' (Outer): (vv. 1-2; // v. 6)

Yahweh Shepherds with Complete and Continual Provision

Verse 1a-b: "Yahweh is my shepherd; //
I will lack nothing [essential spiritually]."

Verse 2a-b: "He causes me to lie down in green pastures; //
He leads me [to lie down] beside quiet water."

Verse 6a-b: "Undoubtedly goodness and grace will accompany me
every day of my life; //
and I will return to [or "dwell in"] the house of Yahweh a long time."

Level B, B' (Inner): (v. 3 // v. 5)

Yahweh Shepherds with Purposeful Renewal and Restoration

Verse 3a-b: "He restores me [physically and spiritually]; //
He leads me along the right paths, /
For the sake of His own reputation."

Verse 5a-b: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; //
You anoint my head with oil, /
My cup overflows."

Level C (Center): Climax: (v. 4)

Never Fear!

Level C, -a, -a' (Outer Climax): (v. 4a, b)

The Sheep's Need and the Shepherd's Nature for Rescue

All-Present, regardless of the environment (v. 4a_i)

Verse 4a: "Yes, even though I might wander through a
valley of deep darkness," /

All-Powerful, regardless of the enemy (v. 4b)

Verse 4c: "Your rod and staff, they comfort me."

Level C, -b (Inner Climax): (v. 4a_{ii})

No Need for Fear! The Divine Shepherd is Always Near

Verse 4b: "I will not be afraid of any danger, for You are with me!"

3. CONCLUSION: PSALM 23 IS A CHIASM!

Psalm 23 has a chiasm within a chiasm. Its formation is both simple and sublime. The entire psalm exhibits an A-B-C-B'-A' chiastic pattern, with the climactic and center section/verse (C; v. 4) also displaying a sub-chiasm, having the pattern of a-b-a' (or a-b-b'-a'). In this way the psalm means to help the reader make no mistake by making it abundantly clear: Yahweh's presence prevents all panic. The outer layer of corresponding verses is composed of the cluster of vv. 1-2 which parallels v. 6. The inner layer of correspondence juxtaposes v. 3 with v. 5. Finally the focus falls on v. 4, wherein the psalmist's fearless proclamation in the light of God's presence in the midst of deep darkness is framed by reflections on his perilous situation and God's powers of salvation.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970). Keller grew up in East Africa surrounded by herdsmen and also spent eight years as a sheep owner and rancher (n.p.; from the "Introduction").
2. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1959; 1969 reprint), p. 208.
3. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 204, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 19, ed. John D. W. Watts (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983).
4. See comments on Clarke's commentary below and in n. 6.
5. See p. 3 and note 9 below.
6. See Arthur G. Clarke, *Analytical Studies in the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979 reprint of 1976 3rd edition), pp. 78-79.
7. Cf. Y. Bazaq, "Psalm 23 (The Lord is My Shepherd)—As a Patterned Poem," *Beth Mikra* 26 (1981): 370-77 [Hebrew] and a review of the same by Frederick E. Greenspan in *Old Testament Abstracts* [hereafter OTA] 5:2 (June 1982): 161 (#537).
8. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry, *The Forms of Old Testament Literature*, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 114-115.
9. Cf. Loren F. Bliese, "Structurally Marked Peak in Psalms 1-24," *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 4:4 (1990): 265-321, and a review of the same by Deirdre A. Dempsey in OTA 15:3 (October 1992): 396-97 (#1431).
10. See p. 2 and n. 7 above.
11. Cf. Reuben Ahroni, "The Unity of Psalm 23," *Hebrew Annual Review* 6 (1982): 21-34 and a review of the same by William J. Urbrock, OTA 11:2 (June 1988): 165-66 (#597).
12. Cf. both recent translations like the NIV and NRSV and the edited page of BHS.
13. Since v. 3b contains the same strong disjunctive as v. 1, this is possible. But another and better alternative is to see 3b as a bi-cola following and fitting with the monocolon 3a to create a type of synthetic "tricola."
14. Cf. Charles O'Connor, "The Structure of Psalm 23," *Louvain Studies* 10 (1985): 206-30, and a review of the same by Charles H. Miller in OTA 9:2 (June 1986): 185 (#528).
15. Cf. Jacob Bazaq, "Structural Geometric Patterns in Biblical Poetry," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985): 475-502, and a review of the same by M. F. Collins in OTA 9:2 (June 1986): 185-86 (#529).
16. Cf. John S. Kselman, "Psalm 101: Royal Confession and Divine Oracle," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (1985): 45-62, and a review of the same by John M. Halligan in OTA 9:2 (June 1986): 187 (#534).

