

1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. Psalm 23 is one of the best known of the Psalms, and it is fairly obvious that this Psalm draws directly from David's experience as a shepherd in the wilderness of his youth.
- b. Refer to the Introduction to Psalms under Bible Survey – OT 15.4.0 for background and context of the Psalms. <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%2015.4-0%20-%20Introduction%20to%20Psalms.pdf>

2. TIME OF WRITING AND AUTHOR:

- a. Scripture unilaterally refers to this worship poem as “a Psalm of David.” It comprises a part of a greater body of material provided in Scripture written by David including Psalms 3 through 41 excluding 10 and 33. There is no credible alternative for an author of this Psalm other than king David.
- b. David reigned as king of unified Israel from the Hebrew capital city of Jerusalem for forty years, from 1010 to 970 BC. Other known events in the historical time-table impacting this story include the following:
 - i. Copper smelting 5,500 BC
 - ii. Bronze age 3,500 BC
 - iii. Old Egyptian kingdom 3,050 BC
 - iv. Pyramids built 2,686-2,566 BC
 - v. Abraham 2,166-1,901 BC
 - vi. Joseph 1,914-1,805 BC
 - vii. Hammurabi 1,792-1,750 BC
 - viii. Moses 1,526-1,406 BC
 - ix. First Passover 1,446 BC
 - x. Iron Age begins 1,200 BC
 - xi. Prophet Samuel 1,060-1,020 BC
 - xii. King David 1,010-970 BC
 - xiii. Messiah Jesus 4 BC-30 AD

3. LITERARY CONTEXT:

- a. King David's Psalms run the literary gamut of 1) Praise and Worship; 2) Lament and Complaint; and 3) Confession and Restoration. The interesting characteristic of his Psalms is because David intuitively knew God relationally, that he could pour his heart out to God as a drink offering knowing God was Faithful and True, Loving and Good. Psalm 23 should be viewed in the context of the totality of David's experience with God.
- b. Spiritual seekers often speak of “Mountaintop” experiences where they have first-hand interaction in Awe and Wonder with God. These are “Threshold” experiences where God makes Himself vital and real in a way that forever changes a person. David was certainly shaped by such experiences. However, as Fallen-humanity, we cannot live indefinitely on the mountaintop. We

have to return to the “Valley” where everyday life is lived out. It is in the low spots of the valley where the mountaintop experiences that have shaped our perception of the reality of God are played out. This is the context of David’s confidence expressed in Psalm 23.

- c. Pastor Mike Sampson of Tahoe Forest Church asked this question to his congregation, “How do you handle the valleys of everyday life?” Pastor Mike suggests that there are certain characteristics about the Valleys of Life:
- i. Valleys are Inevitable – they cannot be escaped, they must be traveled through and endured. In John’s Gospel Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble, but be of good courage for I have overcome [mastered] the world” - John 16:33. The presence of a valley is an opportunity for growth and maturity, and not necessarily an indication of personal failure.
 - ii. Valleys are Unpredictable – no matter how well we plan or prepare, stuff just seems to happen in ways we didn’t expect. This is the nature of Jesus’ assertion in John 16:33 that “In the world you will have trouble.” Further, trouble tends to find us when we are least prepared for it and often at the most inopportune times that we find trials.
 - iii. Valleys are Impartial – everyone experiences valleys and no one is immune from the consequences of pain and suffering, and again it is not necessarily the result of God punishing us because of personal failure. Jesus said in Matthew 5:45b that “God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust as well.” Paul says in 1Corinthians 10:13a, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.” We will all experience the reality of trials.
 - iv. Valleys are Temporary – Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 10:13b-c, “And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” Peter says in 1 Peter 1:3-6, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”
 - v. Valleys are Purposeful – God uses these valleys to perfect our faith. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by being challenged, but Scripture confirms our character is perfected in testing. Notice 1 Peter 1:7 which says in the Amplified Version, “So that [the genuineness] of your faith may be tested, [your faith] which is infinitely more precious than the perishable gold which is tested and purified by fire. [This proving of your faith is intended] to redound to [your] praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) is revealed.” This concept is developed in James’ teaching, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you

know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” – James 1:2-4.

