



Prophetic Observer

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Keeping Time On God's Prophetic Clock

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The Twenty-third Psalm as a Messianic Prophecy

by James Collins

The Twenty-third Psalm is one of the most familiar, famous, and loved passages in the entire Bible. There is no greater picture of the relationship that God has with His people than the picture in the Twenty-third Psalm—the picture of the shepherd and his sheep. Psalm 23 has comforted many heavy hearts, dried many tears, bandaged many wounds, given courage to the living, and comforted the dying. It is the most famous of all the psalms. Even nonbelievers are familiar with David's masterpiece.

However, most people are unaware of the prophetic significance of the Twenty-third Psalm. Psalm 23 is set in the middle of three messianic psalms that prophesy the coming work of the Messiah. Psalm 22 presents the Messiah as the Savior. Psalm 23 presents the Messiah as the Shepherd. Psalm 24 presents the Messiah as Sovereign. The focus of Psalm 22 is the cross. The focus of Psalm 23 is the crook. The focus of Psalm 24 is the crown.

The Cross

Psalm 22 has come to be known as the "Psalm of the Cross." It is an amazing prophecy. One thousand years before Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, David described in graphic detail the crucifixion as if he, himself, hung on the cross. The Twenty-second Psalm opens with, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Do those words sound familiar? They are the same words that Jesus cried from the cross. In Matthew 27:46, we read, "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" When Jesus

took the sins of the world upon Himself so that those sins could be judged and justified through His sacrifice, God in His holiness had to turn away. God gathered every sin that had ever been committed or would be committed by man and placed it upon His Son. Jesus died and He took away sin, by the sacrifice of Himself.

In Psalm 22, David described Roman crucifixion hundreds of years before the Romans even came on the scene. In the days when Jewish executions were accomplished by stoning, David described the sufferings of the cross. He described the people beneath the cross gathered to laugh at Jesus: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn" (Psalm 22:7). He described the profuse perspiration caused by intense suffering: "I am poured out like water." He described His bones as being "out of joint." He described the action of the effects of the crucifixion on the heart: "my heart is like wax; it is melted" (Psalm 22:14). He described Christ's exhaustion: "My strength is dried up." He described the Lord's extreme thirst: "my tongue cleaveth to my jaws" (Psalm 22:15). He described Jesus being nailed to the cross: "they pierced my hands and my feet" (Psalm 22:16). He described the shame as the crowd gawked at the Messiah's unclothed body... *I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me* (Psalm 22:17). He described the soldiers gambling: "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Psalm 22:18). David wrote these descriptions a thousand years before the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus said in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." When the Lord said those words, He spoke of His coming substitutionary death on the cross. This is the picture of Jesus in the Twenty-second Psalm.

He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep.

The Crook

Psalm 23 is the “Shepherd’s Psalm.” It is a beautiful picture of the Shepherd who cares for His flock, leads us through the meadow, feeds us in green pastures, comforts us with His staff (crook), and quenches our thirst beside still waters. Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear because our Shepherd is there.

The writer of Hebrews described the Shepherd of Psalm 23 when he wrote, “*Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant*” (Hebrews 13:20). The Good Shepherd of John 10 is now called the Great Shepherd. Notice also that the writer of Hebrews referenced the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the picture of Jesus in the Twenty-third Psalm. He is the Great Shepherd, raised from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant, who tenderly cares for His sheep.

The Crown

Psalm 24 is also known as the “Psalm of the King of Glory” and it describes the coronation of the Messiah. The final verses of this psalm describe the triumphant return of Jesus Christ. In Psalm 24:9–10, we read, “*Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.*” The Twenty-fourth Psalm foreshadows the establishment of the Millennial Reign of Christ when Jesus will return and enter Jerusalem as the “King of Glory.” It is a prophetic psalm that will ultimately be fulfilled when Jesus Christ returns to earth in power and in great glory.

The Apostle Peter wrote to encourage faithful church leaders with these words, “*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*” (1 Peter 5:4). Here, Peter assured faithful ministers that they

will be rewarded when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. The Great Shepherd of Hebrews 13 is now referred to as the “Chief Shepherd.” This is the picture of Jesus in the Twenty-fourth Psalm. He is the Chief Shepherd, who owns the sheep. When He comes, He will establish His throne. We who have served Him will rule and reign with Him for a thousand years.

