

Psalm 91 – Trampling Snakes

Lessons from the Psalms

I. Introduction: a Wonderful Farm with lots of Snakes

- a. Imagine you are 17, and your parents send you to a farm for the summer. It's a remarkable farm. The workers there are kind, loving, hard-working, humble, encouraging, wise. There are three summer internships. Which do you choose:
 - i. Raising cute puppies and training them to become "seeing eye dogs" that help the blind all over the world navigate their world.
 - ii. Raising abundant crops. The soil at this farm is fertile, something special. The fruits and vegetables are richer, riper, fuller in flavor than even other neighboring farms. The taste explodes in your mouth: raspberries, corn, tomatoes, etc. This job requires hard work, but the harvest is remarkable, extremely rewarding and tasty!
 - iii. Killing venomous snakes. They are everywhere on the farm, lurking in the trees and in the high grass. If you use the right equipment and method, you can kill them. If you don't, you will get bitten and may even die.
- b. The wise farmer's response to your reluctance to work with snakes: "Everyone who works on the farm learns how to kill snakes."
- c. *Which of us would choose the poisonous snake job?!!*
 - i. No one! It's too risky, scary, and dangerous. Just let me be with the puppies or let me work hard in the garden producing fruit, but keep me away from the snakes!
- d. **Today, we are going to learn about how the Son of God did battle with Satan, the weapons He used, and how He ultimately trampled the Serpent of Old. We have much to learn from His example.**

II. Read Psalm 91 (Psalm 90 in the LXX) (all the way through 1x)

- a. A psalm of David, writing in the Spirit.
- b. This is the famous psalm quoted (and twisted) by Satan when he is tempting Jesus in **Matthew 4** (also found in **Luke 4**).
 - i. **Question:** Do we recognize the anguish caused by this temptation?

- ii. Only one of two times, that I am aware of, where the Scriptures say angels came and ministered to Jesus. Consider the fact that the Son of God needed angels to help Him overcome the testing of Satan.
 - iii. Let's first read this account in Matthew, given its relevance to **Psalm 91**.
- c. Read **Matthew 3:16-4:11**
- i. Jesus is baptized.
 - ii. The Spirit of God descends upon Him, and the Father's voice comes from heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
 - iii. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.
 - 1. He has fasted for forty days, prepped for spiritual battle, full of the Spirit, and likely quite hungry!
 - 2. Temptation #1: "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."
 - a. Jesus' response: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (**Deuteronomy 8:3**)
 - 3. Temptation #2: "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" [quoting from **Psalm 91**"]
 - a. Jesus' response: "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" (**Deuteronomy 6:16**)
 - b. We will discuss Satan's use of **Psalm 91** later.
 - 4. Temptation #3: "All these things [kingdoms of the world and their glory] I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."
 - a. Jesus' response: "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (**Deuteronomy 6:13**)
 - 5. Satan leaves Jesus, and "angels came and ministered to Him."
 - iv. **Question**: Does Satan know that Jesus is the Son of God?
 - 1. Answer: I think so!

- a. The demons knew Jesus was the Son of God.
 - b. Consider the story of Legion, the man filled with demons living in the tombs, who would break his chains.
 - i. “When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!’” (**Luke 8:28**).
 - c. I doubt Satan missed Jesus’ baptism and hearing God’s voice!
2. *Satan is bringing all he’s got to bring down the Son of God.*
 - a. Frist goes after Jesus’ flesh (food), then tries to get him to test God (a very serious sin we will discuss shortly), then tries to get Jesus to commit idolatry by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world.
- v. Lesson for us: May we not underestimate the great spiritual battle we engage in when we resist temptation.
1. We see it here in **Matthew 4**, where angels needed to come and to minister to Jesus. The second time we read about angelic help was in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 2. Read **Luke 22:39-46**.
 - a. “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”
 - b. “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.’ **Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.** And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”
 - i. Prayer provides power against temptation.
 - ii. An angel is strengthening Jesus in his agony.
 3. May we be prepared for the intensity of the spiritual battle we too are engaging in.
 4. May we give more respect to the Enemy we are facing, and what will be needed to overcome.

- vi. Now that we've seen the situation where Satan quotes **Psalm 91** in his attempt to cause Jesus to sin, let's read through the Psalm to see what lessons God intended.

