

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast: 15/16 April 2023

No.: T1298

Speaker: David Anderson

The Messianic Psalms

Psalm 91

[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station. New King James Version of the Scriptures is used unless otherwise stated.]

Reading

I'll begin by reading Psalm 91 from New King James Version.

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.” Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.””

Introduction

Whilst only vv.11-12 are quoted in the New Testament, the whole of Psalm 91 is messianic. In this talk, I'll follow the suggestion that Psalm 91, viewed through the lens of New testament revelation, is a conversation between the three Persons of the Godhead:

1. V.1, the Spirit speaks to Messiah.
2. V.2, the Son, as Messiah, responds.
3. Vv.3-13, the Spirit replies.
4. Vv.14-16, the Father speaks about His Son.

Verse 1

Psalm 91 doesn't have a title nor is the psalmist's name stated, except in the Septuagint. Therefore v.1 provides the overall subject of the psalm -it's about the protection of Messiah's spirit, soul, and body, throughout His entire life upon earth. There's no doubt that Psalm 91 is about

Messiah. We've only to ask the question, "Who is the "He" in v.1", the one who "dwells in the secret place of the Most High?" No person, however godly, other than Christ, has had continuous close fellowship with God. John 1:18 states that He, the only begotten Son, is in the bosom of the Father. That's an eternal reality, that's His life and where He dwells -in that intimacy of eternal life with the Father, which is characterised by divine love. And there was no change in that togetherness with His Father when the Son became a Man and lived upon earth, for He always kept the Father's commandments and abode in his love (see John 15:10). He said,

"I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

The "secret place" in v.1 is translated as "shelter" by the English Standard Version. That seems to combine both clauses of v.1 and is helpful because the meaning of "secret place" is "a cover, a hiding place, a place of protection."

For Christ, communion with His God was a secret, private, personal thing (as it is for every godly person). He was often found alone in prayer to His Father, hidden away from His disciples and from public view. It was the secret of His spiritual strength. But, from time to time, the Gospel writers give us glimpses of this communion. For example, His earnest prayers in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). V.1 continues by identifying the place where Messiah abides as "under the shadow of the Almighty." The Spirit, through the psalmist, guaranteed the total and ongoing protection of Christ for all of His life, even through death itself. What an amazing promise! The word "shadow" means "a shade." The prophet Jonah found relief from the blazing sun and the scorching east wind under the shade of a plant God had especially prepared for him. It was much more effective than the hut-shelter that he'd made for himself, but it was temporary, only for a couple of days (Jonah 4:5-6). "The shadow of the Almighty" was a permanent protection for the whole of Christ's life from every evil listed in vv.3-7. Thus Psalm 91 celebrates the rights and prerogatives of the perfect Man, who was entitled to full security and blessing.

Verse 2

In v.2, Christ immediately responds to the Spirit with words of total commitment to Jehovah, which I'll paraphrase:

"As for Me, I will say of the LORD and absolutely mean it, "He Himself and no other is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will completely trust.""

Christ found in His God a place of shelter from all the evils that surrounded Him in His pathway on earth; and an absolute defence from all the attacks of Satan and his followers. Christ claimed God as His own, "My God", and was absolutely confident in His God's keeping power. Several psalms similarly express the godly's faith in Jehovah.² However, at times they doubted, and they relied upon themselves, or others, rather than God. But Messiah, the perfect Man, was totally dependent on His God. Christ always trusted God throughout life and through death, even with respect to His resurrection, His ascension, and His glorification to God's right hand – as He states in Psalm 16, the psalm of the dependent Man.¹

Before I move onto the next section of Psalm 91, I must highlight the fact that different names for God are used in vv.1-2. They are:

1. The Most High God, Elyon, the name of the one True God, whom everyone knew post-Eden onwards. Despite man's open rebellion in inventing and worshipping false gods, the one True God, the Creator couldn't be forgotten or erased from their minds. Abraham used this Name when speaking to men of the world; and there were those, like Melchizedek, who acknowledged Him. It seems that the Most High God, or God Most High, was the name used by those who had faith in Him, whenever they spoke about His supremacy over the

world, which had departed from Him. He remains supreme Sovereign over all the kingdoms of mankind! (see Daniel 5:21).

2. The Almighty God, El Shaddai, the One of complete power, who revealed Himself to Abraham (Genesis 17:1). Job knew Him as The Almighty, the all-sufficient One, who took care of His creation. In the English Standard Version, there's an informative footnote to Joel 1:15, which states that Almighty in Hebrew sounds like "Destruction." Joel describes the devastating judgements of the Day of the LORD. Psalm 91:1 states that Messiah benefitted from "the shadow of the Almighty", who was able to destroy all hostilities to His Christ!
3. The LORD, or "Yahweh", that's translated as "Jehovah" in some versions of the Bible. It is equivalent to "I AM", the Name which describes God's eternal and unchanging existence (see Exodus 6:3). It's as Jehovah that He's in covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. Both they, and their Messiah, can rely on His steadfast love for them and His protection because He never changes (see Malachi 3:6).
4. God, or Elohim, who is the Creator as stated in Genesis 1:1. To Messiah He is, "My God", with whom He has a personal relationship and therefore who both cares and protects Him.

