

**Psalm 23: Lessons from Its Translation from the Early Church until Today**  
**Part 1—The Ancient Versions**

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**Introduction**

The “Shepherd Psalm” has enjoyed high favor in the Christian church from the earliest days. Its popularity began early (e.g., Augustine’s and Jerome’s homilies and Eusebius’s commentary). In the early Syriac “Liturgy of St. James” Psalm 23 was recited in full. Sunnias and Fretela (A.D. 403) disputed Jerome’s *calix meus* (“my cup”) in verse 5 because of the LXX’s ποτήριόν σου (“your cup”). The 8th-century Latin Vulgate codex (Amiatinus, A.D. 690-716) adds *vox ecclesiae post baptismum* (“the voice of the church after rapture?/harassment?") to the superscription. Readings in the LXX, Syriac, Origen’s Hexapla, and Vulgate reveal a number of interpretive issues faced by the early Church. Some of those issues continue to this day. How do the same issues manifest themselves in later Bible translations?

A recent deviation test analysis of modern English translations seems to indicate that projects that allow translators greater freedom in handling this well-known text (e.g., HCSB, NIV, and NRSV) tend to be more accurate representations of the Hebrew than versions too closely tied to the KJV tradition (e.g., NKJV, NASB, and NASU).<sup>1</sup> What are the lessons we might learn from the history of translations of Psalm 23 from the early Church until today? This first part begins the study with a survey of the treatment of Psalm 23 by the ancient versions: the Greek Septuagint, the Aramaic Targum, the Syriac Peshitta, Origen’s Hexapla (serving also as a source for the Greek translations of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion), and the Latin Vulgate. Although the Aramaic Targum is not a Christian translation, it reveals the Jewish hermeneutic that at times impacted early Christian interpretive methodology. This stage of the research is vital, since many of the variations in the translation of Psalm 23 can be traced to one or more of these ancient versions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

## Comparative Analysis of the Ancient Versions

v	Hebrew (MT) <sup>2</sup>	Greek Septuagint <sup>3</sup>	Aramaic Targum <sup>4</sup>	Syriac Peshitta <sup>5</sup>	Latin Vulgate <sup>6</sup>
1a	מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד	ψαλμὸς <sup>7</sup> τῷ Δαυιδ	תּוֹשְׁבַחַתָּא לְדָוִד	ܩܘܠܘܒܐ ܕܐܦܢܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ: ܡܠܘܚܘܒܐ ܕܐܦܢܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܐܦܢܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ.	<i>psalmus</i> [canticum] <i>David</i>
b	יְהוָה רֹעֵי	κύριος ποιμαίνει με	יְהוָה רֹעֵי ית עמיה לְעַמִּיָּה בְּמִדְבָּרָא	ܩܘܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܡܝܐ ܩܘܕܝܫܐ ܕܥܡܝܐ	<i>Dominus reget</i> [pascit] <i>me</i>
c	לֹא אֶחְסֵר:	καὶ οὐδέν με ὑστερήσει	לֹא אֶחְסֵר: כּוֹלָא:	ܡܠܟܐ ܕܐܦܢܝܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ.	<i>et nihil mihi deerit</i>

## Verse 1

**1a (Heading):** There is no significant variation in the psalm heading itself except in the popular edition of the Peshitta, which has “Prophecy concerning the return of the people and the narration concerning the rest that will meet with them after departing from

<sup>2</sup> K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990), electronic ed., BibleWorks Version 6.0.011y (Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, 2 vols., 9th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971), electronic ed., BibleWorks Version 6.0.011y (Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The Targum material is derived from the Hebrew Union College CAL (Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon) project per Lagarde, *Hagiographia Chaldaice* with variants from Luis Díez Merino, *Targum de Salmos. Tradición sefardí de Alfonso Zamora. Edición Príncipe del Ms. Villa-Amil no. 5*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto ‘Francisco Suárez,’ 1982. Electronic ed., BibleWorks Version 6.0.011y (Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, 2003). For an excellent annotated translation, see David M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible 16 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>5</sup> D. M. Walter, ed., *The Book of Psalms, The Old Testament in Syriac According to the Peshitta Version II/3*, ed. by The Peshitta Institute (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1980). Unfortunately, this edition omits all psalm headings without explanation.

<sup>6</sup> Bonifatio Fischer, Iohanne Gribomont, H. F. D. Sparks, and W. Thiele, eds., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1983), electronic ed., BibleWorks Version 6.0.011y (Norfolk, Va.: BibleWorks, 2003). For the Latin Vulgate there are two versions of the Psalter: *Psalterium Gallicanum* (the Latin translation of the LXX) and *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* (the Latin translation of the Hebrew text). For the purpose of this study, the chart cites *Psalterium Gallicanum* and places variations represented by *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* within square brackets.

<sup>7</sup> Theodotion and Origen agree, while Aquila has μελώδημα and Symmachus ὠδή. Fridericus Field, ed., *Origenis Hexaplorum*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim, Germany: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), 2:120.

<sup>8</sup> חַבְלֵי מַגֵּן [ktb’ qdys’] (reprint; London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1954), 353.