III. Psalm 91:1-8 (Psalm 90:1-8 in the LXX)

- a. Ironically, from my perspective, this Psalm, quoted by Satan, provides great insight into overcoming Satan and his forces!
- b. Read **Psalm 91:1-4**.
 - i. "He who dwells in the help of the Most High/Shall lodge in the shelter of the God of heaven."
 - ii. "the help of the Most High", "the shelter", "my protector", "my refuge", "overshadows you with His shoulders", "under His wings you shall hope"
 1. We have an amazing God/Father who desires to help and protect us! Consider these images above.
 - a. How big are God's shoulders?
 - b. Hoping under His wings, not outside alone, shivering in the cold rain, but under His warm, protective wings!
 - c. This is the God of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and today. He has not changed.
 2. His help and protection are conditional! God offers it to "him" who
 - a. "dwells in the Most High" and
 - b. "lodges in the shelter of the God of heaven."
 - iii. **Question:** Why do we need all this protection/this powerful refuge?
- c. Read **Psalm 91:5-8**
 - i. "You shall not be frightened by...."
 1. Fear at night
 2. Arrows that fly by day
 3. Things moving in darkness
 4. Mishaps and demons at noonday
 - ii. There are frightening things out there happening day, noon, and night!

1. There is a war raging on all around the man who seeks to lodge in the shelter of the God of heaven.
 2. The Godly man/woman needs God's protection, refuge, and help.
- iii. A thousand are falling at your side; 10,000 at your right hand (**vs. 7**)
1. People will be dying all around you, but "it" shall not come near you. (**vs. 7**)
 2. **Question:** What is "it"?
 - a. It = Physical death?
 - i. I don't see thousands of people dying physical deaths around David. Hyperbole? Seemed like thousands to David?
 - b. It = Spiritual death/evil/sin?
 - i. "But you shall observe with your eyes, And you shall see the reward of sinners." (**vs. 8**)
 3. **Question:** Who is the "he" and "you" of this psalm?
 - a. (including he who is dwelling in the help of the Most High, making the Lord his protector, being overshadowed with God's shoulders, and around which all these thousands of people are dying?)
 - b. Any Godly person?
 - c. Or is this a certain person?

IV. Read Psalm 91:9-16

- a. "For You, O Lord, are my hope; You made the Most High your refuge." (**vs. 9**)
 - i. What?!! Who is David talking about?!
 - ii. David is saying You, O Lord (God #1) made the Most High (God #2) your refuge. Similar to **Psalm 110** (**Psalm 109** in the LXX):
 1. "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, Until I make Your enemies the footstool of Your feet.'"
 2. Characteristics in Psalm 110 of the "second Lord" pointing to the Son of God:

- a. "I have begotten you before the morning star"
 - b. "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek"
 - c. "he shall judge among the nations"
 - d. Jesus uses this to confound the Pharisees in **Matthew 22**: "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?"
- b. Other clues, it seems to me, that **Psalm 91** is about the Son of God, David's Lord.
- i. "Evils shall not come to you, And a scourge shall not draw near your dwelling" (**vs. 10**)
 1. But, evils did come on Jesus: He was murdered.
 2. But spiritual evils/sin did not come into His dwelling, as He dwelled in the help of the Most High. Jesus did not sin.
 - ii. **Vs. 11 and 12** about the angels holding him up and not letting his foot strike a rock – let's come back to that in a minute.
 - iii. "You shall tread on the asp and the basilisk, And you shall trample the lion and the dragon." (**vs. 13**)
 1. These are all names that refer to Satan!
 - a. Snake/serpent
 - i. "I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (**Genesis 3:15, ESV**)
 - b. The lion
 - i. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...." (**1 Peter 5:8,9**)
 - c. The dragon
 - i. Spoken about throughout the book of Revelation (**Revelation 12:3-17, 20:1-3**)
 2. Why did Jesus come?

- a. “For the purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” **(1 John 3:8)**
- iv. “I will shelter him, because he knew My name” **(Vs. 14)**
 1. “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. I have manifested your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” **(John 17:4-5)**
 2. “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” **(John 17:25-26)**
- v. “I am with him in affliction, And I will deliver and glorify him... And show him My salvation.” **(vs. 15-16)**
 1. Jesus was afflicted, murdered on the cross, then glorified – raised from the dead, conquering death itself.
- c. The early Christians saw **Psalm 91** as pointing to the Son of God, a prophecy of the Son of God treading on the snake/Satan.
 - i. “For this end did He put enmity between the serpent and the woman and her seed, they keeping it up mutually: He, the sole of whose foot should be bitten, having power also to tread upon the enemy’s head; but the other biting, killing, and impeding the steps of man, until the seed did come appointed to tread down his head, -- which was born of Mary, of whom the prophet speaks: “Thou shalt tread upon the asp and the basilisk; though shalt trample down the lion and the dragon;” **(Psalm 91)** – indicating that sin, which was set up and spread out against man, and which rendered him subject to death, should be deprived of its power, along with death, which rules [over men]... [going on to speak of defeating the lion and the dragon, that old serpent].”
 1. *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, ANF 1.457, c. 130-200, Bishop of the church at Lyons (modern-day France).
 - ii. “And, indeed, we are aware... that under the figure of scorpions and serpents are portended evil spirits, whose very prince is described by the name of serpent, dragon, and every other most conspicuous beast in the power of the Creator. This power the Creator conferred first of all upon His Christ, even as the ninetieth Psalm says to Him: ‘Upon the asp and the basilisk shalt Though tread; the lion and the dragon shalt Though trample under foot.’”

