

“Ken Bailey is the consummate expert on the cultural context of first-century life. And here he applies these skills to one motif—the shepherd—illustrating how it is employed in a variety of biblical stories and parables. His interpretations use a variety of tools unknown to many of us: ancient versions, original languages, cultural anthropology, ancient Middle Eastern writers who shared this ancient culture, and his own personal career embedded in a crosscultural life in the Middle East. Always insightful, always fresh, consistently surprising, Bailey has produced yet another book that will get many of us rethinking beloved passages of Scripture in completely new ways.”

**Gary Burge**, professor of New Testament, Wheaton College

“‘The Lord is my shepherd.’ There is no more beloved picture of God’s relationship with his people. Jesus’ declaration that he is ‘the good shepherd’ has comforted Christians for centuries. Using his impressive knowledge of Scripture and his experience living for many years in the Middle East, Bailey deepens and enriches our understanding of what it means to be members of God’s flock.”

**Tremper Longman III**, Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College

“Kenneth Bailey refreshes the souls of readers with deep textual insights and helpful contextual background to safely shepherd readers through the thousand-year story of Psalm 23. He makes several stops along the way in the Prophets, before settling into the Gospels where he deftly introduces us to a fresh understanding of the Good Shepherd. Anyone who loves the 23rd Psalm will love this book.”

**David Lamb**, associate professor of Old Testament, Biblical Theological Seminary; author of *God Behaving Badly*

“‘You prepare a table before me . . . my cup overflows.’ What a feast Ken Bailey has prepared for us in this book, and what an overflowing cupful of insights and illumination. If you ever thought there was nothing more you could ever learn or preach about the biblical image of the good shepherd, this book has an abundance of surprises. Again and again I thought, ‘Why have I never seen that before?’—as Ken draws on his rich lifetime’s experience of Middle Eastern culture to explore biblical texts, and particularly when he shows eye-opening connections between Old and New Testament texts around the shepherd theme. This is a book that simultaneously brings the Bible to life, and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ by deeply enriching our understanding of his mission and claims as the Good Shepherd.”

**Christopher J. H. Wright**, International Ministries Director, Langham Partnership

“Defly wielding the tools of biblical scholarship, story-telling, and cultural exegesis, Ken Bailey has restored to its full color and brilliance one of the most magnificent images of Scripture—the character and work of the Good Shepherd. This book is a treasure trove of useable insights for preachers and teachers and a devotional classic for daily disciples alike.”

**Daniel Meyer**, Christ Church, Oakbrook, Illinois



THE  
GOOD  
SHEPHERD

A THOUSAND-YEAR JOURNEY FROM  
PSALM 23 TO THE NEW TESTAMENT



KENNETH E. BAILEY

SPCK

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to

John and Susan Bailey

and

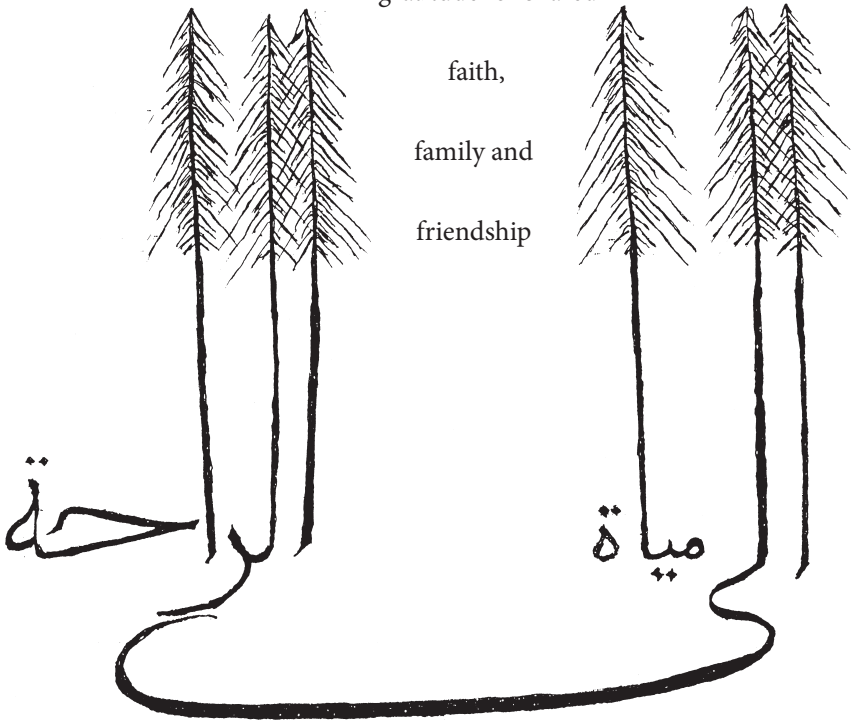
Tim and Elizabeth Daigle

in gratitude for shared

faith,

family and

friendship



“Beside the still waters.”



