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BIBLICAL TOPICS FOR STUDY – PSALM 91

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Psalm 91 (NIV)

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

3 Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.

4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart [NRSV: his faithfulness is a shield and buckler].

5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

9 If you make the Most High your dwelling— even The LORD, who is my refuge— [NRSV: Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place],

10 then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent [NRSV: no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent].

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone [NRSV: On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone].

13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent [NRSV: You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot].

14 “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name [NRSV: Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name].

15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him [NRSV: When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them].

16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” [NRSV: With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation].

Although Psalm 91 has no proven author, it was most likely written by David, and it is one of the protective psalms for those who truly believe in the Lord and act sincerely toward Him.

Let's study verse by verse:

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."



'He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High' means that one who trusts in God always lives beside Him and is covered by His protective and mighty hand, as if it were a shadow or the hiding place of a safe place, and there he finds rest. Shadow conveys the idea of protection from the excessive heat of the sun, that is, from natural dangers. Then the psalmist affirms his trust in God and writes that He is his refuge and fortress. Fortress is an impregnable stronghold, a safe place, a support. This also suggests a protection against human dangers, that is, the Lord protects him from his carnal enemies; He puts him in a place where they can't reach his anointed one. David experienced this kind of protection when he fled from Saul and even in the land of the Philistines. They could never find him or stop him.

Then, he begins to describe His protection over unseen things like the power of darkness and the divine judgments themselves:

3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.



The fowler's snare is a trap to catch birds, and that means the dangers that can befall the naive and helpless, those who do not watch over. Do you know something as innocent as a bird? In addition to the fowler's snare, the psalmist also reports the 'deadly pestilence', that is, in addition to the invisible bonds that can try to bind a child of God, other things can affect him, such as the pestilence, i.e., various types of disease. The Hebrew word for 'pestilence' in this text (דֵּבֶר, *deber*, Strong #1698) can mean epidemics that afflict human beings, livestock or other animals or even pests in the field, and has the meaning of destroying. Therefore, the original Hebrew text can also be translated as 'He will deliver you from the deadly plague' or 'He will deliver you from the threat of destruction', which comes intentionally and maliciously. Therefore, David says that whoever walks constantly in the presence of the Lord can feel safe and protected under the shadow of His hand from all kinds of enemies. And he can also be sure that if he is caught by surprise by something like this, the Lord will always be ready to deliver him, for whatever He allows, He allows for a purpose, which is to glorify His name. Some scholars wonder if it was not Moses who wrote this psalm, for he witnessed the plague as a form of God's judgment against His rebellious people and saw God's work in Egypt. However, David also experienced the plague that was sent by God when he took the census without His permission, and came across the Angel of the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan).

The next verse he says:

4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart [NRSV: his faithfulness is a shield and buckler].

Once again the psalmist compares the protection of the Lord with the wings of a bird, as Jesus Himself said when weeping for Jerusalem that He has longed to gather His children as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing (Matt. 23: 37-39; Lk. 13: 34-35). In Greek, the word 'wing' is *pterux* ('a wing'), *πτερυξ*, Strong #G4420, meaning a wing, pinion. In Hebrew, the word used in this psalm for feathers is *ebrah* (עֲבָרָה), Strong #84, which means feather, wing. And for 'wings' ('and under his wings you will find refuge') the word is 'kanaph', the same used in Rut. 2: 12

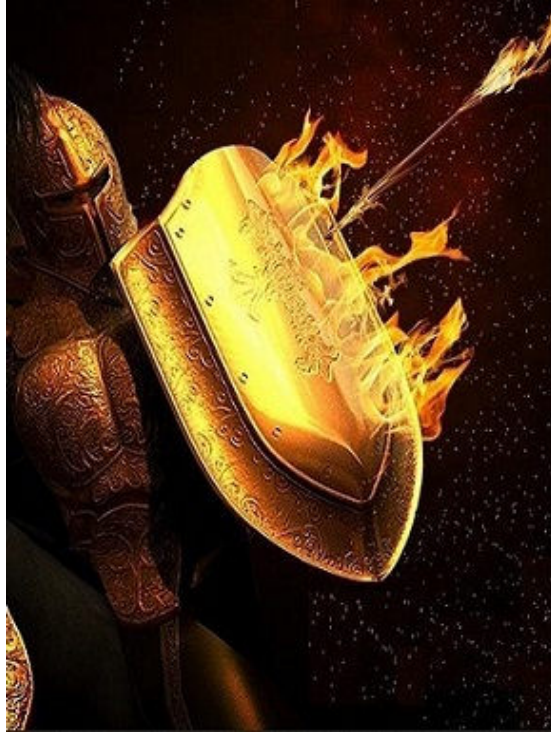
(wings), Rut. 3: 9 (the corner of your garment – NIV) and 1 Sam. 24: 4; 5 (cloak). In Hebrew, the word *kanaph* (כַּנָּף) – Strong #3671 – has several meanings: mantle, cloak, wing or winged (bird), shirt, skirt, corner (of a garment or bed-clothing), border, an edge or extremity (of a bird or army), flap, a pinnacle, covering, protection. Therefore, it has the connotation of covering, dominion, possession and protection, as seen in marriage proposals (Ruth and Boaz, for example, in Rut. 3: 9: “He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.’”). Thus, the psalmist sought refuge under the protective mantle of the Lord, under His wings, as the wings of a mother bird protect her young (Ps. 61: 4; Ps. 63: 7).