- vi. Valleys are to be Endured in Faith Believing – our choices are based upon our experience of God, which in turn shapes our action because our decisions are based upon our conviction of the Character of God. Knowing God is inherently Good is relationally experiential, and as a result we trust God’s intent:
1. Our Choice – is to trust God because our faith is strengthened in the valley experiences. As a result we choose to deliberately act with the faith we have in light of the perfection that is yet to come... “I will fear no evil for You are with me” Psalm 23:4a-b.
 2. Our Action – involves three underlying principles:
 - A. To refuse to be discouraged – meaning we tap into the “Source of our Faith.” When acting in our own strength we will at some point run out and fail, but since God is faithful and true we can rely on His presence and intent. Paul says in Colossians 1:10-12, “And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” Also in Romans 8:28 Paul teaches, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
 - B. To Remember that God is with you – Isaiah 43:1b-3a, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”
 - C. To Rely upon God’s Strength, Protection and Guidance – God is fighting for us. The correct translation of “Jihad” is God fighting for humanity, not humanity fighting for God. God fighting for humanity is Grace, and this is why Jesus had to come to reconcile us with His personal sacrificial atonement. Humanity fighting for God is a perverse abstraction, as if God needed anything from humanity to accomplish His will and purpose. Psalm 34:17-22 states, “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he

protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken. Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.”

3. **Conclusion – The difference between the Christian and the Non-Christian is not the absence of the valleys but rather the Presence of the Shepherd. We also need to recognize that there are stages in our personal development just as exemplified by Moses and David:**

- A. **Moses spent 1) forty years as a prince of Egypt, 2) forty years as a shepherd in Midian, and 3) forty years leading Israel to the Promised Land.**
- B. **King David similarly, was 1) a shepherd in Judah, 2) a servant to king Saul in Jerusalem, and 3) forty years as king of Israel in Jerusalem.**

God uniquely prepares each of His servants for the ministry to which they have been invited to participate. God wastes nothing of each person’s experiences in this preparation. Through our woundedness, brokenness, healing and redemption we earn the right to speak into a wounded and broken world desperate for healing and redemption which God offers freely through Messiah Jesus. Our life is part of the fabric of God’s plan being played out in the course of redemptive history.

4. STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT:

a. Structure – Consists of Four Strophes:

- i. **Vs 1:** The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not [be in] want.
- ii. **Vs 2-3:** He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet [still] waters,
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.
- iii. **Vs 4-5:** 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.
- iv. **Vs 6:** Surely goodness and mercy [God’s Love] will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

b. Theological Development:

- i. **Vs 1 is a poetic statement of Old Testament theology, which involves God blessing His people in the land of milk and honey. David knows God’s blessing on His people means they will not live in want, because God will care for them providing what they need. God’s promise for His people is about their needs being met in the land of plenty, but they**

are still separated from God because of the sin-curse. Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains what "*want*" means:

