

Ir-ot-25
Let Every Thing That Hath Breath Praise the Lord
(The Psalms)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is more understanding about the prophecies in the Psalms and their fulfillment by Christ. Also included is a description of how the Psalms were translated and a very brief playlet derived from that process, showing why they are so beautiful.)

- I. In spite of David's weaknesses, he became a prophet in his writing of the Psalms.
- A. Jesus Christ Himself said the Psalms bore witness of Him.
 "...all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44).
- II. The Spirit moved upon David so that when he spoke of his own experiences, he raised them into prophecy --- using phrases far beyond his own experiences.
- A. Note particularly how verses 13-18 in Psalms 22 describe Christ's crucifixion. [Such as his hands and feet being pierced; that his garments were divided by lot].
 - B. But note that crucifixion as a form of punishment was not established until 1,000 years after David. And in particular, that Jesus' crucifixion had occurrences experienced by no other; such as the parting of his garments by lot.
 - C. Thus David's writings, while germinating from his own sufferings (being hated with attempts on his life for the sake of his anointing), were magnified so that they actually fit Christ's experience! How marvelous are the prophecies of God!
 - D. Obviously the spirit was working through David which enabled him to express future experiences far beyond his own similar, personal ones.
- III. Further, David felt grief for his own sins, but the Spirit magnified them into an expression of Israel's grief for *their* sins. The Psalms speak for a scattered Israel longing to return.
- A. "Have mercy upon me, O God ... blot out my transgressions.... Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shall thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness" (Psalm 51:1, 18-19).
 - B. In many psalms David, an outcast at times himself, speaks in behalf of scattered Israel, such as:
 "O God, thou has cast us off, thou hast scattered us... O turn thyself to us again"
 Psalms 60:1)
 - C. Also, David, in returning to God, expresses the joys of Israel's future redemption:
 "Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.... Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my law giver... Who will bring me unto the strong city?... Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off..." (Psalm 60:3,7, 9-10).
 - D. David even wrote a psalm which spoke of Solomon's ascending the throne, but which prophesies of Christ, of His Second Coming and Millennial Reign.
 - 1. Review Psalm 72:2, 6, 8, 11. This Psalm, while initially of Solomon, prophesies of Christ's Second Coming and of His glorious reign.
 - 2. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said,

“Those with spiritual insight find in the Psalms priceless pearls of wisdom and revelation. Truly, their pleasant words and sweet similitudes open the eyes of our understanding with reference to the coming reign of the Son of David [i.e., Christ].” (*Millennial Messiah*, p. 594.) (Emphasis added).

IV. It is fascinating to learn how our English version of the Psalms came to be so beautifully expressed.

- A. By the early 1600’s, several versions of the Bible had been translated by people of differing faiths. In an attempt to obtain one final version that would satisfy everyone, King James assembled over 50 scholars to prepare a new translation. Part of the final process was to compare and choose from among many translations. The Bishop’s Bible was to be considered first, then other translations in comparison.
- B. A brief playlet first reflects this process. Then a lengthier study and explanation is given:

Bishop’s Bible Reader: “God is my shepherd...”

All others: “Wait!”

Geneva Bible Reader: “‘Shepherd’ is the correct meaning, but to begin by saying God is too abrupt. The rhythm is awkward. There is no melody to the line.”

Great Bible Reader: “Moreover the Hebrew word is ‘Jehovah’ that Coverdale and others have translated as ‘Lord.’”

Geneva Bible Reader: “Yes and the Geneva Bible gives a superior wording for the whole line, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd.’”

Bishop’s Bible Reader: “Make a note of that. And let us continue. ‘Therefore I can lack nothing.’”

Geneva Bible Reader: “That is a correct translation. But there is more simplicity and power in the Geneva Bible’s rendition. ‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.’”

Bishop’s Bible Reader: “Okay make a note of that. Let us continue. ‘He will cause me to repose myself in pasture full of grass.’”

Great Bible Reader: “The Great Bible states: ‘He shall feed me in a green pasture.’”

Geneva Bible Reader: “The Geneva Bible agrees on this and gives a valuable alternative. ‘He maketh me to rest in green pasture.’”

Bishop’s Bible Reader: “‘He maketh me...’ The alliteration is very effective. It gives it rhythm. But make me to what? ‘Repose myself’ and ‘rest’ both suggest the same thing. But how else could it be said if the Lord were a shepherd and I were a sheep?”

Great Bible Reader: “It doesn’t say this in any of the current translations. But how about ‘He maketh me to lie down?’”

All others: “‘Lie down’ is much better!”

