

"UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY"

Psalm 91

(Discourse by Chester Sundbom. Transcribed in long hand from a tape by Sister Ildreth Vigar of Delaware, Ohio.)

The first verse of the 91st Psalm reads, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This Psalm promises many blessings to those who thus abide. Among others, the tenth verse says, "There shall no evil befall thee.

The secret place of the most High means consecration, communion and fellowship with God. It is not a literal place, but as the last part of this verse shows, that those who do thus abide dwell very closely with the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Father himself dwells not with temples made with hands. He does dwell with him that is humble and of a contrite spirit according to Isa. 57:15—"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The people of this type are in an attitude of mind and heart that makes them acceptable to God and in this condition God is very close to them.

The scriptures tell us in Proverbs 23:7, "as a man thinketh in his heart so is he." This attitude of true consecration to do God's will as Jesus did, is very real. The attitude of anyone is of very great importance. Two people may be in the same circumstances, same circumstances respecting money, home, etc., but one may live in hope and the other in despair; and as we can see, there is a very great difference under those conditions.

Now consecration here means more than an instantaneous act, giving our heart. It is not something that we do over and then stop. It is not like a document that is signed and then laid away; but it is a promise or a determination which must be kept day by day. To do God's will as Jesus did, we must really seek to know God's will and daily fulfill it. Let us daily renew our vow of consecration and daily seek to fulfill it. This attitude entitles us to communion with God, and His spirit enables us to search and really know his will and plan. We will also have a fellowship or partnership with him in his great restitution project which will be carried out in the Millennial Age.

Now this place, this secret place of the most High is pictured by the Holy in the Tabernacle which Israel had in the wilderness--we are in this attitude of mind--this condition, this mental condition. When we are in this place we have the laver by which we

can wash by the water of the Word. We have light from the Golden Candlestick and we are holding forth the Word of life, the shewbread, picturing the bread of life, and as our Lord said of himself "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" and so it is with us--we do have these blessings of being in this condition.

Then we have the incense altar, whereby we can offer sacrifice that is pleasing to God; sacrifice that is acceptable because we are laying down our justified humanity in the doing of his will.

Now we note that this text tells us that we must dwell in this secret place of the most High. Dwelling means not to go there just once or twice, a week or when we are in particular trouble, but to dwell means to remain in that attitude--remain in the attitude of consecration, and this will mean that whenever anything comes up for decision, we must, as soon as possible think and ask the question, What is God's will in this particular experience? Now such an attitude of mind takes time and it becomes eventually a fixed attitude of mind. In fact it becomes a part of our habit of thought.

We note it is a secret place--the world cannot understand this at all. The world cannot understand our viewpoint and even the brethren, those that we are closely associated with, can only know partially about these things--about our attitude. The Scriptures show that God knows our heart, our real attitude toward him, what determines our decisions, what makes us do what we do. These things God knows perhaps even better than we know ourselves. So this attitude of mind is very important and it is a secret place--it is a condition that is very definitely between us and our Father himself.

Now it goes on to point out that one who does dwell in the secret place of the most High is in the Shadow of God. That gives us the thought that we are very close to God, and we might note also that we are close to the Almighty. Now there are many mighty ones in the world. Many mighty angels, but only God is Almighty; and so when we think of dwelling in the secret place and being close to the Almighty, it is a very wonderful favor that we should appreciate very much.

Now verse two goes on to say, "I will say of the Lord he is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust." This we understand is one of the examples in which the Psalmist is speaking for Jesus, the Head of the church. There is one instance where he said "they parted my raiment among them." The Psalmist was not speaking of himself, but he was speaking prophetically for Jesus. Here we believe the same thing is true, that Jesus is here pictured as saying "I will say of the Lord, or of Jehovah, He is my refuge and He is my fortress, my God, in him will I trust."

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Now as we look over the history of Jesus, at the first advent, and his experiences, we find that this is just what the Heavenly Father was to him. Sometimes he retreated from the crowds. The scriptures show us that he passed through the midst of them, and hid himself and went away under such conditions that we might say that Jehovah was his refuge; but at other times he stood his ground before the multitude; and the scriptures show that no one was able to take him before his time. But this gives us a good illustration of how Jesus trusted in the Heavenly Father, and his trust was in him continually.