Psalm 22 speaks of our past—of our sins being forgiven on the cross. Psalm 23 speaks of our present life on earth. Psalm 24 speaks of our future in the coming Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

Psalm 22 takes place on Mount Calvary in the past where they crucified the Lord. Psalm 24 takes place in the future on Mount Zion where He is coming back to rule and reign. Psalm 23 takes place in the present in this life in the valley in between the two mountains.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you live, right now, the Psalm 23 life. Today, your life may be filled with darkness. From one sheep to another, I want you to know that you can trust the Shepherd to get you through the valley.

The benediction which closes the New Testament letter to the Hebrews brings full circle the picture of the Shepherd.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen

—Hebrews 13:20–21

The Shepherd is coming back soon. *Are you in His flock?*

James Collins is the author of The Shepherd, a book that examines Psalm 23 through the understanding of the geographical, historical, cultural, literary, and visual context of the Bible. You can order a copy by calling 800-652-1144 or by visiting our website www.swrc.com.

Is War Immoral?

Pastor Larry Spargimino, Ph.D

Since earliest times there have been wars. In a fallen world of greed and selfishness what else do you expect? When Jesus

comes back we are told, “... and in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (Rev. 19:11). If Jesus makes war we can safely

conclude that all wars are not immoral. This is not a blanket approval of all wars—only *just* wars. So, when is a war just?

Christian thinkers have wrestled with this question. Some have said no war is just. They are not something that Christians should engage in. The right thing is “turning the other cheek.” We’ll address that in a moment. The consensus has been, however, that war must be avoided at all costs, unless there is no other way to deal with mad men like Hitler who, if not restrained, would bring unspeakable evil on the world.

Criteria For a “Just War”

There are five requirements that must be met for war to be considered just.

First, war must be declared by a legitimate government, not by an unstable, radical group.

Second, war must always be a last resort. Every other option has failed to bring a peaceful resolution of the problem.

Third, war must be for a morally-defensible cause, such as stopping military aggression of one nation against another, or a preemptive attack, as in the case of Israel striking an aggressor nation that is preparing to launch an attack. On June 7, 1981, Israel conducted a surprise air strike which destroyed the unfinished Osirak Iraqi nuclear reactor located eleven miles southeast of Baghdad. As could be expected, the attack was met with sharp international criticism.

Fourth, a just war must have attainable goals. A tiny island nation would be foolish to launch an attack against a superpower.

Fifth, a just war is one that is fought with great moral restraint. This means that winning the war is not the only concern. The end does not justify the means. There must be a sincere effort to avoid civilian casualties and the needless destruction of property. The focus needs to be a war against enemy combatants.

This brings up the question of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)—nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare. Tactical nuclear weapons against military targets and deep underground bunkers are conceivably a justifiable part of a limited war. Many of the scholars who study the matter believe that megaton nuclear weapons are so destructive not only to the general population but to the environment as to render them immoral. They write that any weapon so destructive as to incinerate and obliterate whole sectors of the civilian population cannot be morally justified.

Dr. Normal Geisler, in his helpful book *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues*, writes: “The purpose of war is to deter the

aggressor, not to destroy him completely. Its aim is to overpower not annihilate, one’s foes. For a war to be just it must envisage securing a peace which establishes with moral order some meaningful community in its wake. If this cannot be the reasonable anticipation of warfare, as it cannot be in total nuclear war, then allowing evil aggression would be better than total annihilation. Saving the race is more important than winning the war, whatever ‘winning the war could mean in that kind of situation’” (p. 176).



Nuclear Close Calls

Nuclear weapons have cast a shadow of doom over humanity. Added to that is the possibility of an accidental war. Wikipedia gives a “list of nuclear close calls.” On January 25, 1995, Russian president Boris Yeltsin became the first world leader to activate a nuclear briefcase. Russian radar systems detected the launch of what was later determined to be a Norwegian research rocket being used to study the northern lights. Yeltsin, who had a drinking problem and had a taste for vodka, was ready to order a retaliatory nuclear strike against the United States. The Norwegian research rocket was mistaken to be an American ICBM heading to Russia. There have been several other “nuclear close calls”—enough to give reasonable people who are unsaved motivation to at least carefully examine the claims of Jesus Christ. I don’t want to sound trite, or corny, but, dear friend are you ready to meet your Maker? Please give careful consideration to the words of Acts 16:31: “... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” There will be some who will “thank their lucky stars” that we haven’t yet been annihilated, but I would rather give thanks to God for His Son Jesus Christ who shed His blood that I could be saved.