1. The New American Standard Bible tends to interpret this Hebrew word of the text as "want in the sense of lack." The Hebrew word used here is *Hasar*, which implies diminished resources. "Lack" is often that of basic [needed] resources, such as bread (e.g., 2 Samuel 3:29; Proverbs 12:9); however, people are also in desperate spiritual want as well. People are often trapped by a lack of the wisdom that leads to living in accordance with God's ways (e.g., Proverbs 6:32; Ecclesiastes 6:2).
 2. In addition to material needs, a living relationship with God is the only solution to our every need. As a believer, I have the reassuring knowledge that the LORD is my Shepherd, thus I shall not be in want.
 3. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated as "want" is used almost entirely for "desire," or "wish." The specific Greek word used here is *Thelo*, and the meaning is usually of a general desire or need.
- ii. Vs 2-3 speaks about the "Physical Life" and the "Pastoral Relationship" between God and His people. This is the comforting side of the Old Covenant where God meets the physical needs of His people through a relationship in terms of their everyday life. Where life in Egypt had been harsh and brutal, God's people were now in a place of protective comfort with God's promise to Abraham restored. Moses is a good picture of this Old Covenant shepherding relationship.
- iii. Vs 4-5 this speaks about the "Spiritual Life" and of a more personal and intimate "Pastoral Relationship" with God. In this strophe David prophetically speaks of the personal and intimate relationship with God that Jesus introduced to His disciples... that of the Father being "Abba Father" or literally "Daddy." The first century AD Jews that Jesus spoke to when He walked the earth did not have this understanding of God. To them, God was unapproachable and distant... a necessity due to God's Holiness and Purity and humanity's fallen state. Jesus had to explain that God was actually their "Daddy," a familiarity that was shocking to them. Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains the meaning of Abba-Father:
1. *Abba* is an Aramaic word, drawn from the everyday language of Palestine. It is probably the first word a child might learn, and it is equivalent to our word *Daddy* which is laden with a warm sense of familial intimacy. The word is found in our Bibles in a combined form, "Abba, Father," which links the Aramaic word with the Greek word for father (*ho pater*).
 2. It may be that the Greek word is added to explain the unfamiliar *Abba* to believers beyond Palestine. But even in Palestine in New Testament times, the combined formula was used in prayer and as a way family members addressed the head of the household. No slave or servant in the household had the privilege of using this personal formula to address his master. This fact underlies the argument in Romans

8:15 and Galatians 4:6, two of the three New Testament occurrences of *Abba* where Paul wants his readers to grasp the dramatic change of relationship that comes with being a Christian.

3. As Christians, we no longer address God as if we were a servant or a slave. The Old Covenant was based upon a Suzerain-vassal relationship... essentially a "quid-pro-quo" formula where if we do what's proscribed in obedience to God He will fulfill His promise to care for us. It is a Master/servant relationship based on obedience. In the New Covenant, we come to the Lord in the full assurance that we are intimate family. The full intimacy of our relationship is sensed in the only other Biblical use of the phrase. "Abba, Father" was the anguished cry of Jesus in Gethsemane, where He was anticipating the agony of Calvary (Mark 14:36). As with David's Psalms when we hurt, Jesus demonstrates that we too can call on a God who welcomes us into his arms as dearly loved children.

Where the Old Covenant was warm and cordial, it was performance based with God seen as being more distant and less approachable. Here in Psalm 23, David foresaw the greater personal intimacy God desired with individual believers, that was relationally based as sons and daughters and even co-heirs of the Kingdom of God (Galatians 3:29-4:7). Jesus is a good picture of the New Covenant Shepherding relationship.

- iv. Vs 6 is David's poetic statement of New Testament theology of God's people as children living forever with their Father in His Heavenly Home. This is a view of Grace far beyond David's Old Covenant peers. David prophetically understands the time will come when the sin-curse will be removed by God's Messiah [Jesus], and that the home for God's people will be in Heaven with God.
 1. The superiority of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus is the movement from the basic physical requirements being met, to the enjoyment of Spiritual blessing forever in the Presence of God.
 2. In the Old Covenant, people believed those who died went to Sheol [the place of the dead], where all the dead went. They believed that those who lived a good life would have a good afterlife, and those who lived a bad life would have a bad afterlife. The idea of people living forever with God was unprecedented in the Old Covenant.
 3. "Surely goodness and Mercy will follow me all the days of my life" is an amazing concept as translated from the Hebrew. My dear friend Pastor Bryan Bode reads this in the Hebrew, "Ach tov wa chesed yirdafuni" which means literally, "Goodness and [God's] Covenant love/loyalty will hunt me down." The reality that God is actually pursuing His people to rescue them is breathtaking. Bryan says, "It is not a mistake that we are found by God in our need for salvation when He is the God who hunts down His own out of the highest Good of His Character and in fulfillment of His covenant promise to bless all the families of the earth."

