

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 324

Psalm 91 and Demons

May 16, 2020

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Episode Summary

With the advent of the coronavirus threat and subsequent quarantine measures, many people are referencing Psalm 91 as though it were intended to provide immunity from the virus. This is an abuse of this psalm. In this episode of the podcast, we talk about the meaning of Psalm 91 – specifically, its characterization as an exorcistic psalm in the days of Jesus. That context has ramifications for its use by Satan to tempt Jesus into acting outside of God’s plan for salvation and Jesus’s rebuttal.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 324: Psalm 91 and Demons. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Pretty good. Ready to get some topical stuff done now.

TS: Yeah! We’ve had a lot of interviews and now single topics. So I’m excited. This first one seems pretty interesting.

MH: Well, the short version here is that I’ve heard enough about Psalm 91 to just have it make me a little ill [laughs] when it comes to the whole Coronavirus thing. So I thought, “Ah, that’s a good place to start. We’ll jump into that.” Because there’s just stuff lurking under the surface that includes demons. And it’s always great to talk about demons, isn’t it? So I thought that would be a good place to start.

TS: You have a book out, so it kind of makes sense. How’s that going? Any updates on that? The book’s going well?

MH: Yeah. Well Amazon said they were out of stock in, like, 10 hours. [laughs] On the first day. I heard and then I went up and looked and saw that it was sold out. So I don’t know if that was good news or bad news, because there’s really no way to tell. Does that mean that Lexham printed 10,000 of these and they’re just gone in a flash? Or did they only print 1,000? Who knows? So I actually

looked today and it said, “You can order the book,” (which is nice of Amazon to tell people), “and then your book will get here sometime next week.” So they either have more or they know they’re getting more. So who knows the mysteries of Amazon? They’re sort of incalculable. So I don’t worry about them too much anymore.

TS: Yeah, there have been lots of good, funny memes and funny things going on about your book. For instance, you got a box full of *Demons*. You’ve got... *Demons* is on the way. There are all kinds of funny things that people are saying and stuff. So that’s good.

MH: *Demons* are good news. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. And your trailers that you shot with Lexham, those are nice.

MH: Those were so long ago I don’t even remember them. I should go and watch one. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, they’re good.

MH: I know, though, that they used... I don’t know if it was... Because when we did the *Demons* stuff, all I remember is that the room was dark. Because they wanted it dark because it’s demons, you know? And I don’t know if they took a picture then or if it was an older picture, but I’m actually going to be on the... Maybe the issue is already out, I don’t even know. But I’m on the cover of Bible Study Magazine with one of these pictures that really makes me look kind of sinister. [laughs] So it’s like, “Thanks a lot, people.”

TS: Yeah, I think I saw it. Yeah.

MH: “Could I have done anything to look a little *more* sinister for you?” Oh, well.

TS: It’s good. I have my copy, Mike. I haven’t read it yet. I did see...

MH: Oh, you got one?

TS: Yeah, I got one. I pre-ordered it a long time ago. I see you have Michael Brown in there. You have Tim Mackie saying a few words.

MH: Frank Turek, yep. Yeah, it has good recommenders. I was real happy that the recommenders liked the book. I was a little disappointed because I had given Tim Mackie (of the Bible Project) a pdf in advance to help him prep for those videos that the Bible Project did, before it went out. And what I wanted Lexham to use for his recommendation was his email reply to me after he’d read the draft. [laughs] He said, “Dude. This is so helpful.” [laughs]

TS: [laughs] Yeah.

MH: You know? That's exactly what Tim would say. But he wrote a blurb that sounds a little more academic and a little less "Tim." But it's still Tim, so we're happy with it.

TS: When you do the *Supernatural* version of *Angels* and *Demons*, you can just have it where he just says, "Dude." [MH laughs] That would actually be a pretty powerful endorsement if Tim Mackie just said, "Dude." That's all you've got to say.

5:00

MH: And I actually sent his email reply to Lexham and asked them to use it. [laughter] But they probably thought it was a joke. Because it was just funny. But, you know, sometimes you don't get your way.

TS: I hear you. Well, Psalm 91, Mike... I'm excited about this episode. Can you give us a little hint at some of the other topics that are coming our way?

MH: Oh, well, I could, but I really don't want to. Because if I... I'm actually trying to avoid new Exodus stuff. [laughs] Because we just left Exodus. [laughs] So I'm actually picking my way around that. But that might factor in there. But all I'll say is Old Testament and New Testament relationship. So I don't want to commit to anything specific. Because something else in the list might strike me during the week and I'll want to do that instead. So I'm going to be a little careful.

TS: Well don't be shy about the Exodus stuff! We've got a good foundation of it now.

MH: [laughs] Yeah, I know.

TS: If you want to build upon that, that's alright with us.

MH: I'm just thinking that it's like wearing out your welcome. Just trying to stay a little away from that, at least for a little bit of time. But we'll find our way back to that at some point I'm sure.

TS: Alright. I hear you.

MH: Well, Psalm 91... I'm going to read through the psalm (it's not that long) to start here. And I'll telegraph the places that we're going to spend some time camping on. So what I want to do is go through the psalm and make some comments as to the Hebrew Bible context of the psalm. And then we're going to drift into, "How was this psalm understood or thought about in Jesus' day (the Second Temple period)?" and, of course, on into the first century A.D., which is part of the Second Temple period. And that's how we'll go. So we're going to cover both Old and New Testament here. Because the Old Testament stuff is

going to create a framework for what's going on in the New Testament. And it's actually going to matter, because... Here's a little heads-up. Psalm 91 is actually one of the places in the Old Testament that Satan quotes in his confrontation with Jesus. And he wasn't really talking about the Coronavirus. [laughs] So... But the fact that Psalm 91 is one of those places is actually interesting. And it's interesting for a number of specific reasons that I don't think will occur to the normal Bible reader or Bible student. So let's just read Psalm 91. I'm reading from ESV:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High...

Now let me just stop there. Isn't it interesting? "Most High." Most High, Elyon... Where have we heard Most High before? Oh, that would be Deuteronomy 32. Deuteronomy 32 worldview... Yahweh dispenses the nations—allots the nations—to the lesser sons of God, who become hostile supernatural forces in the course of the Old Testament. So we'll stow that away.

**He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.**

**² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."**

**³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.**

Now "pestilence"... We're going to camp on that word in a bit. It's the word *deber* (דבר). Interestingly enough... This is the only time I'm going to mention this because I don't want to rabbit-trail into how the Septuagint translator misread a word. But here's a good example where they do. *Deber* (דבר) is also not just the word for "plague" (Hebrew has homographs—otherwise known as homonyms), but it's also the word for *word*. The Septuagint has "he will rescue from the trap of hunters and from a terrifying word," which doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But anyway, *deber* is not the Hebrew word for *word* here; it's something else, and we'll get to that. So verse 4:

⁴ He will cover you with his pinions...

