

ASSURANCE IN THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

(SUNDAY, JULY 7, 2019)

Scripture Reading: 10 Words; Psalm 91

INTRODUCTION

A good question when studying the book of Psalms is to ask how the different Psalms connect with each other.

A good example is considering the last Psalm of book 3 and the first Psalms of book 4.

Psalm 89 – A lament that the glory of the Davidic kingdom and promises have been lost.

Psalm 90 – The start of book 4 of the Psalter. Israel is reminded of God's faithfulness from her earliest days as a nation.

This theme continues in Psalm 91. In Psalm 91 we see names for God that come from the time of the Patriarchs – Most High and Almighty.

We can also say that Psalm 91 addresses the final requests of Psalm 90.

And then Psalm 92 follows with thanksgiving.

As we look at Psalm 91 it is very important to read it in light of God's covenant that He established with Israel.

Deut. 28 contains the promises that God said would come to Israel if she followed the Lord and the curses that God would bring if she turned from the Lord.

Psalm 91 is a Psalm celebrating God's covenant with Israel.

What this Psalm promises almost seems over the top.

How do we understand and apply these promises?

We must understand them in light of the New Covenant that has been established in the blood and body of Christ.

We also must seek to understand how this Psalm points to our Lord and Savior and His victory.

The great hope that this Psalm offers is secured for those who are in Christ.

Because our Lord was offered for us, we know that God will never forsake us.

We also know that because our Lord was hated, so we will also be hated if we follow after Christ.

But the victory of our Lord assures that it is never in vain to follow after Him.

Psalm 91 can be divided into three parts, noted by the use of the pronouns:

Verses 1-2: I

Verses 3-13: You

Verses 14-16: Divine I

God does not promise you an easy, pain-free life. In fact, we can expect the opposite if we follow after Christ. But we have confidence even in danger because of the victory of our Lord.

1. THE SHADOW AND SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH, vv. 1-2

What stands out in this Psalm?

Most people would answer the seeming impossible promises – vv. 10, 13, etc.

No doubt this is one of the great characteristics of this Psalm.

What should also be noticeable is how God offers His protection and presence.

This is what we see especially in verses 1 and 2 and 4.

Secret place of the Most High

Shadow of the Almighty

God – our refuge and fortress

Verse 4:

God covers us with His feather

Under His wings your refuge

His faithfulness/truth that which guards you.

The first great lesson of this Psalm is that because of what Christ has accomplished, you are able to draw near to God.

We draw near because of the blood of Christ.

You find shelter in the Most High.

You can live under the shadow of the Almighty.

Listen to a portion of the great encouragement from Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

Further we must see how much we need God.

The lesson of this Psalm certainly is not that if you really trust in God all your problems will go away and life will be just grand.

The promises of this Psalm actually speak of the dangers you certainly will face in your life.

The opening verses should also be reminders of **how much you need God**.

You need Him far more than we will ever realize.

“I need thee every hour...”

I mentioned earlier the names of God used in verse 1 connect back with the time of Abraham.

1) Most High

עֲלִיּוֹן	53x this is used. Used first in the account of Melchizedek and Abram in Genesis 14:18-20. The God who is above all other supposed gods and powers of man.
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2) Almighty

שֶׁפֶטִי	First used in the account of Abraham in Genesis 17:1. Used a total of 48x.
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Rejoice that God offers Himself as our place of rest and full trust.

And we enjoy this because of what Christ has done for us.

2. THE INCREDIBLE PROMISES OF PROTECTION AND VICTORY, vv. 3-13

Richard Belcher in his book, *The Messiah and the Psalms* writes concerning the promises of this Psalm:

This Psalm contains some of the strongest affirmations of confidence in God's deliverance and protection in all of Scripture. In fact, one wonders if this Psalm does not promise too much...What happens when these promises are not fulfilled? Should early death through illness or the tragedies of life shake our confidence in God's power to protect?¹

As I studied this Psalm, a number of the promises reminded me of God's covenant promises with Israel. Belcher confirmed this with an even more detailed listing.

1) Safety and Deliverance from Pestilence, v. 3

Lev. 26:5 Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

Deut. 28:21 The LORD will make the plague cling to you until He has consumed you from the land which you are going to possess.

2) Deliverance from fear, v. 5

Lev. 26:6 I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make *you* afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land.

3) Great victory in battle, v. 7

Lev. 26:7 You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. **8** Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.

4) God as your dwelling place, v. 9

Lev. 26:11 I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you.

¹ Richard Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms*, 58.

5) Evil and plague not coming near, v. 10

Deut. 28:59 then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues – great and prolonged plagues – and serious and prolonged sicknesses.

6) Trampling on lions and cobras, v. 13

Lev. 26:6 – quoted above

Lev. 26:22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.²

Psalm 91 sets forth the incredible greatness of what God promised to Israel in terms of the Mosaic covenant.