Babylon.” Such an interpretive heading is an obvious post-exilic addition replacing the traditional Hebrew heading, “A psalm of David.” It is possible that the scribe for the Latin Codex Amiatinus<sup>9</sup> created his heading for Psalm 23 on the instigation of the Syriac psalm heading.

**1b:** LXX interprets the 1cs pronominal suffix as an object suffix rather than a possessive genitive. Charles and Emilie Briggs argue that the parallelism requires just such a treatment.<sup>10</sup> It is followed in this by the Peshitta and both versions of the Vulgate. The Gallican Psalter’s *reget* means “he guides” as compared to the Hebrew Psalter’s *pascit*, meaning “he pastures” or “he feeds.” Such a translation merely focuses on one particular aspect of shepherding—perhaps because verses 2 and 3 focus on the shepherd’s task in leading or guiding his sheep. The Peshitta’s *nr’yny* is related to the Hebrew root רעה. The Greek, Syriac, and Latin all substitute an equivalent of אדוני for יהוה as the divine title. Paraphrastic and interpretive elements arise in the Targum of the Psalms: “It is (י) YHWH who fed (רין from ון) his people in the wilderness.”<sup>11</sup> One of the themes in the paraphrastic expansion of this psalm is that of the wilderness experience of Israel. Note, also, the references to manna and quails in verse 3 and manna in verse 5. While we readily acknowledge the paraphrastic and interpretive nature of the Targums, we sometimes ignore the reasons for such expansions. It is not too much to grant the Targumists their desire to make the Hebrew Bible “as intelligible as possible to people with a social, cultural and linguistic context different from that in which the Bible was written.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the Targum on the Psalms tends to lean toward interpreting the text for readers. Sometimes this method is consistent with the Jewish hermeneutic called *drash*. Psalm 23 in the Targum reflects a translator’s reflection on Israel’s wilderness experience.<sup>13</sup>

**1c:** MT negates the verb while LXX turns the negation into a substantival concept: “nothing” (οὐδέν), a translation decision that the Vulgate chose to follow. Although the Syriac ties the negative to the verb, like the MT, the addition of חסר indicates an approach similar to that of LXX. The Targum exhibits this same rendering by its use of כולא. Continuing the interpretive application to Israel’s wilderness experience, the Targum reads, “they did not lack (חסר, 3cpl) anything.”

<sup>9</sup> See Ernst Würthwein, *Der Text des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung in die Biblia Hebraica*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1973), 204-5 (Plate 43): *psalmus David vox ecclesiae post raptismum*.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary (reprint; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1987), 1:211.

<sup>11</sup> כולא במדברא might mean “while his people were in the wilderness.”

<sup>12</sup> Josep Ribera, “The Targum: From Translation to Interpretation,” in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context*, ed. by D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara, JSOTSS 166 (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 218.

<sup>13</sup> Moshe J. Bernstein, “A Jewish Reading of Psalms: Some Observations on the Method of the Aramaic Targum,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. by Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 94 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 495.

2a	בְּנֵאֹת דְּשֵׂא יִרְבִּיצְנִי	εἰς τόπον χλόης ἐκεῖ με κατεσκήνωσεν	בְּאֶתֶר צִיחָתָא צְהוּתָא בְּהַנִּיית דִּיתַאִין יִשְׂרִינְנִי	ܘܥܠ ܡܝ ܡܢ ܗܘܘܬܐ ܥܠ ܡܝ ܢܝܚܝܐ ܡܝ	<i>in loco pascuae ibi me conlocavit</i> [in pascuis herbarum adclinavit me]
b	עַל-מִי מִנְחֹת יִנְהַלְנִי:	ἐπὶ ὕδατος ἀναπαύσεως ἐξέθρεψέν με	עַל מִי נִיחִיא מוּי דְּנִיחַ דְּבִרְנִי:	ܘܥܠ ܡܝ ܡܢ ܗܘܘܬܐ ܥܠ ܡܝ ܢܝܚܝܐ ܡܝ	<i>super aquam [aquas] refectio- nis educavit</i> [enutrivit] me

## Verse 2

**2a:** The LXX presents a fairly straightforward translation, employing a resumptive construction by means of εἰς . . . ἐκεῖ (“unto . . . there”), which the Gallican Psalter manages to reproduce with one change: *pascuae* (“of pasture”) for χλόης (“of green grass”). The Hebrew Psalter represents a literal translation of the MT. In the Syriac, a conjunction is added at the beginning of the verse for smoothness in transition from the preceding verse. Also, ܘܥܠ ܡܝ ܡܢ ܗܘܘܬܐ refers to “a large meadow,” in an attempt to depict the pasture as abundant in grass. The verb (ܥܠܡܝܐ) could be translated “looses me” or “makes me rest” (from ܥܠܡܝܐ). In the Aramaic Targum, the translator offers an explanatory expansion: “In a place of severe thirst among beautiful plants he makes me rest.” It is possible that the Targumist (הַנִּיית) derived the Hebrew נִיחִיא from נָאָה (“be comely”).<sup>14</sup> The Aramaic verb (יִשְׂרִינְנִי) is identical to the Syriac.