If you're like me, you wonder what a pinion is. The NCV (New Century Version) has "feathers," so it's probably part of the wing or something like that, or maybe just the feathers. I don't know. I'm not an authority on the word "pinion" in English.

...and under his wings you will find refuge;

So pinions and wings must have some relationship there.

his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

10:00

Stow that away: shield and buckler. Because the next verse gets us into more of these terrors and threats. And I'll give you a little heads-up. These terrors and threats along with *deber* (pestilence) in the preceding verse (verse 3) are going to be references to names of Canaanite deities, which of course to the Second Temple Jewish mind is going to be a demon. And isn't it interesting how, if the passage is really talking about demons, that we get references to the Lord sheltering us with a shield and buckler. Sounds suspiciously like Ephesians 6:11-16. But just hold onto that.

- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, [MH: *pahad*]
 nor the arrow that flies by day, [MH: we'll come back to "arrow"]**
- ⁶ nor the pestilence [*deber*] that stalks in darkness,
 nor the destruction [*qeteb*] that wastes at noonday. [MH: we're going to spend time on all these words]**
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
 ten thousand at your right hand,
 but it will not come near you.**
- ⁸ You will only look with your eyes
 and see the recompense of the wicked.**
- ⁹ Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—
 the Most High [MH: there it is again], who is my refuge—**
- ¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
 no plague [MH: this term is generic—*nega*—so it's not one of these deity names] will come near your tent.**

What comes next is the part that Satan quotes.

- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
 to guard you in all your ways.**
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
 lest you strike your foot against a stone.**

Satan skips the next verse. [laughs]

- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder;
 the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.**

I guess Satan forgot that part.

- ¹⁴ **“Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.**
- ¹⁵ **When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.**
- ¹⁶ **With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”**

So that’s Psalm 91. And there’s some interesting stuff in there. I’m going to focus on verses 5 and 6 and verses 11-13 for specific backdrop—really specific contextualizing the psalm, both in terms of an Israelite reader and then a later Second Temple Jewish/first century A.D reader (New Testament era). So I’ll just read verses 5 and 6 again:

- ⁵ **You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,**
- ⁶ **nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.**

So without getting into too much detail (because that would be quite possible and I do want to get into Second Temple stuff—Dead Sea Scroll material is going to matter here and then into the New Testament), we have this reference to *deber*. For those who are listening, just think of d-e-b-e-r. It’s a v sound after a vowel in Hebrew. So we have a reference to that in verse 3 and we also get one later in verse 6. I’m going to quote from DDD now (*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*).

Deber is one of the three proverbial causes of death on a wide scale. It is attested some 50 times in the Bible along with war [MH: including the words *sword* and *blood*] and famine (mainly in Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Besides this empirical meaning, it seems to be used a number of times in a personified sense as a demon or evil deity.

Now we’re going to get in a few moments to Habakkuk 3:5, where this is a little bit clearer. And Habakkuk 3:5 will not only mention *deber*, it will also mention a deity known as *resheph*. Hosea 13:14 has similar language. And we’ll get to those in a moment. But just to prep you with this... *Deber*, to quote DDD once more, “seems to be used a number of times in a personified sense as a demon or evil deity.” So just store that away.

If we continue on, we hit verse 6. We have q-e-t- (and it's the emphatic t in Hebrew, t with a dot underneath)... Q-e-t-e-b. I'm going to read from DDD again.

15:00

The term *Qeteb* appears four times in the OT. Its basic significance is 'destruction', (perhaps etymologically 'that which is cut off') though the contexts suggest that other nuances are present. Various scholars have translated it as 'plague' or 'pestilence' in the context of its parallel use with *rešep*, *deber*. The term has overtones of a divine name... *qz.b* [pronounced ke zev'] occurs once in [an] Ugaritic [text] (*KTU* 1.5 ii:24) and may be a kinsman [MH: or who appears to be a relative] of Mot.

Mot is a very famous Ugaritic Canaanite deity—the god of death. So those two are mentioned in tandem. That's part of the argument that *qeteb* is probably another Canaanite deity. When we get to Hosea 13:14 again... I might as well just read that, because it's probably going to help here. So let me just go to Hosea quickly. It might factor in here. This is going to sound really familiar from the New Testament, but it's actually a citation from Hosea.

**14 I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol [MH: the underworld];
I shall redeem them from Death.
O Death, where are your plagues?
O Sheol, where is your sting?
Compassion is hidden from my eyes.**

This is God speaking about the iniquity of Ephraim back in verse 12. I'm going to read verse 14 again, where the Lord is speaking.

**14 I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol;
I shall redeem them from Death.**

"Death" there is *Mot* in Canaanite and *Mavet* in Hebrew.

O Death, where are your plagues?

Guess what that word is. *Deber*. "O Death, where is *deber*?"

O Sheol, where is your sting?

Guess what that word is. *Qeteb*. "O Sheol, where is *qeteb*?"

So you could read Hosea 13 very easily because Mot is quite a well-known Canaanite deity—personified death. And this also happens in the Hebrew Bible. Sheol is personified in a couple of passages and so is death, including this one, because Death is addressed. “O Death.” “O Mot, where are your plagues?” “Where is *deber* and *qeteb*? Hey, Mot! Where’s *deber* and *qeteb*?” And if God is saying, “I’m going to ransom these people from the power of Sheol,” this is a taunt. This is the God of Israel saying to Mot (to Death, the god of the Canaanites), “Hey, dude. Where are your buddies?” [laughs] “They just weren’t too effective here, because I’m ransoming these people from Death. I’m taking them out of your hands.” So you have a flavor here of a pretty strong theological polemic that really involves or revolves around taking these terms as deity figures, which in Canaanite texts, they were. There’s a good indication they were. So it helps frame this discussion a little bit. Let me go back to DDD and its discussion of *qeteb*. And of course, Paul picks up on this language in 1 Corinthians. But we’re not going to rabbit-trail there today. Back to *qeteb*, DDD says:

The most useful information [MH: about *qeteb*] comes from Deut 32:24, where the following tricolon [MH: three stanzas] occurs in Yahweh’s curse of apostate Jacob...

His people have apostatized. In Deuteronomy 32:17, of course, which we reference all the time on the podcast here, about Israel going after other gods (the *shedim*)—these territorial entities referencing the Deuteronomy 32 worldview—Israel runs into apostasy. They go into apostasy. And so if you look at Deuteronomy 32:24... Let me just read it to you in the ESV. Because DDD is going to take it apart a little bit in terms of the Hebrew wording here. But let’s just get the flavor. God is judging his people for their apostasy. I’ll start in verse 23:

²³“**And I will heap disasters upon them;
I will spend my arrows on them;**

“Disasters” is *ra-ah*. “Arrows” is just the familiar word for arrow but it’s going to become important here in a moment.

