

# PSALM 91

## INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 91

Jarchi and others think this psalm was written by Moses <sup>f1316</sup>, as was the preceding; but the Targum ascribes it to David; as do the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions; and very probably, as is generally thought, was penned by him on occasion of the pestilence which came upon the people, through his numbering of them, (<sup><1241></sup>2 Samuel 24:1). The person all along spoken of, and to, according to the Targum, is Solomon his son; and, according to the title in the Syriac version, King Hezekiah, so Theodoret, who is called the son of David; neither of which are probable. Some think the Messiah is meant; and that the psalm contains promises of protection and safety to him, as man, from diseases, beasts of prey, evil spirits, and wicked men, under the care of angels; and this not because that Satan has applied one of these promises to him, (<sup><1016></sup>Matthew 4:6), but because they seem better to agree with him than with any other: and one part of the title of the psalm, in the Syriac version, runs thus,

“and spiritually it is called the victory of the Messiah, and of everyone that is perfected by him.”

It seems best to understand it of every godly man, who is always safe under the divine protection. The Talmudists <sup>f1317</sup> call it  $\mu\gamma[\text{gp}] \text{ r}\gamma\zeta$ , “a song of the occursions”, or “meetings with evil spirits.”

**Ver. 1.** *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High*, etc.] Or the Supreme; a title of God, who is superior to all beings, the Creator and Preserver of them, God over all, higher than the highest of angels or men; (see <sup><1142></sup>Genesis 14:22), “his secret place” is his heart, his bosom, where his only begotten Son lies; and into which he takes his people, where they are set as a seal, and who enjoy intimate communion with him; which is no other than his gracious presence, called “the secret of his presence”, (<sup><1310></sup>Psalm 31:20), which none but saints are admitted to, when his everlasting love, which was a secret in his heart, is made known unto them, and in which they also dwell, (<sup><1016></sup>1 John 4:16), as they likewise do in the eternal decree of election; which perhaps is meant by “the clefts of the

rock, and secret places of the stairs”, where the church is said to dwell, (<sup><2124></sup>Song of Solomon 2:14), unless rather Christ the Rock, and who may be signified by the cleft of that Moses was put into, when the goodness of the Lord passed before him, is intended; and who is the hiding place from the wind: mention is made of “the secret” of God’s “tabernacle”, (<sup><4276></sup>Psalms 27:5), in which he hides his people; alluding to the tabernacle, or temple, and the most holy place in it, called his secret place, (<sup><3172></sup>Ezekiel 7:22), and may refer to the ministry of the word and ordinances, where saints dwell, and enjoy much communion with God; and who are particularly under his special providence, protection, and power; which may here be designed:

*shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty*: who is able to do all things for his people, and is “Shaddai”, all sufficient, as this word is thought to signify; has a sufficiency of happiness in and for himself, and of provisions for all his creatures, and of power and grace for his own children: his “shadow” may be the same with his secret place, his power and protection, often in this book of Psalms called “the shadow of his wings”, (<sup><1978></sup>Psalms 17:8 36:7 57:1), in allusion to birds that overshadow and protect their young with their wings; though perhaps the allusion here may be to the shadow of a tree, and design the word and ordinances of the Lord’s house, which are a delightful, refreshing, reviving, and fruitful shadow, (<sup><2128></sup>Song of Solomon 2:3 <sup><3147></sup>Hosea 14:7), where gracious souls dwell, and abide with great delight and pleasure. Christ, the Son of God, is sometimes compared to the shadow of a rock, or tree, which screens and shelters from heat; as he preserves his people from the heat of a fiery law, the flaming sword of justice, the wrath of God, the fiery darts of Satan, and the fury of persecutors: under this shadow do they abide or lodge all night, safe and secure, as the word <sup>f1318</sup> signifies: the Targum calls this shadow the shadow of the clouds of glory; the Arabic version, “the shadow of the God of heaven.”