Pacifism—Did Jesus Really Condemn All Wars?

There are those who claim it is wrong for Christians to fight in any war. They appeal to the teachings of Jesus, who said, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil:

but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:38–39).

Jesus often used hyperbole—deliberate exaggeration for startling effect—in His teaching. In Matthew 5:29 Jesus says if your right eye offends you, gouge it out. There is not a single example of anyone in the New Testament taking this literally and gouging out their right eye. Matthew 5:30 says the same thing about your right hand. Do holy people have no right hands? We see hyperbole in Mark 11:23. We do not find anyone in Scripture speaking to a mountain and saying, “Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea.”

Another observation—Jesus is not speaking to heads of state in the Sermon on the Mount, nor is He providing rules of engagement for the world’s militaries. Pacifism is an extreme position. The tenets of pacifism would also forbid law enforcement officers from using deadly force in apprehending criminals, and thereby expose the general population to dangerous individuals who would be allowed to have free reign to bring death and destruction to innocent people. And what about Jesus’ statement “that ye resist not evil”? How far do we want to take this? Was Jesus condemning all resistance to evil? Jesus’ ministry on earth was a ministry of resisting evil. He cast out demons, confronted the Pharisees with their own hypocrisy and healed those who were in misery with an illness. **Not** resisting evil is a sin of omission. James 4:17 says, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Once again, to cite Dr. Norman Geisler from the same volume cited earlier: “The able citizen who would not defend his country against an evil aggressor is morally remiss ... *the total pacifist can easily find himself aiding an evil cause by failing to defend a good one.* Thus complete pacifism is at best morally naïve, and at worst morally delinquent.”

How would you feel if a pacifist told the British in 1940 when Britain was fighting for survival, “Go ahead and let the Nazis occupy your country. They can take your bodies but not your souls”? Or how about if someone ventured to tell the Jews, when the full horrors of the Holocaust were known, “Since you Jews are going to be slaughtered anyway, you should voluntarily walk into the death camps to awaken the world’s conscience”? Resistance to such evil is the moral thing to do. We shouldn’t have to apologize for such resistance.

I do think, however, that those who hold to pacifism as a sincerely-held religious belief should be allowed to opt out of military duty that would put them in situations where they may be expected to use deadly force. I don’t believe—in fact, I am firmly against it—government should force people to go

against their convictions, such as forcing people to pay for abortions, or hormone treatments and/or gender reassignment surgery, nor should they force people to be vaccinated, certainly not with vaccines that have been proven to produce harmful side effects in those who are vaccinated.

War is ugly. Nations should work for peace. Our efforts need to be on prevention, and on missile defense shields, a national “iron dome system” like Israel has and which is being implemented in South Korea, and the like. But there are enough religious fanatics and mean-spirited misanthropes in the world who believe that they can fight a war and win, and enjoy their own brand of utopia on the earth. Hence, we need to thank God for our military and pray for the men and women who are defending American ideals of freedom, dignity, and respect for all people. They are much needed and do a sacred work of allowing us to enjoy things like freedom of religion and the safety of our families.

The U.S. is pulling the military out of Afghanistan. What is now happening? Here are the latest headlines: “Taliban Find New Revenues as They Seize Afghanistan’s US-Built Border Gateway.” It cost us over \$40 million and now the Taliban is collecting customs revenue which *they will use to buy weapons which they will use against innocent people.* Another headline: “Looters Have Moved Into Afghanistan’s Bagram Airfield.” We can’t be the policemen of the world, but now the world is in our backyard. There are certain flash points that always erupt into violence. Are we to sit idly by when people like Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad launched a chemical weapons attack using a deadly nerve agent against non-combatants in 2017, many of them women and little children? Was Donald Trump a monster beyond description when he sent fifty-nine Tomahawk cruise missiles to warn al-Assad and set an example?

We are living in serious times. There will be no lasting peace until Jesus returns. But until that time, we can enjoy peace in our hearts, and seek to bring that peace to others through evangelism and church planting. Pray for revival. It will give us national courage to do the right thing and bring the blessings of God upon our land.

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