

If God Promises Protection, **Why** Do Godly People Suffer?



*"11 For he will order his angels to **protect** you wherever you go. 12 They will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone."* Psalm 91:11-12 NLT

- In what ways have you seen Godly people suffer?

Psalm 91 is a song of worship. It is also one of the most popular and comforting psalms in the Bible. The author is uncertain. Some scholars think it was Moses. Also, verses 11-12 were quoted and misused by Satan when he tried to manipulate Jesus at the temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11).

Psalm 91 can be puzzling to understand. It gives the impression that God gave a blanket promise of protection. Yet, God's people in both the Old and New Testaments suffered. Even Jesus said, *"...Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows...."* (John 16:33 NLT).

Some skeptics claim that Psalm 91 contradicts other parts of the Bible and is contrary to reality. For example, one individual wrote on social media: "According to Psalm 91, shouldn't the righteous of the Lord be given constant protection? Is that not so? But is that what we find in this life? I suggest that it isn't, therefore the Bible is unreliable. My submission is: we cannot rely on Psalm 91." (Anonymous).

How do we answer this criticism? How are we to understand Psalm 91? Why do God's people suffer evil, sickness, and crime—if God promised His protection?

Some people mistakenly think Psalm 91 is God's unconditional promise of complete protection and that life would be smooth sailing as long as we stay close to our Creator. But we must keep **four principles** in mind when wrestling with Psalm 91 and the question of suffering.

Central Lesson:

God's protection is the general rule, but sometimes He permits trouble & suffering for reasons we may never know in this life. God asks us to trust Him, stay faithful, and endure.

Four Principles

1. We must interpret Psalm 91 as ancient **POETRY** with its particular literary elements.

Not only is Psalm 91 a Hebrew worship song, but it also Hebrew poetry. Scholars have done extensive studies of ancient Hebrew poetry. One-third of the Old Testament is poetry. It is very different from English poetry which is influenced by ancient Greek and Latin literature which is primarily sound-based and utilizes rhyme and rhythm. In contrast, Hebrew poetry is more thought-based and expresses truth, feelings, and imagery. Instead of rhyme and rhythm, it uses **parallelism**. For example...

1. **Synonymous** – the lines express the same thought in different words (Psalm 49:1).
2. **Antithetical** – the lines express opposite thoughts by means of contrast or stating the positive and the negative (Psalm 1:6).
3. **Synthetic** – the next two or three lines develop the thought (Psalm 19:7-9).
4. **Chiasmic** – a pattern of poetry expressing the message in a descending and ascending order (Psalm 3).
5. **Emblematic** – one statement is literal and the second is metaphorical (Psalm 42:1), plus more.

Psalm 91 also utilized Hebrew **hyperbole**. A hyperbole is a figure of speech in which **exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect**; it's an extravagant statement. The concept is also called **overstatement**. Psalm 91:13 is a clear example of hyperbole. *"You will trample upon lions and cobras; you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!"* (Psalm 91:13 NLT). It is obvious that the psalmist did not mean that the Godly will "literally" trample upon and crush lions and cobras.

In short, Psalm 91 is **not a blanket promise of absolute protection**. It is a poetical over-statement and celebration of God's protection **as a general rule**. Understanding **hyperbole** and other ancient Hebrew literary elements are essential to an accurate understanding of Psalm 91.

2. **God is in control and no harm can touch God's child without His PERMISSION.** *The Apologetics Study Bible* affirms, "The Lord may permit things to happen in life that are troubling and painful, but nothing is ever out of His control. God dispatches His angels to ensure that His will is safeguarded...." (91:11-13).
3. **God's permissive will does not always make SENSE and we may never understand His reasons until we are in heaven.**
4. **God has revealed some GENERAL reasons for why He permits His people to suffer.**
 - Building their character (James 1:2-4),
 - Spiritual spanking for disobedience or foolish decision-making (Hebrews 12:5-7),
 - As a testimony to God's strength working in His people when they experience suffering (2 Corinthians 12:8-10),
 - To prevent something more serious (Exodus 13:17-18),
 - To teach His people important lessons that they would not learn any other way but through suffering (Daniel 4:25),
 - To drive people to a deeper dependence upon God (Exodus 2:23).

Central Lesson:

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Will you trust God for protection? Will you trust Him when He permits hardship? Will you trust Him, stay faithful, and endure even when life and suffering don't make sense?

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.