**Ver. 2.** *I will say of the Lord*, etc.] Or to the Lord <sup>f1319</sup>: these are the words of the psalmist, expressing his faith in the Lord in the following words, taking encouragement from the safety of the godly man above described: the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, read, he shall say to the Lord; that is, the man that dwells in the secret place, and under the shadow of the Lord: the Targum is,

“David said, I will say to the Lord,”

as follows:

*he is my refuge*: a refuge in every time of trouble, outward or toward; a refuge when all others fail; and is himself a never failing one, a strong refuge, which none can break through and into, and in which all that have fled thither and dwell are safe:

*and my fortress*; what fortifications, natural or artificial, are to a city and its inhabitants, that is God to his people, and much more; he is round about them, as the mountains were about Jerusalem; his salvation are walls and bulwarks to them; yea, he is a wall of fire about them, (<sup><B3C></sup>Psalm 125:2 <sup><B3D></sup>Isaiah 26:1 <sup><B3E></sup>Zechariah 2:5), they are kept by his power, as in a garrison, (<sup><B4D></sup>1 Peter 1:5),

*my God, in him will I trust*; his covenant God, his God in Christ, and who would ever continue so; and was a proper object of his trust and confidence, both as the God of nature, and the God of grace; who is to be trusted in, both for temporal and spiritual blessings, and at all times; to which his lovingkindness, power, and faithfulness, greatly encourage and engage: the Targum is,

“in his Word will I trust.”

**Ver. 3.** *Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler*, etc.] These are the words of the psalmist, either speaking to himself, for the encouragement of his own faith and trust in the Lord; or to the man that dwells in the secret place, and under the shadow of the most High; which latter seems most agreeable; though Cocceius thinks they are the words of God in one of his Persons, speaking of another divine Person that should deliver such that trust in him: the Targum makes them to be the words of David to Solomon his son. By the “fowler” and his “snare” may be meant either Saul, who laid wait for David, spread snares for him, and hunted him as a partridge on the mountains, from whom he was delivered; or rather any tyrannical enemy and persecutor of the saints, who lay snares for them; and these are broken by the Lord, and so they escape, as a bird out of the hands of the fowler, (<sup><B3C></sup>Psalm 124:6,7) or it may, best of all, be understood of Satan and his temptations, which are as snares that he lays to catch the people of God in, and from which they are delivered by the power and grace of God; (see <sup><B4D></sup>1 Timothy 3:7 <sup><B5D></sup>2 Timothy 2:26)

*and from the noisome pestilence*; the most pernicious and destructive one; which may be literally understood of any pestilential distemper; from which the Lord, by his powerful providence, sometimes protects his people, when

in danger of it: or, spiritually, of the pestilential disease of sin, that noisome and deadly one, the plague of the heart, which is the worst of all plagues; and from the ruinous and destructive effects and consequences of which the Lord saves his saints.

**Ver. 4.** *He shall cover thee with his feathers*, etc.] As birds do their young, who cannot cover themselves: this they do from a tender regard to them, whereby they both keep them warm, and protect them from those that would hurt them: this represents the helpless state of the children of God, who are, like to young birds, weak and unable to defend themselves: the tender regard of God unto them, as the eagle and other birds have to their young; (see <sup><6821></sup>Deuteronomy 32:11 <sup><2305></sup>Isaiah 31:5 <sup><1235></sup>Matthew 23:37) and the warmth and comforts souls have, as well as protection, under his powerful and gracious presence; he comforts them under their tribulations, as well as defends them from their enemies:

*and under his wings shalt thou trust*; (see Gill on “<sup><4900></sup>Psalm 91:1”) and the passages there referred to; the same metaphor is continued:

*his truth shall be thy shield and buckler*; his faithfulness, which is engaged to keep and preserve his saints safe to his kingdom and glory, (<sup><4008></sup>1 Corinthians 1:8,9 <sup><5123></sup>1 Thessalonians 5:23,24), his Son, who is “truth” itself, (<sup><6446></sup>John 14:6), and whose person, blood, righteousness, and salvation, are as a shield and buckler all around the saints, to secure them from ruin and destruction; and are the shield which faith lays hold on, and makes use of, against the temptation, of Satan; (see <sup><6841></sup>Psalm 84:11 <sup><4016></sup>Ephesians 6:16), the word of God also, which is truth, (<sup><6179></sup>John 17:19), every promise in it, and doctrine of it, is as a shield and buckler to strengthen, support, and secure the faith of his people, (<sup><2805></sup>Proverbs 30:5).

