

# God's Sure Deliverance

Ho Kee How

“He that dwelleth in  
the secret place of the  
most High shall abide  
under the shadow of the  
Almighty. I will say of  
the LORD, He is my  
refuge and my fortress:  
my God; in him will  
I trust.”

### Psalm 91:1-2

The Bible reveals to us the mind of the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God, who is an all-knowing and loving Heavenly Father to His redeemed children. Not only does it contain light to direct our way through this sin-darkened world, it also gives comfort to cheer us along life's (very often) dreary journey in this trouble-filled world. No wonder the psalmist cries out, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). And from God's law, we are made to realise that God is our “refuge” and “fortress”, in whom we can utterly trust, even in the midst of great troubles and adversity in life. One psalm that comes readily to mind which talks of God's unflinching protection and deliverance is Psalm 91.

Apparently, this psalm was written by one who had gone through great trials and spiritual pressures in his life – someone who had been “troubled on every side, yet not distressed ... (nor) in despair” (2 Corinthians 4:8). He remained steadfast and strong because he had experienced God's sure deliverance time and time again. This we can tell from his unequivocal opening declaration (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and also by experience) of the Almighty's absolute reliability for those who seek Him (vv. 1-2). The psalmist is so spiritually strengthened that he is able to “dole out” spiritual exhortations and reassurance to those who are currently undergoing or who will (at some point in time) go through intimidating “storms of life” (vv. 3-13). This psalm ends with God Himself reiterating and affirming the psalmist's bold pronouncement of His sure deliverance and vindication (vv. 14-16).

### Affirmative Declaration of God's Sure Deliverance

Now, Psalm 91 opens with a majestic declaration: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (v. 1). “He” would refer to the believer, God's saint. The psalmist recognises the special relationship the believer has with his God. Having been redeemed and “called ... out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9b), believers are now God's special people. God's wrath has been lifted from us believers; the enmity between God and us has been removed by the atoning blood of Christ on the cross (which the Old Testament saints looked forward to by faith). We now have access to the most High, the Almighty, even the LORD, and can “therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). But this very blessed spiritual status also automatically makes us sworn-enemies with the world. Straightaway, we become the target of the world's hatred. "Marvel not, my brethren," the Bible tells us, "if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13). In other words, do not be surprised that if the world is provoked by the holy and impeccable demands of God's Word, it will also detest those who advocate and propagate God's Word.

### *Our "Hiding Place"*

This spiritual reality is alluded to by the psalmist when he uses the expression "secret place". The Hebrew word translated as "secret" means "cover" or "hiding" – hence it denotes a hiding place, i.e. a place of protection. The psalmist is fully aware – and so must we who are discerning – that upon being born-again, we are entered into a formidable arena of spiritual conflict. There is an invisible warfare going on! Notwithstanding Christians' role as "peacemakers" (cf. Matthew 5:9), Jesus has warned his disciples that "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). The Greek word for "tribulation" denotes being squeezed, pressured, compressed. This implies that Christians will have to endure troubles from "outside agents". The apostle Peter also attests to this fact: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). If anything, all these intimate an intensive, unrelenting spiritual conflict – which can be so intense that we will need to "dwell in" (i.e. resort continually to) a hiding place, which is readily available "in the secret place of the most High".

This thought is corroborated by the word "shadow", which literally means "shade" from the elements. So, figuratively speaking, the Almighty is our "shade" or defence from the hostile elements of our world around us. Incidentally, "the most High" is God's title referring to His supremacy while "the Almighty" draws attention to His power. Thus, He is the most Supreme in position, in power and in every degree. Indeed, He "is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" (Psalm 113:4-6). To be able to find shelter in Him is to find safety at the highest level.

### *Object of Our Confidence*

Oh, what great comfort! No wonder the psalmist can "say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress" (v. 2a). He expresses his utmost confidence in God, whom he likens to a "fortress" – a stronghold that cannot be breached by any enemy. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b). Besides, his invoking of the name of "the LORD" is also very telling. He invoked the sacred name of the covenantal God of Israel – "Yahweh" – which refers to the pre-existent, eternal God who can see the end from the beginning. While we cannot see beyond our present pressures and trials, the LORD knows the end of our paths. We can trust in Him whose counsel shall prevail over the "many devices in a man's heart" (Proverbs 19:21), thereby ruling and overruling the affairs of men (cf. Proverbs 16:9). Hence, "my God; in him will I trust" (v. 2b).