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## ABBREVIATIONS

- BAGD Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- Ibrahim Sa'īd, *Luqa*  
Ibrahim Sa'īd, *The Gospel of Luke* (1970; reprint, Cairo: Middle East Council of Churches, 1980).
- Ibn al-Salibi, *Tafsir*  
Dionysius Ibn al-Salibi, *Kitab al-Durr al-Farid fi Tafsir al-'Ahd al-Jadid [The Book of Precious Pearls in the Interpretation of the New Testament]*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 'Abd al-Masih Dawlayani, 1914). Ibn al-Salibi wrote in Syriac and died in A.D. 1164. These volumes were translated into Arabic at the Monastery of Za'farani (Southeast Turkey) in 1728. Volume one (*Matthew and Mark*) lists no date or place of publication. However volume two (*Luke and John*) lists "Cairo, 1914" as the place and date of publication.
- Ibn al-Tayyib, *Tafsir*  
Ibn al-Tayyib, *Tafsir al Mashriqi*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Towfiq Press, 1910).
- LVTL, *Lexicon*  
*Lexicon in Vetris Testamenti Libros*, ed. Ludwig Koehler and W. Baumgartner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958).
- LSJ, *Greek-English Lexicon*  
H. G. Liddell, Robert Scott and H. S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. J. S. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966).
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and G. Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967-1976).



*“Midrash is the hammer  
which awakens the slumbering sparks  
in the anvil of the Bible.”*

BABYLONIAN TALMUD,  
SANHEDRIM



## PREFACE



My journey with the theme of this book began with seven years of my childhood in the late 1930s in the south of Egypt, where my family lived in the village of Edmu in the province of Minya. After some years of absence, that journey continued from the mid 1950s and into the 1960s when I served for ten years with the rural churches of the Egyptian Evangelical Church in the same district. This was followed by twenty years in Lebanon, and finally by a further ten years living and teaching at the edge of Bethlehem in Israel/Palestine at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, where shepherds grazed their flocks around us. Thus, for nearly fifty years, Middle Eastern shepherds with their flocks were a part of the larger context in which I grew up and then lived and taught the New Testament. It was my privilege to have laymen and clergy in three countries as my students who had herded sheep for extended periods in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Sheep-herding in the Middle East falls into two overlapping categories. First, there are the seminomadic sheep herders who often have large herds and spend months away from their villages following seasonal rains and grazing the open pasture land. Second, there are settled village families, each of whom owns a few sheep. It is customary for a number of families to combine their animals, and for one young man (or two young women) to form them into a herd and take them out each day to graze. This second pattern is widespread and more universal than the first. Some villagers develop large herds and still return to the village each night.

Countless books and articles have been written on the texts selected for

this work. Of particular interest are the brief monographs written by Middle Easterners who in their earlier years themselves herded sheep. Each of these shepherds emigrated to the West, and at some point in their lives, using their own personal experience as shepherds, published their perceptions of Psalm 23. I have chosen five such accounts in which these two patterns are observable. The five are as follows:

Rev. M. P. Krikorian grew up in the late nineteenth century in the mountains behind the cities of Tarsus and Adana, which are now in Turkey. While he was in high school his family acquired a herd of a hundred sheep, and his father selected him to herd them. Initially the young man “wept bitterly at the suggestion” because it meant that he was obliged to drop out of school.<sup>1</sup> Yet some years later after becoming a pastor in the Middle East and then surviving the Armenian Genocide, he emigrated to the West and wrote a book on the Twenty-Third Psalm, which he dedicated to “My beloved father who gave me that first chance to become a shepherd.”<sup>2</sup> The family had a long tradition of herding sheep, but for Krikorian it was a new experience. He acquired shepherding skills from the family, from other shepherds and from the sheep themselves. In his case, he returned each night to his family home in the village. His book is titled *The Spirit of the Shepherd: An Interpretation of the Psalm Immortal*.<sup>3</sup>

Rev. Faddoul Moghabghab was born in the city of Ain-Zehalta in the mountains of Lebanon. As a young man he herded the family’s small flock. As he notes, “My father owned a number of sheep and lambs; it is customary for all the people of Mount Lebanon to keep a few sheep.” Later in life he attended university and seminary in Beirut and in time emigrated from Lebanon to America, where he wrote a book about his experiences as a Middle Eastern shepherd.<sup>4</sup>

Moving from north to south across the Middle East, a brief but useful account of the life of a shepherd is available from George M. Lamsa. A

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<sup>1</sup>M. P. Krikorian, *The Spirit of the Shepherd: An Interpretation of the Psalm Immortal*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1939), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>I am indebted to Rev. Avidis Boynerian for bringing this book to my attention and for acquiring a copy of it for my use.