**Ver. 5.** *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night*, etc.] The terrible things that happen in the night; as fire, storms and tempests, invasion of enemies, murders, thefts, and, robberies: a good man, when he has committed himself and his family to the care and protection of God by prayer, has no reason to be anxiously careful of these things, or to indulge a slavish fear about them; (see <sup><4905></sup>Psalm 3:5 4:8 <sup><2024></sup>Proverbs 3:24,25), the Targum is,

“thou shall not be afraid for the fear of devils that walk in the night:”

so Jarchi interprets this, and the next verse, of such; as do others of the Jewish writers: a man that trusts in the Lord need not be afraid of men or devils: a fear of evil spirits is natural to men, and very early appeared; perhaps it took its rise from the fatal affair of the fall of our first parents, through an intercourse with an evil spirit; and ever since has been imprinted on human nature an aversion to evil spirits, and a dread of them, and even of all spirits in general; (see <sup><8013></sup>Job 4:13-16, <sup><4025></sup>Matthew 14:25,26 <sup><2247></sup>Luke 24:37,38),

*nor for the arrow that flieth by day*; the judgments of God, such as the sword, famine, and pestilence; these are called the arrows of God, (<sup><6323></sup>Deuteronomy 32:23,24,42 <sup><3156></sup>Ezekiel 5:16) <sup>f1320</sup>, because they move swiftly, come suddenly, and strike surely, and are open and visible; they are sent by the Lord, and are ordered and directed by him, and hit and hurt whom he pleases, and none else; and therefore such who dwell in the secret of the Lord, and under his shadow, need not be distressed about them: the Targum interprets it of the arrow of the angel of death, which he sends out in the day; (see <sup><8214></sup>Hebrews 2:14), so Jarchi understands it of a demon that flies like an arrow.

**Ver. 6.** *Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness*, etc.] Some think, and not without cause, that what is figuratively expressed in the preceding verse is here explained; and, indeed, the “pestilence” may well be called the “terror by night”: the name of the plague, at a distance, is terrible; the near approach of it is more so; when it enters a country, city, or town, what fleeing is there from it? and in the night season it is more dreadful than in the day; not only to think of it in the gloomy watches of the night, but to see the vast numbers carried out to be interred, and to hear the dismal cry, Bring out your dead: and so it is here said to “walk in darkness”; in the darkness of the night, or to arise from dark and unknown causes; when it moves and walks through cities, towns, and villages, and there is no stopping it: and this also may be the “arrow that flieth by day”; which flies as swift as an arrow, and that flies as swift as a bird <sup>f1321</sup>; this is taken out of the Lord’s quiver, has its commission and direction from him, and does execution by night and by day: the plague that smote the firstborn in Egypt was in the night; and that which was in David’s time, and might be the occasion of penning this psalm, began in the day, (<sup><2129></sup>Exodus 12:29,30 <sup><1215></sup>2 Samuel 24:15),

*nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day*; as the pestilence, which may be increased, and rage the more, through the heat of the day; and which destroys great numbers wherever it comes: seventy thousand were taken off in three days by the plague occasioned by David's numbering of the people: the Targum is,

“of a company of devils that destroy at noon day;”

that is, thou shall not be afraid: some think respect is had to a pestilential hot wind, common in the eastern countries, which begins to blow about eight o'clock in a morning, and is hottest at noon; which instantly suffocates persons, burns them, and reduces them to ashes presently, which the Arabs call “sammiel”, or a poison wind <sup>f1322</sup>.

**Ver. 7.** *A thousand shall fall at thy side*, etc.] The left side, as the Targum; so the Arabic version, and Jarchi and Kimchi; which sense the opposition and distinction in the next clause direct unto: this is not to be understood of falling in battle, as some interpret it, but by the pestilence before spoken of:

*and ten thousand at thy right hand*; which shows both the great devastation made by the plague where it comes, and the special care and providence of God in preserving his people from it; of which David had an experience, when vast numbers of his people were destroyed by it on the right and left:

*but it shall not come nigh thee*; it may come near the place where good men are, or else it could not be said that a thousand should fall on their side, and ten thousand at their right hand: the plague that killed the firstborn in Egypt was near the dwellings of the Israelites, though it entered not into them; and that in David's time was near him, though he was not infected with it: but the meaning is, that it should not come so near such as to seize their bodies and they fall by the distemper; there being a particular providence oftentimes concerned for their safety, which guards them from it; (see ~~2004~~ Ezekiel 9:4), not but that good men may fall in a common calamity, and by an epidemical distemper; but then it is for their good, and not their hurt; they are taken away from the evil to come, and are delivered from a worse plague than that by which they fall, the plague of their own hearts, the evil of sin; and so the Targum adds, “shall not come near to hurt”, though it understands it of devils.