²⁴**they shall be wasted with hunger [*ra-ab*],
and devoured by plague [*resheph*]
and poisonous pestilence [*qeteb*];**

20:00

So basically, God is going to send these disasters on his people. But the terminology in the wider Canaanite world was these hostile supernatural forces. So back to DDD. It says:

The useful information Deuteronomy 32:24... Here’s what we read when Yahweh curses apostate Jacob. [It says, in Hebrew:]... *mězê rā ‘āb* ‘sucked dry by Hunger

[MH: that's one description] (ra'ab)', *ûlêḥumê rešep* 'and devoured by Pestilence (resheph)' [MH: devoured by resheph]... Thus 'Hunger' is probably an epithet of Mot [MH: because death had been mentioned earlier] (Heb *Māwet*), god of death; *lêḥumê*, 'devoured', can also be construed as 'fought against', cf. the arrow metaphor of v 23 [MH: that we read, in reference to the arrows]; 'Pestilence' is personified as Resheph, the plague-god [MH: and here's the important line], who in Ugaritic is represented as an archer (*KTU* 1.82:3). [MH: Resheph in Ugaritic is represented visually as an archer. He shoots arrows.]

So you have Resheph (this Canaanite deity/demon figure in Second Temple parlance) who is an archer. So that's going to become important when we see references to arrows along with *qeteb* and *deber* and *Mot* in other passages. Let's go, in fact, to Habakkuk 3:5. This is a good time to reference that. I mentioned it earlier, but... Habakkuk 3:5 is kind of important for this. This is one of these passages where Yahweh marches from the South. We spent a lot of time talking about these in the Exodus series. In verse 5, in the midst of Yahweh coming from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran and so on and so forth (that's verse 3)... When you hit verse 5, it says:

**⁵ Before him went pestilence [MH: marching ahead of him: *deber*],
and plague followed at his heels [MH: coming up from behind: *resheph*].**

So "Before Yahweh went *Deber*, and *Resheph* followed at his heels." That's kind of an interesting verse. We're going to talk a little bit about why. As you're thinking about that, let me go back to the Hosea reference here and just read that again. So in Habakkuk 3:5, we've got two of these figures in tow, marching under Yahweh's command, as it were—under his authority. In other words, they're not independent deities. They are lesser and subservient. And you go to Hosea 13:

I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol. I shall redeem them from death [Mot]. O Death [O Mot], where are your plagues? [Where is *deber*?] O Sheol, where is [*qeteb*]?

So you have these passages like this that personify these things. And scholars who muck around in these texts have noticed that, "Hey, these same terms are actually some of the gods of these surrounding nations." And naturally, they're rivals to the status of Yahweh of Israel. And a couple of them get referenced in Psalm 91. That's the point. A couple of them get referenced very directly. We had *Deber* there. Let's go back to the psalm, just to pick up here again. In verses 5 and 6, we have for sure *Deber* and *Qeteb*. But then we have a reference to the arrow that flies by day. Is that *Resheph*? It might be, because *Resheph* is an archer. Might be an oblique reference to him. So there's some kind of strange stuff going on in Psalm 91. If we loop in Habakkuk 3:5 and if we loop in Hosea 13:14, we've got a number of these terms. And they're personified even in the

Hebrew Bible. But they're all under Yahweh's authority. He is clearly the superior in the picture. So I'm going to go to DDD again and read you a little bit about *Resheph*. DDD says this:

25:00

The tradition of Resheph as a god of pestilence is attested in Deut 32:24 and Ps 78:48. The first text, a passage of the Song of Moses, deals with those who provoked God to anger and were unfaithful [MH: they were apostate]: they are punished with hunger and destroyed by Resheph and →Qeteb (“I will heap (?) evils upon them, my arrows I will spend on them; wasted with hunger, devoured by Resheph and Qeteb the poisonous one”, Deut 32:23–24a).

That's how DDD renders Deuteronomy 32:23-24. Continuing, it says:

In the OT *Bārād* [MH: that's another term we haven't encountered yet] occurs in Ps 78:48, in a passage which concerns the seventh plague of Egypt, where Barad occurs in parallel with 'the Reshephs' [MH: barad is lightning... and then it quotes the Hebrew text.] (pl.): *wayyasgēr labbārād bě'îrām ûmiqnêhem lārěšāpîm*, “He (that is, Yahweh) gave up their cattle to Barad...

It's lightning or hail or both. Traditionally, we look at that as a fire. If you remember back to the plague episodes, these fiery hailstones—the fiery part—could be a way of describing lightning. A lightning storm that yields hail, in other words. So,

He (Yahweh) gave up their cattle to Barad and their herds to the Reshefs.

Lightning bolts as arrows. Think of arrows. We're using the language of visual encounter—visual appearance—and then in the ancient Near Eastern world, this is going to get theologized. Because they don't know meteorology. They don't know modern science or anything like this. So you see a lightning bolt, this is from the gods. And it's a bad thing. What the Bible is going to correct... It's actually going to push back on this in a couple of regards. We'll get to that in a moment. But the notion that... If you were (not just an Israelite, but really anybody)... That this is random and haphazard and the gods are fighting against you and against themselves and this competing interest... Think of the Greek gods and whatnot—Zeus with the thunderbolts and all that, a similar idea. There's a certain randomness to it and capriciousness to it. That's one point that the Bible is going to push back on. But it's also going to essentially demythologize the weather stuff. But we'll get to that in a moment.

But here back... The description is... Because it's written in the language of an observer. So the observer is going to interpret what's happening here as the wrath of God. And that's true. God *can* step in and manipulate the weather and control it and use it as a judgment. That's just a given in biblical theology. But if it's God doing this, then it's not independent deities. That's the demythologizing

part. So these things are in God's hand. He doesn't need to go ask [laughs], "Hey. Can you come in to work early today? I've got a plague. Can you show up and..." No. It's not like that. It's not that kind of thinking, where God has to send an evil spirit so that lightning works. We know that isn't the case. And the Bible pushes back on that idea a little bit. But this is a very common concept in the ancient world. So back to DDD. In Psalm 78, Yahweh gives up the Egyptians' cattle to Barad (lightning or hail or both) "and their herds to the Reshefs."

In Isa 28:2 *Bārād* is paralleled with a demon in the service of Yahweh, →*Qeṭeb* ('Destruction').

