

THE LORD'S MY SHEPHERD



We, in this present day, sing hymns in our churches and seldom think about all the long years of our church history. There were many years that people believed that only the songs that appeared in the Bible were the only ones they should sing. Those songs are found in the book of the Bible that we call *The Psalms*. *The Psalms* have often been called the “Songbook of the Bible.”

Jesus knew and loved the Psalms. He often sang and quoted from them. Down through the history of the Christian Church many persons have given praise and prayer from these songs; and the Christian martyrs have suffered and died with these Hebrew poems on their lips. In the Book of Acts it is recorded that Paul and Silas in prison sang Psalms at midnight (Acts 16:25).

Those Psalm songs are rather hard for us to sing for they do not have the *rhythm*, or *meter*, to which we are accustomed. Because of this, for many years a number of persons attempted to make arrangements of *The Psalms* to fit familiar tunes that everyone knew. Those arrangements are called *paraphrases*. Some of those *paraphrases* of the various Psalms were poorly done from a literary viewpoint for they tried to keep the exact meaning and stay as close to the original words as possible. This is often hard to do.

Our hymn “The Lord’s My Shepherd” is one of the better paraphrases. Do you know from which of the Psalms it was arranged? The answer is at the bottom of this page, but don’t look until you have tried to figure it out!

One of the best hymnals which included only Psalm paraphrases was, and still is, *The Scottish Psalter*. *The Scottish Psalter* printed in 1650 contained our hymn. There had been earlier printings of this hymnal but the version printed in 1650 was the first to include “The Lord’s My Shepherd.” It was considered by many authorities to be the “Prince of Versions” (a version is the making of a change from the original) for it was said to contain the very best of the paraphrases from the many Psalters (Hymnbooks of that time.)

It was just a few years later that poets and leaders in the church decided that poems written by persons who were sincere and dedicated could also be sung in churches. One of the first hymn-writers was Isaac Watts. He has often been called the “Father of English Hymnody.” Do you know any hymns he wrote? One that you would like a great deal is called “I Sing the Almighty Power of God.” It uses a lovely, singable English melody called “Forest Green.” See if your choir director will help you explore and find this hymn and tune.

To go back to “The Lord’s My Shepherd” again: Try comparing this text with the King James or the Standard Revised Version of the Bible to see how closely it stays with the original. It makes a lovely poem, doesn’t it?

The tune *Evan* was written by Dr. Lowell Mason, an American, and based on a melody written earlier by an English clergyman, Dr. William Havergal. Dr. Havergal, following a serious carriage accident which left him nearly blind and an invalid for many years, turned to the study of music. He became a fine organist and hymntune composer. His daughter also, wrote many fine hymns. Dr. Mason, who contributed much toward making church music in America become strong and meaningful, changed the original tune’s meter so that it is easy to sing and remember. It fits this text very well. Another tune often used with this Psalm paraphrase is called *Crimond*. *Crimond* with this text was sung at Queen Elizabeth’s wedding at Westminster Abbey in 1947 (she was at that time *Princess Elizabeth*.) Perhaps you or your choir director could locate this tune in another denominational hymnal so you could hear it and compare it with *Evan*.

If you said “The Twenty-Third Psalm” you are right.