Bishop’s Bible Reader: “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.’ Very good. Make a note of that. Let us continue...”ⁱ

Following is a more thorough explanation of how Psalm 23 was translated, provided by Margaret Tuttle Sanchez, “How the Psalms Were Prepared for King James,” *Ensign*, 1974, p. 39. It is based on historical accounts of how the translation process was carried out. Each translator, working on the set of scriptures they were translating, such as

Psalms, held a previously translated version in his hand. The Bishop's Bible was supposed to be the main translation considered, so its translation was read first. The group was then to choose from all the various translations that which was the best. We can see that by reading out loud the different translations, and seeking the best one, much of the Bible was put into a translation that was very pleasing to the ear, and thus they created a translation that is very moving to the soul.

From Sister Sanchez' article:

"With such considerations in mind, let us attempt to recreate the scene as one of these scholars takes up his copy of the Bishops' Bible and begins to read from the Twenty-third Psalm:

"God is my shepherd. ..." "Wait!" There is a chorus of exclamation. There is no question of going back to the Latin Vulgate, *Dominus regit me*, meaning that the Lord rules or governs me. All present agree that "shepherd" is the correct meaning. But to begin by saying "God" is too abrupt. The rhythm is awkward. There is no melody to the line. Moreover, the Hebrew word is *Jehovah* that here and elsewhere Coverdale has translated as the LORD, using capital letters. And besides, the Book of Common Prayer and the Geneva Bible both agree that there is a superior wording: "The Lord is my shepherd." The reader continues: "Therefore I can lack nothing." This is better than the inversion in the Prayer Book, "Therefore can I lack nothing," but it does not equal the simplicity and power of the Geneva version, "I shall not want." This is it, a line with dignity and beauty of movement: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

"Again, the Bishops' version is read: "He will cause me to repose myself in pasture full of grass." The Prayer Book (Great Bible) version states, instead, "He shall feed me in a green pasture." But why the future tense? Coverdale originally used the present tense, "He feedeth me." The Geneva text agrees on this point and contributes a valuable alternative: "He maketh me to rest in green pasture." "He maketh me"—how effectively the rhythm is enhanced by the alliteration. "To what?" "Repose myself" and "rest" both suggest the same thing. But how else could it be said, if the Lord were a shepherd and I were a sheep?

"He maketh me to *lie down*"—here the committee has had inspiration. The words are not in any of the English texts before them, but they agree to adopt them. "He maketh me to lie down in green pasture." "Why not green pastures?" a new voice asks. Perhaps one of the group has glanced at an English paraphrase of the psalter, the one Anthony Gilby published in 1580, translating from the Latin the paraphrase of the psalter prepared by the Frenchman Theodore Beze (known as Beza in England).

Gilby was one of the translators of the Geneva Bible and his reputation is sound as that of Beza. "Green pastures" suddenly sounds universal. Coupled with the use of the

present tense, the line takes on immediacy and significance for each follower of the Good Shepherd. It is accepted.

“And he will lead me unto calm waters.” The future tense has already been vetoed. Geneva, Coverdale, and Gilby all say, “And leadeth me.” Someone makes an astute observation: there is more balance and dignity if the “he” of the Bishops’ version is retained but all the “ands” are dropped. “He leadeth me”—it is a good beginning. There is a choice of prepositions: “to”? “unto”? “by”? “forth”? “beside”? “Beside” is chosen. Shall it be “calm waters,” “the pleasant rivers of waters,” “a fresh water,” “the waters of comfort”? The Geneva version triumphs again with the quiet beauty and appropriateness of “the still waters.” “Green pastures” and “still waters” now balance perfectly:

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”

“The line surpasses those of all earlier texts; it bears the stamp of excellence so characteristic of the King James version.

“The Bishops’ Bible continues: “He will convert my soul; he will bring me forth into the paths of righteousness for his name [name’s] sake.” This version closely parallels the tense and wording of the Great Bible: “He shall convert my soul, and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” It is the Latin Vulgate that said, *Animam meam convertit*, suggesting the word *convert*, so frequently used in English translations.

“The Hebrew word *yeshubeb* also suggests a turning and can be translated “he turns back.”² Coverdale says, “He quickeneth,” but Geneva, still unerringly retaining Coverdale’s present tense, changes the word to *restoreth*, as does Gilby. For the latter part of this verse, there is substantial agreement among texts. Except for the repeated *he* that the committee chose again in place of *and*, however, the Geneva version can be said to supply the entire line: “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

“The reader resumes: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff be the things that do comfort me.” All are listening attentively, and this sounds superb, until the awkward phrase “be the things that.” “Yea though I walk” sounds better than the words “though I should walk,” used by Coverdale and Geneva. All are willing to accept “thy rod and thy staff” in place of Coverdale’s “thy staff and thy sheepphook.”

