

Study Guide for the Chiastic Structure of Psalm 23

Taken from an Adventist Review article by Richard Davidson (03 Feb 2024) called "Exegesis for Everyone"

Note: I have provided answers to the study guide questions, but there are other possible answers and the ideas could be worded in better ways. Also, I have provided a downloadable organizer in both Spanish and English to print out for a group Bible study.

Use the organizer to answer the questions that follow.

ORGANIZATION OF PSALM 23: Chiasm

A _____

B _____

C _____

C' _____

B' _____

A' _____

ORGANIZATION WITHIN THE BOOK:

Topic of Psalm 22:

Topic of Psalm 24:

How is Psalm 23 related to these psalms?

Study Guide for Psalm 23

Introduction: First, read the whole passage. (Psalms 23:1-6)

A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

1. Who is the author? *David*
2. What do you know about David that is relevant to this psalm? *He was a shepherd.*
3. Who is the shepherd in this psalm? *The Lord (not David)*
4. So, who is David in this psalm? *He is the sheep. Thus, when you read this psalm, read it from the point of view that you are a sheep following a shepherd around.*

Fill out the Chiasm: Now, let's look at the organization of this psalm. It is written as a chiasm. That means that there is some kind of parallel at the beginning and end of the psalm. Fill out the chiasm for yourself before looking at my answers. Use the downloadable

1. What is similar at the beginning and end? $A = \textit{The LORD is my shepherd}$ $A' = \textit{I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.}$

What is the significance of starting and finishing in this way? *Our assurance and life is in God from start to finish.*

2. Now, find the second parallel parts. $B = \textit{He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.}$ $B' = \textit{You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.}$

What is similar about these two parts? *Answers vary. The shepherd is taking care of all the sheep's needs.*

As a sheep, what does this tell you about your relationship with the shepherd? *Answers vary. God takes care of me and wants me to have the best in life even when I am surrounded by evil. He provides all that I need and more.*

Who is providing everything? *The Shepherd*

What is he providing you? *Answers vary*

3. Finally, let's find the middle of the chiasm. What two parts are parallel in the middle? $C = \textit{He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.}$ $C' = \textit{Even though I walk}$

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

What is similar about these two parts? *Paths and the presence of the Shepherd as you walk along the paths.*

By the way, the valley of the shadow of death is most likely a real place. Here is an account by Theologian Richard Davidson about his trip through this valley.

“Archaeologists and biblical geographers have suggested that this phrase refers to a specific place in Palestine called “the Valley of Death.” It has been identified with the Wadi Qilt, which runs through the Wilderness of Judea from Jerusalem to Jericho. The wadi (a dry ravine except during rainy season) is some 15 miles long in total, and I have hiked (and camped) with my son through the entire gorge. The narrowest part passed through over five miles of cliffs reaching some 1,500 feet on each side, with space to walk at the bottom only 10-12 feet wide. There are numerous caves where wolves and other predators could hide in David’s time. At the end of the wadi, as it opens out, my son and I came upon a whole flock of sheep, lying in the pleasant grass shaded under the tall cliffs.”

The middle of a chiasm is the most important idea in the whole passage. What does God think is the most important information for you to learn from this psalm? *God is with us in the green pastures and in the places of danger. Righteousness is not something that we need to blindly look for. God is leading us in the paths that are righteous. We can trust His leading. We can be secure in danger because our Shepherd has the tools to protect us.*

Organization within the Book of Psalms: Now, let’s examine this psalm for even more understanding. Although the order of the books of the Bible has changed, the order of the chapters within the books have not. Thus, the order of the psalms is all part of God’s organization of His holy book. Let’s look at the organization.

1. First, read Psalm 22:1-2 quickly.

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

What is psalm 22 about? *This is about Jesus and His death on the cross.*

2. Now, read Psalm 24:7-10.

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in

battle! Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! *Selah*

What is psalm about? *This is about Jesus our king returning to heaven in glory after His death.*

The psalm before and after are both messianic. According to Richard Davidson: “The psalm also holds a deeper meaning! Psalm 23 is sandwiched between two messianic psalms—Psalm 22, the Psalm of the Cross, and Psalm 24, the Psalm of the Crown (Christ’s ascension and entrance into heaven), making it likely that these three psalms form a “Messianic Trilogy.”⁶ The clues in Psalm 23 verify this conclusion.”

3. Let’s analyze the clues in Psalm 23 that point to it being about the Messiah.
 - Who is singing this psalm (not David)? *The sheep.*
 - Does this indicate Jesus in any way? *The lamb of God*
 - What were the 2 paths that were most important in the psalm according to the chiasmic structure? *Righteousness and the valley of the shadow of death.*
 - How does this relate to Jesus? *He alone is the righteous Lamb of God and He alone truly walked through the valley of Death.*

According to Davidson: “Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the Cross. Psalm 24 is the Psalm of the Crown. Psalm 23 is the Psalm of the Paschal Lamb!”

Knowing that Psalm 23 tells us about Jesus, what insights do you have about Jesus from the Psalm? *He trusted His Father totally when He was on earth.*

Conclusion: The scriptures deserve more than just a surface reading. One way to go below the surface is to look at the organization within the passage. Another way is to look at the organization of the passage within the larger work.

When we dig down deeper, we find more and more insights into who God is and how much He loves us and how to maintain our relationship with Him. When we look deeply into the scriptures, we see again and again that it is about God leading us, not about us walking alone. It is about God being with us, never about trying to live out God’s commandments in our own strength and knowledge. Just as Jesus was the sheep following His Shepherd, we are to be sheep depending upon our Shepherd to lead us and take care of us.