A note of reflection is in order here. While we sojourn here on earth as strangers

and pilgrims, we will face external pressures due to unexpected events, where we cannot see exactly what lies “around the corner”. All these can intimidate us, and press us into taking some hasty step or making some regrettable decision. In such times, we do well (like the psalmist) to put our confidence in the LORD God. May we not place our confidence in a world-class education system, an efficient government, influential and well-connected men of renown, material wealth, or even our own intellectual powers and shrewd abilities. It is no exaggeration to say that we Christians living in advanced and affluent societies (like Singapore and many first-world cities) can become easily captivated by all these. May our conviction be thus: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses (which is a vain thing for safety): but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7; cf. 33:17a).

### **Metaphorical Depictions of God’s Sure Deliverance**

To drive home his utmost confidence in God’s sure deliverance, the psalmist employs the use of 4 metaphorical depictions.

#### *Rescue of a Vulnerable Bird from Hunter (vv. 3-4)*

The first picture depicted is one of a decisive rescue scene. An unwary bird was delivered “from the snare of the fowler” (v. 3a). The Hebrew word (*natsal*) for “deliver” here indicates that it was snatched away in the nick of time by its rescuer. This tells us that unbeknown to us, there are formidable, treacherous, malicious enemies who would want to harm us and even entrap us. They would secretly and subtly scheme against us who follow the truth. Well, the psalmist has this reassurance for us: God

shall “snatch us away” from the trap laid down by the workers of iniquity and those with hidden agenda. If we walk in God’s truth, not only will “The righteousness of the upright ... deliver them: but (also) transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness” (Proverbs 11:6). In other words, “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him” (Proverbs 26:27)!

In fact, v. 4a renders a very graphic depiction of God’s deliverance of us – “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust”. This figuratively refers to us being screened by gigantic wings surrounding us, as in a giant bird huddling and protecting small chicks under her enormous wings, keeping predators out so that they won’t become easy prey. We will be so sheltered that no wicked schemer can come near to harm us. Their schemes and devices can never penetrate God’s protective “wings” over us. The psalmist displays a little sense of mocking humour here. These crafty “fowlers” may be able to catch all sorts of vulnerable “birds” unawares, but their most sophisticated of “bird-traps” are no match when confronted by God’s powerful “wings” – they become a case of “predators-turned-prey” instead! Note that it is “his truth” (as revealed in God’s Word) that shall protect us (v. 4b). “He that walketh uprightly (i.e. according to God’s truth) walketh surely” (Proverbs 10:9a), for the LORD “shall keep thy foot from being taken” (Proverbs 3:26b). God’s deliverance is decisive indeed!

#### *Preservation of a Soldier in Battle (vv. 5-7)*

In vv. 5-7, grim terms are mentioned – “terror” (sudden alarm and dread), “arrow

that flieth" (a weapon of war), "pestilence" (deadly, infectious disease apparently due to piles of dead, rotting bodies left lying in the open at the end of a day's fighting, which pose great health hazard), "wasteth" (having a devastating effect), "thousand ... fall at thy side". All these are descriptions befitting a war-scene. The psalmist is here portraying a fierce, heated battleground with heavy casualties, where many soldiers are being wounded, cut down and killed. We are not saying that Christians are belligerent, aggressive people looking for a fight. But in our spiritual battle, we are at times confronted head-on by our enemies who are out to do us hurt. We are put on the defence. Notwithstanding, the LORD of hosts is able to preserve us in the heat of the battle, so much so that though "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee" (v. 7).

We see an allusion to God's army in Old Testament times – in Joshua's time (cf. Joshua 10:7-11), in Gideon's time (cf. Judges 8:10-12), in David's time (cf. 2 Samuel 10:17-18), etc. Interestingly, we read little of casualties on the Israelites' side, except when there was sin in the camp (as in the case of Achan in the battle of Ai) [Joshua 7:1-5]. This was "because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:42b). Remember Gideon's army of 300 men (Judges 7:7a) against "the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east (that) lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude" (Judges 12a)? While we read of no casualties among Gideon's 300 men, Scripture tells us that "there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men (of all the hosts of the children of the east) that drew sword" (Judges 8:10b). Literally, "a thousand" and "ten thousand", as it were, "shall fall at thy

side"! This is a powerful imagery of God's sure protection even in the heat of spiritual battle. The Lord knoweth them that are His. Truly, God's deliverance is unerring!