Qeṭeb is under Yahweh's authority. The biblical writers are using this notion... Think of it this way: they're using this notion that is widely held that these forces are supernatural entities. But the theological point the biblical writers are trying to make is that, "No, God just *does* this. He can *do* this in judgment. Or he can withhold it in mercy. This isn't like a superhero pantheon of different forces, like Storm, like the X-Men, or something like that. So the Bible actually pushes back on a little bit of this. But it uses the same language because that's what connects with the audience. This is going to be very familiar. So DDD says:

In Hab 3:5 we have the description of a theophany and the attendant natural phenomena. God is described as a divine warrior, Lord of light; before Him goes →Deber (master of epidemics, cf. Exod 9:3 and Jer 21:6), while Resheph (Pestilence) follows on God's heels.

Ps 76:4 mentions the *ršpy qšt* [MH: the plural of *resheph* and then *qeshet*], an expression which could be interpreted as "the Reshephs of the bow" [MH: like a bow and arrow] and be related to the imagery of the god armed with bow and arrows [MH: and then it quotes the psalm] ("[In Zion, God] shattered the *ršpy qšt*, the shield, the sword, the weapons of war").

30:00

Job 5:7 is a very difficult text, inserted in a passage dealing with the need for man of absolute trust in God. Here 'the sons of Resheph' (*bēnê rešep*) are mentioned ("and the sons of Resheph fly high"); they seem to be winged demons, particularly if we think of Ps 91:5, where the expression *ḥēš yā'ûp* "the arrow that flies" could be an allusion to Resheph.

That's just a smattering of material from DDD about Resheph. So what we've got going on here is the Bible is dipping into and using a matrix of ideas about natural forces and natural disasters and weather and so on and so forth. And instead of affirming that, "Yeah, there are specific dudes in the spiritual world that are in charge of that," basically it says, "No, all of these forces in nature are at the command of the God of Israel." It uses military language. It uses the visualization of a retinue and all these things. The biblical writers do these things. But their

point is that the way that the Canaanites think about this is not the case, because the Canaanite deities that you think are in charge of this really aren't. [laughs] They really aren't in charge of anything like this. God doesn't have to fight them to get them to not do these things or to do these things. They don't actually have any control over this. That's the theological point that the biblical writers in these smattering of verses are trying to make. Verses 11-13 (of Psalm 91)... I'll read this again:

- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.**
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.**

That should be very familiar from the temptation of Jesus by Satan. Now here's the part that isn't quoted by Satan:

- ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.**

There's a number of kinds of interesting things going on here. Obviously, the serpent imagery is what grabs you right away. We have these same terms (these serpentine terms) mentioned in Deuteronomy 32 about the enemies of Israel, both in terms of human enemies and supernatural enemies. "Their wine is the poison of serpents, the cruel venom of asps." So there's a generic reference in Deuteronomy 32. The more interesting one to me is Psalm 58. And I'll tell you why it's interesting. Psalm 58 is considered by many scholars... We actually ought to do an episode on Psalm 58 and Psalm 82. Because Psalm 58 is viewed as a psalm that picks up themes from Psalm 82. And I'll just read you the first verse. This is ESV:

Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods?

The Hebrew is *'elem*. And basically (I don't want to say "every" because there's always an exception)... pretty much every Hebrew scholar—Old Testament scholar—believes that *'elem* here is actually an old form of the plural of *el*. In other words, gods (like *'elim*, even though it's not spelled that way). Because we have in Psalm 89 the *bene 'elem* or the *bene 'elim* (it just depends on the manuscript tradition and so on and so forth). And I tend to agree with that because... Just listen to parts of the psalm:

- ¹Do you indeed decree what is right, O you gods?
Do you judge the children of men uprightly?**
- ²No, in your hearts you devise wrongs;**

your hands deal out violence on the earth.

Does this sound like Psalm 82:2-5? Yeah, it does. Because this is what they get accused of. And then it goes on and it says in verse 4:

**³The wicked are estranged from the womb;
they go astray from birth, speaking lies.
⁴They have venom like the venom of a serpent,
like the deaf adder that stops its ear,
⁵so that it does not hear the voice of charmers
or of the cunning enchanter.
⁶O God, break the teeth in their mouths;
tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD!**

35:00

You can see the serpent and the lion imagery here that is operative in Psalm 91, but you can also, if you're thinking Psalm 82... Scripture has this notion that extends from Deuteronomy 32 and Daniel 10 that the things that go on with wicked people (wicked rulers)... behind that is actually wicked supernatural beings that influence that chaos that happens on earth. They don't do anything about it to correct it. They either permissively let it go, or if we take the wording of this psalm, it seems a little more intentional. "No, in your hearts you devise wrongs. Your hands deal out violence on the earth." If you go to the end of the psalm... This is another reason why people look at this as kind of a dim mirror of Psalm 82, the way it ends.

**¹¹Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous;
surely there is a God who judges on earth."**

And if you actually look in the Hebrew text, we have "surely there is *elohim* who judges on the earth." And interestingly enough, the verbal there... It's not actually a finite verb. I'm sorry for the grammar lapse here. But I just have to get into this. Because somebody is going to look at this and say, "You know, Mike, it should be gods in verse 11. 'Surely there are gods who judge on earth.'" Well, that's what he's saying *isn't* happening in verse 1. So there's a problem right there. "Well, it has to be plural, because the verbal here is the plural participle, *softim*." Well, that's true. It's not a finite verb, for one thing, and therefore a participle, which is classified as a verbal adjective, which can be used substantively (in other words, functioning as a noun) and can be used as a plural of majesty. And that's what you have here. There are a few of these in the Hebrew Bible, where a participle functions as a plural of majesty, precisely because it's doing service as a noun in what would be called a verbless clause. So just to lapse into that a little bit just so that the listeners out there know that yes, we can cover these bases.

What you have here is a very similar call to the way Psalm 82 ends: “Arise, O God, and judge the earth. Take the nations...” That kind of wording, however you want to translate that. So there’s a similarity there. And my point is that here you’ve got a psalm that has stuff in it that sounds like Psalm 82 and yet also has this serpent language (this adder language) and this lion language that we also encounter in Psalm 91 and elsewhere. The chaos enemies of earth are cast this way as *tannim* (sea monsters or serpents). You’ve got Pharaoh in Exodus 29 and Exodus 32. You’ve got the whole incident with Moses and Aaron in front of Pharaoh with the serpents. The staff becomes a serpent and devours the other two—you’ve got some of these words in there. You’ve got Psalm 74 that uses the language of the sea monsters. God slays the sea beasts. And Isaiah 51:9 is another one of them. Isaiah 27:1 is probably the most famous eschatological one. I’ll just read it to give you a flavor for the kind of language that’s here:

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent...

There you get the serpent language. You’ve got *nachash* there a couple of times. “He will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” That’s *tannim* and that’s the word that occurs in Psalm 91. So this terminology is used for chaos agents—either supernatural, emblematic, or human. It’s a matrix of ideas, as I often say.