Then it goes on in the third verse to say, "surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler." We notice that he brings in the third person here. He has been speaking about himself and his Heavenly Father, and now he speaks about someone else. Now who is this? This we understand and we believe that Jesus is here speaking about his body members, the church and he is talking about them and what God will do for them. Lessor's translation which is a Jewish authority for these verses, connects these two verses together by substituting the word "surely." It reads this way, "My God in him will I trust. He shall surely deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence." Jesus did express this trust in God, not only for himself, but in the 17th chapter of John he records that wonderful prayer to our Heavenly Father--he did say that he committed them to the Father and that he kept all of them but the Son of Perdition. Now he indicates here that he is trusting the Heavenly Father, after he would leave them--that the Heavenly Father would take care of them in all their various experiences. So it is helpful, we believe, to realize that this is a prayer for us who are endeavoring to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. So here he says "my God, in him will I trust that he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence." The snare of the fowler suggests that the fowler was one who took birds by deceptive means and it suggests the deceptions of Satan against individuals, against certain particular persons.

Now among others of these deceptions, the great Adversary endeavors to snare us with, are, as Jesus said, the cares of this life. We can become so engrossed with the difficulties and cares of this life that the Adversary will, by means of these, endeavor to draw us away from the Lord. On the other hand he also suggests the deceitfulness of riches. There are some who, under prosperity fail to trust the Lord and be thankful and become entangled with the deceitfulness of riches. Or Satan's snares may be temptations to pride--to pride of something we do; instead of realizing that everything that we do is of the Father and as Jesus himself said, "of myself I can do nothing." How much more true is it of us who are imperfect.

Another snare may be to discouragement. To be discouraged with our progress or with various situations--now all of these things are snares or they can be snares to those of the Lord's people through the great Adversary. We believe the Adversary is the one who endeavors to trap us by such means. It is perhaps helpful to note that he does not say that we will not be tempted by these things--but he does say we will be delivered from the snare of the fowler. And the condition is that stated in the first verse--"if we dwell in the secret place of the most High"--in the secret place of full consecration to the Lord. One who has this determination to do God's will, who is serious about it, cannot be plucked out of the Father's hand. Jesus said no man is able to pluck them out of his hand.

So here we have the suggestion--the snare of the fowler being individual deceptions which the great adversary will use. Then he goes on to say --"or from the noisome pestilence." Now a pestilence is an epidemic or something, a disease that attacks many people, groups and classes--many of the Lord's people assembled together. In Titus 1:11 the Apostle Paul speaks about teachers who subvert whole houses; and many of us have seen experiences of this, kind. of thing--where a whole group or a whole large number of the Lord's people have been carried away by some particular deception; which of course would be a spiritual sickness or pestilence. Quite often, after a long time, after such an experience we find some individuals may be delivered from such a condition--and why would they be delivered? Because all along they had been dwelling in the secret place of absolute consecration to the Lord, and eventually, after they had gone through certain experiences, they were ready to see and accept God's will and follow his leadings. In the meantime, of course, they had learned very valuable lessons--learned them the hard way, perhaps, but nevertheless they were delivered in God's own way and time.

Verse four goes on to say, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shall ye trust." This pictures again the closeness of our Heavenly Father to those who are dwelling in the secret place of absolute consecration, pictured by a mother hen, and we know that the mother hen does protect her chicks with her wings. So this pictures that closeness to God, and it also suggests that we are so close to the Heavenly Father that we feel the warmth of his love. We do trust in his protection at all times.

Then the latter part of the fourth verse goes on to say, "his truth shall be thy shield and thy buckler." In old time warfare the shield and the buckler were very important to the soldiers. They were a protection from the darts and the arrows or weapons of the enemy. Now a Christian's warfare is real, but it is not with carnal weapons, and we believe this suggests the fact that the truth is our protection in a Christian battle. Sometimes we will hear someone say, "I'm going to win this case because I'm armed with the facts." And someone that has seen others deceived by something coming along, may say, "Well they

can't fool me because I know just what their deception is." And so the truth is very definitely a protection, especially against deceptions of the Adversary.