**2b:** ἐξέθρεψέν in the LXX translation shifts the thought to “he nourishes” (ἐκτρέφω). The Targum doubles the phrase (מִי נִיחִיא) to emphasize the great restfulness or gentleness of the waters themselves, but retains the verb “lead” (דְּבִרְנִי). The Syriac Peshitta is a near duplicate of the Targum, minus the doubling of the phrase “waters of rest.” In the Vulgate, *refectio-  
nis* introduces the idea of “restoration” while the Gallican Psalter’s verb (*educo*) can represent either “nourish” or “lead.” However, the Hebrew Psalter’s *enutrivit* (*enutrio*) unambiguously denotes “nourish.” Thus, a number of the ancient versions chose a second possible

<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Aquila’s translation makes the same association as the Targum: ἐν ὀραϊότητι πόας κατεκλινέ με (“in beautiful grass he makes me recline”)—Field, 2:120.

meaning of the Hebrew root נהל that Moses also employed in Genesis 47:17 (בָּלַחֵם וַיִּנְהֵלֵם, “then he provided them with food”).<sup>15</sup> Both the Aramaic and Syriac chose the connotation of leading.<sup>16</sup>

3a	נַפְשֵׁי יִשׁוּבָב	τήν ψυχήν μου ἐπέστρεψεν	נפשי ייתוב במנא ופסיונין	ܢܦܨܝܐ ܡܝܢܐ	<i>animam meam convertit [refecit]</i>
b	יִנְחֵנִי בְּמַעְגְלֵי-צֶדֶק	ὠδήγησέν με ἐπὶ τρίβους δικαιοσύνης	דברני בהלכות צדקא צדיקי	ܡܢܚܝܢܐ ܡܢܚܝܢܐ	<i>deduxit me super [duxit me per] semitas iustitiae</i>
c	לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:	ἕνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ	מטול גבורת שמייה:	ܡܠܘܟܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ	<i>propter nomen suum</i>

### Verse 3

**3a:** Although most commentators tend to ignore the problem, the translator and exegete must determine the meaning of שׁוּב in the first line of verse 3.<sup>17</sup> ἐπέστρεψεν in the LXX clearly indicates the sense of “convert” (from ἐπιστρέφω)—clearly reflected in the Gallican Psalter by *convertit*. One could argue that the Peshitta followed the LXX with its translation employing the Aphel of ܢܦܨܝܐ (ܢܦܨܝܐ). ܢܦܨܝܐ is the verb employed in the phrase ܠܥܠ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ (“turn to the Lord”), but Smith lists “to restore the soul” (perhaps derived from this verse?) as well.<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew Psalter, however, changes the Latin to *refecit* (*reficio*, “restore”). Such is also the obvious meaning of the Targum, since it adds “with manna and quail” (בְּמַנָּה וּבַצִּיִּי). Symmachus, favoring “he revived me,” translated the clause, ἀνεκτήσατό με (with ἀνακτάομαι).<sup>20</sup>

**3b:** All of the ancient versions translate this line of verse 3 with the same meaning and very similar phraseology.

<sup>15</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic ed., rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. by M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2000), נהל, pi. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Leading is also the meaning conveyed by Aquila’s διαβαστάξεις. Symmachus chose to follow something nearer to “nourish” by translating it as ἐτημέλησέ με (“cared for me” or “looked after me”)—Field, 2:120.

<sup>17</sup> For a commentator who does deal with the problem, see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 110: “the two senses [“convert” and “restore”] evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be.”

<sup>18</sup> J. Payne Smith, ed., *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1903), 450.

<sup>19</sup> A Greek loanword normally meaning “pheasant” (Stec, 61).

<sup>20</sup> Field, 2:120.



**4d:** Just the paraphrastic Targum displays a variation in translation here: דמימרך בסעדי (“your Memra is my support”). The divine Memra occurs in the Targum of Psalms “exclusively where God and humans relate to one another, as a device for keeping a proper distance between them.”<sup>23</sup> In this particular occurrence it has the potential of being hypostatic and perhaps is used to “obviate anthropomorphism.”<sup>24</sup>

**4e:** Interpretive expansion accounts for the Targum’s תיגראך תריצא ואוריתך (“your straight staff and your law”), an obvious use of an allegorical hermeneutic.

**4f:** All ancient versions are identical down to the emphatic personal pronoun.

<b>5a</b>	תַּעֲרֶךְ לְפָנַי   שְׁלֶחֶן	ἤτοιμασας ἐνώπιόν μου τράπεζαν	סדרת קדמי פתור מנא זקיף	סגולא סגולא פלגיא	<i>parasti in conspectus meo mensam [pones coram me mensam]</i>
<b>b</b>	נַגַּד צַרְרִי	ἐξ ἐναντίας τῶν θλιβόντων <sup>25</sup> με	קבל מעיקיי	למסבא תלובבא .	<i>adversus eos qui tribulant me [ex adverso hostium meorum]</i>
<b>c</b>	דְּשַׁנְתָּ בַשֶּׁמֶן רֵאשִׁי	ἐλίπανας ἐν ἐλαίῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν μου	דהינתא בעופיא פטימא גושמיה ובמשח רבותא ריש כהניי	אדסנא זיג, כחצנא	<i>inpinguasti in [delete in] oleo caput meum</i>
<b>d</b>	כּוֹסֵי רוּחָה:	καὶ τὸ Ποτήριόν σου μεθύσκον ὡς κράτιστον	כלידי רווחא:	חבס, תרסא ארץ גא .	<i>et calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est [calix meus inebrians]</i>

## Verse 5

**5a:** Targumic variation continues with מנא זקיף (“manna is raised up”), an example of double translation to give two different explanations for a Hebrew word (here, שְׁלֶחֶן). The repeat appearance of manna (cp. v. 3) reminds the reader of the translator’s application of this psalm to Israel’s wilderness experience.