1. *Tertullian Against Marcion*, ANF 3.388, c. 160-230, Carthage, North Africa.

V. About Satan's Psalm 91 Quote

- a. "For He shall command His angels concerning you, To keep you in all your ways; In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone..." (vs. 11-12)
 - i. Satan quotes this passage, leaving out "To keep you in all your ways..."
 1. **Question:** Why would Satan leave this out? (I will answer later.)
 - ii. It seems to me that Satan is saying: if you are the Son of God Jesus, prove it by throwing yourself down and letting the angels catch you before your foot (and entire body) *strikes the stone* below, just as it was prophesied in **Psalm 91**.
 - iii. Jesus does not take the bait. His response: *Do not test the Lord Your God*, quoting **Deuteronomy 6:16**.
 1. This is from the story of Israel in the desert.
 2. There are at least two instances I am aware of when the Scriptures state that Israel tempted the Lord.
 - a. **Exodus 17:1-7**
 - i. People are desperate for water. They had seen the miracles of the exodus from Egypt and the miraculous provision of bread/manna. Yet they accuse God of bringing them into the desert to kill them, using "abusive language".
 - ii. "because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" (**Exodus 17:7**)
 - b. **Numbers 21:4-9** (referenced in **1 Corinthians 10:9**: "... nor shall we tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents....")
 - i. "Why did you bring us here to kill us in the desert?"
 - ii. "Our soul is weary of this worthless bread...."

- iii. God sends snakes to kill many, and those who are bitten can be healed only by looking at the copper snake lifted up on the pole.
 - 1. Jesus references this story in **John 3:14**; that Jesus would be lifted up (on the cross) to heal many from sin and death, and granting eternal life.
- 3. The point: Tempting God is a serious sin. It was under the Old Covenant and is under the New Covenant.
 - a. Satan wants Jesus to tempt/test God, to commit a wicked sin, a sin “leading to death.” (**1 John 5:16-17**)
 - b. Jesus refuses.
 - i. Jesus had just heard God’s voice say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
 - ii. Jesus needed nothing more than this.
- iv. **Question:** Do we test God when things get tough?
 - 1. Demand that He does this or that. No! “Not my will, but yours be done...”
 - 2. It’s okay to share our trials, our suffering, our desires with God, but we do not put God to the test.
 - 3. We are His children, who He loves. That is enough!

VI. The Verses Satan Quotes from Psalm 91

- a. **Questions:** Is this a prophecy (that the angels will bear up the Son of God so he does not dash his foot against a stone?)? If so, how is it fulfilled, if not in **Matthew 4**?
 - i. I will share what I think. You can decide for yourself!
- b. “He shall command His angels concerning you to keep you in your ways...” (the part Satan left out!)
 - i. **Psalm 91** promised
 - 1. No evil befalls the man who places his hope in the help and shelter of the Most High; no evil shall come near to you
 - 2. This is about sin – “it” shall not come near you; you are “to keep your ways”, staying far from sin.

- ii. So, God will command His angels to keep you in your ways, to strengthen you during these times of great temptation/struggle with sin.
 - 1. We see this when angels ministered to Jesus after the temptation in **Matthew 4** and the temptation in the garden.
 - 2. In a prophetic sense, it seems to me that the “you” in this passage refers to the Son of God.
- c. “In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone.”
 - i. **Question:** What is this referring to? The way Satan used it, it sounds like a prophecy about angels catching the Son of God before He strikes His foot (and entire body!) against the stones below.
 - 1. Greek word **προσκόπτω (proskoptō)** can mean “to strike” or “to stumble”. There are examples of both throughout the scriptures.
 - 2. “To strike/to beat”
 - a. “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on [or struck] that house; and it fell.” (**Matthew 7:26-27**)
 - 3. “To stumble” (literal: to trip over; or figurative: to sin)
 - a. “If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (**John 11:9,10**)
 - b. Speaking of Jesus as “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”, Peter says, “[the Jews] stumble, being disobedient to the word...” (**1 Peter 2:8**)
 - c. Read **Proverbs 3:23-29**
 - d. “But the ways of the righteous shine like a light; They go before and give light until full daylight. But the ways of the ungodly are dark; They do not know how they stumble.” (**Proverbs 4:17-18**)
 - e. “Listen and give ear. Do not exalt yourselves, for the Lord has spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God before it grows dark, and causes your feet to stumble on the

dark mountains. You shall wait in anticipation of the light, but the shadow of death will be there; and they shall bring you into darkness.” (**Jeremiah 13:15-16**)