4. To “Dwell in the House of the Lord forever” speaks of God as “Lord” but in the close relational context of “family.” Zondervan’s New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains the translation of these words:

Family is explained:

- A. The Hebrew concept of family: The foundation for the biblical view of family is laid in Genesis 2. There God instituted marriage as a permanent union between one man and one woman. This stable relationship is the foundation of a stable society. The larger groupings of Old Testament society [the tribe and the clan] are expressions of extended family relationships. It is particularly significant that the Old Testament focuses on the family as central in communicating faith to children. Two Hebrew words are typically used to indicate the family: *mispahah* is translated "family" in the NIV and NASB, and *bayit* means "house" but is often used in the sense of "family" (as in "the house of" someone; e.g., Exodus 2:1; 2 Samuel 21:1; 2 Chronicles 10:19; Hosea 1:4) or is translated "household."
- B. The Greek words translated as "family": The most common words to express the concept of family in the New Testament are *oikos*, "house," and its derivatives. This parallels the use of *bayit* in the Old Testament. *Oikos* may indicate the couple, their children, and any servants or relatives living in the home (1 Timothy 3:5, 12). It may also represent an entire people, such as Israel (Luke 1:33; Acts 7:42), or the Christian community (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17; cf. Ephesians 2:19, "household" [*oikeios*]). The significant term *patria* is found only three times in the New Testament. This term for family means "father's house" and focuses attention on the particular forefather who is the origin of the family group and who also provides it with its identity (Luke 2:4; Acts 3:25; Ephesians 3:15).
- C. The church and the family: The house, or family, is the smallest natural group in the New Testament congregation. In the church, the family remains basic in the nurture of children in the faith. In New Testament times, the house was the primary place of meeting and fellowship for believers (e.g., Acts 2:46; 16:15; Philemon 2). For the first centuries of the Christian era, believers did not meet in church buildings but in smaller, more intimate groups in homes. Thus, the greeting in Romans 16:5 to the "church that meets at" the house of Priscilla and Aquila is a reflection of the normal pattern of early church life. It was very natural for early Christians, meeting in household groups, to sense deeply the family quality of their mutual relationship as children of God. It is also significant that the New Testament pays attention not only to relationships within families (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-24; 1 Peter 3:1-7) but also to relationships between believers who are called

on to live together and to "love as brothers and sisters" (e.g., Romans 12:9-16; Ephesians 5:1-21; Colossians 3:12-15; 1 Timothy 5).

- D. Summary: The modern church cannot and should not try to reproduce every structure of the early Christian community. But there are certain things that are basic to the very nature and identity of the church. Whatever structures a local congregation evolves, it is clear that these structures must help members live together and love one another as family. This is utterly basic to what it means to belong to Jesus and his church.