<sup>23</sup> Stec, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Cp. Marcus Jastrow, comp., *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, 2vols. (Brooklyn, N.Y.: P. Shalom Pub. Inc., 1967), 1:775.

<sup>25</sup> Symmachus translates as ἐνδεσμούντων με (“who tie me up” or “who bind me”)—Field, 2:121.

**5b:** As in verse 1, LXX takes the relationship of the 1cs pronominal suffix on the participle as an objective genitive. It is no surprise that the Gallican Psalter accurately reflects the LXX’s rendition. The Peshitta’s ܩܠܝܢܝܘܢ is an interesting translation—it is the same as בְּעַל זְבוּב in the OT (2 Kgs 1:2, 3, 6, 16—cp. Βεελζεβούλ in Matt 10:25; 12:24, 27; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15, 18, 19).

**5c:** The Targum contains the only variation: “you make my body fat with stout birds and the head of my priests with the oil of anointing.” Here is yet another example of double translation. קיי is literally “make fat” (cp. MT, רשן) and can also refer to anointing. In order to fill out the double meaning, the translator inserted extra referents (“my body,” “stout birds,” and “my priests”), thus rounding out a picture of divine blessing and prosperity.

**5d:** From the early Church, the last clause of verse 5 has been a matter of contention. It was the subject of one of Jerome’s letters defending his Latin translation of the Psalms. Writing to Sunnias and Fretela, he argues that the Greek τὸ ποτήριόν σου is in error and that other versions,<sup>26</sup> the LXX, the Hebrew, and all expositors follow the Hebrew כּוֹסִי which is equivalent to *calix meus*.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the Targum’s כלידי is probably a loanword from the Greek κάλυξ or the Latin *calix* (from which English obtained “chalice”).<sup>28</sup> The LXX employs a circumlocution (μεθύσκον ὡς κράτιστον = “filled as the best” = *inebrians quam praeclarus est* [Gallican Psalter]) to express the superfluity of drink represented by an overflowing cup. Perhaps we could translate the Greek and Latin circumlocutions as “filled as full as possible.” The Syriac adds the conjunction for ease of transition. It also approximates the LXX’s comparison, but with a specific object of comparison: ܕܥܝܢܝܘܢ ܕܥܝܢܝܘܢ (“satiated as *with* life”).<sup>29</sup> Both the Targum and the Hebrew Psalter follow the Hebrew literally without circumlocution.

<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Jerome is referring to Aquila and Theodotion who both employed ποτήριόν μου—Field, 2:121.

<sup>27</sup> J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Latinae: S. Hieronymus*, Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina Prior 22 (Paris: Garner Fratres, 1877), 1:843 (Epist. 106): “Pro quo in Graeco legisse vos dicitis, *calix tuus*: sed hoc in Κοινη̄ errore obtinuit. Caeterum et Septuaginta, et Haebraicum, et omnes Interpretes, *calix meus*, habent, quod Hebraice dicitur CHOSI: alioquin si *calix tuus*, esset, diceretur CHOSACH.”

<sup>28</sup> Stec, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Weitzman suggests parablepsis (the eye jumping from ܕܥܝܢܝܘܢ to ܕܥܝܢܝܘܢ in the next line of the Hebrew text) as the reason for the addition of ܕܥܝܢܝܘܢ (“like life”). M. P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 56 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18. However, the LXX had also employed the element of comparison, but without “life.”

v	Hebrew (MT)	Greek Septuagint	Aramaic Targum	Syriac Peshitta	Latin Vulgate
6a	אֲדָרָא טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי	καὶ τὸ Ἐλεός σου καταδιώξεταί με	ברם טבתא טיבותא וחסדא ירדפונני	ܐܘܒܪܘܬܐ ܕܝܘܡܝܢܝ ܝܪܕܦܘܢܝ .	<i>et misericordia tua sub-</i> <i>sequitur me</i> [sed et benignitas et miseri- cordia subsequetur me] <i>omnibus diebus vitae</i> <i>meae</i>
b	כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי	πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς μου	כל יומי חיי	ܟܠܝܘܡܝ ܚܝܝܝ .	<i>et ut inhabitem</i> [et habitabo] <i>in domo</i> <i>Domini</i>
c	וְשַׁבְּתִי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה	καὶ τὸ κατοικεῖν με ἐν οἴκῳ κυρίου	כד אתיב בבית מקדשא דיהוה	ܕܐܘܬܝܒ ܒܒܝܬ ܕܡܩܕܫܐ ܕܝܗܘܐ	<i>in longitudinem</i> [longitudine] <i>dierum</i>
d	לְאֲרָךְ יָמִים:	εἰς μακρότητα ἡμερῶν <sup>30</sup>	נגדא דיומנא דיומיא:	ܠܥܘܠܡܝܢ ܕܝܘܡܝܢܝ .	