17. Cf. Pierre Auffret, "Essai sur la structure littéraire du Psaume 23," *Estudios Bíblicos* 43 (1985): 557-88, and a review of the same by Hector Avalos in *OTA* 9:3 (October 1986): 288 (#817).
18. Cf. K. K. Sacon, "A Methodological Remark on Exegesis and Preaching of Psalm 113," *Nihon no Shingaku* 25 (1986): 26-42 [Japanese], and a review of the same by the author in *OTA* 10:1 (February 1987): 64 (#221).
19. See p. 3 and n. 9 above.
20. Cf. Timothy M. Willis, "A Fresh Look at Psalm xxiii 3a," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 104-106, and a review of the same by the author in *OTA* 10:3 (October 1987): 270 (#824).
21. Cf. Mark S. Smith, "Setting and Rhetoric in Psalm 23," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41 (1988): 61-66, and a review of the same by John M. Halligan in *OTA* 12:1 (February 1989): 67 (#228).
22. Cf. Yair Mazor, "Psalm 23: The Lord is My Shepherd—Or is He My Host?," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100 (1988): 416-20, and a review of the same by John W. Wright in *OTA* 14:2 (June 1991): 184 (#633).
23. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 420 and p. 184.
24. Cf. David Paul McCarthy, "A Not-So-Bad Derridean Approach to Psalm 23," *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 8 (1988): 177-92, and a review of the same by Mary K. Deeley in *OTA* 14:2 (June 1991): 184-85 (#634).
25. Cf. Chaim Gilead, "Psalm 23 in View of Biblical Realia," *Beth Mikra* 35 (1989-90): 341-47 [Hebrew], and a review of the same by Frederick E. Greenspan in *OTA* 14:2 (June 1991): 184 (#632).
26. Cf. N. A. van Uchelen, "Psalm XXIII: Some Regulative Linguistic Evidence," *Old Testament Studies* 25 (1989): 156-62, and a review of the same by Wayne Pitard in *OTA* 13:2 (June 1990): 170-71 (#563).
27. Cf. Bernard P. Robinson, "Pastures New: The 23rd Psalm Revisited," *Scripture Bulletin* 29 (1999): 2-10, and a review of the same by Paul L. Redditt in *OTA* 22:3 (October 1999): 461-462 (#1618).
28. Cf. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, pp. 113-116. Robinson calls it a "Psalm of Confidence." See Redditt, p. 461.
29. Cf. Psalm 3:1-3 and 13:1-5, where, respectively, v. 3 and v. 5 are the confessions of trust.
30. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, p. 208.
31. Cf. Leupold, p. 209. Leupold's outline is that the Shepherd provides rest and guidance (vv. 2-3); protection (v. 4); food (v. 5); and fellowship (v. 6b). V. 6a is viewed as a parenthesis wherein the psalmist abandons any figure of shepherding.
32. Cf. Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," pp. 214-17 in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991). He calls the poem's structure both simple and complex, but his analysis reveals only the former description. He references several German and one French articles and some English articles and one book on the structure and metaphors of Psalm 23—which are probably the source of his comment on the psalm's complexity—but he does not remark on any chiasmic interpretations found therein. Sources on structure he mentions are, Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 204-205; Charles O'Connor, "The Structure of Psalm 23," *Louvain Studies* 10 (1985): 206-30; Siegfried Mittmann, "Aufbau und Einheit des Danklieds Psalm 23," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 77 (1980): 1-23; Werner Stenger, "Strukturelle 'relecture' von Ps 23," *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn, Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen*, Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Heinrich Gross, ed. Ernst Haag and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986), pp. 441-55; and Jean Marcel Vincent, "Recherches exégétiques sur le Psaume xxiii," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978): 442-54.
33. Cf. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, p. 217, notes; citing G. J. Thierry, "Remarks on Various Passages in the Psalms," *Oud Testamentische Studien* 13 (1963): 97, C. A. and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*,

vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952 impression), p. 207; and Timothy A. Willis, "A Fresh Look at Psalm xxiii 3a," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987): 104-106.