5. Lord is explained:

- A. The Hebrew words: Two Hebrew words are translated "lord" in the OT. '*Adon* means "lord" in the sense of a superior, master, or owner. It is also used as a term of respect. '*Adon* is generally found in the Old Testament in reference to human beings (e.g., Genesis 18:12; 19:2; 24; 1 Samuel 16:16). But at times, especially in a series of names such as "the LORD, the God of Israel" it is used of God. A special intensified form, '*adonay*, is found over three hundred times in the Old Testament, and this plural form refers only to God. Where '*adon* or '*adonay* refers to God, the English versions show it by capitalizing the first letter of "Lord." The other Hebrew word translated with an all capitalized "LORD" is *Yahweh*, God's revealed personal name. *Yahweh* occurs 5,321 times in the Old Testament in this form, and when it occurs most English versions indicate this by the capitalized form LORD.
- B. The Greek word: The word translated "Lord" in the English versions is *kyrios*. In ordinary speech, it may simply have been a term of respect or a form of address that emphasized a superior position, as that of the master of a slave. When *kyrios* is so used, it is translated by an appropriate English equivalent, such as "master," "owner," or even "Sir." When *kyrios* designates God or Jesus, it is rendered "Lord." In the Gospels, however, this should not be taken to mean that the speaker always acknowledges Jesus as God (e.g., Matthew 8:2, 21; Luke 9:59). However, since the Septuagint uses *kyrios* for *Yahweh*, it is clear that in many of its uses in the Gospels, the title Lord is equivalent to the divine name of God. It seems certain that when Jesus spoke of himself-- e.g., the time he called himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8), he was ascribing deity to himself (cf. Luke 20:42-44). Some uses of the title Lord by the disciples may also reflect the growing awareness that Jesus truly was divine, as Thomas finally confessed when he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). It is after the Resurrection, and in the Epistles, that we discover the significance of *kyrios* as applied to Jesus as God incarnate. Jesus is Lord. The earliest chapters of Acts testify to the fact that after the Resurrection, the church immediately confessed "Jesus is Lord"; and the rest

of the New Testament constantly affirms Jesus' lordship as being the promised Messiah-Jesus, God incarnate.

6. In Summation, in Psalm 23 the Spirit showed David a way better future some 1,000 years before Messiah Jesus would make this a reality for all of God's people for all time. Jesus mission of the Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost removed the sin-curse and opened the door for God's people to be reunited with God. This is the fact symbolized by the torn curtain separating the Holy of Holies [God's place] from holy-priestly place in the Temple at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:50-51). The Apostle John would later write of the reunion of God and His people in eternal Heaven in Revelation. David had a sneak preview of this blessed event 1,000 years before Jesus was born. For more on the end-times remediation and Eschatology, here is a link to the AD Website: <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%20Apocalyptic%201.3%20-%20Eschatology,%20Millenianism%20&%20the%20Rapture.pdf>

- c. **Redemptive Implications of Psalm 23** – In applying the New Testament theology of Psalm 23, we need to remember that our understanding of God's redemptive plan for humanity and the expression of God's love is radically changed. In the New Covenant, when God the Father looks upon His people who have responded to Jesus' call to "follow Me" and are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, He sees the son or daughter He loves. Christian discipleship is the indwelling Spirit transforming individual believers into reflections of Jesus. Hence, The New Testament and some Old Testament writers explain that we no longer need live in fear of the uncertainty of the future because believers are invited into a transformational relationship that results in eternity with God.

God is not oblivious to our fear of uncertainty in the world, so He provides for His faithful followers the promise of certainty in an eternal home. Using Psalm 23 imagery, God invites us into His Rest. With this in mind, consider these promises offered in Psalm 23:

- i. If I am fearful of losing my way, He offers me direction: "*He leads me beside quiet waters...*"
- ii. If I am fearful of poverty, He offers me provision: "*I shall not be in want... my cup overflows... "*
- iii. If I am fearful of fatigue or burnout, He offers me rest and renewal: "*He makes me lie down in green pastures beside quiet waters... [where] He restores my soul.*"
- iv. If I am fearful of spiritual compromise, He offers me growth: "*He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake... "*
- v. If I am fearful of loneliness, He offers me His companionship and solace: "*You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me... "*

- vi. If I am fearful of humiliation, He offers me honor: "*You anoint my head with oil...* "
- vii. If I am fearful of calamity, He offers me His bountiful kindness: "*Surely goodness... will follow me all the days of my life...* "
- viii. If I am fearful of rejection or isolation, He offers me His merciful favor: "*Surely... love will follow me all the days of my life...* "
- ix. If I am fearful of being lost, He offers me His salvation in an eternal home: "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*"

The only requirement on my part to receive the care and protection of this devoted Shepherd, is to trust Him and surrender to His Lordship.