When we think of the armour that is spoken of in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, verse 13, we are reminded of what Brother Russell said in the comments--that up to the "evil day" the whole armour was not needed nor provided; but since we are in the evil day this protection is absolutely necessary. Now as we look back over Satan's methods in various times we find that his method changes to suit varying conditions. In the dark ages there were few Bibles--then there were few that could even read the Bible if they had one. Fear, superstition and darkness were covering the earth and at that time all that most Christians needed was to know that Christ had died for them, that they must trust in God and endeavor to do God's will as nearly as Christ did during those times when the church was pictured as fleeing into the wilderness and being miraculously fed. The Lord provided all the necessary food for his people; but Satan's deception during that time was relatively simple. But in the end of the age, the scriptures show that knowledge would be increased and this would be true of religious knowledge as well. Superstition would begin to lose ground and we have all seen this happen. Many of the creeds that were one time believed in as definitely from God, are now hardly considered at all. Very few people even know their creeds; and Satan has had to get up new deceptions--new ideas to counteract the increase of knowledge.

In 2 Thess. 2:10, 11 we are told that Christ's presence would be accompanied by signs and lying wonders and deceptions--"strong delusions," that would deceive, if possible, the very elect. We learn from this that we need certain things--certain truths that were not particularly necessary during the dark ages. We believe the Heavenly Father has provided for us Present Truth. The fourth verse of Psalm 91 which reads, "his truth shall be thy shield and buckler"--is specially helpful at the present time. The protection against any deception is Present Truth.

We find that even the dictators behind the iron curtain feel it necessary to suppress literature that deals with facts. It is very true that the protection against deception is truth; and so it is with God's Truth of The Divine Plan of the Ages. The fact that we can harmonize all the various doctrines--know God's plan--enables us to be protected against all the deceptions the Adversary is bringing forth at this time.

The best protection against any deception of course is God's Word, and in the end of this age, Jesus tells us that he would gird himself and come forth and serve us with meat in due season. We find that this has happened in the Lord's providence--that the old views were harmonized. The truths that seemed to be contradictory--election and free grace were

harmonized. Certain new truths were due--dispensational truths. The important fact is that all these fit together. And we have at this time the two R's--ransom and restitution; and the High Calling, and an explanation of world conditions, and the Second Presence of our Lord; an explanation as to how He can be here as a thief and still "come a shout." All the seeming contradictions concerning the Second Presence are harmonized. Now all these truths will definitely protect us from all the deceptions of the Adversary.

We believe the 5th to the 7th verses suggest how some will be protected. The 5th verse begins by saying "We shall not be afraid of the terror by night." This night suggests fear in darkness even small darkness is something that troubles many people; and their fear is along so many lines. The Bible tells us that they fear torment and the time of trouble, the end of the world, the second death. Men's hearts, the Scriptures say, will be failing them for fear. Many of the dark age doctrines are largely set aside, yet the fear of them still remains. The point of this scripture is that the Lord's people who are dwelling in the secret place of the Most High--who have the truth as a shield and buckler--will not be afraid of the terror by night.

There was a certain Christian mother who had a son. She had brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but somehow or other he just would not accept Christ, and it was a cause of very great grief to her because she had done everything in her power, and according to her belief at that time. She did not know what would happen to her son and she said "he was such a good boy." He was so generous, but somehow or other, he just had not accepted Christ. But then in the Lord's providence, she was given the truth about restitution--she saw that God was calling just a few in this Gospel Age, and the great majority would be brought to the exact knowledge of the truth in the great Millennial age; and she was delivered from her great fear--she was no longer troubled by the terror by night.

The fifth verse goes on to say, "nor for the arrow that flieth by day." The day suggests a period of time of comparative light--this increase of knowledge makes this present time, by comparison--daylight. There are in this daylight the fiery darts of the wicked--even bitter words. We read from the 64th Psalm, third verse, "Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words." This is the ridicule of skeptics, and all such things--the pointed questions that unbelievers ask do greatly trouble those who do not have God's truth as their shield and buckler.