### Verse 6

**6a:** Interestingly, the LXX and both Latin Psalters employ a simple conjunction to begin this verse, rather than to use something more emphatic to represent אֲדָרָא. On the other hand, the Peshitta leaves the particle out completely, even though the Aramaic Targum found an emphatic particle to employ (ברם). The LXX translator also chose to omit “goodness” (the only one of these ancient versions to do so<sup>31</sup>). The Gallican Psalter, of course, follows suit. The Peshitta utilizes the root ܝܘܡܩ for חֶסֶד, perhaps to avoid the more common homonym ܪܘܚܘܬܐ meaning “reproach,” “shame.”

**6b:** No variation exists among the ancient versions.

**6c:** This section of the psalm is one of the most debated with regard to the identification of the root for וְשַׁבְּתִי. Is the root יָשַׁב, שָׁוַב, or שָׁבַת? LXX translators understood the first root (יָשַׁב = κατοικέω).<sup>32</sup> Both versions of the Latin Psalter agreed with the LXX (both *habito* and *inhabito* = יָשַׁב)—the added *ut* in the Gallican Psalter is the translator’s way to reproduce the resultative force of LXX’s infinitival construction (τὸ κατοικεῖν με). In addition, both the Syriac Peshitta and the Aramaic Targum took the Hebrew as a form of יָשַׁב. The Targum’s מְקַדְּשָׁא is an explanatory addition: “the house of the sanctuary of YHWH.”

<sup>30</sup> Symmachus: εἰς μῆκος χρόνου (“for a long time,” literally “unto length of time”)—Field, 2:121.

<sup>31</sup> See Field, 2:121, for the various Greek translations catalogued by Origen, which include “goodness” (including Symmachus, for example).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.; Symmachus has (καὶ) κατοικήσεις μου (“and my dwelling”).

**6d:** All of these ancient versions translate the Hebrew literally. The Targum’s **דְּיוֹמְנָא דְּיוֹמְיָא** is just a stylistic variant to express the plurality of extension.

### Conclusions

Evidence gathered from this brief study of the ancient versions’ treatment of Psalm 23 can be utilized in the description of the translation techniques and translation philosophies of those versions individually and collectively.<sup>33</sup> With the primary exception being the Targum, the ancient versions maintained a fairly literal translation of Psalm 23. Even the Targum, however, clearly possessed a Hebrew base virtually identical to the MT, since additions were interpretive expansions of the Hebrew that we still possess. Interdependency shows up exactly where we expect it: the Gallican Psalter reveals its dependence upon LXX.

The translations of **יְנַהֵלֵנִי** in verse 2 revealed a propensity among some of the versions to emphasize the nourishing and caring aspect of the shepherding metaphor, while others emphasized the guiding and leading aspect. Such variation demonstrates that the translators were wrestling with the psalm as a whole and not translating word by word or even phrase by phrase. In verse 3, **יְשׁוּבֵב**, **נַפְשִׁי** was translated with a sense of conversion except in the Targum, Symmachus, and the Hebrew Psalter of the Latin Vulgate. It is possible that the sense of restoration and refreshment came about through Jewish translations during the early centuries of the Church. It makes one wonder if such translations might have been reactions to Christian exposition.

The versions reveal a variety of techniques. Double translation characterizes sections of the Targum of Psalm 23. Circumlocution was employed by the LXX and Peshitta at the end of verse 5. The emphatic particle **אֵל** at the beginning of verse 6 is variously ignored (Peshitta), translated by a simple conjunction (LXX), represented by compound particles (Hebrew Psalter in Latin Vulgate), or translated by a single equivalent particle (as in the Targum). In at least one case (the Peshitta’s translation of **חֶסֶד** in v. 6), the translator(s) were careful not to employ a homonymous form that could lead to a misunderstanding.

In regard to text critical studies, the ancient versions give very little support to any emendations of the text of Psalm 23. Every translation is explainable on the basis of the existing Hebrew text—especially if careful attention is given to translational factors rather than adopting a narrow word-by-word evaluation.

Future amplification of this study will focus on early Church expositors and their citations of Psalm 23 and on the various translations of the Psalm from the Reformation to the modern era. Such a study has the potential of revealing hermeneutical methodologies as well as translation techniques and philosophies. One factor to be examined is that of dependence on the ancient versions.

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<sup>33</sup> An excellent study of ancient translation technique and philosophy that interacts with the LXX as well as the Targums is Staffan Olofsson, *The LXX Version: A Guide to the Translation Technique of the Septuagint*, Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series 30 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990).