**Ver. 8.** *Only with thine eyes shall thou behold*, etc.] The flying arrow, the walking pestilence, and wasting destruction, and the great devastations made by it:

*and see the reward of the wicked*; the vengeance of God upon them, and this as a just punishment for their sins; not looking upon it with delight and pleasure, rejoicing in the misery of their fellow creatures, any otherwise than as the glory of divine justice is displayed in it; (see <sup><RB16></sup>Psalm 52:6 68:10), the pestilence is always threatened, and it always comes, as a Judgment upon a wicked generation of men; and so it is ever to be considered, and is considered by good men, (<sup><RB15></sup>Leviticus 26:5 <sup><RB20></sup>Deuteronomy 28:20,21).

**Ver. 9.** *Because thou hast made the Lord which is my refuge*, etc.] So the words, according to Kimchi, also are directed to the good man; giving the reason of his safety, because he trusts in the Lord, and puts himself under his protection: but they should rather be rendered, and the accents require such a reading, “because thou, Lord, art my refuge” <sup>f1323</sup>; and so are either the words of the good man that trusts in the Lord; or rather of the psalmist himself, seeing his safety in the midst of danger, and ascribing it to the Lord; whose providence was in a peculiar manner over him, whose power protected him, and he was as an asylum or city of refuge to him; so that nothing could hurt him:

*even the most High, thy habitation*; it should be rendered, “thou hast made the most High thy habitation”; being an apostrophe of the psalmist to his own soul, observing the ground of his security; the most high God being made and used by him as his habitation, or dwelling place, where he dwelt, as every good man does, safely, quietly, comfortably, pleasantly, and continually: the Targum makes them to be the words of Solomon, paraphrasing them thus,

“Solomon answered, and thus he said, thou thyself, O Lord, art my confidence; in an high habitation thou hast put the house of thy majesty.”

**Ver. 10.** *There shall no evil befall thee*, etc.] The evil of sin cleaves to the best of saints, the evil of temptations besets them, and the evil of afflictions comes upon them, as chastisements from the Lord; for they must expect to receive evil, in this sense, as well as good, from his hands; but the evil of punishment never touches them; and therefore, when any public calamity

befalls them in common with others, yet not as an evil of punishment; it is not an evil to them, it is for their good:

*neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling*; how should it, when they dwell in God, and have made him, the most High, their habitation <sup>f1324</sup>; (<sup><3900></sup>Psalm 91:1,9) otherwise it may come nigh their temporal dwellings; (see Gill on “<sup><3900></sup>Psalm 91:7”) though it may not enter into them; and, should it, yet not as an evil, or by way of punishment; (see <sup><3183></sup>Proverbs 3:33).

**Ver. 11.** *For he shall give his angels charge over thee*, etc.] Created spirits, so called, made by the Lord, and are at his command; who are ministering spirits to his people, who encamp about them, and are concerned in the preservation of them; they being committed to their care and charge by him who is Lord of heaven and earth: Satan applied this passage to Christ, (<sup><4016></sup>Matthew 4:6), nor did our Lord object to the application of it; and it can hardly be thought that he would have ventured to have done it, had he been aware that a misapplication might be objected; or that it was not the received sense of the place: what he is to be blamed for, in quoting it, was the wrong purpose for which he produced it, and for leaving out the next clause, which he saw was against his design;

*to keep thee in all thy ways*; in walking and travelling from place to place, as Providence calls and directs; and in all civil ways, in all lawful business and employment of life; in all spiritual ones, as the ways of God and religion: what Satan tempted Christ to was neither of these ways; it was not a natural way of going, nor the duty of his office, nor any of the ways of God.

**Ver. 12.** *They shall bear thee up in their hands*, etc.] Which denotes the strength and power of angels to carry the saints in their hands; their tender care of them, such as a parent or nurse have of children; the helpless condition of the people of God, who are like infants, and need to be dealt with after this manner; the condescension of angels to take such an office on them, in submission to the will of God; the constant view they have of the saints, being always in their hands, and so in sight: thus they bear them, up in life, and at death carry their souls to Abraham’s bosom:

*lest thou dash thy foot against a stone*; lest they fall into sin, or into any calamity and distress; lest the least hurt or mischief befall them, or the least injury be done them; (see <sup><3183></sup>Proverbs 3:23). The Targum interprets it of



the evil concupiscence, or corruption of nature, which is like a stone; (see ~~<666>~~ Ezekiel 36:26).

