

Psalm 91

By

Vic Coleman

Introduction

We live in two worlds, one spiritual and one physical. The physical world is one that we see, feel, touch, and smell. But the spiritual world that we cannot see, has just as much influence in our lives as the physical. And prayer, to our Father, guided by the Holy Spirit, is our gateway and the means to affect this world.

Recently I was awakened early one morning, long before dawn, by a dream where the Lord showed me that reason some things were happening in my life was because the enemy was “stealing” from me. I had “left a door open” in my life and the enemy was exploiting it. So, I got up, grabbed my Bible and prayed. I soon opened Psalm 91. I read and prayed this Psalm out loud. After a while I went back to my computer and started to study this Psalm. As I studied verse by verse, I began to see how praying this Psalm aloud, could change my physical world. God had promised so much in just a few short verses.

Through this lesson I hope to shed some light on this Psalm so Believers will see the truths and comfort it presents, understand its power, and *apply it* as they are “driven to their knees” by the trials of life.

Now before we start, I want to make a couple of important points concerning God speaking through dreams and visions. First, *the primary way in which God communicates with His children is through His Word*. God can and has used a number of ways to communicate with His people throughout history, e.g., a still small voice, through a burning bush, appearances of angels, visions and dreams, Christ’s appearance on earth. In my life, God speaks to me primarily through His Word, by the Holy Spirit. On occasions, with no regular pattern, I will have a “vision” at night. Then over the next few days, things will happen which confirm the “meaning” of the vision. I am not an interpreter of dreams; I don’t try to interpret every dream I have as from God. I don’t ask for or look for God to speak to me in this manner. On occasions, He does. And I know it’s from God because over time, the events of my life subsequent to the vision have confirmed what the vision seemed to be telling me. On more than one occasion I was able to prepare for a “storm” before it hit.

My second point is this: if God chooses to speak to you in this manner, you don't have to "rack your brain" for endless days searching for a meaning; just have confidence in His ability to make things clear to you, in His time, in His way. I just want to be clear about this manner in which God on occasions speaks to me, personally. I don't want you trying to interpret a dream you may have had that was really caused by "bad pizza" you had for dinner. If God speaks to you in this manner, it's not your doing – it is His choice for His purpose. It doesn't mean that you are "extra special" in God's eye. If God does not speak to you in this manner, you are not "left out"; God will speak to you in other ways, primarily through His Word. So don't go out and buy the latest book on interpreting dreams. 😊

Scriptures Used In This Lesson

Job 1

Job 2

Psalms 91

Psalms 121

John 14:26 – 27

Philippians 4:6 – 8

Hebrews 11:35 – 38

James 1:16 – 18

There Really Is a Spiritual World Out There

The book of Job provides one of the most interesting examples of how this invisible spiritual world directly affects our lives. Read Job 1:1 – 5. This section provides some background on Job. We learn that he is "perfect", and "upright", he "feared God", and "eschewed" evil, according to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible. If we look at the Hebrew definition of these words, we get a much clearer view of Job.

- Perfect (tam) – complete, not lacking anything, morally innocent, having integrity
- Upright (yashar) – righteous, pleasing, correct
- Fear (yare') – reverent, showing honor or respect for
- Eschewed (cuwr) – to turn aside, to depart, to avoid

We see that Job was complete, lacking in nothing, a righteous man who showed respect for God, and avoided evil. So, Job was a godly man of integrity, who also happened to be very wealthy.

Now read verses 6 – 12. We see that there is an exchange between God and Satan of which Job is unaware. This conversation took place in the spiritual realm. As you read verses 13 – 22, you will find that the spiritual world had a direct effect on Job's physical world. Again, this is evident in Job 2:1 – 6, and verses 7 – 8.

What can we gain from these passages? There is a spiritual world which can have a direct effect on the physical world in which we live. The trials that Job experienced had nothing to do with his "sinful" conduct. On the contrary, we are told that Job "eschewed" (avoided) evil and honored God. The trials in Job's life occurred because Satan challenged God. Essentially, Satan said that the only reason why Job was a man of integrity was because God blessed him. Basically, God said "No" and Satan went out to prove God wrong. The battle was between God and the enemy; who was right and who was wrong; who knew what they were talking about, and who didn't - God or Satan. It was a spiritual battle that affected the physical world. The outcome of this battle had extraordinary eternal consequences. If God was "wrong", then He wouldn't be God; everything about Him could be questioned. There was much riding on the results of this battle, and Job was in the middle.