Appendix A: Evaluation of Translations of Psalm 23<sup>34</sup>

v. 1	MT	מזמור לדוד יהוה רעי לא אחסר:		%
	Base	A psalm by David. YHWH is my shepherd, I do not lack.	12	100
	KJV	A Psalm of David. The LORD <i>is</i> my shepherd; I shall not want.	9.5	79
	NKJ	A Psalm of David. The LORD <i>is</i> my shepherd; I shall not want.	9.5	79
	NAS	<i>A Psalm of David.</i> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.	9.5	79
	NA U	A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.	9.5	79
	ESV	A PSALM OF DAVID. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.	9.5	79
	NRS	A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.	9.5	79
	CSB	A Davidic psalm. The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.	10	83

<sup>34</sup> William D. Barrick, "King James Only, Sometimes, Never: Examining the Modern Versions of the Bible" (unpublished paper, Shepherd's Conference, March 2005). Due to the constraints of space in the individual verse charts, I have shortened the longer acronyms for the versions to just 3-letter abbreviations. Full abbreviations will be used elsewhere.

NIV	A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.	10	83
TEV	The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.	6	50

## Observations on verse 1:

- Other than differences in italicization (NASB) and capitalization (ESV), all except HCSB and TEV treat the psalm heading the same. Omission = -4.0.
- A more accurate translation recognizes that the Hebrew preposition is a *lamed* of authorship (cp. the same usage in Isa 38:9; Hab 3:1).<sup>35</sup> The psalm is actually “by David.” Ambiguity = -0.5 point. HCSB’s “Davidic” is contrary to David as author. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- The verb in the first line of the text is absent, but understood, in the Hebrew noun clause. Italicization in KJV and NKJV is unnecessary, as evidenced by the treatment of the remaining translations.
- “The LORD” is the traditional rendering of the Tetragrammaton (יהוה = YHWH) first employed by the Septuagint translators because of a misinterpretation and misapplication of the Third Commandment.<sup>36</sup> In public reading there is no way for the hearer to know whether the divine title thus represented is *Yahweh* (LORD: יהוה = YHWH/Yahweh) or *Adonai* (Lord: אֲדֹנָי = “Master/Lord”). Translating both with the same word contributes to a confusion of divine names. Ambiguity = -0.5 point.
- Employment of a future tense for the Hebrew verb in the second line is due to a doubtful, but traditional, treatment of the imperfect in Hebrew as a present-future tense form. The context of this psalm and of this line (cp. the first line) indicates that the present would be more accurate. Inaccuracy = -1.0 point.
- “Want” is ambiguous in English and continues in use in translating Psalm 23 primarily due to familiarity with the KJV’s rendering of the psalm even among non-Bible readers. A smoother use of “lack” would be “I have no lack,” even though it changes the form to imply the negation of a noun (“lack”) rather than the Hebrew’s negation of the verb. Ambiguity = -0.5 point.
- NIV and HCSB exhibit the only substantial attempts to clarify the meaning of “want.” NIV’s is accurate and clear, but HCSB’s is potentially misleading. Ambiguity = -0.5.

<sup>35</sup> The *lamed* of authorship is really nothing more than the *lamed* of agency (cf. Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 114). In the psalm titles the verb (viz., כָּתַב) is elided—not an uncommon occurrence in the use of prepositions in biblical Hebrew (cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 224-25).

<sup>36</sup> Louis F. Hartman, “God, Names of,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 7:680.

- TEV's positive for negative in the final line is unnecessary and misleading. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- Principles derived from the examination of the translations of verse 1:
  - Principle #1:** Copula verbs understood in Hebrew noun clauses need not be italicized since they are part of the accurate translation into English. This verb is present in the Hebrew grammar even though not represented by a specific Hebrew word.
  - Principle #2:** Hebrew verb tenses need to be translated by context, not by form.
  - Principle #3:** Ambiguity in English should be avoided as much as possible.
  - Principle #4:** Treatment of the Tetragrammaton should not be based upon the erroneous interpretation of the heretical Jews of Alexandria, Egypt in the third century B.C. Clarity rather than confusion in public oral reading ought to characterize a translation's treatment of the divine name.

v. 2	MT	בְּנֵאֹת דֶשָׁא יִרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל־מִי מְנַחֵחַ יִנְהַלֵּנִי:		%
	Base	In grassy/green pastures He causes me to lie down, Beside calm water He leads me.	15	100
	KJV	He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.	15	100
	NKJ	He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.	15	100
	NAS	He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.	15	100
	NA U	He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.	15	100
	ESV	He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.	15	100
	NRS	He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;	15	100
	CSB	He lets me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.	14	93
	NIV	He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,	15	100
	TEV	He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.	12	80

## Observations on verse 2:

- Most versions are unusually accurate throughout.
- HCSB and TEV change the causative to a permissive (“lets”). Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- There are two Hebrew idioms in this verse: “pastures of vegetation” and “waters of rest.” The first refers to the fresh green of grass or other edible vegetation. “Green pastures” is an excellent rendering in English. The second refers to water that is not a rushing torrent with cascades and rapids. “Still” and “quiet” are both accurate translations for English.
- TEV substitutes “rest” for “lie down.” This is potentially misleading since the Hebrew verbs are different. Ambiguity = -0.5.
- TEV’s exchange of “to” for “beside” is potentially accurate, but interpretive. Ambiguity = -0.5.
- Expanding the final phrase, TEV again misrepresents the actual wording of the original. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- Principles derived from the examination of the translations of verse 2:  
**Principle #5:** Hebrew idioms should not be translated word for word, but according to their sense.