We also can see a connection to God's covenant with Israel in terms of the conditions that we see in this Psalm.

9 Because you have made the LORD, *who is* my refuge, *Even* the Most High, your dwelling place,

14 “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.

One lesson then of this Psalm is that God never is the one who fails to do what He has promised.

So many people want to blame God for trouble.

God never can be accused of failing.

It is Israel of old who failed.

It was her heart that was hardened and turned from the Lord. The same is true for us.

² Belcher summarizes these connections in a slightly different order, 59.

As Richard Belcher notes, “Part of the purpose of the Mosaic covenant was to show that **Israel was not able to keep the terms of the covenant.**”³

The third great portion of the book of Isaiah, 40-66, illustrates the great failure of Israel and shows a different Servant must come.

Israel, God’s servant, had not done what God called her to do.

And this Psalm also points to Christ, the one who could fully claim, “My God, in Him I will trust.”

Truly it is only Christ would who could be described by verses 9 and 14.

Significantly this Psalm is connected with the greatest time of testing our Lord faced before the Garden and the Cross.

What verses in this Psalm stand out in light of Christ’s ministry?

The devil tried using verses 11 and 12 in tempting Jesus to do something foolish and seek to prove the truth of these verses.

Matt. 4:5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, **6** 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.’ ”*

Matt. 4:7 Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘*You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’ ”*

The devil wanted Jesus to prove His identity as the Son of God by forcing God to fulfill the promises of this Psalm.

Instead Jesus showed His identity as the Son of God not through testing His Father but through His complete trust in His Father.

Heb. 5:7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, **8** though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

As we consider the structure of this Psalm in terms of the pronouns that are used, we can say that it ultimately speaks **as a prayer of our Lord.**

³ Belcher, 59-60.

It is Jesus Christ who we understand would be the main speaker in this Psalm.

Christ in this Psalm then also speaks to us, encouraging us to trust in the promises found within it.

And then what about verses 14-16?

3) THE DIVINE PROMISE OF THE FATHER, VV. 14-16

In these verses we have the divine Word of Promise from the Father.

It is indeed the Father who delivered Jesus Christ not simply from danger but from death.

For all those who are in Christ, then this Psalm becomes that which we are to embrace.

To all who are in Christ is not the greatest promise that of salvation and eternal life, that which we see in verse 16?

So how do we properly apply the promises of this Psalm?

Does it give you a guarantee that if you trust in God enough you will be delivered from every disease?

I mentioned earlier that we must interpret this Psalm according to God's covenant promises.

Indeed God's covenantal promises are not empty but neither can they be taken out of context.

One of the key questions to ask in light of the New Covenant is when will we experience the fullness of all the blessings that God has made to us?

The answer is that in this life we do not yet receive the fullness of God's blessings.

We enjoy now the still spectacular down payment of those blessings.

Jesus Christ was victorious in terms of His ministry and in His death, burial, and resurrection.

He now enjoys all authority in Heaven and in earth.

The nations are His inheritance.

We share in this victory, but the fullness of all the blessings we have been promised still remain.

Eph. 1:13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit

of promise, **14** who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Now, there is no conflict or contradiction between one passage of Scripture and another.

Rather we have to seek to understand how the promises of Scripture all fit beautifully together.

This Psalm which speaks of God's protection then is not in conflict with the words of Christ that we will suffer persecution as those who follow after Him.

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

How do we understand Psalm 91 in light of the sobering words of our Lord?

There will come a day when we will experience the complete victory that Psalm 91 declares.

In the meantime, we live our lives with assurance and trust.

The assurance is not that we will never sick or that no difficulty will come our way.

The assurance is that even in sickness or difficulty, we know that our Lord reigns and that He will one day return in complete victory.

The great purpose of this Psalm is also to call you to trust in the great God who gives to us such precious promises.

Richard Belcher writes:

"No disease, pestilence, or evil can ultimately harm the one who is in the secret place of protection, which for the believer is now 'in Christ.' All our enemies will be defeated. The one who will trample the head of the serpent has come, and his followers will also trample the head of the serpent in victory. Thus nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Through the work of Christ our Mediator, who as king dispenses covenant blessings and wins our victory, we will be more than conquerors."⁴

God does not promise you an easy, pain-free life. In fact, we can expect the opposite if we follow after Christ. But we have confidence even in danger because of the victory of our Lord.

⁴ Belcher, 61.

Connection with the Lord's Supper.

Blood and body of Christ – our peace, our access to God, our assurance of sins forgiven, and God's protection and care.

We now do have confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

We have boldness not because of our own strength our courage, but because of the call of Christ.

2Cor. 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. **8** *We are* hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – **10** always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. **11** For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. **12** So then death is working in us, but life in you.

Prayer

Hymn: 78

Benediction: Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.