So, there is a spiritual world that affects the physical world. What "tool" does God provide to "tap into" this spiritual world? Prayer. God has given us a physical means to communicate with Him, Who exists in the spiritual realm. And this is where Psalm 91 comes in. When we are "driven to our knees" by the trials of life, we can pray this Psalm to our Father as a petition for His protection and a reminder of what He's already provided. Now we'll dig in.

Key Point: There is a spiritual world that can affect our physical world.

Key Point: Our communication with God (prayer) can affect our physical world.

Dwelling In the Secret Place

Read Psalm 91:1. There are several words I'd like to define used in the KJV. I'll be using this version for most of the lesson. You don't have to have a King James Version of the Bible, but it will be useful.

- Dwelleth (yashab) – to sit, to sit down, to remain, to be set
- Secret (cether) – covering, shelter, hiding place

- Abide (luwn) – to lodge, stop over, pass the night, to cause to rest or lodge

So to “abide” in the “secret” place of the Most High, means to lodge or rest under the shelter of God; to stop over and rest under His protection. The verse is essentially saying that *those who remain and sit down in the covering and shelter of God will rest under His protection.*

It goes without saying that it is best to “dwell (yashab)” with God *before* trouble comes. If the weather forecast predicts a severe thunderstorm for your area, it is best to already be under shelter before the storm hits, rather than to “run for cover” in the midst of the storm. So it is with God - it is best to already have a close personal relationship with Him that is strengthened daily, so you can be prepared when a storm comes your way.

Key Point: It’s best to dwell (yashab) with God *before* trouble comes.

Many Christians and non-Christians alike wait to run to God after they encounter a trial.

Why? How can that be changed so that people “yashab” with God before trouble comes?

What got you drawing closer to God?

Verse 1 also provides an assurance of His protection. His shelter is so secure that you can “abide” there, i.e., you can stop over and rest. And while you are resting, you can affirm verse 2. God is your fortress, refuge and your God, i.e., the one you love, obey and worship. It is He that you trust.

When I think of verse 2, I picture being at home relaxing, watching a Star Trek™ re-run (I’m a Star Trek™ fan), eating popcorn on the couch. A severe storm could be right over my house, but my concern is on what will happen to the crew of the Enterprise when they beam down to a planet. What is *not* on my mind are concerns about the wind, a leaking roof, hail falling on my head, or getting drenched by the rain. Why? Because I trust in the safety of my shelter so much that my mind is “free” to focus on other things, like the mission of the crew of the Enterprise.

Trusting God should be the same. Our trust in Him should be such that our minds are “free” to focus on things other than our troubles, such as the work He has called us to do. The word “trust” comes from the word “chacah” which means to confide, hope, to take refuge in.

Key Point: Trusting God “frees” our minds to focus on things other than our troubles. The closer we get to God, the more “free” we become.

But too often we find ourselves trusting in things that offer no rest.

- Ourselves (I can do it myself)
- Our understanding (I can use common sense and figure it out)
- Our bank account (I got enough money; I can handle it)
- Someone else’ bank account (They have helped me before; they won’t turn me down now)
- Advice for others (They said, “If I were you, I would...”. They haven’t even worked out their own problems yet)
- Logic or reason
- Our “control” over our circumstances (Control is really an illusion; we can’t control our bad habits, much less other people whom we don’t yet know will affect our circumstances)
- Worldly philosophies (Everyone else does it this way)
- Someone else to come through for us

Can you think of some other things people trust in other than God? The last time you got into trouble, which one did you trust in? Why? Why did it fail you? How can you keep yourself from doing it again?

There are times when God will use one of the above to help us, but it’s when we begin to depend and rely on something else other than God that we fall short. God should be our primary source of help.

Safety From the Snares

Read verse 3. It contains words we don’t use very often, especially in the KJV. The “snare” in Hebrew is literally a bird trap. Figuratively, it refers to traps, plots, or schemes of calamity against you. The “fowler” is the one who lays the trap or bait. So verse 3 says that with great certainty (surely), God will snatch you away and save you from schemes and plots laid by those who are trying to trap or hurt you. He will also save you from deadly or dangerous (noisome) diseases.

In verse 4 we are given a picture of his protection. You can imagine a female eagle covering her chicks with her feathers. The chicks are safe and close to the mother. Remember, the chicks “yashab” and “luwn” with the mother.

The last half of the verse bears some explanation. My first reaction was, “What does it mean that God’s ‘truth’ will be my shield, and what’s a ‘buckler’?”