So what you have in Psalm 91, focusing on verses 5-6 and 11-13, is a lot of “powers of darkness” language. You’ve got a lot of supernatural chaos language. You’ve got connections to Deuteronomy 32. You’ve got a peripheral connection to Psalm 82 going on here. Basically, supernatural bad guys are littered in among the verbiage of Psalm 91. And that’s going to matter when we get to the Second Temple period, and that’s where we’re going right now.

Now I came across a couple of articles here and the links to these articles are going to be on the episode webpage. You probably already know that if you use the website to get your podcasts. But if you don’t, go up to the episode webpage and get links to these articles. These are available online so I’m giving you the links. One of them is by Craig Evans. Evans is a very well-known New Testament scholar. He had an article back in 2009 on Psalm 91, and it’s called “Jesus and Evil Spirits in the Light of Psalm 91.” The initial source for that was *Baptistic Theologies* 1 (2009): pages 43-58. It’s also published in a book called *Celebrating the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Canadian Contribution*. It’s edited by the late Peter Flint and a few other people. You could get that book in book form and you’d have the chapter. But anyway, you can get the essay on a link on the episode webpage. Craig Evans himself was nice enough to post this. I don’t know when he did it, but he did it, so it’s up there. Now in this article, Evans starts on very early with this comment. He says:

40:00

Commentators have long suspected that this psalm was understood as offering assurance against demonic affliction.

Now chances are very high that when *you* read Psalm 91, just in your Bible reading at some point in life, like me... I wasn't thinking about demonic affliction at all. After listening to the first half of this podcast, you could see why they would think that way. Because it is. [laughs] Okay? This is the worldview! So Evans says:

Commentators have long suspected that this psalm was understood as offering assurance against demonic affliction.

However, the discovery at Qumran [MH: where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found] of Psalm 91 [MH: here's the key] in combination with exorcism psalms has pretty well settled the matter once and for all: Psalm 91 apparently was understood in the time of Jesus as offering divine assurances of protection against demonic powers.

So the point even then really wasn't specifically some of the natural things that we would associate. There were people who read them quite transparently as attacks from demons. So this psalm at Qumran was actually grouped in among other exorcistic psalms that are not in the Hebrew Bible, but they're nevertheless part of this group. So that's interesting, especially because Satan is going to try to use this. But I should also add that it was also understood as a psalm of David.

Now if you go in your English Bible to Psalm 91, this one doesn't have a superscription. It doesn't say "Psalm of David," "Psalm of Asaph," or anybody else. Well, at Qumran, the Dead Sea Scroll version of the psalm... And it's the psalm. It just... It *has* a superscription. And it's a psalm of David. Which gives it the messianic flavor, does it not? So it's another little thing right under the surface that's kind of interesting. Now we could... I'm going to link out. In fact, I'm going to open up in my software here and go to the Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition. And Evans is going to reference 11Q5 first. And then he's going to go into 11Q11, which is this collection of exorcistic psalms. I'll read here 11Q5. When I say the word *blank*, it just means that there's a gap in the text. So...

2 *Blank* (*Compositions of David*) [MH: The editor presumes that there's some note about "these are the compositions of David," because the first line that actually shows up is:] And David, son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, /and/ learned,

3 *Blank* and discerning, and perfect in all his paths before God and men. And

4 *Blank* YHWH gave him a discerning and enlightened spirit. And he wrote psalms:

5 three thousand six hundred [MH: That's a lot more than we get in the book of Psalms, by the way.]; and songs to be sung before the altar over the perpetual

45:00

6 offering of every day, for all the days of the year: three hundred
 7 and sixty-four; and for the sabbath offerings: fifty-two songs; and for the
 offerings of the first days of
 8 the months, and for all the days of the festivals, and for the «Day» of
 Atonement: thirty songs.
 9 And all the songs which he spoke were four hundred and forty-six. [MH: So we
 got 3600 of them and we've got 446.] And songs
 10 to perform over the possessed: four. The total was four thousand and fifty.
 [MH: All of that stuff together is 4,050 items that David wrote.]
 11 All these he spoke through (the spirit of) prophecy which had been given to
 him from before the Most High. *Blank*

That's 11Q5. So we learned David was quite prolific. [laughs] And among the stuff that he produced were four songs to perform over the possessed. It seems these four psalms were discovered (providentially, coincidentally, however you want to look at that) in the same cave. They were labeled 11Q11. There were three new psalms in this group and Psalm 91. Now the ones that are not in the Hebrew Bible are very clearly exorcistic psalms. They're all fragmentary. But all of them mention demons with confrontational language. And then you get Psalm 91 in among them. I'm going to read you (a lot of this is fragmentary) 11Q11, the first column.

We get a reference in line 40: Yahweh.

Line 5 contains the word dragon. Then you have the earth.

We get the word "exorcising" (as in exorcising demons) in line 7.

Line 10 has the word "demon." (Just a few words.)

Column 2 has a little bit more and, interestingly enough, it mentions Solomon. Line 2 says, "Blank Solomon. He will invoke blank." And the next line is "the spirits and the demons." Blank on either side.

So get this. We've got Solomon looped in here. Well, it's a psalm of David and it's Davidic and the line of kingship, and demons. So you get a little feel for that. Column 3 is more of the same thing.

I want to get to the fifth column here. Column 5 has a good amount preserved, but it's really interesting. Line 3 says: "The volunteers of blank" and then it actually names Raphael, the archangel. "Raphael has healed them."
 Line 4: "of David against" and then a long blank. And it ends with "Yahweh."

Line 5: "The heavens, when he comes upon you in the night, you shall say to him, 'Who are you?'"

And you're going to love this. Line 6: "Who are you, O offspring of man and the seed of the holy ones?"

Does that sound familiar? Can you say it with me (if there are children in the room, you probably won't want to say this): "bastard spirits." Demons. This is the Genesis 6 language connection.

"Who are you, O offspring of man of the seed of the holy ones? Your face is a face of delusion and your horns [MH: ooh!] are horns of illusion. You are darkness and not light."

Line 8: "Injustice and not justice. The chief of the army, Yahweh, will bring you down."

Line 9: "to the deepest Sheol. He will shut the bronze gates."

