

Israel's Hymnal
 Biblical Research Monthly
 May, 1944
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PSALM NINETY-ONE

[Pss 91:1] He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

[Pss 91:2] I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust.

[Pss 91:3] For he will deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, And from the deadly pestilence.

[Pss 91:4] He will cover thee with his pinions, And under his wings shalt thou take refuge: His truth is a shield and a buckler.

[Pss 91:5] Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, Nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

[Pss 91:6] For the pestilence that walketh in darkness, Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

[Pss 91:7] A thousand shall fall at thy side, And ten thousand at thy right hand; [But] it shall not come nigh thee.

[Pss 91:8] Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, And see the reward of the wicked.

[Pss 91:9] For thou, O Jehovah, art my refuge! Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation;

[Pss 91:10] There shall no evil befall thee, Neither shall any plague come nigh thy tent.

[Pss 91:11] For he will give his angels charge over thee, To keep thee in all thy ways.

[Pss 91:12] They shall bear thee up in their hands, Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

[Pss 91:13] Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: The young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot.

[Pss 91:14] Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.

[Pss 91:15] He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him, and honor him.

[Pss 91:16] With long life will I satisfy him, And show him my salvation.

Among all the Psalms that are quoted and loved, Psalms 23 and 91 possibly are the favorites of most people. The former is very easy to be understood; but the latter is more difficult. David was the human author of Psalm 23. We do not know who wrote Psalm 91. It is not necessary for us to know the human agent whom God chose. This is God's Word and we rejoice in it.

This passage naturally falls into two divisions: I. That which was sung by the first soloist (vss. 1-13); II. That which was sung by a second soloist (vss. 14-16). The first portion naturally divides into the following sections: A. The security of the believer (vs. 1); B. The psalmist's testimony (vs. 2); C. The promise to the Jews of the Tribulation (vss. 3-8); D. The address to King Messiah (vss. 9-13). The second section also falls into the following divisions: A. The exaltation of Messiah (vs. 14); B. The preservation of Messiah in the times of trouble (vs. 15); C. The eternal existence guaranteed to Messiah (vs. 16).

I. Message of the first soloist (vss. 1-13)

A. The security of the believer (vs. 1)

In verse 1 we have the promise of security and preservation to all who take refuge in God. Proof that this is a general proposition is found in the very statement itself: "He that dwelleth ..." This is one of those "whosoever" verses of the Scriptures. Anyone--Jew or Gentile--can flee to God for refuge and can dwell under the shadow of the Most High. God will protect him and everything that comes into his life will be designed for his own good--even though at the time the person may not be able to understand how God can work things out for his good. Every believer should take his stand upon this verse and look to God to overrule in his life, protecting him while here below and taking him home to glory when life's pilgrimage here is over.

B. The testimony of the psalmist (vs. 2)

In verse 2 we have the psalmist's own confession: "I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust." In other words, the psalmist in verse 2 was declaring that he had taken his stand upon the general promise of God's protecting the believer. One must by absolute trust appropriate the promises which God has made in His Word. A person must, however, be absolutely certain that the promise has been made to one in his position. In other words, one must not pick out the promises of God throughout the Scriptures indiscriminately, ignore the facts of the contexts, and claim just any of them. He must look at the time that the promise is made; by whom it was uttered; and to whom it was given. If a study of all the facts shows that a person is eligible to take hold of such promises, then he may, in absolute unswerving belief, take his stand upon the promise, and God will make it good.

Since verse 1 is a universal promise--to everyone who will trust--the psalmist could take his stand upon that promise--as he did--and expect God to protect him and make good every element of the promise. The soloist who sang this to the congregation at the Temple was supposed to have appropriated this promise by faith just as a soloist today who brings a message in song certainly should be sincere and should mean everything that he sings. If he cannot sing it truthfully and from the depths of his heart, he should not bring any message in song. Someone has said that more lies are told in the singing of psalms and hymns than any other way. I fear that there is more truth than poetry in this statement. Every worshipper should be very careful and should think about the sentiment of the song which he is singing before he attempts to repeat the words. If he cannot sing from the depths of his heart any song or any portion of it, he should not sing it. Especially should those who bring messages to a congregation of God's people be very careful along this line. They should know the meaning of the song and should in all sincerity and faith sing its message. If they cannot do this, they should remain silent.