*Security of the Habitation of the Just (vv. 9-10)*

In the third metaphorical depiction of God's sure deliverance, the psalmist engages in a play of words. Because you make the LORD your "habitation" (v. 9b), i.e. you spend much time retreating in communion with God, He will make your "dwelling" (v. 10b) safe and "quiet from fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:33b). Of course, we do not put our confidence in the brick

"He (God) will  
comprehensively deliver  
upon (Him)"

and mortar of our house, but rather on the LORD who watches over our safe dwelling, though other dwellings may crumble or be "plagued". The Hebrew word for "plague" (v. 10) comes from the root verb (*naga*) which means "to strike". It hints at "something that happens suddenly and forcefully" and can refer to catastrophic strokes of nature, like natural disasters. After all, we know that earthquakes, tornadoes, hailstorms, floods, etc. are all manifestations of God's wrath and judgment on this sinful world. Yet God is certainly able to protect any house, according to His sovereign will, and withhold His Hand of judgment.

Even in the midst of judgments, He is selective over which houses to destroy or to plague, like He did in the land of Egypt while the children of Israel were being enslaved there. When the LORD "rained hail upon the land of Egypt ... the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail" (Exodus 9:23, 25-26). Furthermore, when the LORD plagued the Egyptians with "a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three

children, that no evil (whether natural or man-made) may encroach upon them outside of His jurisdiction. In short, "God is on the throne, and He is in control", whatever happens. A case in point was the gripping well-documented incident concerning Kokura, the Japanese city which was spared the second atomic bomb at the close of World War II. Hiroshima had been bombed; next on the list was supposedly Kokura. Somehow, due to a mysterious cloud obscuring the pilots' view, Nagasaki was targeted instead. Only a week later did news filter through that large groups of American prisoners-of-war (some of whom would have been believers or children of Christian parents)

decisively, unerringly, selectively and  
 over His afflicted child who "hath set his love  
 upon him" and who "shall call upon (Him)."

days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22-23). Truly, "The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just" (Proverbs 3:33).

The LORD is not a "hands-off" God who is so unconcerned about the affairs of the world that He just let nature take its course. Nor is He a God with limited power who could only watch helplessly when evil things happen. All things are planned and allowed by God. He can use events, circumstances, people; He can also intervene directly. In fact, He exerts himself in eagerly watching over His

children, that no evil (whether natural or man-made) may encroach upon them outside of His jurisdiction. In short, "God is on the throne, and He is in control", whatever happens. A case in point was the gripping well-documented incident concerning Kokura, the Japanese city which was spared the second atomic bomb at the close of World War II. Hiroshima had been bombed; next on the list was supposedly Kokura. Somehow, due to a mysterious cloud obscuring the pilots' view, Nagasaki was targeted instead. Only a week later did news filter through that large groups of American prisoners-of-war (some of whom would have been believers or children of Christian parents)

had earlier been moved by their Japanese captors to a concentration camp in Kokura! Coincidence? Nay, we are persuaded that it was due to God's special providence at work, which manifests God's deliverance as selective!

*Safe-Keeping of a Traveller from Harm*  
*(vv. 11-13)*

In v. 11, we note that God shall "charge" (or give command to) his angels to "keep" (or guard) us in all our ways. This metaphorical portrayal of a traveller brings to mind the promise of God in preserving our "going out" and our "coming in"

(cf. Psalm 121:8). God's commitment to preserve His children's safe passage can even go to the extent of ensuring that they would not get hurt physically, if He so wills. Not one hair of our head shall perish without the Father's knowledge and permission (Luke 21:18; cf. Matthew 10:29-31). Hence, His angels "shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (v. 12). However, this does not give us licence to expose ourselves to unwarranted and needless risks or dangers. Remember Jesus' firm rebuke of Satan's misuse of this promise? "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:6-7)! Nonetheless, in our service or work or needful travellings for the Lord's sake, if we encounter dangers to life and limb, it is God's prerogative to protect us from all harm and danger, if He so wills.

