



THE SIEVE OF HIS SOVEREIGNTY

BY AIMEE JOSEPH

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I 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. He will cover you with his pinions and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. Psalm 91:1-4.

While many have been repeating Psalm 91 almost as a mantra against the dangers of COVID-19, it is significant to know that the psalmist is not promising a danger-free, trouble-free existence. Rather, the psalmist finds hope in the protection and nurturing care of the father in the midst of pestilence, traps set by a broken world, conflict, and plague.

This psalm shares a similar imagery with a song of God's faithfulness written by Moses in Deuteronomy 32. In both, the Lord is depicted as a powerful bird protecting and caring for his people.

He found them in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings,

catching them, bearing them on his pinions, the Lord alone guided him, no foreign god was with him. Deuteronomy 32:10-12.

In Deuteronomy 32, God's people are depicted on his wings for training, whereas in Psalm 91, God's people are hidden in safety under his nurturing and sheltering wings. If we read his sheltering protection to mean that nothing dangerous or uncomfortable will ever enter our lives, we completely miss the point.

Dangers befall us on every side, but no danger, no perceived evil comes to us without first passing through the sieve of His sovereignty and passing through the feathers of his faithfulness.

He absorbs it first, taking the bite out of the blow. And if the blows hurt (and they do), we would do well to imagine them without the insulation of His powerful indwelling presence. Before the news reaches our hearts, it passes through his scarred hands. Just as Christ took the sting out of death, he takes the evil out of the evil, allowing only trouble that he promises to work for our good and his glory.

When there are nettles in the nest, we know that his all-knowing, all-

powerful, all-loving hands have allowed it and have purposes for it beyond what we can see or imagine. That doesn't mean we have to pretend that all is fine in the nest or chirp pretending through the pain. It does mean that we take refuge in him, we press further into his breast, and we trust in his proven character.

The writer of Psalm 91 hints at this when he connects a motivational cause to the clause that begins verse 4, "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge." After the semi-colon, the writer gives us the reason for his confident fleeing to the refuge of God: his faithfulness is proven.

The Hebrew word translated faithfulness, *emeth*, literally means firmness, faithfulness, truth. God's character is firm, solid, and sure. When one chooses a shield, one ought to consider the qualities of the material of its makeup. Our shield is stronger than diamond, it is the proven goodness of our God's nature. And the Hebrew word translated shield here is not a small handheld shield, but more like an encompassing shelter in the middle of the battle, a dugout, or a trench. We don't and cannot even hold it, it holds us.