Ashley Glover

Dr. MacLennan

Christianity in Its GC

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Psalm 91

Fear is an inescapable emotion humans possess. The innate tendency to be wary of that which we do not understand or avoid situations which evoke uneasiness within us stems from the human universal of fear. Nevertheless, in several portions of the Holy Bible, God uses his omnipotent presence to quiet the fears within individuals’ hearts. A familiar scripture passage which demonstrates this idea is Psalm 91. God’s protection is everlasting to those who believe and acknowledge his sacrifices, and with His protection the fears of life are diminished.

A seemingly recognizable passage, Psalm 91 may commonly be referred to as a Psalm dealing with trust or confidence (NIV). The origin and explanation for this Psalm is unknown, though some believe it was written by a psalmist as a word of thanks after a successful recovery from an illness. Others suggest the verses were implemented as a sort of liturgy used in order to gain entrance into a temple (NIV). After I had first read this Psalm, the issue of trust weighed heavily on my mind. In order to receive protection or guidance from God, one must first trust in a higher power. In other words, one must have faith in an elusive being. Additionally, an individual must be willing to overcome natural human instinct in order to trust fully in God. At times this seems illogical due to the fact that fear in a situation often overtakes an individual, thus causing him to rely on human impulses rather than spiritual guidance. The scholars who argue that trust in God is the meaning of this Psalm are not altogether incorrect in their assumptions; a level of trust in the Lord is needed in order for an individual to feel they are in warrant of protection. Nevertheless, I agree with those Biblical scholars who support the assertion that the main objective of this Psalm is to illustrate God’s protection of his people.

The first four verses of Psalm 91 demonstrate the overall theme of protection. The word choice used within the few sentences effectively characterizes God as an omnipotent protector. The terms, “Most High” and “Almighty” are essential in establishing the power God holds; additionally, they are common terms used in society which illustrate a monarchial relationship in which the higher of the powers is worshipped and obeyed. While the relationship between a Christian and God is vastly different between that of a king and his subject, the word choice used elicits a similar connotation with regards to power. In verse two, the psalmist regards the Lord as “my refuge and my fortress” and thus illustrates the fact that God is a strong protective force against evil. A fortress is commonly associated with battle; an opposing force is trying to invade the sanctuary within; nevertheless, the structure is strong and will not easily bend to the impending force. This is true of God’s protection; despite the forces endangering an individual, the strength of God’s shield will prohibit the forces from penetrating a believer. This verse acts as the psalmist’s “personal confession of trust” (Deffinbaugh). The writer is speaking from experience; he obviously believes the words he is writing and thus experienced an event in which God protected him. He urges the reader to accept this ideal and consequently be saved from the impairment of fear.

The third and fourth verses add to the assertion established in the preceding verses that God is our ultimate protector. Though the relativity of the third verses’ dangers are not common in today’s age; the specific examples are representative of a larger whole. In regards to the fowler’s snare, God protects us from the unforeseeable events around us. He is able to predict the future and thus is able to prepare us for upcoming events. Additionally, God is able to give us strength when we are faced with dilemmas in which we as individuals are members of a weaker party. Thanks in part to medical advances we no longer have an extreme fear of “deadly pestilence”; nevertheless, unforeseeable circumstances do arise and prompt fear. In the wake of the turmoil, God watches over us and guides us down the desired path.

The imagery in verse four illustrates two drastically different sides of God’s power. “He will cover you with feathers and under his wings you will find refuge” (NIV). This view illustrates God’s compassion and tenderness toward us. While protecting us from evil, we will be shown the path of righteousness. Contrastingly the phrase “his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” provokes the image of a strong and determined force protecting the weak. According to one of the contributors to an online bible study group, Bob Deffinbaugh, “His keeping power is portrayed by the use of two images, a mother bird and metal armor (Deffinbaugh).” This symbolizes “the warmth of God’s love and concern” (Deffinbaugh). Additionally, the metal armor represents toughness (Deffinbaugh). The use of the opposing ideas is very effective way of describing God’s power. He is not one to be feared, for he deeply cares for all of his creation; however, his determination is absolute and his power will not wane. With constant reminders of God’s wrath from fire-and-brim-stone preachers and fanatic religious cults, the grace and concern God shows through this verse is a welcomed reaffirmation of his love for us and thus increases our faith and trust in his will.