Let us take one example here: We had in World War I the various nations fighting against each other. We had Germany on the one hand fighting against England--both were claiming to be Christian nations. Now someone at that time would wonder how can this

be? One Christian nation fighting against another Christian--this was the general thought at that time. But one who had been enlightened as to the harvest message and the Truth would see that these were just at best kingdoms of this world; and he would know of God's Plan for ending this present age. Now one who did not understand the truth might be asked this question--Why do Christian nations fight?--and he might have his faith destroyed because he would not be able to answer this question. This would be a very pointed question--one that would strike to the very heart of a person's faith. But one who had the truth as his shield and buckler would have all this explained to him--he would have no trouble whatsoever. Yes, the harvest truth does protect; and those who are in the secret place of the most High will have his truth as their shield and buckler.

The Psalmist goes on in the 6th verse, "they will not be afraid of the pestilence that walketh in darkness." This suggests the darkness of the nominal systems. There are two extremes in the nominal system to-day--on the one hand we have the fundamentalists who endeavor to hold strictly to the Bible--to hold to the eternal torment doctrine and all those things which, to them, seems to be holding to the Bible. Then to the opposite extreme are the modernists--those who say we can't accept such dark age ideas; and they go to the very opposite extreme and practically defy the Bible itself in Babylon--spiritual Babylon, and this is a pestilence. Pestilence means spiritual sickness--adhering to these great systems after the salt is taken out. You remember Jesus said to his followers, "ye are the salt of the earth"--salt is a preservative. The Lord's people are called out of the systems--they are called out by the truth of the Divine Plan and this truth protects them from the pestilence in the nominal system--this is God's provision at this time.

The 6th verse goes on to say, "nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." This suggests the hot desert sun at midday. We are told that the time of trouble will burn as an oven--the elements will melt with the fervent heat, the fervent heat of controversy and all things of the present system in which people trust--all this will be destroyed. Also there will be doctrinal controversy over present truth. All these things bring tests and they can result in the destruction of the faith of those who do not have present truth. But those who do have God's truth as their shield and buckler need have no fear whatsoever--the truth explains every reasonable question and it harmonizes the Bible from cover to cover.

The 7th verse says that "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee." Yes, even those who once knew present truth can fall from their steadfastness. Even though this can happen (and many of us have seen this happen), there is the comforting assurance--"it shall not come nigh thee." And why is this? Because if we are dwelling in the secret place of the most High--of absolute consecration to do God's will, we will have the protection of the truth and of God's care.

This will actually save us.

He points out in the 8th verse, "only with thine eyes shall thou behold and see the reward of the wicked"--those who fall from their steadfastness. If we are faithful we will not fall with them.

In the 9th and 10th verses we notice the Lord bringing in the third person, and again speaking as though directly to us, "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, . ." Now this is a very wonderful statement; something we should endeavor to take hold of--endeavor to appreciate very much, because it is the promise of God, and it is of our Lord who is very deeply interested in our spiritual development. He is telling us here that because we have made Jehovah, which was his refuge, even the most High--because we have made him our habitation, there could no evil befall us, neither would any plague come nigh our dwelling. Here it is pictured that because we are dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty (because we are under his wings) nothing can happen that will trouble us in any permanent way. Surely this points out that we will be delivered--we will have experiences that will test our faith and require the exercise trust in God; but in the last analysis, after we have learned by experiences--nothing can come to us but will be for our best eternal interests.

Then in the 11th verse, he brings out the method which he will use to thus protect us--"He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." The angels do protect the Lord's people--"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Heb. 1:14.

Twelfth verse--"They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." Thirteenth verse—"Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." Here it is shown that whatever deception may come up--because we are trying to dwell in this secret place of the most High--nothing can harm us at all--we shall be the victors over these things, through the power and strength of our Lord.

Verse 14, "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name." This we believe is referring to the Lord's people--we will be delivered, we will be set on high, because we have known his name. This could indicate the future exaltation of the true followers of Jesus.

In the 15th verse we read, "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him." And the 16th verse reads, "With long life

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will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation." All these blessings are contingent upon our fulfilling the condition of the first verse--dwelling continually "in the secret place of the most High", in the attitude of absolute consecration, that whenever something comes up requiring a decision: our immediate thought should be, as quickly as possible--"just what does the Lord want me to do in this particular situation?" And if it is difficult, we have the statement made to us by James, "if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."

So may we continue to dwell in this secret place that the heavenly Father himself has provided; that Jesus dwelled in when he was a spirit begotten new creature in the earth; and has arranged for us to dwell in while we are on this side the veil. May the Lord continue to guide us in our effort to serve and to do his will.