34. Cf. VanGemeren, p. 217, citing A. L. Merrill, "Psalm XXIII and the Jerusalem Tradition," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 354-60 and John Eaton, "Problems of Translation Psalm 23:3f," *Isis Bible Translator* 16 (1965): 171-76. In this regard one should also see John Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, (SBT, Second Series 32. London: SCM Press, 1976), pp. 36-38.

35. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 207.

36. Clarke, *Analytical Studies*, pp. 78-80.

37. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 204-205, citing E. Vogt, "The 'Place in Life' of Ps. 23," *Biblia* 34 (1953): 195-211 and L. Koehler, "Psalm 23," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 68 (1956): 227-34.

38. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), pp. 110-111.

39. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry, pp. 113, 115.

40. Cf. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, pp. 104-105. He points out how the Spanish word mesa (a high plateau where sheep graze) means "table"; and the same word with the same meaning appears in an African dialect. Of course it only matters if this is the meaning of the Hebrew word David used, *מַשֶּׁה*. But this Old Testament Hebrew term appears only to be used of an ancient "table" where humans eat: either of a leather mat placed on the ground (cf. Isa. 21:5), a (usually royal) table with dishes (cf. 1 Kings 5:7), or of a cultic table for sacrificial food or meat (cf. Exod. 25:23; Ezek. 40:39f.). See the standard Hebrew lexica.

41. Roy Clark Maddux, *The Psalms in Outline* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 19.

42. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 111.

43. Robert L. Alden, *Psalms of Devotion*, vol. 1: *Psalms 1-50* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 59.

44. The adapted translation used as a convenience for this chart is that of the NRSV. The punctuation and some wording have been changed to fit the conclusions of this paper. The differences are that NRSV has (1) a comma after "shepherd" in v. 1; (2) a semi-colon after "waters" in v. 2; (3) a period after "my soul" in v. 3, which is here translated "me"; (4) a semicolon after "evil" in v. 4, which is here rendered "danger"; and (5) the traditional substitution of LORD for the appearance in the Hebrew text of the tetragrammaton (*hwby*), for which Yahweh (the standard pronunciation) has been re-substituted. Also any words in brackets are supplied. The Hebrew word often taken as "soul" (*vpr*) when used with a suffixed personal pronoun, usually refers to that person's own life or self; therefore, the pronoun itself has the same sense in English. In such cases "soul" has nothing to do with an immaterial part of a person that lives on after death. It does refer to the life force of a person in the sense of his own life or self; and consequently the NRSV as other modern versions sometime do, gives a footnote for the use of "soul" in the text of this psalm which says "or life" or something similar.

45. Listed in descending priority, these accents are: 1. *Silluq*; 2. *Oley Veyored*; 3. *Athnach*; 4. *Rebia Magnum*; 5. *Rebia Mugarash*; 6. *Shalsheth Magnum*; 7. *Sinnor*; 8. *Rebia Parvum*; 9. *Dechi vel Tiphcha*; 10. *Pazer*; 11. *Mehuppak*; 12. *Azla*.

46. 1a of the MT is the editorial superscription added to the "original" psalm.

47. Cf. NRSV and NIV.

48. Cf. BHS.

49. Cf. Wendland's linguistic analysis of Psalm 23 in Ernst R. Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), p. 66. Wendland notes how many or most translations into English do not reflect the strict formal correspondence that exists between the parallel lines of this verse in Hebrew: In-pastures-of greenness he-lays-me-down // Beside-waters-of quietness he-leads-me.

50. The KJV has the same versification, naturally, and similar punctuation; but the NKJV is superior translationally (in terms of structure and poetic sensitivity) because it presents the poetic

and musical nature—which is intrinsic to all members of the Hebrew psalter—through the use of poetic stanzas. The psalms are songs and the Old Testament Psalter (Book of Psalms) was the hymnbook of ancient Israel. All psalms are poetry that was eventually set to music for use in the worship that occurred in the Temple in Jerusalem and, later, the synagogues. On the other hand, the NKJV, also like the KJV, does not necessarily have the best rendering for all words and phrases in this psalm; more modern versions like the NRSV and NIV win in this category.

51. This term can be meant generally (as here) for any parallelism besides those that are synonymous or antithetical; or it can relate specifically to a category of parallelism when more than three types are assumed.

52. See nn. 13 and 51 above.