C. The promise to the Jews of the Tribulation (vss. 3-8)

In verses 3-8 are found some wonderful promises. During World War I many relatives and loved ones bade farewell to their men folk who went off to war. They took their stand upon these verses for the protection and safe return of their loved ones. Many of them never came back. At the present time there are many consecrated Christians who are likewise taking their stand upon these verses in behalf of their loved ones as they go off to war. Thus they look to God to fulfill this promise in behalf of their loved ones. Many of these consecrated ones will be sadly disappointed that their loved ones never return. (I am judging the

present by the past.) Has God failed in His promise? No believer can accept such a conclusion. If Christian people take their stand upon these verses in behalf of their loved ones and if God does not fulfill this promise contained therein in their behalf, then something is very radically wrong. Is the trouble with God? Never! Then it must be in our interpretation of the promise. We must now look carefully at what the passage actually says.

Let us in this connection bear in mind in verse 1 the sentence is in the third person--"He that ..." in verse 2 the standpoint has shifted to the first person--"I will say of ... *My* refuge and *my* fortress ..." But in verse 3 the standpoint has again shifted and is that of the second person: "For he will deliver *thee* ... shalt *thou* take refuge." "Thee" and "thou" figure throughout these verses (3-8). They therefore constitute a unit within the psalm.

Who is referred to by these pronouns? Since the psalmist was singing his message to the Jewish people at the temple, it is clear that the pronouns "thee" and "thou" refer to the people of the audience. We must also bear in mind that the Book of Psalms is Israel's hymnal. Since this was one of the messages to be sung to the congregation, the pronouns in the second person can refer to no one but the Jews. But has God fulfilled this promise to the Jews throughout the past? So far as history shows, He has not. He certainly has not fulfilled it to the Gentiles; nor has He in anywise thus far made this promise good to the Jews. But since it is a special promise to them, since it has never been fulfilled to them in any particular, and since God fulfills His Word as He gives it, we must look at the facts to determine what is the trouble--if any.

I may compare these verses (3-8) to a check that is post dated. Such a check will not be honored by any bank until the date indicated on the check arrives. These verses constitute a postdated check, so to speak, which God made to the nation of Israel, and He has designated the time when He will fulfill it. The date is found in verse 8: "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, And see the reward of the wicked." God promises to fulfill the message of these verses in the time when He rewards the wicked. When this expression is studied in the light of related passages, it becomes evident that the time mentioned is none other than that of Jacob's trouble--Tribulation. Thus in effect God has promised to Israel that in the Tribulation He will make the promises found in this section of psalm 91 to the faithful remnant who take refuge in the shadow of the Almighty. Since this is a postdated check made in favor of Israel which God will honor in behalf of the faithful remnant of Israel in the Tribulation, it is illogical for Christian people today to ignore these facts and claim God's protection of their loved ones now. These facts show why it is that He has not honored this promise in the behalf of the myriads of His faithful children that have taken their stand upon it.

If my reader will only study these verses in the light of the facts to which I have just called attention, he will see that the time here foreseen is one of warfare and of special judgment from God in the form of pestilence and epidemics. At that time the pestilence, epidemics, and weapons of war will destroy the wicked in Israel--as well as those among the Gentiles--but will not touch the faithful remnant, for "A thousand shall fall at thy side, And ten thousand at thy right hand; *but* it shall not come nigh thee." This same promise of protection is made to the faithful remnant of Israel of the end-time as is seen in Isaiah 33:13-16. Not only is protection promised, but even food and water are included in the things that will be given them. This same promise likewise is made to the same faithful remnant of Israel in Isaiah 65:13 and 14.

It is therefore illogical for us to ignore the facts of the context of Psalm 91 and claim these promises for ourselves and loved ones.

There are sufficient promises made to "whosoever will" found throughout the Scriptures, and there are special promises in the New Testament which God has made to His people today. Let us take hold of them and take our stand upon them and God will fulfill them to us. But let us avoid misinterpreting the Scriptures and forcing upon them any construction which the language will not bear.

D. The address to King Messiah (vss. 9-13)

In verses 9-13 we have language that is addressed to King Messiah by the first soloist as he sang his part. In our imagination we can see the soloist as he stood before the congregation in the Temple singing verses 3-8, directing his message to their heart. Then suddenly turning from the audience he addresses King Messiah who appears in vision to him and speaks the words found in verses 9-13. That this portion of the psalm is directed to King Messiah is evident from verse 9 which reads as follows:

9 For thou, O Jehovah, art my refuge!
Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation.

Unfortunately, the text of the Common Version does not bring out clearly the exact thought of the original Hebrew as is the case in the Revised Version which I have just quoted. It is clear from this rendering that the psalmist turns from his audience and addresses Jehovah who appears to him in vision. In the first line he expresses his conviction that Jehovah is his refuge. In other words, he has taken his refuge in this Jehovah. The second line of this quotation is parallel to the first one and reads as follows: "Thou hast made the Most High thy habitation." This Jehovah in whom the psalmist has taken refuge in turn has made the Most High (God the Father) His habitation. Thus there are two Jehovah's here mentioned: Jehovah in whom the psalmist has taken refuge and Jehovah who is the habitation of the Jehovah--Redeemer. In other words, we see here two persons of the Holy Trinity: God the Father and God the Son. The psalmist certainly was a Trinitarian. He believed Israel's Great Confession which is (literally rendered): "Here, O Israel Jehovah our Gods is Jehovah a Unity." A person must accept the doctrine of the Trinity or he cannot understand many of the vital passages found throughout the Old Testament as well as those in the New.

After having addressed Jehovah the Messiah, the psalmist declares that God would take care of the Messiah during His earthly pilgrimage. When He is upon the earth, He is the God-man, God in the human form who enters the world by miraculous conception and virgin birth. He was perfect man and at the same time perfect God. These truths are set forth in the New Testament very clearly as well as in the predictions found here and there in the Old Testament. God promises in this section (vss. 9-12) to take care of the Messiah under all conditions.

Verse 13 declares:

13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder;
The young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot.

These words are likewise addressed to Messiah. In verses 10-12 Messiah is on the defensive and God is protecting Him. But in verse 13 He is no longer assuming this attitude but is rather on the offensive. This section (vss. 9-12) was fulfilled when our Lord was here upon the earth the first time. But was verse 13

fulfilled then? Did Jesus tread upon lions and adders? Did He trample upon young lions and serpents? No, He was not a snake killer, neither was He a big game hunter. To take this language literally is to make nonsense of it. It must therefore be used in a figurative sense. The lion in metaphorical or symbolical language always signifies a human government (Dan. 7:17,23). The serpent is a symbol of Satan (Rev. 12:9). When Christ was here upon the earth, did He thus deal with human governments and with Satan as is here indicated? All will answer in the negative. But since the promise is a positive one and since it has not yet been fulfilled, we may be certain that it will be an accomplished fact when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again. When He returns to take up the reigns of control, He will destroy the government of the Anti-christ, will bind Satan, and cast him into the pit of the abyss for a thousand years. Thus verse 13 refers to events connected with our Lord's return, whereas verses 10-12 speak of His first coming. Between verses 12 and 13 the entire Christian Dispensation is passed over in silence.

II. The message of the second soloist (vss. 14-16)

In the last three verses of this psalm we have the language of the second soloist, who chimes in with the message of the first soloist to King Messiah. In this section the singer is impersonating God the Father. My reason for saying this is that he, the soloist, promises to deliver King Messiah from all His difficulties and to set Him upon high, to raise Him from the dead, and to give Him eternal existence. Since the soloist could not do this, and since only God the Father could do this for God the Son, we may be certain that the second soloist was impersonating God the Father who delivers a threefold message to the Son during the period of His humiliation here upon earth.

A. The exaltation of Messiah (vs. 14)

In verse 14 the Father promises to save the Messiah from all of His adversities and to set Him upon high -to give Him a place at His right hand, exalted in the heavens.

B. The preservation of Messiah in times of trouble (vs. 15)

In verse 15 He promises to take care of Him and to be with Him in all the trouble through which He passes and to honor Him.

C. The eternal existence guaranteed to Messiah (vs. 16)

In verse 16 He promises long life and salvation to the Messiah. Salvation here means deliverance from the situation in which He finds Himself; namely, from death. The long life here promised is that of eternal life. Of course the Son has eternal life in Himself because He is God, but here He is presented as the God-man who suffers, dies, and who goes down into Sheol according to Psalm 16 but from this place God delivers Him. Thus we have in these concluding verses God's promise to Messiah of vindication, deliverance from all troubles in this life, and final deliverance from Sheol and the grave and ultimate exaltation at His right hand in glory.

The message of this psalm is what Israel needs. Every Christian should know what is the teaching of Psalm 91 in order not to take a stand upon a passage which God promised to Israel alone in the time of the Tribulation.

It is all right for us to interpret a passage, arriving at the exact meaning which God had in view. Then when we discover a principle set forth in any passage and we see a case that is analogous to the one to which

the principle has been applied, we may apply it to the similar situation today. By so doing we will not be violating any of the fundamental principles of interpretation.

May the Lord bless this exposition of this portion of His precious Word to the heart of the reader is my prayer.