

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. 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-30-32 AD  |

### 3. LITERARY CONTEXT:

- a. King David’s Psalms were written between the time David was anointed King by Samuel and the latter part of his life. David was a complicated man... he was passionate and worshipful; courageous and sensitive. He was the quintessential warrior/poet, and Scripture describes him as a man after God’s own Heart. His 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 what I call “Threshold” experiences where God makes Himself vital and real in a way that forever changes a person. Once you have crossed

the threshold of such an experience, and God reveals Himself Spiritually and relationally... you are never quite the same. 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 and it plays out again in Psalm 35.

#### 4. STRUCTURE AND THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT:

*PSALM 35 - Prayer for Rescue from Enemies, A Psalm of David. New American Standard Bible – from PRADIS Zondervan Bible Study Library, Scholar's Edition*

PS 35:1 Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;  
Fight against those who fight against me.

PS 35:2 Take hold of buckler and shield  
And rise up for my help.

PS 35:3 Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me;  
Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

PS 35:4 Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life;  
Let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me.

PS 35:5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,  
With the angel of the LORD driving *them* on.

PS 35:6 Let their way be dark and slippery,  
With the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

PS 35:7 For without cause they hid their net for me;  
Without cause they dug a pit for my soul.

PS 35:8 Let destruction come upon him unawares,  
And let the net which he hid catch himself;  
Into that very destruction let him fall.

PS 35:9 And my soul shall rejoice in the LORD;  
It shall exult in His salvation.

PS 35:10 All my bones will say, "LORD, who is like You,  
Who delivers the afflicted from him who is too strong for him,  
And the afflicted and the needy from him who robs him?"

PS 35:11 Malicious witnesses rise up;  
They ask me of things that I do not know.

PS 35:12 They repay me evil for good,  
To the bereavement of my soul.

PS 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth;  
I humbled my soul with fasting,  
And my prayer kept returning to my bosom.

PS 35:14 I went about as though it were my friend or brother;

PS 35:15 I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother.  
But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;  
The smiters whom I did not know gathered together against me,  
They slandered me without ceasing.

PS 35:16 Like godless jesters at a feast,  
They gnashed at me with their teeth.

PS 35:17 Lord, how long will You look on?  
Rescue my soul from their ravages,  
My only *life* from the lions.

PS 35:18 I will give You thanks in the great congregation;  
I will praise You among a mighty throng.

PS 35:19 Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me;  
Nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously.

PS 35:20 For they do not speak peace,  
But they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.

PS 35:21 They opened their mouth wide against me;  
They said, "Aha, aha, our eyes have seen it!"

PS 35:22 You have seen it, O LORD, do not keep silent;  
O Lord, do not be far from me.

PS 35:23 Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right  
And to my cause, my God and my Lord.

PS 35:24 Judge me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness,  
And do not let them rejoice over me.

PS 35:25 Do not let them say in their heart, "Aha, our desire!"  
Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!"

PS 35:26 Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress;  
Let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me.

PS 35:27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication;  
And let them say continually, "The LORD be magnified,  
Who delights in the prosperity of His servant."

PS 35:28 And my tongue shall declare Your righteousness  
*And Your praise all day long.*

### 5. Discussion:

#### a. God is obviously David's Protector:

- i. David is not relying on himself or his followers to take care of him. The concept of God contending for a person is revealed in the first three couplets. God fighting for the one He loves is the correct Biblical concept of "Jihad." It is God fighting for us, not us fighting for God.
- ii. David continues his complaint in verses 11-26. Then exults in the certainty of God's vindication for him in verses 27-28.

- iii. This pattern of dependence upon God while voicing his worldly complaints to his Heavenly Father is a typical approach David employs in many of his Psalms.
- b. Note the difference between the Akkadian Epic poem of “Erra and Ishum” – from Zondervan’s Archaeological Study Bible – New International Version. The following is the actual Excerpt from the Epic Poem of Erra and Ishum:
  - Why do you stay in town like a feeble old man?
  - How can you stay at home like a lisping child?
  - Are we to eat women’s bread, like one who has never marched on the battlefield?
  - Are we to be fearful and nervous as if we had no experience of war?
  - To go on to the battlefield is as good as a festival for young men!
  - Anyone who stays in town, be he a prince, will not be satisfied with bread alone;
  - He will be vilified in the mouths of his own people, and dishonored.
  - How can he raise his hand against one who goes on the battlefield?
  - However great the strength of one who stays in town,
  - How can he prevail over one who has been on the battlefield?
  - City food, however fancy, cannot compare with what is cooked on the embers.
- c. Discussion on this epic poem contrasted with Psalm 35:
  - i. Peoples of the ancient Near East understood the brutality of war from firsthand experience. In the Bible and elsewhere we see reflections of the dread of its destructiveness, but we also see examples of a “warrior creed” that glorified war and conquest.
  - ii. The Akkadian epic of Erra and Ishum focuses on Erra [aka Nergal] a god of war and destruction, black headed and the lord of the underworld. In the myth Erra has been lethargic but threatens to arouse himself and massacre the “black headed people” meaning the Mesopotamians. Erra is urged on by a group of seven warrior gods but in the end the situation is defused by the counsel of the god Ishum.
  - iii. Of particular interest is the manner in which the seven [Assyrian] warrior gods urge Erra to rouse himself for battle. They inform him that staying home is effeminate and childish; the battlefield is the province in which a man gains honor. The fancy cuisine of the city, they claim, cannot begin to compare with food roasted over embers out in the field or water drunk from a skin. Furthermore, it is a disgrace to allow weapons to rust or become covered with cobwebs [due to unuse]. They exhort Erra to slaughter his opponents and thus to terrify the world. Their words probably reflect the militaristic ideology of the actual Assyrian soldiers -a perfect example of a warrior creed.
  - iv. **How Psalm 35 is strikingly different** – it is a prayer by David for God’s help in battle. Nevertheless, the Psalm offers a helpful point of comparison because it illustrates the contrast of the ideology of David who was also a warrior. There is no glorification of brutality here; to the contrary, David condemns those who declare war without cause (vs 19-21). As elsewhere in the Psalms, David appealed to God’s Justice. Most significantly, by

pleading for God to intervene on his behalf, David repudiated the notion of gaining glory for himself by his own talent, belligerence, or aggression.

- v. **In contrasting and evaluating ancient thematically similar documents, it is important to notice the subtle as well as obvious differences. Pagan gods were mean, self-centered, vain, capricious, ignoble and exhibited the more base aspects of human relational qualities... in other words, the gods are dragged down to the human level. While Biblical Scriptural counterparts demonstrate that God is completely different... God is kind, loving, sacrificially 'other centered' and seeks to elevate humanity to a higher level. Because of David's relational connection to God and his understanding of God's Greatness, David is confident God can be trusted to do His part. Listen to David's confidence expressed in Psalm 23:**

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
He leads me beside quiet waters,  
He restores my soul.  
He guides 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 love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.

**d. CONCLUSION:**

The point of this comparison of Psalm 35 and the Epic Poem of Erra and Ishum is to illustrate the difference between Biblical Godly Character and Pagan worldly passion. Between the Nobility of God, and the ignominious conduct of Pagan gods and humanity who follow them. This disparity of character is clearly displayed in a variety of ancient faith-documents I have read... including the Bhagavad-Gita, Teachings of the Buddha, The Qur'an, Black Elk Speaks, and many others. Biblical Scripture is distinctly different... instead of being "humanity looking upward" in a desperate search for truth, the Bible is God declaring Truth downward so humanity may know Him and please Him... the Bible is a long Love-Letter and the Self-Revelation of God.