

# Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

## *The Spiritual Journey of Psalm 91*

By Ken Woodley

Psalm 91 is a treasure of subtle transcendence.

An epic novel describing—in just 16 verses—God’s direct and loving intervention in our lives. If we accept the offer. It also mirrors our spiritual journey, from regarding God as a distant figure to understanding God’s personal love for us.

Most psalms have one distinct voice. They praise God, for example, or they cry out in lamentation. Some do both. But in the vast majority of psalms the voice—the speaker in the psalm—does not change.

In Psalm 91, the “voice” changes twice. There is a trinity of voices, three distinct “actors” in the psalm, and each shift in voice deepens the journey, making it more and more personal until, in the end, God speaks to us directly.

“An Order for Compline” in the Book of Common Prayer is where I first encountered this verbal manna. But it took several readings before I understood the true depth of Psalm 91.

Consider verses 1 and 2:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
abides under the shadow of the Almighty.*

*He shall say to the Lord,  
“You are my stronghold,  
my God in whom I put my trust.”*

The psalm begins with a kind of narrator voice speaking about a third party—He. “He who dwells...He shall say...”

The first shift occurs with verse 3 and a new “voice” takes over and continues through the end of verse 13. The voice is no longer an impersonal narrator talking about a third party example of what God will do for someone else—the “he” is gone. The psalm’s voice is now directly telling you and me what God will do for us:

*He shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter  
and from the deadly pestilence.  
He shall cover you with his pinions,  
and you shall find refuge under his wings;*

*his faithfulness shall be a shield and buckler...  
Because you have made the Lord your refuge,  
and the Most High your habitation,  
There shall no evil happen to you,  
neither shall any plague come near your dwelling...*

The voice has become far more intimate and personal but God is still backstage, waiting in the wings. Not, however, for long. In verse 14 God literally bursts through in person and takes centerstage:

*Because he is bound to me in love,  
therefore I will deliver him;  
I will protect him, because he knows my Name.  
He shall call upon me, and I will deliver him;  
I am with him in trouble;  
I will rescue him and bring him to honor.  
With long life will I satisfy him,  
and show him my salvation.*

The psalm writer is no longer telling us what God will do. God is telling us what God will do. It's an extraordinary transition from the first verse, but it is the whole story of the Bible in miniature.

The linguistic evolution in the psalm underscores the message of Christ and so much of the narrative through both the Old and the New Testaments: we can have a personal relationship with a loving God.

The psalm writer had undoubtedly experienced that truth for himself and describes his own spiritual journey through these shifting voices, hoping we will see that truth, and find it, for ourselves.

Remember, the curtain was torn in the temple as Jesus was crucified. The message was clear: God is not behind a holy, shrouding wall within the inner temple and accessible only to high priests.

God's voice is waiting, wanting and willing to be heard in the deeps of our own heart and soul. Feel Jesus tearing the curtain within you, revealing all of that love.

