



College of Theology & Evangelism Fiji

Ambassadors for Christ International – USA ☒ AFCI USA Service Center

PO Box 369 ☒ Roswell, GA 30077, USA

Office: 470-514-5427 ☒ E-mail: info@afci.us

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Psalm 91 “My God in Whom I trust!”

COVID 19 and Psalm 91

The current global pandemic is unprecedented in the experience of everyone living. Many people are eager to see COVID-19 end. On February 20, a video was reportedly shot at the Gateway of India during a Hindu prayer session to stop the spread of COVID-19 in China. An Indian Union Minister, a Chinese Consul General in Mumbai, and Buddhist monks chanted ‘Go corona, go corona’ . . .

On another front, millions are turning to the sacred pages of Scripture for comfort and security during this coronavirus pandemic. The three most go-to Bible passages are Psalm 23, Psalm 27, and Psalm 91. In Singapore, a megachurch pastor preaching Psalm 91 promised the protection from COVID-19 over his entire church. His bold claim was: “We are completely protected.” Another prominent prosperity-gospel leader requested followers to pray and give a donation of USD91.00. The figure of 91 recalls Psalm 91. Thirdly, Christianity.com reported that millions around the world are praying Psalm 91. The number 91 is literally their 9-1-1 to our mighty God for divine protection from all harm. It makes sense why several Christians have opted to live in defiance of the social distancing order. But what if all of these claims are meanly counterfeit?

Psalm 91 certainly contains a profound promise of protection, especially verses 2–3, 5–7, 9–10:

“I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!” For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence . . . You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you . . . For you have made the Lord, my refuge, even the Most-High, your dwelling place. No harm will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent.”

The psalmist is promised, “No evil/harm will befall you” (v. 10). We may ask, is this possible? For this we must understand the **context** of this psalm. First and foremost, it should be noted that for an Israelite living under the Mosaic Covenant, rich blessings followed faithfulness, but pestilence and destruction awaited covenant disobedience (see Lev. 26 and Deut. 28). As a warning, Israel must cling to the covenant, obey God’s voice and enjoy His blessing as His people. So, the answer is YES! An OT saint living in covenant obedience with God was promised full protection from things seen or unseen!

However, Christians are living under a different covenant arrangement. One which does not guarantee protection from every evil and danger nor promise pestilence for disobedience. Under the New Covenant, the apostle Paul says that no harm will ‘separate us from the love of Christ’ (Rom 8:35), which of course implies that it will befall us. Paul cautions in 2 Timothy 3:12, that all who live for God will suffer persecution, and in Philippians 3:10, he indicates that to know Christ one must know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings. It would be worthwhile then to examine Psalm 91 so that its message is not **misapplied**.

It is rather unfortunate that the verses from Psalm 91 have become **proof text** during the Coronavirus outbreak. The warning by commentator Mays is well stated: “Psalm 91 itself poses a danger. Because its assurance of security is so comprehensive and confident, it is especially subject to the **misuse** that is a possibility for all religious claims, that of turning faith into superstition. In Judaism and Christianity, bits of the text have been worn in amulets that were believed to be a kind of magical protection for those who wore them.” Making such a claim today, that the God of Psalm 91 is so large and in charge that no deadly disease or plague can ever come near you, is far removed from the teaching of Psalm 91.

Consider also that the only Scripture Satan quotes in the NT comes from Psalm 91. He is enticing Jesus to sin in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11; Lk. 4:1–13). Since he willfully misinterpreted and misapplied the meaning of the text in its context, it should not surprise us that he will likely attempt to distort its message in our lives. Now we know that Jesus trusted God and relied upon him, yet his life and ministry led directly to death on a Roman cross. So where was the protection this psalm promised for Jesus? There has to be more to this psalm than first appears. So, let us then consider this dramatic and beautiful psalm.

Psalm 91 is without title and is anonymous. The date of this psalm is uncertain; probably it is post-exilic, written by a king or a daring man of war who has come to the temple to worship. The priestly blessing, he receives (1 Sam. 1:17), abounds in a rich profusion of metaphors, promising deliverance from every type of danger. A variety of images are used by the speakers to describe potential threats to the psalmist, but the most prominent families of metaphors refer to military and medical threats.