Vv.3-13

On the basis of Messiah's interjection in v.2, the Spirit replies to Christ by describing, in vv.3-13, what abiding under the shadow of the Almighty means in practice. The "you" in these verses is singular and therefore applies primarily to Christ during His lifetime on earth. V.3 opens with the word, "Surely", which denotes the certainty of His total protection from all natural and spiritual dangers He encountered. Not security from, but security throughout or amongst His life. First, from "the snare of the fowler" (v.3a), which is a metaphor for all those human plots against Him (Mark 12:13):

"The wicked have laid a [hidden] snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts" (Psalm 119 v.110).

Those hunters included the Pharisees and the Herodians, who were sent to catch Him in His words (Mark 12:13). Later, the chief priests and the scribes consulted on how to put Him to death by deceitfully trapping Him (14:1). Their opportunity came when Judas Iscariot promised them that he'd betray Christ (14:10-11).

Second, from "the perilous pestilence" (v.3b), the very worst sinister and fatal diseases. V.4 describes how these deliverances happened. In tenderness, God covered Christ with His feathers so that, by faith, Christ found refuge under God's wings (v.4a). A mother bird takes her chicks under her wings so that they are completely safe.³ V.4 concludes by identifying Messiah's defence armoury. God's truth, or faithfulness (English Standard Version), is like both a large static shield and a small mobile buckler. The word of God was Christ's complete protection from any attack of His enemies.

In vv.5-6, the Spirit asserts that the guaranteed protections of vv.3-4, would enable Christ not to be afraid of any of these things which assaulted Him 24/7. There was the secret or unseen terrors of night-time, of being stalked by "the pestilence that walks in darkness." Then by day, those which were both open and seen: the arrow that flies and the destruction that devastates. Commentators present several explanations of what these actually were, but I think the words of vv.5-6 adequately provide the overall impressions of these, whether literal or metaphorical.

V.7 concludes that each and every attack on Christ failed and He was the glorious Victor. The "you" in v.7 is emphatic and the whole verse is a statement of exact, minute protection!

Furthermore, v.8 states that Christ would observe that every wicked agency received the appropriate punishment for assailing Him.

Vv.9-13

In the Darby translation, vv.9-13 form a new paragraph, which is introduced with an echo of v.2. I think that Darby's rendering of v.9 is most helpful:

“Because thou hast made Jehovah, my refuge, the Most High, thy dwelling-place.”

In addressing Messiah, the Spirit uses Messiah's own confession from v.2, “My refuge.” Also the Spirit highlights the fact that Messiah had made the Most High His dwelling place, which echos the words of v.1. So the promises of vv.10-13 are guaranteed to Messiah, because of His total reliance on Jehovah's protections. [As Moses sang](#):

“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, ‘Destroy!’” (Deut.33:27, NKJV).

Or, as the Spirit says to Messiah:

“No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling” (Psalm 91:10).

Moreover, in vv.11&12, the Spirit explains that God had specifically commanded His angels to guard Messiah at all times and in all circumstances. They were to carry Messiah in their hands to ensure that He didn't even accidentally trip up:

“Lest thy foot stumble against a stone” (v.12b, Darby).

In the Temptations of Christ, the devil recognised that vv.11&12 were spoken to Christ. Let's read Matthew 4:5-6:

“Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

Luke's record is the same except that he adds the words “to keep you” after the statement, “He shall give His angels charge over you.” When we combine these two accounts and then compare the devil's quotation with the actual words of Psalm 91:11-12, we notice that he omitted the words “in all your ways” from the end of v.11. Just as he did in the garden of Eden, the devil again showed his deceit in twisting the word of God for his own evil purposes. [But he didn't succeed with his, ‘Look-at-what-God-has-promised-for-you.-Go-on!-try-it-out-and-prove-it-to-be-true’ temptation of Christ. No!](#) Christ knew that God is always faithful to His word. Unlike Eve, He didn't doubt it. And He'd already proved it for thirty years! Using the word of God as His defence, Christ dismissed the devil's attempt:

“Jesus answered and said to him, “It has been said, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God’”” (Luke 4:12).

Unlike Adam, Christ was the ever-obedient One, the second Man, who is the Lord from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47). Matthew 4:7 states that the devil left Him and immediately angels came to

minister to Him, proof that they were discharging their responsibilities, and that God's promises of Psalm 91:10-12 were being fulfilled.

V.13 closes this section of Ps.91 with the Spirit promising that Messiah would tread upon the lion and the cobra; and trample the young lion and the serpent underfoot. This probably means that Messiah not only would have mastery over wild and fierce animals (cp. Mark 1:13), but also over those spiritual powers that they represent in whatever guise they came. "Lion" is usually translated "fierce lion" and shows that Messiah is all-powerful, even over the king of beasts. Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). [Jesus said that He was stronger than the prince of this world, who along with all his cohorts, was publicly cast out and triumphed over at the cross \(John 12:31 with Colossians 2:15\).](#)

The cobra, or asp, was known for its stealth and cruel venom (Deut. 32:33) and is an apt description of the devil and his forces, as well as evil men, who were hostile to Christ. Young lions are always hungry and seek to devour prey. These describe those who hunted Christ throughout His entire life to destroy Him. The serpent was some huge sea creature extant in Old Testament times. Messiah was able to break the head and slay this reptile of the sea, who represented the devil (see Psalm 74:13 & Isaiah.27:1).

vv.14-16

Vv.14-16 form the final section of Psalm 91, in which the Father makes promises to Messiah, His Son. Essentially, they reinforce the protections guaranteed by the Spirit. There are six "I will" statements.

