

Psalms 78:52

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

Analysis

But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. The conjunction 'but' (Hebrew vayyassa, וַיַּאֲסֶה) marks a gracious turn from Egypt's plagues to Israel's deliverance. The shepherd imagery (ro'eh, רֹעֶה) contrasts sharply with Egypt's destruction—God struck Pharaoh's livestock but tenderly **guided** His own flock through the wilderness.

The dual metaphor of **sheep** (tson, צֶמֶד) and **flock** ('eder, עֶדֶר) emphasizes Israel's dependence and God's pastoral care. This anticipates David's own shepherd-king role (vv. 70-72) and ultimately Jesus as the Good Shepherd who leads His flock through death's wilderness (John 10:11). The exodus becomes paradigmatic for all divine deliverance—God's people are always sheep needing guidance.

The verb **guided** (nahag, נָהַג) suggests gentle leading, not harsh driving. God accommodated Israel's weakness, providing manna, water, and His presence in the cloud. This pastoral patience reveals divine character—sovereignty exercised through tender care, not brute force.

Historical Context

Asaph writes this historical psalm likely during the divided monarchy, rehearsing the exodus narrative to warn against covenant unfaithfulness. The wilderness wanderings (Exodus 13-18, Numbers 10-36) lasted forty years due to Israel's

unbelief. The shepherd metaphor would resonate deeply in an agrarian society where shepherding was noble—David himself came from the sheepfolds (v. 70).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing yourself as a dependent sheep affect your approach to decision-making and control?
2. In what 'wilderness' seasons has God's guidance been most evident in your life?
3. How might God's tender leading of Israel challenge harsh or manipulative leadership styles in the church?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֵא	כַּצֹּאֵן	עַמּוֹ	וַיְנַהֲגֵם	כַּצֹּדֶר
to go forth	like sheep	But made his own people	and guided	like a flock
H5265	H6629	H5971	H5090	H5739
בַּמִּדְבָּר:				
them in the wilderness				
H4057				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 77:20 (Parallel theme): Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Nehemiah 9:12 (Parallel theme): Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

Isaiah 40:11 (Parallel theme): He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Psalms 105:37 (Parallel theme): He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

Psalms 95:7 (Parallel theme): For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice,

Psalms 100:3 (Creation): Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.