4. It seems to me, Satan was using the word to mean “to strike” Jesus’ foot in the literal sense.
 - a. “Fulfill the prophecy of **Psalm 91** Jesus! Throw yourself down and let the angels catch you, so you don’t strike your foot against the stones down here and hurt yourself. This will prove to all (and you) that you are the Son of God.”
 - b. However, in **Psalm 90**, the meaning of this word was “to stumble over a rock” in a figurative sense: to sin or to fall spiritually.
 - c. This seems to fit: if we consider both verses having similar meaning:
 - i. “For He shall command His angels concerning you, To keep you in all your ways....” (vs. 11)
 - ii. “In their hands [referring to the angels’ hands] they shall bear you up, Lest you strike your foot against a stone [stumble/fall into temptation/sin].” (vs. 12)
 - d. It makes sense why Satan left out the phrase: “To keep you in all your ways....”
 - i. Trying to turn “the angels will lift you up in your time of trial and temptation” into “the angels will catch you if you throw yourself off the temple”.
 - ii. Satan tempts the physically weakened Jesus (after 40 days of fasting) with an opportunity to demonstrate He is the Son of God, as prophecied in **Psalm 91**.
 - iii. But, Jesus is spiritually prepared! Sees through Satan’s deception and temptation and does not take the bait.

VII. Our Spiritual Weapons to Trample Snakes

- a. Scary, sobering, and amazing reality: we are called to trample on snakes!

- i. If Jesus came to destroy the devil's work (**1 John 3:8**), then we must do the same as his followers.
 - ii. Remember our farm at the beginning of the lesson? None of us wanted the kill-the-snake job on the farm! Much easier to hang with the puppies or even work hard in the fields for the harvest.
 1. Yet, here's the reality: we either kill the snakes or we get bitten/killed by them. I don't see a middle ground.
 2. The snakes are everywhere, seeking to destroy us, even as we go about producing a wonderful, lush crop for the Father and carrying out His good works.
 - iii. Fortunately, we have spiritual tools to help us with this dangerous job!
- b. **"He who dwells in the help of the Most High"** (vs. 1)
- i. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [to teach Jesus' apostles all things and help them remember all that he had told them]" (**John 14:25-26**)
 - ii. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but I depart, I will send Him to you [to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment]. (**John 16:7-8**)
 - iii. The Spirit of God dwells inside of us, comforts, guides, protects, warns, helps us!
- c. **"He shall free me from the snares of hunters"** (vs. 3)
- i. Satan, the lion, the serpent is hunting us down, seeking to ensnare, then devour us. Yet, in baptism, we are freed from sin. As we walk in the light, Jesus' blood continues to purify us, freeing us from Satan's snares.
- d. **"His truth shall encircle you with a shield"** (vs. 4)
- i. Full-body shields of truth offer tremendous protection!
 1. Jesus uses the Word of Truth to defend against temptation (**Matthew 4**). The more we saturate ourselves in God's word, the more it is available to us to discern truth vs. demonic lies.
 2. The Word also helpful against "every troubling word" (v. 3)
 - a. When accused and deceived, we are not in a good position to do God's work!

- ii. The Kingdom message of truth also gives an offensive weapon: the power to “trample on serpents” and wreak havoc on Satan’s kingdom!

1. **Luke 10:1-20**

- a. Jesus sends out the 70, two-by-two.
 - b. “Pray the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.”
 - c. The message: “the kingdom of God has come near you.”
 - d. “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.”
 - e. While most of the apostles were killed, no evil befell those who sheltered in the Most High! They resisted temptation, brought down Satan’s strongholds, and overcame death itself!
- e. The angels
 - i. “Are [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (**Hebrews 1:14**)
 - f. Prayer
 - i. “Then He said to them, ‘Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.’” (**Luke 22:46**)
 - g. A beautiful picture of the Church: demolishing Satan’s strongholds and remaining sheltered in God’s protection.
 - i. “So you are all participants together in a shared worship, God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holy things, adorned in every respect with the commandments of Jesus Christ... Pray continually for the rest of humankind as well, that they may find God, for there is in them hope for repentance... In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilized; do not be eager to imitate them... let us be eager to be imitators of the Lord, to see who can be the more wronged, who the more cheated, who the more rejected, ***in order that no weed of the devil may be found among you, but that with complete purity and self-control you may abide in Christ Jesus physically and spiritually.***”

1. Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians*