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# Does God Really Mean What He Says in Psalm 91?

by Daryl E. Witmer

## PSALM 91

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 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. He will cover you with His pinions and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. 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. You will only look on with your eyes, and see the recompense of the wicked. For you have made the Lord, my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down. 'Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him, and honor him. With a long life I will satisfy him, and let him behold My salvation.'*

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Throughout human history countless numbers of people have suffered and died — including multiple thousands of believers with strong faith in God and in His great and

precious promises. So how were the promises of protection and provision outlined in Psalm 91 relevant in their lives? **What do those words actually mean anyway?** Hasn't God failed to honor those sweeping and powerful promises in at least some cases? And if that's true with Psalm 91, just how realistic, relevant, and reliable are all the other promises in God's Word?

Here is my best attempt at an answer:

- Some Bible students suggest that Psalm 91 is actually a reference to the future Millennial Kingdom. Verses 13 and 15 make it sound that way, don't they? Especially when correlated with Isaiah 65:24-25 and Isaiah 11:5-8.
- Some commentators claim that this Psalm is actually a testimony of Moses (note the many plague-like references) and, as such, should be considered more of a record about what God did for Israel in the past than a pledge of what He'll do for us today.



Perhaps the best answer incorporates and enhances both of those views.

- **We know that God is now and is always able to protect everyone. We know that He has at times protected many people. We know that He will in the future protect some people.**
- We also know that God is wise and sovereign, not always choosing to do all of that which He is able to do.
- Psalm 91 may be offering believers a promise of spiritual protection, not merely physical protection.

- No Scripture should be construed as a Divine pledge of unqualified physical protection to all believers for all time in all circumstances.

**In other words, Psalm 91 is really a testimony of what God has chosen to do on occasion in the past, an assurance of what He is altogether able to do in the present, and a beautiful literary portrait of His awesome capability in the future.**

In order to accurately understand and *appropriately* claim the promises of Psalm 91 for myself today, I sometimes preface them with a little phrase that seems to be implied by the whole of Scripture and a basic knowledge of life: "Unless God in His great love and wisdom decrees otherwise for a higher good . . ."

- Unless God in His great love and wisdom decrees otherwise for purposes of a higher good, I know that He is fully able to "deliver me from the snare of the trapper, and from the deadly pestilence."
- Unless God in His great love and wisdom decrees otherwise for purposes of a higher good, I know that "a thousand may fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand; But it shall not approach me."
- Unless God in His great love and wisdom decrees otherwise for purposes of a higher good, I know that "no evil will befall me, nor will any plague come near my tent."

**This little phrase is not intended to qualify, add to, or take away from the words of Psalm 91.** It is meant to define them in the context of the whole counsel of God's Word, which includes the account of Jesus' death, the matter of Paul's thorn in the flesh, the story of Stephen's death, and many other instances of adversity.

Whatever the depths of its meaning, this Psalm, its promises, and all of Scripture **can surely be considered true, comforting, and 100% reliable.**

**More Evidence in Defense and Confirmation of the Christian Faith**