Then he says that the faithfulness of God is like a shield, both big and small.

He says: “his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart [NRSV: his faithfulness is a shield and buckler].” The shield (Hebrew, *çinnâ* or *tsinnah*, צִנָּה, Strong #6793; in Greek, *thyreas*, from *thyras* = door) was the name given to the large shield; and ‘buckler’ (מָגֵן *mâghen*; Ez 38: 4 – Strong #4043) means the smaller one. The buckler was an ancient shield, round and small, held by a strap or worn on the forearm. The shield implied a greater protection as something surrounding the person, that is, the Lord’s protection around His anointed ones. In other words, he says that God will be shield to protect us in battle, and a buckler behind which we can hide and defend ourselves.

5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,



The Hebrew word used here for ‘terror’ is pachad (Strong #6343; פחד), which means: terror, horror, dread, dreadful, fear, greatly feared, a sudden alarm, a great fear of something (like death, for example).

Here, the psalmist speaks of the calamities that can befall people both day and night, but God will always be attentive to His children at all times.

The terror of night can refer to the terrible things that happen at night such as enemy invasions, murders, robberies and assaults, even fire and storms. And ‘arrow that flies by day’ may be related to the judgments of God, such as the sword, famine and pestilence, called arrows of God – Deut. 32: 23-24; 42; Ezek. 5: 16. It can also continue the theme of war (shield and buckler), which he mentioned in the previous verse, that is, the weapons that our enemies wield by day. If we focus on the spiritual side of this verse 5, we can say that God gives us strength and protection against the hidden things (‘night’) that are plotted against us and against the clear and overt threats (‘day’). And it reinforces the idea that those who believe in the Lord need not live in fear of anything at all, for they have the guarantee of His protection and deliverance when it is necessary. Although the Lord often does not exempt us from the trials of life, He assures us of His presence with us, giving us security in all situations. He did not give us a spirit of cowardice [NIV: timidity], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim. 1: 7). He also did not give us the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but He gave us a spirit of adoption, and with Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’, for we are His children (Rom. 8: 15; Gal. 4: 6-7).

6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.



David returns to use the images of sickness and death when speaking of the pestilence and the plague that destroys (‘nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday’ – cf. 2 Chr. 6: 28: the prayer of Solomon). Pestilence here may refer to an infectious disease affecting livestock or other animals; an epidemic among people or a pest of crops; something that conveys the feeling of destruction (deber, דִּבְרָה, Strong #1698), and that stalks in the darkness, that is, that appears in obscurity, secretly. At that time, they did not have the scientific knowledge of today to detect or control the epidemics that afflicted people, neither the pests among animals nor the pests in the fields. And when he says ‘the plague that destroys’, namely, destruction and devastation, it’s logical that it’s something quite destructive. It is not just epidemics or plagues, but wars against enemies, leaving many dead and injured. David fought in many wars against Israel’s enemies, so he says in verse 7: “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” He had the strength of the Spirit of God upon him and the approval of the Lord, so he could safely say that even if many fell in combat or other calamities beside him, either on his right or on his left hand, it would not come near him; on the contrary, he would still standing to fulfill the mission he had received from God. His victory was certain such was the confidence he had in the Lord. When he was still a boy and killed Goliath, he felt victorious because he recognized that his deed did not come from his own strength, but from the power of God. We have to face our personal battles with this boldness and this confidence within us that many on our side may give up and fall, but the Lord takes us forward until we achieve the victory He promised us. So he goes on saying:

8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.



The plagues that God sent against the Egyptians spared the Israelites (Ex. 9: 26; Ex. 10: 23; Ex. 11: 7). This means that God makes the difference between those who serve Him and those who don't. He always justifies us in all situations before those who affront us; sooner or later the truth comes out. Whoever touches children of God without reason will receive an answer from Him. And God will not do His justice only in the future, on the Day of Judgment of the wicked and the redemption of the righteous, but He does it every day on His children who ask, weep and cry out before His throne. Our God is a present God, a God of today, a God who makes Himself known to us, who shows us His miracles and wonders when we think it's all over. By faith we can see the fate of the wicked, for the bible speaks to us clearly; therefore, we can leave our causes in God's hands. It is written in Job 35: 4: "I will answer you and your friends with you." And in Job 19: 28-29: "If you say, 'How we will persecute him!' and, 'The root of the matter is found in him'; be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishment of the sword, so that you may know there is a judgment."