The word “truth” comes from the word “emeth”, which means:

- firmness, faithfulness, truth
- sureness, reliability
- stability, continuance
- faithfulness, reliableness
- truth
- as spoken
- of testimony and judgment
- of divine instruction
- truth as a body of ethical or religious knowledge
- true doctrine

As I reviewed the list, I realized that all of the definitions of “truth” speak of characteristics of God which protect me. God’s faithfulness is what I depend on. That faithfulness is tied to His reliability and stability. Because He is reliable, God’s spoken and written Word is true; it will never fail. Therefore, I can depend on His divine judgments and instruction. And finally, because He is God, He has all knowledge, so His doctrines are true.

The word “shield” refers to a large shield, and “buckler” refers to a small shield worn on the forearm. So, verse 4 implies that God’s truth (emeth) has you covered, no matter what kind of shield you need, large or small; God’s protection is complete.

Key Point: God’s protection is complete.

When was the last time you questioned God's abilities? Why? What made you doubt Him? Did you eventually change your mind? If so, what made you trust Him? What can you do to ensure that you trust Him in the future?

So When Can I Be Afraid?

Read verses 5 and 6. Notice the phrases that refer to time. We are not to be afraid at *night* nor by *day* (verse 5), nor in *darkness* nor at *noonday* (verse 6). So, when are we supposed to be afraid and fearful? According to these verses, never; at no time of day or night. Why – because His “*emeth*” is our protection. (Go back and review the definition above).

Going back to our shelter analogy, our shelter protects us day and night. The roof of our shelter does not open at night to let the rain in. Our roof is a stable structure that maintains its integrity. And so it is with God; He never sleeps nor slumbers. He is reliable. Remember, His “*truth*” (*emeth*) is our shield. Read Psalm 121. It's a short Psalm, but it reinforces the point concerning God's protection.

Trouble All Around

Read verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 91. Verse 7 has particular relevance at this time because of the downturn in our nation's economy. For some of us, trouble is all around; people are losing jobs, homes, and peace of mind. But the verses speak of our protection even though calamity is all around us. We don't have to lose our inner peace, even though “*bad things happen*”. God's shelter is not only for our physical wellbeing, but also our mental and spiritual wellbeing. When we truly trust in God, we will behave with a calm and peace that others do not understand. They may ask, “*How come you're not worried or upset?*”. The answer is that we trust in the Prince of Peace. Read John 14:26 - 27 and Philippians 4:6 – 8.

Do you know someone who experienced a severe trial but seemed to “keep their sanity”? What happened? Why were they so calm through it all? How would you have behaved if the same thing happened to you? Why?

Verse 8 gave me some comfort because of some of the things that were done to me in the past by others. It let me know that the wicked will get their just reward. I may not see it immediately, but they will not escape the hand of God.

Verses 9 and 10 continue the theme of protection. In verse 9, “refuge” comes from a word that means a refuge or shelter from rain, storm or danger. “Habitation” refers to a dwelling, some place you remain. So by making the Lord our refuge and staying there (dwelling), no evil will come our way.

Now, you may be wondering,

“Does this really work? I’ve had bad stuff happen to me in the past. Jesus even had bad stuff happen to Him?”

What’s the explanation? In the case of Jesus, “bad” things happened to Him as part of God’s plan. Throughout the Gospels, there are numerous phrases like, “so that the scriptures would be fulfilled” (Matthew 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 13:14, 27:9, Mark 14:49, Luke 4:21, 18:31 - NIV). The events of Jesus’ life on earth were foretold by prophets several hundred years before He was born, including His death. So Jesus fulfilled a plan established by God the Father. The ultimate plan was to raise Jesus from the dead and exalt Him so that we could reestablish our fellowship with the Father.

In our lives there are a number of reasons why bad things happen. A few are listed below:

- Our sinful conduct
- Disobedience to wisdom, sound judgment or biblical principals
- Our intent to do things our way instead of God’s way
- The sinful conduct of others
- Satan’s schemes against us
- Reasons we can’t explain at this time

But some things may happen as a result of God fulfilling His plan for us. Our testimony speaks volumes when we maintain our “peace” in the midst of a trial through our personal relationship with God through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. That type of testimony honors God, and He recognizes and approves of it. In the end, we will receive honor from Him. Read Hebrews 11:35 – 38. Earlier verses discuss the “heroes” of faith who by their faith, overcame great obstacles. This passage talks about those who suffered because of their faith. Verse 38 declares “the world was not worthy of them”.

