

1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. **Author** – Though the author is anonymous, it is clear he had a great insight into the heart of God. The first part of the psalm is wisdom – verses 1-13 with recurring themes; while the second part is oracle – verses 14-16. Most intriguing is that Satan used verses 11 and 12 in Matthew's Gospel account of the temptation of Christ. Though not specifically Davidic in its overt identity, the writing certainly captures David's faith in God and his prophetic vision.
- b. **Outline** – Has a distinct rhythmic form:
 - i. 91:1-2 – Invitation to the protection of God.
 - ii. 91:3-8 – Forms of protection.
 - iii. 91:9-10 – Invitation to the protection of God.
 - iv. 91:11-13 – Forms of protection.
 - v. 91:14-16 – The oracle of Salvation.

2. SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: *PSALM 91* – NASB version, topic is the “*Security of the One Who Trusts in the LORD.*”

PS 91:1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
PS 91:2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”
PS 91:3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence.
PS 91:4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.
PS 91:5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day;
PS 91:6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.
PS 91:7 A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, *But* it shall not approach you.
PS 91:8 You will only look on with your eyes And see the recompense of the wicked.
PS 91:9 For you have made the LORD, my refuge, *Even* the Most High, your dwelling place.
PS 91:10 No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent.
PS 91:11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways.
PS 91:12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.
PS 91:13 You will tread upon the lion and cobra, The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.
PS 91:14 “Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him *securely* on high, because he has known My name.
PS 91:15 “He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.
PS 91:16 “With a long life I will satisfy him And let him see My salvation.”

3. BACKGROUND AND EXEGESIS:

- a. **In the Introduction to The Psalms** (Quick Link - <http://www.authenticdiscipleship.org/pdfs/1-biblical-literacy/Bible%20Survey%20-%2015.4-0%20-%20Introduction%20to%20Psalms.pdf>) the Bible is comprised of specific and identifiable genre each of which communicates the author's

intended meaning [message] in a distinct manner. Poetry is the genre of emotions and imagery, and consequently a strict literal translation tends to obscure what the author intended us to discover. We need to employ our imagination to perceive the author's artistic rendering and also place ourselves in the author's audience to understand what they would have heard and understood as the author's intended meaning.

b. Verses 1-4 provide an excellent example of how this application of hermeneutics works. Let's look at this in a verse by verse approach.

i. Vs 1: He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty

Key thoughts are “dwells in the shelter” and “abide in the shadow.”

1. *“To dwell”* obviously means the place where we live... it is our home, a place of security and safety, where we are most comfortable surrounded by our family and loved ones. The author is showing a literary image of living in God's protection in His home. In the midst of uncertainty and conflict, living in God's house conjures up the notion of the safest place in the universe.
2. *“To abide”* is a further application of dwelling, it means the conscious decision to live and remain in proximal intimacy with God. Humanity has a choice of how and where they will live... in their own strength and merits, or under God's strength and promise.
3. *“In the shadow”* is another view of this proximity to God. To be in the shadow of anything means you are right up against it... whether it's a person, a building, or a tree. The shadow is a form of protection from the sun, not something nefarious or ominous.
4. *“In the Shelter”* is protection from a variety of things... sun, rain, critters, etc. One form of covering is the security that God provides. Shadow is another form of covering... both provide a sense of safety and comfort.
5. While the “shelter” conveys a physical reality of protection, the “shadow” conveys a more Spiritual reality of protection. Essentially saying that one who so dwells and abides is protected both physically and Spiritually.

ii. Vs 2: I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!”

1. *“Refuge”* and *“fortress”* further develop the concept of safety and protection – mirroring what was stated in vs 1. It is a common feature of Hebrew poetry to make a statement with one phrase and then restate it another way to express emphasis. Zondervan's New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words explains, A number of Hebrew words indicate fortified cities. In the ancient Near East, principal cities were enclosed with walls that might be from 15 to 25 feet thick and over 25 feet high. Trenches were often dug in front of the walls, and towers were built at their corners. These fortified cities were virtually impregnable. The psalmists

and prophets called on God's people not to rely on their fortified cities but to remember that "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble, knowing The LORD Almighty is with us.

2. **The key expansion here is the positive affirmation of the author that he “trusts God.”** In a world that is subject to chance and calamity, God is a foundation that can be completely trusted... both in the physical here and now, and also in the Spiritual eternity that awaits all of humanity. By extension he is suggesting that this same beneficial state of mind/heart/being are available to all who trust in God.

iii. **Vs 3:** For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence.

1. **This is again a further development asserting in confidence that God is able and actively protects those who rely on Him.** The human reliance here is a passive work of faith, whereas the active work of protection is solely the work of God... who alone can protect.
2. ***“Snare of the trapper”*** evokes a craftily placed deception to capture prey... there are those in the world that mean us harm, and while our wisdom and alertness may help keep us safe, only God can protect us consistently.
3. ***“Deadly pestilence”*** is the unseen calamity that may overtake us from which there is no defense outside of God. Any of our defenses are useless against such threats.
4. **While the *“snare”* is more a physical metaphor, *“Pestilence”* is more a Spiritual metaphor.** This again enhances the completeness of protection we can rely upon in dependence upon God both here and now and in eternity.

iv. **Vs 4:** He will cover you with His pinions [feathers], And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark [rampart].