9 If you make the Most High your dwelling— even The LORD, who is my refuge— [NRSV: Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place],

10 then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent [NRSV: no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent].

So he continues in verse 9 saying that the Lord is his refuge and that his safe home is in the arms of God. He dwells daily in His presence. In this way, no harm will come to his dwelling ('then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent'). In this verse, the word 'disaster' [KJV, 'plague'] in Hebrew is *nega'* (נָגַף – Strong #5061), which means 'mark', and comes from 'naga': a blow (figuratively, infliction); also (by implication) a spot (concretely, a leprous person or dress), plague, sore, stricken, stripe, stroke, wound; briefly, a physical injury. We can say that 'plague' here does not only apply to physical wounds and injuries, if we take into account the Hebrew meaning of the word, but we can also believe that no destructive word, no curse word can reach us, trying to destroy our faith in God and His power to free us and do miracles. Therefore, NVI writes: "no disaster will come near your tent". No misfortune will come to our lives or to those in our home as long as we remain obedient to God's guidance.



Thus, he goes on saying:

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone [NRSV: On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone].

The Lord gives us angels, whose charge it is to guard our lives from evil and prevent such plagues from reaching us. Their war shields block the enemy's flaming arrows from reaching us. How great deliverance He has already given us, and we found out later! We have already received deliverance, without even knowing it. The word 'stone' not only refers to natural stones, rocks, or other physical obstacles, but also to all sorts of obstacles to our Christian walk. The bible talks about not putting stumbling blocks in the way of a blind man (Lev 19: 14), at the same time that Jesus said that blessed is anyone who takes no offense at Him [or NIV: 'Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me']; in other words, blessed is he who does not find reason for stumbling in him (Lk. 7: 23; Matt. 11: 6), and to cut off and throw away what causes a man to stumble (Matt. 18: 8-9). This means everything that can lead a believer astray, such as scandals, doctrines not compatible with the Bible, false teaching, false prophecy and counsel from men, both believers and the ungodly (Ps 1: 1). The angels not only received this commission from God to guard His children (like the archangels, for example), but we were also given by Him the ability to order them to break the weapons fashioned against our lives, and these commands are the very Word of God that we use in our favor when we pray under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, for when we know what it contains, we also have the ability to judge what is in disagreement with it. In addition, angels do battle in the heavenly realms to break down the barriers of darkness to a revelation we seek from God. Daniel was an example of this.



Then the psalmist says:

13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent [NRSV: You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot].



‘The lion and the cobra, the great lion and the serpent’ [or ‘the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent’] illustrate all the evil that can threaten the believer, all the forces of darkness. The lion is a symbol of power, leadership and manifestation of powers or spiritual influences over men. Daniel saw animals such as the lion with eagle’s wings (Dan. 7: 4), for example, the symbol of Babylon. John saw the lion as one of the faces of the cherubim before the throne (Rev. 4: 7), as well as the beast that comes out of the sea, symbol of the antichrist, whose mouth was like a lion’s (Rev. 13: 2). Ezekiel also described the lion as one of the faces of the cherubim around the throne of God (Ezek. 1: 10); Samson killed a lion, signifying his victory over an evil power. The snake, the adder, the serpent, mentioned in many biblical texts, especially those of

the prophets, also refer to the power of Satan, often using enemy armies on earth. For example, Isaiah (Isa. 14: 29) describes the Assyrian kings with the symbolism of a snake, an adder, and a flying fiery serpent. And in Isa. 27: 1, the enemies are described as ‘the fleeing serpent’ (Assyria), the twisting serpent [NVI: coiling serpent; KJV: crooked serpent – the Babylonian Empire, also situated between the Tigris and the Euphrates] and the ‘dragon [tanniyn’ or ‘tanniym’] that is in the sea’ or ‘the monster of the sea’, symbol of Egypt. In the book of Revelation, the dragon is described as the ancient serpent (Rev. 12: 9; Rev. 12: 15-17; Rev. 13: 2b, 4); and in Genesis (Gen. 3: 15), prophetically referring to Jesus as conqueror over the serpent, God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

It is interesting to notice that in this text of Psalm 91: 13 the word translated in our bible as ‘serpent’, in the original Hebrew version and in the KJV is ‘dragon’, the same word written in Isa. 27: 1 [‘tannin’ or ‘tanniyn’ or ‘tanniym’, תנין, Strong #8577, meaning ‘monster’, like the sea-monster often described in the book of Job; or translated in Ezek. 29: 3 (NIV) as ‘the great monster’ or (NRSV) ‘the great dragon’]. Tannin means: a marine or land monster, that is, a Sea-serpent or jackal; dragon, sea-monster, serpent, whale, that is, something that moves gliding, undulating.