Another Element of Divine Protection

In Psalm 91:11 – 12, David speaks of another aspect of God’s protection: angels. God will “charge” (command, appoint, give a charge to) His angels to “keep” us (protect, preserve, save, keep watch over). The KJV says that they shall “bear thee up in their hands”. To “bear thee up” means to lift up, carry, support, and sustain. So God will command His angels to lift, carry, support and sustain you.

Verse 13 provides a picture of the type and extent of the “victory” we have with God over those things which can cause us harm. An “adder” (KJV) is a type of venomous snake, like a cobra or viper. A “dragon” could be a dragon, dinosaur, sea monster, or serpent. To “tread” upon and to “trample under feet” signifies a complete domination over those harmful things.

Putting this all together we see that through God we have complete domination over things which would normally make us fearful. I want to emphasize that the focus is to remain on God, not any of our abilities. If we have any victory at all, it’s because of God. Read James 1:16 – 18. When we enter a season of peace and things generally go our way, we become comfortable. Our focus shifts from God to the good things He provides. We start enjoying the “good life” to the extent that the intensity of our relationship with Him diminishes. We may even begin to think that we had some power and influence and were primarily responsible for our victory. Nothing could be farther from the truth. So, beware of the “good life”.

*Do you know someone who took the credit for someone else’s work? Why did they do it?
Is this a good thing or a bad thing? How did the person who actually did the work feel?
How do you think God feels when we take credit for things He’s done? Have you done this recently?*

Now, God Speaks

In the last three verses of Psalm 91, God speaks about the person to whom He provides protection. Notice in first phrase of verse 14. What does it mean to “set your love upon Him”?

The word “love” comes from the Hebrew word “chashaq” which means to love, to be attached to, to long for. Lately I have been doing a lot of traveling for my job. If I am away from my wife for a day or two, it’s not *too* bad. But if the trip last three days or longer, I really start longing for her. Hearing her voice over

the phone is not enough. I want to be with her. Given that we are well into our second decade of marriage, we've become attached to each other.

Are you attached to God? Do you long for Him? If so, how did your "longing" for God come about? What do you do to sustain the relationship? If you don't long for God, why not? What prevented you in the past? What is preventing you now? Anger, disappointment, confusion, unanswered questions? How can you develop a longing for God in spite of the above?

You'll also notice in verse 14 the benefits you receive because you "chashaq" God, i.e., long for and are attached to God. He will "deliver" you (bring you into security and safety), and He will "set you on high" (to set too high for capture, to be exalted by God). All this because you have "known" His name (you know by experience, you recognize, you acknowledge Him).

Verse 15 says that when we "call" Him (cry out loud, call for help), He will answer us and "deliver" us. The word "deliver" in verse 15 comes from a different Hebrew word than verse 14. "Deliver" in verse 15 comes from the word "chalets" which means:

- To remove, to rescue
- To equip, to armed
- To invigorate, to make strong

So not only will God rescue us, but He will equip us and make us strong. When God "honors" us, we will gain glory, be honored, and become strong.

And finally in Verse 16, God will "satisfy" us with long life. "Satisfy" not only means to provide what is needed, but to fulfill, overflow, to satiate. I am inclined to think that this is also a reference to eternal life.

God also said that He will show us His salvation. "Salvation" comes from the word which means the following:

- Salvation

- deliverance
- welfare, prosperity
- deliverance
- salvation (by God)
- victory

It is by no accident that the Hebrew word from which we get “salvation” is the same word from which “Joshua” is derived. “Joshua” is the Hebrew translation of “Jesus”.

Summary

There are several keys to experiencing “all this protection” provided by our Father. They are:

- We must dwell with God; (yashab) – to sit, to sit down, to remain, to be set
- We must abide with God; (luwn) – to lodge, stop over, pass the night, to cause to rest or lodge
- We must “trust” in God; (chacah) – to confide, hope, to take refuge in.
- We must make the Lord our “habitation”; (ma ‘own) – a dwelling place, a refuge
- We must set our “love” upon Him; (chashaq) – to love, to be attached to, to long for

Now you may be thinking, “Vic, this is a long list.”, but all of the above revolves around our personal relationship with our Father. As our relationship grows, all of the above will come naturally, without effort.

So I urge, before a storm comes, build your “refuge”. Develop a closer relationship with God and pray aloud Psalm 91. You will be strengthened and encouraged by the “rock solid” protection He promises to the ones He loves.