1. **Obviously, God doesn't have wings or feathers. This is imagery, not idol fancy.** This image evokes the common occurrence of a hen protecting her chicks from harm. A hen will defiantly face a greater adversary spreading her wings under which her chicks cluster for protection. A chick is completely helpless, and if it strays from the hen's protection, it is completely vulnerable to prey. The frightened chick may desire to flee, but to do so in the presence of an adversary is certain death.
2. **Any farmer would be aware of the power of this image and would identify with what the author was saying.** God is faithful and true... if we remain steadfast in our resolution to remain [abide] in His protective care, He can be trusted to keep us safe.

3. ***“Shield”*** is a defensive weapon... it is what you stand behind to ward off the immediate threats of a face to face encounter with an adversary using arrows, spears or swords.
 4. ***“Bulwark”*** is the portion of a defensive position on a castle or fortress from which defenders may repulse the offense of an enemy. Where the shield is more ground to ground combat, this is a different vision of the combat. The image here is of a soldier on a rampart with the attackers being on the more vulnerable position on the ground. The rampart is obviously a way better and safer place to be!
 - v. In these four verses the author paints a verbal picture of what can be expected in an ***“abiding”*** relationship with God. The Apostle John uses this same abiding concept in his Gospel message – see John 15:1-11 where John uses this word eight times in this short passage. John’s passage is again not a literal thought, but rather a metaphor of what Christian dependence looks like.
 - vi. These four verses set up the mental picture from which the rest of the Psalm should be understood through verse 13. Starting with verse 14 through 16, the scene shifts with the oracle of God announcing His covenantal faithfulness for those who trust in Him.
- c. Interestingly, verses 11 & 12 is what Satan used in his second temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). This is a clear picture of the Old Testament landing in the New Testament and is a common thematic thread of Scripture. As with the temptation that Adam and Eve faced in Eden, Satan was cleverly deceitful... he told half-truths that cast doubt on the Character of the Father causing suspicion that He is neither Loving or Good. Satan offers Adam and Eve a rationale that they should have taken to God in faith. Instead they acted using their own logic and they Fell into sin. Satan knows that Jesus is the Messiah... that He is God in human form. Satan knows that Jesus’ flesh was weakened by His fasting, but it is evident His Spiritual connection with the Father was heightened. With His knowledge of the Scriptures and with the conviction of faith, Jesus powerfully repels Satan’s deceptions recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:
- MT 4:5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city [Jerusalem] and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,
- MT 4:6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’ ”
- MT 4:7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’ ”
- d. The statement from Jesus ***“Put the Lord Your God to the Test”*** is really interesting... to ***“Test”*** means ***“to tempt, to put on trial, to force one to prove them self.”*** In light of the preceding portion of Psalm 91 which affirms God’s faithfulness (1-10), and the following statement from God (14-16)... it begs the question ***“Why would Satan have used this in his approach to his temptation of Jesus?”*** The answer may well lie in Satan’s final attempt to test Jesus:

Mt 4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

Mt 4:9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Mt 4:10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’.”

- e. **Satan knows Jesus is God in the flesh, and he knows Jesus’ flesh is His weak spot. Satan is probing what he expects will be Jesus’ weakness. Satan also knows Jesus will be King of Heaven and earth, and that all authority will be put in His hands (Matthew 28:18-20 – The Great Commission). What Satan is offering here, Jesus knows He already has. So, what is the nature of the temptation? Satan is offering a way for Jesus to get to the goal of becoming King of earth without having to go to the Cross. Satan is offering a short cut... one that eliminates His suffering and dying but falls short of fulfilling Jesus’ intended role as the “Lamb of God.” Satan knows that Jesus is the only possible atonement to restore humanity into intimate vital relationship with God, and Satan hates humanity... because we are the object of God’s reckless love. There is some irony here... Jesus refuses to put the Father to the test out of His abiding love, but Satan is trying to put Jesus to the test even though he knows Jesus is God. Jesus obviously passes the test... He will be obedient to death, a theme that will be revisited in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 29:32-46ff). Jesus’ suffering in the Garden was not because He was a wimp or was afraid of death as He knew many of His followers would also suffer and be put to death. The text is ambiguous about His rationale, but it is clear Jesus trusted God:**

Mt 26:36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

Mt 26:37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

Mt 26:38 Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Mt 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Mt 26:40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

Mt 26:41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

Mt 26:42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

4. **CONCLUSION – In observing this scene in the Garden above, it is clear that Jesus is submitting to and accepting God’s will. The intense nature of Jesus’ fervent prayer is compelling. Jesus is aware that He is the “King that was born to die” as God’s Atonement, which had to happen on the Passover in Jerusalem. Jesus also knew that many of His followers would make the ultimate sacrifice in dying for their faith**

knowing they would live forever with Him in the resurrection. Physical death is a forgone conclusion for us all, it is only a matter of how, when and where we pass into eternity. Consequently, it would seem that which troubled Jesus in the Garden was most likely Spiritual in nature, not merely physical. We'll never know this side of eternity just exactly what went on Spiritually in Jesus' Crucifixion, but it had to be massive. A parting thought, it wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the Cross, it was His reckless love for humanity that held Him there as He suffered and died and entered the Spiritual maelstrom we know as the Atonement for humanity... fulfilling His destiny as The Lamb of God (John 1:29). As I ponder this amazing event, The Apostle John's introduction to his Gospel comes to mind... in John 1:1-4 it is written,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the Beginning.

Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.

One of the most incredible acts of the strength and discipline of Jesus was demonstrated on the Cross. It seems clear to me from this passage, that Jesus could have unhinged all of Creation with one uncontrolled thought as He suffered and died. The Author of Creation is also its Sustainer and ultimately its Recreator... and humanity's only eternal Hope. People wonder what we'll be doing in eternity, I believe it will be fascinating! The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12 a tantalizing hopeful view of eternity,

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then [in eternity] we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.