<sup>4</sup>Faddoul Moghabghab, *The Shepherd Song on the Hills of Lebanon: The Twenty-Third Psalm Illustrated and Explained* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1907).

deacon of the Syrian Orthodox Church, Dr. Lamsa grew up in a community of seminomadic sheep herders in Syria. He writes,

My ancestors for untold generations were sheep raising people. My father and my mother loved and tended sheep. I was raised in a sheep camp. We lived in a tent made of the hair of goats just as Abraham and Isaac did. Like other boys, I was taught and disciplined by the shepherds. Since my father was chief shepherd, I was taught thru [*sic*] his wisdom.<sup>5</sup>

Lamsa became a Syriac scholar and translated the fourth-century Syriac Bible (the Peshitta) into English. He also published many other books recording his studies of and reflections on that same Syriac Bible. Along with these numerous works he published a short study titled *The Shepherd of All: The Twenty-Third Psalm*.

Stephen A. Haboush grew up in Galilee. In his youth he became the shepherd of the family flock of sheep. Later in life he immigrated to America and wrote a book titled *My Shepherd Life in Galilee: With an Exegesis of the Shepherd Psalm*.<sup>6</sup> His short work is authentic and helpful.

Abraham Mitri Rahbany was not a shepherd, but he grew up in the mountains of what is now Lebanon, surrounded by farmers and shepherds. He observed those shepherds with their sheep on a daily basis for all of his early years. Later in life he wrote a book that covers many aspects of Eastern life and the Gospels. This book, titled *The Syrian Christ*, includes a helpful chapter on sheep and shepherds.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these five Middle Easterners we can note two Westerners, one American and the other British. William Thompson lived and served in Lebanon for twenty-five years as a missionary of the American Presbyterian Church. He learned Arabic well and made numerous extensive journeys on horseback across what is now Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. His observations and reflections were published originally in 1858 in two volumes under the title *The Land and the Book*.<sup>8</sup> Eric F. F. Bishop of England served in Jerusalem with the Church Missionary Society for twenty-eight

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<sup>5</sup>George M. Lamsa, *The Shepherd of All: The Twenty-Third Psalm* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holdman, 1939), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Stephen A. Haboush, *My Shepherd Life in Galilee: With an Exegesis of the Shepherd Psalm* (Chicago: Merchandise Mart, 1949), pp. 1-8.

<sup>7</sup>Abraham M. Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), pp. 295-309.

<sup>8</sup>W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (New York: Harper, 1871), 1:229-305.

years and authored *Jesus of Palestine* and *Prophets of Palestine*, which have valuable information about the biblical text and the world of Middle Eastern shepherds.<sup>9</sup>

Of more limited value are recent accounts by Westerners who were at various times in their lives exposed to shepherds and their sheep. Leslie D. Weatherhead of England gathered data regarding sheep from as far away as India,<sup>10</sup> and Phillip Keller owned and operated a sheep ranch in East Africa and was involved with sheep in the American West.<sup>11</sup> These authors apply experience from sheep-herding in Africa, Asia and America to Psalm 23. Occasionally it fits and is useful.

In addition to these English-language sources, this study has relied heavily on the Arabic writings on the good shepherd texts that are available to us. Much has been lost across the centuries, but a few treasures, ancient and modern, have survived. I have had the following available to me.

#### ARABIC LANGUAGE COMMENTARIES

Ibn al-Salibi, Dionesius. *Kitab al-Durr al-Farid fi Tafsir al-Ahd al-Jadid* [The Book of Precious Pearls in the Interpretation of the New Testament]. 2 vols. Cairo: ‘Abd al-Masih Dawlayani, 1914.

Ibn al-Salibi was bishop of Amad (Diyarbakr). He wrote in Syriac and died in A.D. 1164. This commentary was translated into Arabic in the Monastery of Za‘farani (Southeast Turkey) in 1728.

Ibn al-Tayyib. *Tafsir al-Mashriqi* [A Commentary on the Four Gospels]. 2 vols. Cairo: Tawfiq Press, 1910.

Ibn al-Tayyib was a part of the Church of the East. He was a brilliant scholar, a medical doctor, a translator, an author and secretary to the patriarch of his church. He wrote books on medicine and theology. He produced philosophical works along with a number of high-quality commentaries. These two volumes are among them. He lived in Baghdad and died in 1043.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Eric F. F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), and *Prophets of Palestine* (London: Lutterworth, 1962).

<sup>10</sup>Leslie D. Weatherhead, *A Shepherd Remembers* (New York: Abingdon, 1938).

<sup>11</sup>Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

<sup>12</sup>Samir Khalil, “Ibn al-Tayyib, a Polyvalent Thinker,” in *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut: Middle East Council of Churches, 2005), pp. 518-29.

