

Psalm 91 – Protection (physical and spiritual)

Verses 1 – 13: divine protection; verses 14 – 16: divine promise

Introduction

A believer has come to the temple to worship. Warfare is in the context of worship. Only when our vision of the triune God is in focus are we in a position to stand and fight. Our focus is on God, not Satan; on the Holy Spirit, not evil spirits. We pray for this in the Lord's prayer – daily in actuality or intention: *Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

v.1 personal. Note the names of God: *Most High, Almighty* (= Shaddai, a name that sustained the homeless patriarchs cf Ex 6 v3), *Lord* (= Yahweh), *God* (= Elohiym).

"dwell" refers primarily to frequenting the Temple, but alludes to the worshipping attitude (cf *"abide in Christ"*)

"secret place" (cf cover, + concept of *covering* in the Bible)

"abide" (= dwell) The primary thought of the psalmist was probably the temple and its worship where the presence of God was most evident.

"shadow" (= defence. God's guest – cf Ps 39 v12)

v.2 *"refuge"* (= shelter as in v.9, same Hebrew word *machaceh* or *makhaseh*). A creedal statement, spoken rather than read or thought. An oral culture. The significance of this in sharing with Muslims and in answering Satan. See Luther's hymn in the Appendix. Psalm 56 v4 *"God in whose word I praise"* – the use of Scripture in prayer. A God who speaks: 2 Cor 4 v6; the eternal and incarnate Word – *logos*. Sometimes we get clues to the situation or need by the way God guides us to pray.

v.3 God's deliverance, cf the Lord's Prayer again – daily or in theme from the snare of the fowler, from the noisome pestilence.

v.4 God protects as a bird protects its young: a picture of God's mother love as well as father love. Covering again. Trust as a shield and buckler cf Ephesians 6 v16 *shield of faith with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one*. The buckler covers all the front. The wings cover all above.

v.5 The banishing of fear. The most destructive of all human emotions.

(i) *The terror by night*. The night demon Lilith. Isaiah 34 v14

(ii) *Arrow by day* – sunstroke.

v.6 (iii) *the plague* – personified cf Isaiah 37 v36 – *destroying angels*; and eg in Egypt *the angel of death*.

(iv) *the destruction at noon* (LXX *the demon at midday*)

v.7 eg Lot, Noah

v.8 not always see now!

v.9 *the Lord* (= 'refuge', same Hebrew word as in v.2 "*habitation-dwelling*")

v.10 protection of our dwellings ... House cleansing

v.11 *angels...guards* - celestial bodyguards. Angels in the Bible. Eg Heb 1 v14 and in the life of Christ.

v.13 *tread on the lion, adder, young lion*. Daniel 6 v22; Luke 10 v19; Judges 14 v6 – Samson: super-human strength when needed.

v.14 *knows my name* – the essence of personality – *when He calls*. "*Those who know their God shall be strong and do exploits* (Daniel 11 v32)

v.16 *long life* of "*commandment with promise*" The idea of long life was meant to be understood as a sacramental promise of eternal life. John 10 v10.

Appendix (Words and music by Martin Luther, 1529, translated from German to English by Frederic H. Hedge, 1853.)

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Vivienne Stacey, May 1993, Paphos