Does this sound familiar? [laughs] This is part of this material in 11Q11 in which, right after this, in the next column, we get Psalm 91 in its entirety. It's not completely identical. Because Solomon... Well that's a Targum. I don't want to say that. But there are Aramaic translators that read into a little part of this. But it's very, very, very close to the Psalm 91 that we have. It's basically identical. But not completely. But it begins this way: "Of David." [laughs] Okay? And we get this: "Of David." They have it... It is bracketed here, but the Septuagint of this psalm has the superscription. So... And the Septuagint is going to align well with this. So they're figuring this is the Hebrew original here. "In the shelter of the Most High... Shadow of the Almighty..." So on and so forth. So you get Psalm 91 there. And it goes down through parts of verse 14. So Psalm 91, this is why scholars look at this and they go, "Hmm, sure looks like," in the words of Evans:

The appearance of Psalm 91 in 11Q11 strongly suggests that this psalm was understood not only at Qumran as an exorcism psalm but was understood this way among many Jews in the time of Jesus.

50:00

And I agree. I think Evans is tracking well on that. So a couple of specific items. I looped in the Septuagint. So the Septuagint attributes the psalm to David. Through the fancy and wonderful world of textual criticism, the material at Qumran here in Psalm 91 aligns very closely with little idiosyncrasies we'd get in the Septuagint, as opposed to the MT. And so odds are very high—very high—that this would've been the Hebrew underlying Septuagint and so scholars feel quite confident in saying, "This one had a superscription as well. Because the Septuagint one surely does." And maybe it didn't, but it's a good argument. It's sound in its reasoning.

Another thought is that one of these exorcistic psalms (I didn't read all of them—the whole lot of them) mentions Resheph by name. And we have the reference in Psalm 91 to the arrows, which we talked about earlier. So what I'm trying to do here is trying to create a picture—a context, a framework—for how people in the first century... If you were doing the sword drill: "Psalm 91. What's that about?" Chances are there's going to be somebody in the crowd (probably more than one) that would say, "Demons! Exorcism!" Because this content is in there. It wouldn't have been a foreign thought to somebody in Jesus' day. But to us, we're reading this filtered through an English translation so it's really hard to pick this up. Plus, we wouldn't have the context of Qumran and all this other stuff. And the Septuagint. We need to give the Septuagint some due here. Evans also writes:

The content of Psalm 91 readily lends itself to an exorcistic function. Verse 3 promises deliverance from the 'deadly pestilence*', while v. 5 promises the faithful person that he will 'not be afraid of the terror of the night' or the 'plague that rages at noon'.

By the way, that is not the way that plagues actually work (natural forces). They don't time themselves.

The creatures mentioned in v. 13 ('serpent', 'sea monster', and the like) were sometimes understood as demonic beings. As already mentioned, the 'sea monster' (tannim) here in v. 13 also appears in line 5 of the first exorcism psalm.

So these exorcistic psalms have the same vocabulary as Psalm 91 and Psalm 91 is lumped in there among them. Evans also throws in a note here that I think is worth mentioning, that it's very clear that the Aramaic translator (the Targum translator) of verses 5-10 took it as an exorcistic psalm. And he loops Solomon into this. I'm going to read you the Targum translation that Evans has referenced in his article:

5. 'You will not be afraid of the terror of *the demons* [MH: It actually puts the word in there.] *that go about in the night*, nor of the arrow of *the angel of death that he shoots* in the daytime, [MH: you can see how the Targum is expansive here]

6. nor of the *death* that goes about in the darkness, nor of *the company demons that destroy* at noon.

7. *You will call to remembrance the Holy Name, and* a thousand will fall at your *left* side, and ten thousand at your right hand; (but) *they* will not come near you *to do harm*.

8. You will only look with your eyes, and you will see *how the wicked are being destroyed*.'

9. *Solomon answered, and this is what he said*: 'Because you, O Lord, are my refuge, *in the most high dwelling place you have set the house of your Shekinah*.'

10. *The Lord of the World responded, and this is what he said: 'No evil shall befall you, and no plague or demons shall come near your tent.*

If you compare what's going on in the Hebrew and the Aramaic, its first couple of verses already set the stage for this Solomonic language. Here are verses 2 and 3. The Hebrew has:

**(He) will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.**

The Targum says:

David said: 'I will say to the Lord'...

And then there's a gap, an ellipsis. Verse 3:

For he will deliver you, Solomon, my son [MH: puts Solomon right in there], from the snare and the obstacle, from death and confusion.

So it takes the line from verse 3, "for he will deliver you," (this generic you) and the Targum translator interpreted that as David speaking to Solomon his son. That's how Solomon gets looped in there and he gets looped back later as we read.

55:00

Now, let's pool all this data and think about Psalm 91 and how to read it. And then we'll get into what happens with Jesus real briefly. To me, it is important that we have a tradition that there's a superscription here in the Septuagint. And very, very likely at Qumran for this being a psalm of David, which certainly gives it a messianic feel. It's also really important that Psalm 91 is lumped in with exorcistic psalms at Qumran. And those other exorcistic psalms in which it is bundled have very clear demonic, sinister, powers of darkness language in them, some of which is also in Psalm 91. I think that's important. The inclusion of Resheph and that other stuff I think is important. Just the ancient Near Eastern/Canaanite backdrop that we talked about earlier is important. To me, these things need to inform how we read Psalm 91 and then how we understand its use and Jesus' rebuttal in Matthew 4 and accounts of the temptation there. So in biblical days and the wider ancient Near East, I think we could say this: natural disasters and disease were linked to demons because they were a threat to human life. They are chaos forces that just happened to people. And that's going to get linked to the notion of supernatural chaos forces.

There is an Old Testament scholar from the Netherlands, Dr. Gerrit Vreugdenhil. But you can also find a short paper that he wrote online. We'll have this link on our website as well: "Demonic Doom: Psalm 91 and the Threat of Evil Spirits and

Demons.” It’s also very good and very interesting. His short article actually sketches out his own research. He has a book coming out on Psalm 91. It’s not shipping yet. I actually looked it up, because we have corresponded briefly. It’s published by Brill, so it’s really expensive. But hopefully it’ll come back in paperback. Or if you’re at SBL this year, you can get it as a discount. But it’s a book specifically on Psalm 91 and this demonic orientation of the psalm. In his short paper, when he’s talking about his research, he describes some of the things that he investigated. And he writes this:

In chapter 3 we [MH: he’s using the editorial *we*] asked: Which place do demons have in the world view of (the ancient) Israel? What did the Israelite men and women think of demons? Did they play a part in everyday life? On which fields of life did they experience the activities of demons?