In the following verses (5-10) God’s protection is said to be able to withstand all obstacles. In the course of one’s life, he will encounter various physical, mental, emotional, societal and spiritual dilemmas; nevertheless, God will offer support and guidance in order to effectively deal with each situation as it arises. In regard to the fifth verse, God’s protection is never-ending and never-failing. Societal and environmental limitations have no merit on God’s abilities to secure and defend his people. Despite past and future transgressions, God will watch over you. Your failures and misdeeds are forgiven thanks to the sacrifice of his son, and you are able to live in peace knowing God will watch over and guide you in your journey. Verse seven is imperative in reiterating God’s protective nature. Though sinners around you may fall, if you remain diligent in your faith and honor the Lord, he will save you from harm. This is a much more difficult task in this day-in-age. Society is composed of fickle individuals who cling to the ideals of almost anyone in power regardless of merit. Pressure to “be part of the group or the in-crowd” causes some to lose their self-identity and moral code. The definition of a Christian is becoming increasingly skewed, and I fear it will eventually become meaningless. However, one reward in resisting peer pressure and affording confirming to societal norms is the promise of God’s fortification in your life. Though motivated by selfishness rather than by a respect and love for the Creator, God’s unending compassion and faithfulness will ensure you live a happy and successful life.

The reflections to this verse in the New International Version of the Bible states, “The poetic hyperbole and allusions are meant more to evoke than to specify; thus the psalmist affirms that no place, no time, no circumstances that befalls us is beyond God’s ability to protect us” (NIV). Throughout this passage, one can find several references containing specific examples; this is done in order to generalize and create a larger theme in which to live by. It eases the comprehension for some while evoking questions in others and thus sparking conversation and inquiry. Deffinbaugh states, “No matter how disproportionate the odd, God’s protection is certain.” He draws on the historical reference of the plagues of Egypt to help support his contention. The Israelites who stood strong in their faith and listened to God declarations were spared while the Egyptians were victims of God’s wrath.

In verses eleven through thirteen, through the use of metaphors, the reader is once again comforted by God’s protection. The passage suggests God will supply constant protection. Additionally, he will help you overcome that which frightens and ails you. God’s protection is much more powerful than Satan’s will and ability to oppose us (Deffinbaugh). Furthermore, with the phrase, “…they will lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone” we are aware that any degree of fear is recognized and calmed by God. His guidance is crucial in order for the human race to make righteous decisions and move forward into the unknown. Because of our trust and reliance of God’s protection, we are able to confidently face that which you fear; “…you will trample the great lion and the serpent” (NIV).

In the final verses of the Psalm, God expresses the assurance that he will always uphold and shelter us. Despite false assumptions, verse fourteen is not meant in a threatening manner-believe in God or you will have no protection-rather it suggests that having a relationship with the Lord is deliverance (NIV). Those who understand the importance of God are faithful and trustworthy and therefore allow themselves to accept the protection God offers (NIV). According to Deffinbaugh’s analysis, “We are not safe because we hope so, but because God says so.” One could analyze the structure of the Psalm and draw attention to the fact that the beginning of the passage of writing focused on human trust. At the end, the words focus on “God’s word of promise” and thus create sureness, sanctuary, and optimism (NIV).

When the verse states “…I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.” (NIV) God alludes to the fact that all danger is unavoidable; yet, he is able to guide and sustain an individual through the hard times. I have found this to be true in my own life and there are also many other biblical stories which illustrate God’s presence. In the book of Daniel, two separate stories are commonly referred to when there is a need to demonstrate God’s support; God was present with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego while they were in the fiery furnace of Nabuchadnezzar. He was also present when Daniel was in the lion’s den (Deffinbaugh). So in turn, God will either allow us to avoid perilous situations or provide us with comfort and guidance in the presence of danger (Deffinbaugh). Moreover, when God says he will “honor” him, he will not simply offer guidance but deliver the individual and offer him glory (Deffinbaugh). Finally, at the end of the Psalm, God promises a long life and after death he offers salvation. This helps calm the fears of death and prompts eagerness and hopefulness in receiving the salvation of His kingdom.

Like the lyrics of the popular song “He’s Never Failed Me Yet” suggest, God gives us power to overcome fear. “For all the dangers, toils and snares that he has brought me out”; God delivers those who have faith and accept God’s help. His protection is awe-inspiring and unrequited; still, God continues to guide us. Despite the turmoil within our respective lives, we as people can always count on God’s faithfulness and protection.