V.14 opens with the reason for the first:

"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him."

Evidently the Hebrew for "love" is unusual. It means "to hug tightly in yearning love", that is, to cling, or hold fast, to a person. Christ, the perfect Man, [loved the Lord His God with all His heart and with all His soul and with all His strength and with all His mind \(Luke 10:27\)](#). He constantly relied upon God to deliver Him out of all the situations He encountered throughout His life. But especially when He entered into death. [When He hung on the cross, the Jewish authorities mocked and taunted Him by mimicking words of Psalm 22:8:](#)

["He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!"](#)

In desperation, He cried:

["Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen!"](#)
(Psalm 22:21)

and

["Save me, O God! For the waters have come...into my soul" \(Psalm 9:1, King James Version\).](#)

Hebrews 5:7 makes this observation:

"[Christ] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to [His God] who was able to save Him [out of, Darby translation] death, and was heard because of His godly fear."

The second “I will” of Psalm 91:14 gives the outcome of that deliverance:

“I will set [or, exalt (margin)] him on high.”

Psalm 68:18 prophesied of Messiah:

“You have ascended on high, [You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men.](#)”

[And](#) Ephesians 4:8 applies it to the Christ,

“Who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things”
(Ephesians 4:10).

God has placed Him there so that “in all things He may have the preeminence” (Col.1:18).

V.14 ends with the reason for Christ’s exaltation: “because he has known my name.” Christian believers know that name to be “The Father”, which the Son was given to reveal to His disciples in order to bring them into the secret of divine relationships (John 17:11-12, 26). But Messiah also knew the practical meaning of those four names of God mentioned in vv.1 & 2.

The third, fourth, and fifth, “I will” statements are in v.15. “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him” (v.15a) was the constant experience of Christ. [For example, at Lazarus’ grave He said:](#)

[“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. ...I know that You always hear \[and answer\] Me” \(John 11:41-42\).](#)

Perhaps His most unique experience was on the cross, when, having endured the wrath of God against sin, He prophetically said: “You have answered Me” (Psalm 22:21b). “I will be with him in trouble” (v.15b) finds its fulfilment in Christ’s comments about the desertion of all the disciples that followed His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane:

“Indeed the hour...has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32).

But also when He prophetically uttered:

“Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help” (Psalm 22:11).

It was as Man, that He was abandoned by His God upon the cross; but as Son, His eternal relationship with His Father cannot ever be interrupted.

“I will deliver him and honour him” (v.15c) is a repeat of “I will deliver him; I will set [or, exalt (margin)] him on high” (v.14). Christ was always obedient to His Father’s will, even to His death upon the cross. Therefore God highly exalted Him and honoured Him by bestowing on Him “the name which is above every name.” It’s the Father’s decree that Jesus must have the highest honour and be revered by all.

[At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, “of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth”, and every tongue will confess Him as Lord, to the glory of God the Father \(see Philippians 2:9-11\).](#)

V.16 brings Psalm 91 to a close with the final “I will”:

“With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.”

This promise is more fully described in Psalm 21:1-5:

“[Messiah] shall have joy in Your strength, O LORD; and in Your salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! You have given him his heart’s desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. ...For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head. He asked life from You, and You gave it to him—length of days forever and ever. His glory is great in Your salvation; honour and majesty You have placed upon him. For You have made him most blessed forever; You have made him exceedingly glad with Your presence.”

Yes, Christ is now crowned with glory and honour at God’s right hand in heaven (Hebrews 2:9 & 8:1). Peter preached to his fellows that God had made Jesus to be both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). In His everlasting kingdom:

“[Messiah] shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; so he shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between both offices” (Zechariah 6:13, with margin).

Thank you for listening to this talk Truth for Today, number T1298, on Psalm 91 in the Truth for Today ‘Messianic Psalms series’. All Scripture references are included in our website’s transcript of this talk.

Footnotes

1. Psalm 16 is also a Messianic Psalm. Although it was written by David, the apostle Peter stated in Acts 2:31 that he (David) “spoke of the Christ.”
2. For example: “Refuge” in Ps.14:6; 46:1; 61:3; 62:7-8; 73:28; 94:22; 142:5; “Fortress” in Psalm 18:2; 31:2-3; 66:11; 71:3; 144:2.
3. Many psalms liken God’s protection to the warm protectiveness of a parent bird:
 - a. Psalm17:8.
 - b. Psalm 36:7 exults in God’s lovingkindness:
 - b.i. “How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.”
 - c. Psalm 7:1 states the psalmist’s joy at being so protected.
 - d. Psalm 61:4.
 - e. Psalm 63:7.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.