v. 3	MT	נְפְשִׁי יִשׁוּבָב יְנַחֵנִי בַמַּעַלְי־צְדָק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:		%
	Base	He revives/restores my soul, He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.	15	100
	KJV	He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.	13	87
	NKJ	He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.	13	87
	NAS	He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.	14	93
	NAU	He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.	14	93
	ESV	He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.	14	93
	NRS	he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.	13.5	90
	CSB	He renews my life; He leads me along the right paths for His name’s sake.	13	87

	NIV	he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.	15	100
	TEV	He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths, as he has promised.	10	67

## Observations on verse 3:

- TEV's interpretive translation obscures the potential reference to conversion in the text. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- The psalmist employs a different verb for "lead/guide" in this verse as compared to verse 2. That difference ought to be maintained in translation so that the reader understands that it is different. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- "Paths of righteousness" proves to be another point of differentiation between the translations. The Hebrew construction (בְּמַעַלְלֵי צְדָקָה, *bēma'g'lēy-tsedeq*) represents an indefinite rather than a definite noun phrase. No definite article appears in the text. "The paths of righteousness" is too specific as far as the grammar of the Hebrew is concerned. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- NRSV's "right paths" represents a different interpretation that can be taken as "correct paths" or "moral paths." Neither has any definite connection to the concept of "righteousness" in the Hebrew text. "Right paths" is overly interpretive. Ambiguity = -0.5.
- Both "life" (HCSB) and "me" (TEV) for "soul" is ambiguous = -0.5.
- "As he has promised" (TEV) is interpretive and obscures the original wording badly. Inaccuracy = -3.0 (for three elements of particle, noun, and pronominal suffix).
- Principles derived from the examination of the translations of verse 3:
  - Principle #6:** Different vocabulary words in the same context should be translated by different terms in the receptor language when possible.
  - Principle #7:** The absence of the definite article ought to be retained in translation unless other contextual or idiomatic factors indicate clearly otherwise.
  - Principle #8:** Interpretive translations should be kept to a minimum.

v. 4	MT	גַּם כִּי־אֵלֶךְ בְּגַיַּת צַלְמוֹת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתְּךָ הֵמָּה יִנְחֲמֵנִי:		%
	Base	Indeed, though I walk in a very dark valley, I do not fear trouble, Because You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, <b>they</b> comfort me.	27	100

KJV	Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou <i>art</i> with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.	23	85
NKJ	Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You <i>are</i> with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.	23	85
NAS	Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.	24	89
NA U	Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.	24	89
ESV	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.	23	85
NRS	Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff-- they comfort me.	26	96
CSB	Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.	27	100
NIV	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.	23	85

	TEV	Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd’s rod and staff protect me.	22.5	83
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Observations on verse 4:

- There is no article for “valley” in the text (Principle 7). NRSV’s “the darkest valley” resulted from attempting to be smooth and concise. The article was added due to proper English usage. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- Omission of “valley” (TEV) obscures the intended metaphor. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- “The shadow of death” is a Hebrew idiom (Principle 5) referring to deep darkness. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- The verbs (“walk,” fear,” “comfort”) are present by context (Principle 2). Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- In the Hebrew, רָעָה (*ra’*) in this context refers to “calamity” or “trouble” while the English “evil” implies something moral. Omission (TEV) is equally inaccurate. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- Providing an antecedent for the 2ms pronoun (TEV’s “Lord”) is unnecessary. Lesser inaccuracy = -0.5.
- The final line of the verse involves a compound nominative absolute (or, extraposition) followed by the emphatic personal pronoun before the verb. Although the emphasis is not possible to represent easily and smoothly in English, a careful wording of the absolute construction can help to imply it.
- TEV’s “protect” for the text’s “comfort” is inaccurate = -1.0.
- Principles derived from the examination of the translations of verse 4:  
**Principle #9:** When possible, emphasis ought to be expressed in the translation, but not at the expense of a smooth English translation.

v. 5	MT	תַּעֲרֵךְ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹחַן נֹגֵד צָרָיִךְ דִּשְׁנֵת בְּשֶׁמֶן רֹאשִׁי כּוֹסִי רוֹיֵחַ:		%
	Base	You arrange a table before me in front of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil, My cup overflows.	19	100
	KJV	Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.	19	100

NKJ	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.	19	100
NAS	Thou dost prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou hast anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.	18	95
NA U	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.	18	95
ESV	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.	19	100
NRS	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.	19	100
CSB	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.	19	100
NIV	You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.	19	100
TEV	You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim.	11	58

## Observations on verse 5:

- Again, the context requires present tense verbs (Principle 2). NASB and NASU are the only versions choosing to employ the English present perfect, which makes the action past. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- TEV’s expansion of “in front of my enemies” to say “where all my enemies can see me” contains two inaccuracies: the addition of “all” and the unwarranted restructuring of the statement. Inaccuracies = -2.0.