So he’s asking these worldview questions. Then he goes through at one point in the article (and of course the book) through Jewish incantation texts or Jewish magical texts, as scholars like to refer to them. They would write these in bowls and cups. We have pieces of pottery or sometimes the whole thing. Or pieces of jewelry, things that you would wear on your person (on your body). I hate to use the word “spell,” but I guess that’s fair. “Incantation” sounds a little more neutral. But they’re short, written prayers. And I guess you could call some of them spells (that’s probably fair) to ward of demons. And he actually gives an example of one (this is Jewish material) that comes from Geniza at Cairo in this short article. He writes this:

The amulet mentions the name of the woman [MH: who was wearing this thing]: Ḥabibah bint Zurah. It is possible that amulet was worn as a kind of necklace or that the amulet was located near the place where she would give birth to her child.⁸ On the first column the purpose of the amulet is stated, namely: 'to drive away all kinds of demons and demonesses, lilis and liliths, evil diseases, harmful male spirits and harmful female spirits, and evil spirits, male and female [MH: She’s just running the gamut here]... so that she [MH: the baby or the mother... we’d have to read the full book to determine how that determination is made] be healthy and protected from any harm for all time'. Between the lines of the incantation, we find on the first column a reference to Psalm 91. The psalm is cited according the principles of notarikon.

And Dr. Vreugdenhil defines that for us in a footnote. I’ll read the footnote. Vreugdenhil writes:

The word 'notarikon' is borrowed from the Greek language (νοταρικόν), and was derived from the Latin word 'notarius', which means 'shorthand writer'. It is a method of deriving a word, by using each of its initial (or final) letters to stand for another, to form a sentence or idea out of the words.

1:00:00

So this was sort of a... I don't know... It's probably not a memory technique. Maybe it would become that if you made one of these and then you prayed through the psalm or you recited part of the psalm and this would help you to do that. Or it could be supplemental. You could be orienting a prayer around (in this case Psalm 91) and adding these other details, based on... Your memory cue would be the first or last letter of a line or a word in the psalm.

So these are the kind of texts that he deals with in this book. But what it shows is that there were people who quite obviously considered Psalm 91 to have something to do with protection from demons (as opposed to protection from a cold or something like that). It was more supernatural to them. For my own take, as with other matters of biology and understanding of nature and whatnot, it's easy for us to look and say, "Well, they didn't have tools of science. We know how weather works. We know how disease works. We know how contagions work." And we do. So I think it's obvious that science has informed us how diseases and weather works. I talk about this kind of thing on my FAQ. When we get comments like this from people living in the second or first millennium B.C. or the first century... And we do have tools of science that we can evaluate what they're saying about the *natural world* (that's the key thought). We can evaluate what they're saying about the natural world, but that doesn't give us permission to evaluate what they say about the *supernatural* world, which doesn't conform to the tools and methods of scientific inquiry. Those are two different things. Even though the ancient person married the two, those are two different things.

So we could say, "Well, hey, we know how the weather works and it's not empowered by a demon." We get that. But that doesn't mean that the demons or the gods or these supernatural entities don't exist. It just means that certain people misappropriated an ability to them. That's what it means. So a lot of people want to throw out the baby with the bath water. You know me and this podcast—we don't do that here. We try to be fair with the worldview and with the data. And in this case, these passages weren't designed to tell us how the natural world works. They just weren't. God chose writers who didn't know these things. And he knew that. So they're not doing science; they're doing theology. So we don't have the authority to use science (a thing they're *not* writing about) to dismiss a thing that they *are* writing about and that Scripture affirms (a supernaturalistic worldview).

I think Habakkuk 3:5 actually helps here. It doesn't sever a link between what's going in the spiritual world and human world. It doesn't do that. God can do something to influence the weather as a judgment or as a blessing. God can do these things. They're not out of the purview of divine activity. But the point is that it's God. It's not lesser inferior beings who are doing this. And I think Habakkuk 3:5 helps there. Such things, Scripture affirms, operate under the sovereignty of God. To get that message across, Habakkuk 3:5 has the Canaanite deities (or the demons in Second Temple thinking)... Recall that *daimonion* was a generic

term for a lot of these entities. It has the Canaanite deities that were thought responsible for such things held in check by Yahweh or, in some sense, displaced by Yahweh as to their presumed abilities. I'm going to read a little paragraph here from my *Demons* book. I write:

1:05:00

In addition to symbols representing the encompassing reach of chaos, biblical writers used the names of deities from Canaanite religion attached to specific natural phenomena and illnesses. Unlike their polytheistic counterparts, they did not have distinct deities acting independently of the true God in charge of those forces. Just as death (*mōt*) itself was under the authority of Yahweh, so were disease and natural disaster. Yahweh was the lone sovereign. For example, when Egypt was punished with plagues, it wasn't because Yahweh had to request the services of a deity or demon. The Most High either acts unilaterally or dispatches a supernatural underling to dispense judgment through such disasters (Ps 78:49–50).

In other words, he's the one in charge. So that's from the new *Demons* book. The end result is that it shouldn't surprise us that ancient people presumed the gods or demons were behind natural forces. That shouldn't surprise us. As Christians we can affirm the general idea that God is in control, but deny that demonic entities are the ones pulling the levers here. Biblical theology has God in control of such things, but as Jesus himself points out in Luke 13... And we need to loop Luke 13 in. This is not the temptation. This is something I blogged about on my website. As Jesus points out in Luke 13, it's not like we should think God is pushing buttons on every event in the natural world or aiming at wicked people when things happen. Some things just happen. That is the way the world works. Imperfection is part of the created world at the beginning, and its imperfection is made worse by the fall and its curses. The fall didn't result in demons being assigned to diseases and disasters, nor is there any biblical indication the world was created that way. Habakkuk 3:5 is an example where the biblical writers try to push back on the common thinking and, I think, correctly frame these things. I will link to my thing on Luke 13 as well that I wrote recently on the episode webpage.

So let's get to Jesus and ask ourselves the obvious question. We'll go to Matthew 4 here, just so that we get the flavor. But this is a really common passage. I think all of you are going to be familiar with it. Let's just read this. Matthew 4:1:

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness...

Other Gospels say he was *compelled* by the Spirit to go out into the wilderness. Of course, that's where you would find the devil (the domain of death and chaos— that which is anti-Eden). He goes out there and he fasts 40 days and 40

nights. And he's hungry. And the tempter shows up. Satan shows up and starts talking to him. You get this conversation. And in verse 3:

³And the tempter [Satan] came and said to him [Jesus], "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written,

**"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."**

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,'

And

**"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."**

So that's where he quotes Psalm 91. Now the obvious question is, "Why did he pick that psalm? Why would he do this?" My take is that Satan knows the content of the psalm. He knows how people think about the psalm. People think about Psalm 91 as an exorcistic document that Yahweh and David and the son of David (the messiah) has command over demons. "And surely, surely, if this is the case, I could ask you to throw yourself off the pinnacle of the Temple and his angels will keep you from harm. So let's see! Let's see. If you're really the messiah, you should be able to jump right off here and get rescued by angels. And then we'll know that you in fact are superior to demons (to the guys who work for me) and even me, myself. So let's see that."