As a companion poem to Psalm 90, the psalmist in 91 sings a noble **song of trust**, but he has a didactic purpose as well. Within the broader OT context, verses 5–13 are similar to the wisdom teaching in Proverbs 3:21–26; and verses 4 and 12 links with Deuteronomy 32:11. Both psalms begin with the blessedness of those who find a dwelling place in God. In Psalm 90 we have the “eternal God” and in Psalm 91 we have the “everlasting arms.” These two great poems make a wonderful exposition of Moses’ parting words, in Deuteronomy 33:27, “*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*” The two Psalms are also in striking contrast, the former presenting primarily the condition of the faithless Israelites under divine judgment, and the latter indicating those who came under God’s special protection. Other notable factors include:

- Psalm 90 tells of the sovereignty of God, but Psalm 91 tells of his tenderness (1, 4, 15);
- Psalm 90, of the brevity of man’s life, but Psalm 91 of “long life” in God (16);
- In Psalm 90 the soul is full of trouble and fear, but in Psalm 91 he is no longer afraid (5);
- In Psalm 90 man confesses his sin, but in Psalm 91 God acknowledges man’s love (14);
- Psalm 90 is a prayer for satisfaction, and in Psalm 91 is the promise of it (16).

These and other contrasts bind the psalms together. The solemn sadness of Psalm 90 gives place to the sunny gladness of 91. Few psalms could be at once as encouraging and as thought-provoking as this one. This worshipper is a simple soul, but he has a profound faith. The sense of security, which is incidental in Psalm 90, is the main thrust of Psalm 91. What is important is that we know where our true home is and who our God is.

It is in this context that our psalmist takes refuge in God’s special covenantal faithfulness toward Israel (1–2, 4). Therefore, in a poem of this kind we must not look for **a complete theology**. Psalm 91 in relation to COVID-19 has more disparity than similarity. Now, what is true of the trusting nation, is true also of the trusting soul, so that the national application of Psalm 91 does not rob the individual of the ground of confidence which it affords.

We are not guaranteed a pain-free or illness-free life. We read in Scripture that it is often through strife and struggle that the believer grows spiritually with God and is an encouragement to others (Joseph, Jonah, Abraham, Moses, Esther, Daniel, Paul, Peter, John, and so many others). The happiest people in the world are not those who do not have problems; it is those who are not afraid of problems. Psalm 91 points to God as our eternal Refuge and no evil or virus can take that away.

Fiji Ministry News

- Our nation currently has 3 active COVID-19 cases, with zero deaths.
- The **Lovu Bible Church** has not met together since March 19. Most of our members are coping well at this time.
- The Fiji Higher Education Commission gave us the directive to **resume** our classes 3 weeks ago.
- As of today, 19 out of 20 **CTEF** students are back on the campus.
- Ms. Ramati Vasist is a widow, who lives very close to our home. In January this year she converted from Hinduism. Recently, her whole family was asked to evacuate by a close relative. This unexpected ordeal has given occasion to some Hindu neighbors and relatives to taunt her for leaving Hinduism. This is her first fiery trial. We are meeting with her once a week for prayer and study.

Alumni Focus



- Mr. **Ilaitia Matalomani**, who came from a Methodist background graduated from CTEF in 1995 with B. Div.
- Recently he reached out to us for good theological resources.
- We were pleased to give him the Biblical Doctrine and Dr. MacArthur’s ESV study Bible.
- Ilaitia is currently the **president** of a Methodist Lay-training school in the district of Rewa, about 209km from us.

Prayer Requests

- ◇ For continued trust, obedience, and faithfulness in serving our great God.
- ◇ Since I am teaching six classes per week, there is a backlog of grading work.
- ◇ Mrs. Angela and her two adult daughters from Nadi town have recently left Hinduism and embraced Christianity. They have been through a lot in life before finding Christ. Ashwin and I am meeting with them once a week.
- ◇ For Gospel opportunities.

We are indebted to your love, generous and faithful support to our family and ministry.
By God’s Grace & For His Glory
Premend & Ashwin