



# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

Adversity is painful, yet none of us is able to escape it. Centuries ago, Job said: "People are born for trouble as readily as sparks fly up from a fire" (Job 5:7, NLT). In *Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges recalls being fourteen years old when his mother very suddenly died. Life became confusing for him, and "worst of all," he writes, "I did not know how to turn to God in times of trouble." Over time, and through his study of the Word, Bridges learned to trust God in adversity. "It was a slow and difficult process," he wrote. But as years passed God taught him that divine wisdom and love bear upon each trial. In short, *our wise and good God is sovereign in every event of our lives*. So in whatever trial you face, "Count it all joy;" God is working his plan (James 1:2)!



VBTS Old Testament professor Dr. Mark Hassler (pictured center, with sunglasses) is a field archaeologist and director of publications for the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR). The 2020 Shiloh Excavations, which had been scheduled for this past month, were cancelled due to COVID-19. But the date for next summer's excavations is set for May 16 – June 7, 2021. And for the ten days prior to the dig, Dr. Hassler will be leading an ABR tour of the Holy Land (May 7–16). Since the tour immediately precedes the excavation of Shiloh, tour participants may elect to stay for a few more days and experience the joy of being a part of the excavation team. Before the ABR team began working in Shiloh (Israel's first capital and earliest location of the Tabernacle; cf. Joshua 18:1), they excavated Khirbet el-Maqatir, the possible location of Ai (Joshua 7–8) and Ephraim, a city in Jesus' day (John 11:53–54). A final publication of the site is set to release in 2021, and Dr. Hassler is both the coeditor and contributor to volume 2.

*If you are interested in participating in the 2021 Holy Land tour or the Shiloh archeological dig, contact Dr. Hassler at [mhassler@vbts.edu](mailto:mhassler@vbts.edu).*



## *A Meditation of Psalm 23: “Experiencing Heaven on Earth”*

**Our world today** seems to be filled with darkness, turmoil, and volatile voices of hate. In times like these, the unchanging message of calm and rest in Psalm 23 is a welcomed respite. About 140 years ago, Charles Spurgeon called this hymn, “David’s heavenly pastoral,” and he observed, “[if] we enter into the spirit of the Psalm . . . then we shall experience the days of heaven upon the earth.” Let’s review a few insights from this song, and enter together into David’s experience of internal peace in the midst of the chaos of life.

**Verse 1:** The Psalm begins and ends (v. 6b) with “Yahweh” who is the theme of David’s words. Yahweh functions as a shepherd who provides for each sheep so there will be “no lack.” David is probably referring to Moses’ words in Deut. 2:7: “These 40 years Yahweh your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.” Wherever Yahweh leads, he provides—He can be trusted.

**Verse 2:** Yahweh’s provision for each sheep is “fresh grass” and “waters of rest.” Again, David is recalling Moses’ words in Num. 10:33 where the Ark of Yahweh went ahead of the children of Israel “to seek out a *resting place* for them.” Just as Yahweh sought a placid place in the wilderness for his people, so he seeks the same for David. This verse connotes the sheep resting comfortably because of their absolute confidence in the Shepherd.

**Verse 3:** The shepherd “brings back my life”<sup>1</sup> and “leads me down right paths.”<sup>2</sup> Life can be difficult and exhausting, and Alter posits, “the image is of someone who has almost stopped breathing.” Yet God revives and directs his steps (Prov. 3:6) “for his name’s sake.” This is the “climactic point of vv. 2–3”<sup>3</sup>—God acts according to his purpose on behalf of his sheep.

**Verses 4–5:** David switches to the second person when referring to Yahweh: “You are with me.” Even in the “valley of deadly shadows”<sup>4</sup> God’s presence (“rod and staff”) protects us. In fact, he prepares “a banquet of thanksgiving”<sup>5</sup> with foes all around us. God “moistens my head with oil,”<sup>6</sup> and “my cup overflows.” The “cup” relates to the experiences of life, just as Jesus said to the two brothers, “You will drink my cup” (Matt. 20:23). The point, says Alter, is that Yahweh will make our lives “luxuriant” when heaven’s happiness abounds in our hearts.

**Verse 6:** David concludes with two joyous thoughts. First, in all of David’s experiences, he recognizes that he is pursued by Yahweh’s goodness and love. Second, David’s greatest desire is to dwell in Yahweh’s house “for many long days.”<sup>7</sup> Such a statement represents David’s longing in life to enjoy the presence of Yahweh as did Moses in “the tent of meeting” (Ex. 33:7f).

It is one thing to read about “heaven on earth” from Psalm 23, but it is quite another to experience it. Such enjoyment boils down to one personal question: **Can you trust God?** Jerry Bridges declares this question to have a double-sided implication.<sup>8</sup> On one hand, can you trust God? Your view of God will determine if he is worthy of your full surrender. David made it clear in this Psalm that God is more than worthy of his confidence. On the other hand, can you trust God? To put it another way, do you consider God to be your Shepherd? If you say “yes, he is my shepherd,” then in good or bad times, you may experience “fresh grass” and “waters of rest.” May God grant you his rest, as you walk in a world that is full of confusion.

<sup>1</sup>Alter, 78; <sup>2</sup>NET; <sup>3</sup>Craigie, 207; <sup>4</sup>Motyer, 60; <sup>5</sup>Craigie, 207; <sup>6</sup>Alter, 79; <sup>7</sup>Ibid. 80; <sup>8</sup>Bridges, 16