With that understanding, we should have no difficulty accepting the truth of v. 13: "Thou shalt tread upon (i.e. 'triumph over') the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet (i.e. 'put under subjection')." Again, it must be reiterated that we don't go looking for trouble, that is, until trouble befalls us. No one should look for a lion or viper to tread upon. But if you are thrown into the lion's den, like Daniel when he was "entrapped" by the jealous officials in his righteous obedience to God's law, God can shut the lion's mouth on your behalf and subdue it (cf. Daniel 6:16-23). Or if you are shipwrecked and escaped to an island for shelter, like Paul in his last missionary journey when a venomous viper fastened on his hand without warning, God can see to it that no harm comes to you (cf. Acts 28:1-6). Or if in guarding a flock of sheep, like as in young David's case when a young lion snatched a lamb out of the flock, God

can grant you strength and wits to smite and slay it, literally "trampling it under feet" (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34-35). Admittedly, the creature "dragon" may pose a little bit of a problem to Bible-readers in general. Now, the word "dragon" can refer to dinosaur, representing the largest and most ferocious of land animals. Notwithstanding, the Almighty God would have no problem subduing that powerful creature (which He has created in the first place) as well in His commitment to safe-keep His child so that he can do His bidding. This metaphorical representation of a traveller's safe-keeping highlights God's deliverance as comprehensive!

### **Divine Reaffirmation of God's Sure Deliverance**

Interestingly, an abrupt change in speaker is detected in vv. 14-16. It is no longer the psalmist speaking, but Someone who is the object of worship (v. 14a) and prayer (v. 15a), and who has the power to deliver (v. 15b) and grant salvation (v. 16b). Clearly, it is none other than the LORD God! Do realise that Psalms constitute poetry, and the grammatical rules governing poetry are more flexible than for prose. The grammatical rules of poetry allow for frequent switching of addresser and addressee, through the interchangeable use of respective pronouns (the context being key to understanding respective sections of a piece of poetry) – quite unlike a narrative account, where there are strict rules governing structure and usage.

### ***Divine Interest in Believers' Deliverance***

Apparently, God is here reaffirming and putting His seal upon all that the psalmist has boldly declared earlier. He not only reiterates His commitment to

deliver, but also emphasises the conditions precipitating His sure deliverance. He will decisively, unerringly, selectively and comprehensively deliver His afflicted child who "hath set his love upon (Him)" (v. 14a) and who "shall call upon (Him)" (v. 15a). The conditions required of such who will be delivered are that he delights in communing with God and meditating on His law day and night, and that he cries out to God "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" (Philippians 4:6). God in turn reassures such a one of His favourable response.

It is instructive to note that God uses intensive verbs in describing His actions. Now, in Hebrew language usage, besides the plain form of a verb, there is also an intensive form of the same root verb. For example, the intensive form of "kill" is "slaughter", and the intensive form of "eat" is "consume". Four times in this last section of Psalm 91, God's actions are captured in intensive verbs ["deliver", "set on high" (v. 14), "deliver", "honour" (v. 15)], which have the effect of reiterating and reaffirming His sure deliverance.

### *Divine Undertaking of Believers'*

#### *Deliverance*

Of note is that in this psalm alone, three different Hebrew words are used for "deliver". The first (*natsal*) has been mentioned in v. 3. The second Hebrew word (*palat*) for "deliver" (in v. 14a) means "cause to escape". That is to say, God will provide a way out for us. When the chip is down, He "will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13b). The third Hebrew word (*chalats*) translated as "deliver" (v. 15b) has the idea of "equipping

to strengthen", thereby indicating that God can so strengthen us in our trials as to make us prevail over woes and foes. This triple use of the word "deliver" not only signals to us the various means God has at His disposal to deliver us, but also reaffirms God's commitment to see to our sure deliverance.

This brings us to our last verse: "With long life (literally 'length of days') will I satisfy him (i.e. 'cause him to have enough'), and shew him (i.e. 'cause him to see') my salvation" (v. 16). Well, not all godly saints get to live to a ripe old age, for sure. But God will grant to us sufficient length of days in our limited lifespan to fulfil all of His wondrous will for our lives. And in the process, He will cause us to personally experience His "salvation" – not so much as in the salvific sense of the word (since we have already experienced God's saving grace upon believing), but rather as in the sense of victory and deliverance!

### **Conclusion**

Dear saints of God, the LORD, who is "the most High" and "the Almighty", is also our heavenly Father who "as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:13). He "knoweth our frame" (Psalm 103:14a), and in His deliverance of His afflicted children, He not only undertakes to secure them (cf. "set on high"), but He will also show up the weight of truth to be on their side (cf. "honour"), thereby vindicating their trust in Him. Truly, safe is the saint who dwells continually in the secret place of the most High, He being "a very present help in trouble". And wise is the Christian who makes communion with God an abiding daily affair in his life. Amen.