Matta al-Miskin. *The Gospel According to Luke* [Arabic]. Cairo: Monastery of Saint Makar, 1998.

———. *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew: Studies, Interpretation and Explanations* [Arabic]. Cairo: Monastery of Saint Maqar, 1999.

Father Matta al-Miskin (d. 2009) was a monk at the Coptic Orthodox Monastery of St. Makar in Wadi Natron (between Cairo and Alexandria). He spent most of his life writing extensive commentaries on the Gospels, which were published by his monastery. His work is little known outside of the Arabic-speaking Christian world. His monastic spirituality is deep, and these volumes will no doubt in time be translated into English and bless the worldwide church for many generations to come.

Sa'īd, Ibrahim. *Sharh Bisharit Luqa* [Commentary on the Gospel of Luke]. Cairo: Middle East Council of Churches, 1980.

———. *Sharh Bisharit Yuhanna* [Interpretation of the Gospel of John]. Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa, n.d.

Rev. Dr. Ibrahim Sa'īd was a pastor and scholar of the Egyptian Evangelical Church in the mid-twentieth century. He was a brilliant preacher in the finest Classical Arabic, and under his leadership the Qasr al-Dubara church on the famous Maydan al-Tahrir in central Cairo was built. He authored extensive commentaries on Luke and John.

## ARABIC TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE

Translation is always commentary. The translators must try to understand the text, and only then can they present it in the receptor language. This study has made use of a collection of twenty versions of the New Testament into Arabic and four versions of the Old Testament. I have managed to acquire copies of all the printed Arabic New Testaments that began to appear at the very end of the sixteenth century. I have also acquired films of many hand-copied Bibles from before that time that date as far back as the ninth century. A brief description of these versions is available in my book *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*.<sup>13</sup> How have Eastern Christians understood this text? This question can often be answered by noting how they translated the

<sup>13</sup>Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), pp. 538-43.

verses in question. An interpretive flow from these centuries of Eastern Bible translation have constantly influenced this study.<sup>14</sup>

### ARMENIAN

Nerses the Graceful of Lambron. *On Psalm 23 [22]*. In *Commentary on the Psalms, Manuscript 1526*.

This was translated for me by the Rt. Rev. Anushavan, bishop of the Armenian Orthodox Church of North America, New York. This twelfth-century manuscript is held in the Mesot Nashotots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Yerevan, Armenia.

I have also relied on information I was privileged to glean over two decades from several of my students at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon, who herded sheep in their early years. From their living experiences I have gained many insights. Finally, it was my privilege on numerous occasions to observe and question shepherds with their sheep in the south of Egypt (ten years), the mountains of Lebanon (twenty years) and in the West Bank, Israel/Palestine, near Bethlehem (ten years). While writing parts of this book I was able to observe numerous shepherds leading their flocks among the terraced hills around Bethlehem.

My deepest gratitude must be extended to countless friends over a sixty-year period that stretch from the south of Egypt to Armenia who have done their best to keep me on “the paths of righteousness” in my interpretation of this great biblical theme.

Without the help, guidance and support my editor, Andrew Le Peau of InterVarsity Press, this work would never have been written. His wisdom and friendship have sustained me in all stages of the composition of this book. I wish also to express my unending gratitude to my personal secretary and copyeditor, Sara B. Makari, who has been tireless in assisting me on all levels of composition of this study. My thanks go out as well to Dr. Gary Burge, who in spite of his heavy academic schedule of teaching and writing in the field of New Testament graciously agreed to read through the chapters

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<sup>14</sup>All of the quotations from Arabic are my own translations. It seemed tiresome to clutter up the notes with constant repetition of the phrase *my translation*. I am solely responsible for any errors in this regard.

on the Gospels, and who offered numerous helpful suggestions on many levels. Mr. Tom Finnegan, my computer guru, kept my hardware functioning properly and rescued me from many software glitches. To him I am deeply indebted.

Thanks must be extended also the staff of the library of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary who have graciously allowed me to check out numerous books and keep them on my desk for an embarrassing length of time. I am also grateful to the Rt. Rev. Bishop Anoushavan Tanielian of the Armenian Orthodox Diocese of Eastern America for his translation of the Psalm 23 section of the untranslated and unpublished twelfth-century Armenian commentary on the Psalms by Archbishop Nerses the Graceful of Lambron.<sup>15</sup>

I invite you, gentle reader, to join me on the journey from David's famous psalm through good shepherd texts in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Gospels to a final word from St. Peter on the subject. A rich biblical feast of ethical, theological and artistic delights awaits us. My goal is to uncover those delights and make them available to the worldwide church.

*Kenneth E. Bailey*  
*New Wilmington, PA*

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<sup>15</sup>*Manuscript 1526* (13th cent.), in the Mesot Nashotots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, Eravan, Armenia.