Now there are a couple ways you could look at this. One is he's using the psalm to have Jesus prove the point and "win the confrontation." "Show your mastery over the powers of darkness. Show your status as the Son of God. Show your status as being equal to Yahweh." When we get right down to the rest of the Old Testament theology about the son of David, the messiah is God. "Let's see that. Show us that you're superior to *Deber* and *Qeteb* and *Resheph*. We want to see that. Prove it." Now what does Satan have to gain? I look at this and think it's a fishing expedition. Let's say that Jesus says, "Okay. Here we go. Geronimo!" And he takes off over the pinnacle of the Temple. Now think about it. You've got two outcomes. One is that angels show up, catch him, and "Okay, point proven." Like

1:10:00

what does that do? The other one is, Jesus hits the bottom and dies. [laughs] Okay? And God has to raise him up to make the plan work. Oh, and wouldn't that be interesting? Because if that happened, Satan would know that if this guy dies, God's going to bring him back to life. And I would assert that God and Jesus don't want Satan to know that. And the first option (Jesus jumps and is caught by angels) isn't the plan. And not only isn't that the plan, but Jesus is not the monkey to Satan's organ grinder. He is not here to perform for Satan or anyone else. He's on a mission; he knows what the mission is. "Frankly, your request (your challenge), Satan, can be safely ignored. It can be safely ignored. It serves us (me and my Father) no purpose to entertain you or inform you in any way."

So what does Jesus do? He responds with Scripture and says, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,'" which to me, I read that as a double entendre. He's saying, "Look, I'm not going to put God to the test." And it can also be read like, "You shouldn't put God to the test. And you're putting me to the test. Do the math, dude. Do the math." But he's not going to perform. He's not a performer. He owes him no information and no entertainment.

And I think for our application here... Why even mention this? In our day and age (we're going to end with this), the point is not just arcane knowledge about Psalm 91. I wanted to do all that to make the point that, yeah, Jesus is... In theory, Jesus could have jumped off, been rescued, and "Yeah, I proved the point. I am superior to all these things. I'm superior to every supernatural knucklehead named in Psalm 91. There you go." But Jesus doesn't do that. He does not presume to act in a way that is contrary to what God wants him to do and that, ultimately, is contrary to the point of the psalm. And I would just suggest to us that it might be a good idea to think of Psalm 91 the way it's supposed to be thought of. This is a protection from supernatural darkness.

So what we've said today about Psalm 91 and what is in Psalm 91 itself... The general teaching point here is not that this material is supposed to give us a video game or a professional wrestling analogy for the pecking order of the supernatural world. That's just not what it's supposed to be and it's not what we're trying to do here. We shouldn't over-literalize the material for the purpose of analyzing "Which disaster did I hear about on TV... was it demon-caused or not? Is the virus the work of Satan or demons or...?" If you're using Psalm 91 to do that, that is as much a misuse of the psalm as a misuse of any other passage. It's just not what it's there for. Rather, the psalm is a messianic psalm about David's agent—his ultimate son. The Davidic messiah has power over forces of darkness. That is what the psalm is about.

It's also not a psalm that teaches us we won't get sick. The psalm is about victory over supernatural darkness. God is in control of the forces of nature. He is not powerless to protect us as though he isn't in control of nature. But Psalm 91 is ultimately not about specific calamities and forces of nature. It doesn't guarantee

you won't get sick or won't get hit by a hurricane or will never live in a place that gets an earthquake. Or fill in the blank. It doesn't guarantee those things. Ultimately, it's about the messiah's victory over the powers of darkness. And all who are in the shelter of the Most High (all who are in Christ in New Testament parlance) will overcome the evil one and the evil ones through Christ. It's his faithfulness at the temptation in this regard that's crucial. It's crucial to what later happens. Had he tipped off... Had he tipped the hand in the temptation account here, and had Satan learned that, "Oh, if you kill him, God's just going to bring him back from the dead," or, "God won't let him be killed..." That changes tactically what the powers of darkness will do about the messiah. What God needs to happen—what the end game is—is that Jesus *does* die. So we're not putting that card on the table for Satan to learn anything.

So ultimately, Jesus' faithfulness here in Matthew 4, which involves this challenge drawn from Psalm 91, is crucial to Jesus' later faithfulness in going to the cross, where he does get raised from the dead and ascends to the seat of power once more, so that we reap those benefits and so that we are in the shelter of the Most High. We are in Christ. And we have victory over all of these evil ones. It's a coherent, sensible portrayal, not only in terms of the Old Testament, but also just what the terms become in Matthew 4, in the temptation scene. "God either won't let him die, or if he does, he'll raise him from the dead. If I'm the cosmic genius of the supernatural evil world, therefore killing the guy isn't the solution." But that's exactly what needs to happen. So Jesus is not putting the card on the table. So it's actually really interesting. Satan kind of knows where to hit him. But at the end of the day, Jesus says, "We don't owe you anything. We're not going to presume. 'You should not put the Lord your God to the test.' We owe you nothing. No entertainment. No information." So it's really a good chess match, when you really think about it. And the context of Psalm 91, I think, colors it in the right way.

TS: Mike, can you speak about Solomon? In the Second Temple period (their literature), the Second Temple Jews didn't freak out when they saw Jesus casting out the demons because they'd been reading about Solomon as an exorcist. Is that right?

MH: Yeah. If you recall, we did an old episode on this. It's number 87. Man, that seems like a looong time ago. [laughs] Google episode 87: Exorcism of Demons as Part of the Messianic Profile. Because in that episode, if you recall, we asked the question just exactly like you put it. Why, when Jesus runs around casting out demons and that gets used to reinforce the idea of his identity as the messiah... Like, "This has to be the messiah. Look at that." Since (to our reading) there's no really clear element like that in the Old Testament. You never read about... There's no episode in the Old Testament where a demon gets cast out of anybody. Nobody. Much less David or the son of David. So it creates this disconnect, like, "That detail doesn't make any sense. It must be something new that the New Testament writers made up." But it's not. Just like you said, they're

talking this way about Solomon. They have this tradition about David. And so when Jesus starts doing this, it's like, "Okay." [laughs] You know? He has just become part of the discussion about who... "Is he the messiah?" Because it's actually a big deal.

TS: Alright, Mike. Well, that was a good one. It's basically probably a chapter out of your *Demons* book, I would imagine.

MH: It actually isn't. [laughs] I do demons stuff and the natural world a little bit. But I don't have a chapter on Psalm 91. I reference it, but this is new content. So now I've spilled *Unseen Realm 2* content here on the podcast. But it's alright.

TS: I'll tell you. Love it. Any time we can get that to happen, I'll take it.

MH: Squeeze that out of me, right? [laughs]

TS: Absolutely. Alright, Mike. Well, that was good. We appreciate it. Alright, guys, with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

1:20:00