What the psalmist means is that the Father fully protects us from evil and also gives us, as His heirs, the power to trample on the envoys of the darkness and their evil deeds. On the cross, Jesus crushed the serpent’s head, and left us the power to tread on its tail, we might say so. This is why Jesus said in Lk. 10: 18-20, in regard to the return of the seventy: “He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.’ See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” And John wrote in 1 Jn. 3: 8b, “The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” Thus, the Lord protects us from evil totally, no matter how the danger appears. In the boldness and strength of His Spirit and His word, we overcome that which is greater than us.

14 “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name [NRSV: Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name].

In the KJV, ‘Because he loves me’ it is written: ‘he hath set his love upon me’, but the Hebrew word ‘love’ in this Psalm does not come from the verb used for ‘to love’ (Ahava or ahva, אהב = love). In this text the word used is chashaq, חשק, Strong #2836, which means ‘delight’, which has its origin in a primitive root meaning: to cling, that is, to join, (figuratively) to love; delight in; to deliver; have a delight, have a desire, long for; fillet; start to love. Thus, the expression, ‘Because he loves me’ conveys more the idea of having around, hugging tightly with love, with affection (Deut. 7: 7; Deut. 10: 15: ‘set his affection’) or delighting in someone. Following: ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him’ or ‘I will deliver; I will protect those’, in the KJV is translated ‘I will set him on high’; and the Hebrew word used for ‘on high’ or ‘I will protect him’ is sagab, שגב, Strong #7682, which means ‘exalted.’ It comes from a primitive root which means: to be or to make lofty or inaccessible; by implication, safe, strong; used literally and figuratively; to defend, to exalt, to be excellent, to be set on high, in a high position, to be safe, set up on high, be too strong. The other expression ‘for he acknowledges my name’ or ‘those who know my name’ gives the idea of an intimate and experienced

relationship with God (Jn. 1: 18, where ‘no one has ever seen God’ means ‘no one has ever understood His fullness’).



So, we can understand the verse this way: because the psalmist delights in God and wants to be close to Him and because he knows Him more deeply, He will deliver him from all evil, will protect and exalt him, will place him in a position of honor. In other words, he is God’s own favorite and therefore receives His comfort. More than that, he will know what salvation is.

15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him [NRSV: When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them].

As a result of this relationship of affection and faithfulness, God gives him the assurance that when His son calls on Him, He will answer, will be with him in times of trouble to deliver him from it and, more than that, He will glorify him, will put him in a position of honor. It is interesting to notice here the omniscience of God and the individuality with which He treats each child, knowing each one by name and distinguishing the voice of each one of them, to the point of looking at each one in particular when they ask for something or when they cry for help. Even in the midst of a crowd, someone who is intimately known to Him is seen and heard by this God and treated in a private way, as if they were alone, conversing in a room. And it is also important to realize that when the Lord takes a child out of a problem, it is always to honor him before those who thought it was hopeless. The Lord not only delivers His children from troubles; He also brings a solution to them.



16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” [NRSV: With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation].



This last verse complements God’s promise made to the psalmist in the previous verse. The abundance of days is a promise of God, at least as far as salvation is concerned, that is, eternal life. In Ancient times, longevity was seen as a sign of God’s blessing on a person: Ex. 20: 12; Deut. 5: 16; Job 5: 26; Job 42: 16-17; 1 Chr. 29: 28 (David); Gen. 47: 28 (Jacob); Gen. 35: 28-29 (Isaac); Gen. 25: 7-8 (Abraham); Gen. 9: 28-29 (Noah).

God says He will show you His salvation. And the word used here in Hebrew for ‘salvation’ is yeshu`âh, ישועה, Strong #3444, just as Jesus (Yeshua – ישוע) is commonly called. The word yshuw`ah (or yeshu`âh) means ‘something saved’, that is, ‘deliverance’; therefore, aid, victory, prosperity, deliverance, health, help, to save, to protect, to guard, to preserve (health), welfare. In this way, salvation was already a

promise of God to His people through the Messiah, and it remains available today for everyone who believes in Jesus and gives his life to Him as their only Lord. The idea remains that everyone who believes in the Lord and lives under His wings, in His hiding place, can enjoy all the blessings that this name (Jesus, Yeshua) brings with it: help, victory, prosperity, rescue, health, aid, salvation, protection, guard and well-being.

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