**Ver. 13.** *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder*, etc.] Or be unhurt by such savage and poisonous creatures; as the Israelites, when they travelled through the wilderness, in which were serpents and scorpions; and many of the servants of God have been delivered from them, or have slain them, as Samson, David, and Daniel; and so Christ was among the wild beasts in the wilderness, and yet not touched or hurt by them; and his disciples had power given them by him to tread on serpents and scorpions, and to take up serpents, without receiving any damage from them; and when a viper fastened on the hand of the Apostle Paul, he shook it off, without being hurt by it; (see ~~<4013>~~ Mark 1:13 16:18 ~~<2109>~~ Luke 10:19) (~~<4875>~~ Acts 28:5), it may be understood figuratively of Satan, who, for his voraciousness and cruelty, is compared to a lion; and, for his craft and subtlety, to a serpent, (~~<6188>~~ 1 Peter 5:8 ~~<6619>~~ Revelation 12:9),

*the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample underfoot*; which also may be understood of the great dragon, the old serpent, called the devil and Satan; whom Christ trampled under his feet when he hung on the cross, and spoiled him and his principalities and powers; and who, in a short time, will be bruised under the feet of his people, as he has been already by the seed of the woman, (~~<6185>~~ Genesis 3:15 ~~<6161>~~ Romans 16:20).

**Ver. 14.** *Because he hath set his love upon me*, etc.] These are the words of God himself; and, according to Aben Ezra, are directed to the angels, describing the good man, and making promises to him; and in this clause he is represented as one that had “set his love” upon the Lord, being first loved by the Lord, and having the grace of love wrought in his heart by him: the phrase denotes the strength of his affection to God, and the sincerity of it; its singularity, being placed alone on him, and the settlement and fixedness of it, so as nothing could separate from it: this the Lord takes great notice of, and is highly well pleased with: hence it follows,

*therefore will I deliver him*: from noisome diseases before mentioned, from all afflictions into which he comes, and from all the temptations of the evil one, so as that he shall not be hurt or destroyed by them:

*I will set him on high*; on the Rock Christ Jesus, that is higher than he, higher than the angels, higher than the heavens, and where he is now out of the reach of all his enemies, and will be set hereafter on high in heaven,

among princes, inheriting the throne of glory; yea, even set upon the same throne with Christ himself:

*because he hath known my name*; himself, his being, and perfections; his Son, the Angel of his presence, in whom his name, nature, and perfections are; and his name as proclaimed in him, a God gracious and merciful; and this not merely notionally, but experimentally, and affectionately and fiducially; for such, that truly know him, love him, and trust in him; and these exalt him, and so are exalted and set on high by him.

**Ver. 15.** *He shall call upon me, and I will answer him*, etc.] God is to be invoked by prayer, and to be called upon in every time of trouble, in faith and with fervency, in truth and uprightness, and sincerity of soul; and he himself directs and encourages to it, and promises an answer, which he always sooner or later gives; for he is a God hearing and answering prayer; (see <sup>CHRIST</sup> Psalm 50:15).

*I will be with him in trouble*; the Lord knows his people in adversity; he visits them in their affliction, grants his gracious presence with them, supports them under it, that they are not overwhelmed by it; he bears them up and through it, and makes all things work together for their good:

*I will deliver him, and honour him*: deliverance is again promised, to denote the certainty of it; and with this addition, that the Lord will honour such that know him, and love him: all his saints are honoured by him, by taking them into his family, and giving them a name better than that of sons and daughters of the greatest potentate; by clothing them with the righteousness of his Son; by adorning them with the graces of his Spirit; by granting them communion and fellowship with himself, and by bringing them to his kingdom and glory.

**Ver. 16.** *With long life will I satisfy him*, etc.] In this world: the saints live in it as long as they choose to live; and when they come to die, be it when it will, they are, like Abraham, full of years, or satisfied with them; they have had enough of them, and would not live always here; but, with good old Simeon, desire to depart in peace; and in the other world they shall be satisfied with length of days, for ever and ever, even with eternal life; and nothing short of this will satisfy a good man:

*and show him my salvation*; Jesus Christ, the author of salvation, whom God appointed to do it, and who has finished it; salvation itself, wrought out by him; its fulness and suitableness, and interest in it; and also eternal

glory and happiness, the completion and consummation of salvation: the former is shown unto and seen by faith here; the latter will be seen and enjoyed in heaven to all eternity. Aben Ezra and Kimchi refer this salvation to the days of the Messiah.