- TEV’s total interpretive restatement of the second line inserts potentially erroneous cultural detail (“honored guest”) and obliterates the psalmist’s actual statement. Inaccuracies = -5.0.
- In the Hebrew for “with oil” (בַּשֶּׁמֶן, *bashshemen*) the definite article is used, but it is the generic usage with a commodity or with the material used in connection with an action like anointing.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, its absence in English is accurate.
- TEV’s exchange of “fill to the brim” for “overflows” employs words that do not represent the original text. The reader would be unable to know what the psalmist actually said. Inaccuracy = -1.0.

v. 6	MT	אֵךְ טוֹב וַחֲסֵד יִרְדְּפוּנִי כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי וּשְׁבַתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:		%
	Base	Surely, goodness and loyal love will pursue me my whole life, And I will dwell lifelong in YHWH’s house.	19	100
	KJV	Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.	16	84
	NKJ	Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.	16	84
	NAS	Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	16.5	87
	NA U	Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	16.5	87
	ESV	Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	16	84
	NRS	Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.	17	89

<sup>37</sup> E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed., trans. and rev. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1910), §126n.

CSB	Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.	17.5	92
NIV	Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.	16.5	87
TEV	I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live.	13.5	71

## Observations on verse 6:

- “Only” in HCSB leads to a misunderstanding of the text. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- TEV’s “I know that” for “Surely” is an inaccuracy = -1.0.
- Adding “your” (TEV) to the two descriptive nouns in an inaccuracy = -1.0.
- The verbs in the context of verse 6 are obviously future because of references to the remainder of the psalmist’s life (Principle 2).
- That which is translated “mercy,” “lovingkindness,” and “love” in these versions is the Hebrew **חֶסֶד** (*hesed*) referring to “loyal love” or “steadfast love.” “Mercy” is inaccurate = -1.0; “lovingkindness” and “love” are closer = -0.5.
- “Follow” is a tame and potentially misleading translation of the much more aggressive “pursue” for **רָדַף** (*rdp*), but it is not so much a matter of absolute inaccuracy as ambiguity. Ambiguity = -0.5.
- Complete elimination of the preceding verb (“pursue”) by TEV is a misrepresentation of the text. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- As in verse 1, the divine name requires a less ambiguous translation for public reading. Ambiguity = -0.5.
- Elimination of the divine name (TEV) is an inaccuracy = -1.0.
- TEV’s “will be my home” for “I will dwell” is a misleading restructuring that obscures the original wording of the psalmist. Inaccuracy = -1.0.
- “Forever” is extremely unfortunate as a translation of **לְאֹרֶךְ יָמַי** (*l’orekh yamîm*, literally, “for length of days”), and idiom (Principle 5) meaning “lifelong.” It is in synonymous parallelism with the preceding phrase (“all the days of my life” or “my whole life”). Inaccuracy = -1.0.

### Concluding Statistics and Observations for Psalm 23 Translations

Version	Verse by Verse Score						Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
KJV	79	100	87	85	100	84	89.2
NKJ	79	100	87	85	100	84	89.2
NAS	79	100	93	89	95	87	90.5
NAU	79	100	93	89	95	87	90.5
ESV	79	100	93	85	100	84	90.2
NRS	79	100	90	96	100	89	92.3
CSB	83	93	87	<sup>38</sup> 100	100	92	92.5
NIV	83	100	<sup>39</sup> 100	85	100	87	92.5
TEV	50	80	67	83	58	71	68.2

Comparison with TEV shows the degree of literalness and accuracy in the eight selected versions. Those translations of Psalm 23 are obviously not free translations emphasizing dynamic equivalence. They are more formal in their renderings.

Why do HCSB, NIV, and NRSV outscore KJV, NKJV, NASB, and NASU? Part of the reason in this particular passage is the former three translations allowed their translators greater freedom in handling this very popular and well-known text. NKJV, NASB, and NASU basically followed the KJV with little variation, even if the translation proved to be technically inaccurate with regard to the original Hebrew. The high scores in Psalm 23, therefore, ought not be taken as indicative of the tenor of the rest of the OT in these versions. Other factors must be taken into consideration in evaluating a translation. For example, NIV's obvious penchant for the Septuagint in matters of textual criticism impacts the overall accuracy and consistency of its translation in the OT. Also, NIV will tend, at times, to be quite free with the text. Psalm 23's popularity may not have allowed the NIV translators to be as free with it as they might with less familiar and popular portions of the OT. It is possible, in any evaluation system, for a less accurate overall translation of the Bible to shine and excel in both accuracy and clarity in certain passages. It just so happens that Psalm 23 reveals the "Achilles heel" of the KJV/NKJV and NASB/NASU pairings. The newer translations remained too faithful to the KJV at the price of accuracy. Politics and commerce do not mix well with Bible translation, because accuracy is thereby jeopardized.

<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly, HCSB bettered all of the more literal translations in its accuracy for Ps 23:4.

<sup>39</sup> Such examples of accuracy in NIV when the more literal translations have failed, are the reason why its overall final score is higher. At least in Psalm 23, NIV has been more consistently accurate and literal than the other translations. Accuracy in Psalm 23, however, does not guarantee equal success for accuracy in the remaining translation of the OT.