“The Great Bible (Prayer Book) version agrees exactly with the Bishops’ Bible regarding the word *staff* and then slices away the words, “be the things that do comfort me,” to conclude simply, “comfort me.” But is that enough? Rhythmically, it is almost too abrupt.

Again the Geneva Bible contributes the perfect balance; “thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” Both the Latin and the Hebrew texts confirm this reading; the pronoun belongs there.

“The Bishops’ Bible goes on, in future tense: “Thou wilt prepare a table before me in the presence of mine adversaries.” This is a smooth and effective reading compared with that of the Great Bible: “Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me.” But here, quite literally, Coverdale in 1539 has followed the wording of the Latin Vulgate: *adversus eos qui tribulant me*. His 1535 version is better. Here we find the present tense, and the word *prearest*, instead of the expression “dost prepare,” used in the Geneva version.

“But it is the Bishops’ Bible that furnishes the indispensable phrase, “in the presence of,” which has a rhythmic movement superior to “in the sight of” and is far better than the term *against*. But *adversaries* does not seem to be the right word. Coverdale says instead, “mine enemies,” and so, too, does Gilby, and this is accepted.

“The reader continues: “Thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be brim full.” All the others say “dost anoint” or “hast anointed,” so again Coverdale supplies the effective present tense: *anointest*. The expression “brim full” is delightful and possibly acceptable, were it not for the more excellent alternative in the Geneva text: “my cup runneth over.” The goodness of the Lord is limited if the cup is filled only to the brim; his graciousness actually exceeds our capacity to receive. This interpretation is not suggested in the Latin Vulgate or in the other English translations, and here the Geneva translators have made an outstanding contribution to the final text of the King James version of the Twenty-third Psalm. Nor is its meaning the only excellence of this clause, for in the very sound of the words, the stressed syllables of *runneth* and *over* suggest the full cup, while the cup’s overflowing is suggested by the unstressed syllables that follow.

“Pieced together as it may be, there is a fine sweep and harmony in the verse as it now stands: “Thou prearest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.” The “and,” which in every other version precedes “my cup,” is here omitted by decision of the committee, and the result is a considerable increase in forcefulness as the statements decrease in length.

“Coming to the final verse, the reader of the Bishops’ Bible resumes his text: “Truly felicity and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of God for a long time.” Everyone agrees on the words, “shall follow me all the days of my life,” for there has never been any confusion about the meaning of the Latin *subsequetur me omnibus diebus vitae meae*.

“Again, the word *Jehovah* occurs in the Hebrew, and this will be given as the LORD, rather than as *God*, in the chosen text. But shall we say, “Truly felicity and mercy?” “Doubtless kindness, and mercy?” “But thy loving kindness and mercy?” Or shall we choose to plead, “Oh let thy loving kindness and mercy follow me”? At this crucial point, the scholar who looks at Gilby’s paraphrase sees the words: “And surely thy goodness and mercy shall follow me.” This is it! Let us not say “Truly” or “Doubtless,” but let us say “Surely,” for what the Lord does is certain and sure.

“We can omit “and” and “thy,” but not “surely” and not “goodness” and “mercy.” So here, Gilby’s text has made an unmistakable contribution to the shaping of the Twenty-third Psalm. All agree that “I will dwell” is preferable to “I shall remain,” which is given in the Geneva version. Now what shall we do about the concluding words, so grandly expressed in the Latin *in longitudinem dierum*? The Hebrew means much the same: “unto the stretched-out days,” as one translator interprets it. ³ “For a long time” sounds very weak in comparison, and so does Geneva’s expression “a long season.” Here we return to the wording of the Great Bible.

“The beloved Prayer Book version begins with the words, “The Lord is my shepherd,” and it ends: “and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Appropriately, then, the King James text does likewise.

“In this manner, the committees of scholars unerringly conserved all that was gracious and dignified and beautiful from the cherished versions of the past. Moreover, what was done with the Psalms was accomplished in general with the entire King James version of the Bible.”

Some may have questions about how the same verses could be translated differently. But remember that in translating there is usually more than one way the concept can be expressed. Also, there may be no one word that has exactly the same meaning. Translating from one language to another is very challenging. So we should be very grateful for those who worked so hard and so cooperatively to bring us such a beautiful, inspiring translation of the Psalms.
