



BIBLE LENS

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Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

God the Preserver of Man

December 6–12, 2021



from the **Golden Text**

Isaiah 41:10; 49:16

Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. . . . See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.

—New King James Version

“Here is the address of God to his people,” suggests a scholar. “Because of their relationship with him they do not need to fear anything. This is not some species of positive thinking; . . . God states that they can take courage because he, their God, is with them.”

In the ancient world, inscribing, or tattooing, was usually a sign of enslavement. In this instance, though, the image portrays God’s intimate love for His children: They are as close as the palms of the hands.

from the **Responsive Reading**

Psalms 91:4

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

buckler: small shield; image of protection

Psalms 63:7, 8

Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice. . . . Thy right hand upholdeth me.

“Shadow of thy wings”—also employed by the psalmist in 17:8, 36:7, and 57:1—depicts the protection of young birds under their mother’s wings. Per one commentary, a later Aramaic rendering is “in the shadow of thy Shechinah will I rejoice.” *Shechinah* (or *Shekinah*) denotes the divine presence, underscoring God’s nearness to His creation.

from Section 1

1 | Psalms 11:1

In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?

Although the mountains around Palestine were common places of refuge, David rejects the counsel to run. A scriptural authority observes: “Faced with a choice, the psalmist chooses not flight but faith. The choice, in effect, is the relinquishing of self-sufficiency in dependence upon God.”

3 | Psalms 42:8

The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

Translation

*. . . the LORD pours his unfailing love upon me,
and through each night I sing his songs,
praying to God who gives me life.*

—New Living Translation

4 | **Psalms 139:3, 5**

Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. . . . Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

Compassest is translated from the Hebrew verb *zārâ*, to survey. It may have reminded listeners of a distinct but identical-sounding Hebrew word signifying to winnow (as chaff from grain)—a metaphor for separating the valuable and good from the worthless and offensive. *Beset*, from the Hebrew word *sûr* (usually meaning to encircle, confine, or press upon), is here seen to indicate God’s all-embracing presence.

from **Section 2**

5 | **Psalms 25:1**

Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Translation

Lord, I give myself to you.

—International Children’s Bible

6 | **Psalms 138:3, 7, 8**

In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. . . . Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.

Translation

*On the day I called, you answered me;
you increased strength within me. . . .*

*If I walk into the thick of danger,
you will preserve my life*

*from the anger of my enemies.
You will extend your hand;
your right hand will save me.
The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me.*

—Christian Standard Bible

7 | **Genesis 21:9, 10**

Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

Abraham's fathering of a child by his wife's servant was in keeping with an ancient Near Eastern practice in cases of infertility. Slaves and their children were considered property of their owner, so a son conceived this way was deemed a legal heir.

Because the word rendered *mocking* (Hebrew, *sāhaq*) means laughing and is related to Isaac's Hebrew name (*yishaq*), some scholars interpret Ishmael's laughter as playful.

7 | **Genesis 21:12–16**

God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

Since Abraham was eighty-six when Ishmael was born and a hundred at Isaac's birth (see [16:16](#); [21:5](#)), Ishmael would have been a teen or young adult at this point, as is clear from the Hebrew terms used. The noun translated *lad* (*na'ar*) means unmarried male; the word rendered *child* (*yeled*) can signify simply offspring. Regardless of Ishmael's age, the central idea to Jewish storytelling was that God is at hand in the direst circumstances (even for Hagar—a foreigner, woman, and slave) and that He will deliver on every promise (in this case, to make Ishmael prosper; see [v. 13](#)).

grievous: hard or painful

seed: child; descendant

spent: used up

over against: away from

bowshot: a distance equaling the flight of an arrow (about a hundred yards or ninety meters)

7 | **Genesis 21:17–20**

God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad.

Hagar occupies a unique role in Hebrew history. In some traditions, she is believed to have been a princess, a daughter of Pharaoh given to Sarai after Abram and his followers escaped from the Egyptian monarch (see [12:14–20](#)). Her lowly status among the Israelites is clear: She is not addressed by name in the biblical account until an angel of God speaks to her in the wilderness (see [16:7–13](#)).

In that previous appearance, God provided Hagar a covenant blessing—one of the first such blessings given in the Bible, and the only divine promise of abundant descendants given to a woman. During that audience with God, Hagar became the first person recorded to name Him: “She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.”

Though rarely mentioned later in Scripture, Hagar’s offspring are identified with the wealthy Hagarites driven from their land by Hebrew tribes—and possibly the Ishmaelites, the tribe that purchased Joseph from his brothers (see [I Chronicles 5:18–21](#); [Genesis 37:26–28](#)). Muslims honor Hagar as the mother of Arab patriarch Ishmael and ancestor of the prophet Mohammed.

aileth: troubles

from **Section 3**

8 | **Psalms 31:14, 15**

Thou art my God. My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.

Translation

“You are my God.”

*The course of my life is in Your power;
deliver me from the power of my enemies
and from my persecutors.*

—Holman Christian Standard Bible

9 | **I Samuel 23:9–14**

David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; . . . Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up. Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbare to go forth. And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.

At this time the Philistines had attacked the Judean town of Keilah, located about eight miles (13 km) north of Hebron. While evading King Saul, who is intent on killing him, David is directed by God to defend Keilah (see vv. 1–5). In spite of this help, however, the town’s inhabitants are apparently willing to deliver David to Saul. Again seeking God’s direction, David slips away with his men into the wilderness of Ziph, southeast of Keilah. Saul continues his pursuit, but God’s protection ensures that David and his ever-growing army remain out of reach.

One source explains, “What we witness here is . . . the simple truth that David, as a man who inquires naturally and regularly of God, has the strength of faith at his disposal.” He adds, “God is committed to David as Israel’s future and is present in these events to bring that future to pass, but David must trust and act in accord with that divine commitment.”

mischief: harm; evil

forbare: held back from; delayed

10 | **Proverbs 18:10**

The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

Commentators remark that the tower image illustrates a specific kind of safety, one that elevates God’s people above trouble and danger. The Hebrew word rendered *safe* (*sāgab*)—also signifying high or exalted—underscores this concept. [Psalms 91:14](#) expresses the idea as well: “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high [*sāgab*].”

from **Section 4**

11 | **Psalms 92:4**

Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

Translation

*. . . you’ve made me happy, LORD,
by your acts.
I sing with joy because of your handiwork.*

—Common English Bible

13 | **Luke 6:6–10**

It came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. . . . And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Jesus’ questions present a dilemma to the Jewish religious leaders. With the first query, they are bound to admit the lawfulness of doing good and unlawfulness of doing evil. With the second, they are made to see the pointed contrast between the Master’s readiness to save a man and their plots to put Jesus to death. “To the Pharisee,” a scholar reflects, “religion was ritual: it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. . . . To Jesus, religion was service. It was love of God and love of others. Ritual was irrelevant with love in action.”

Prayer through the night was often the Savior’s preparation for a momentous occasion. According to Luke’s Gospel, his next act is to call the 12 disciples to apostleship (vv. 13–16).

from Section 5

16 | **John 10:27, 28**

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Translation

My sheep respond to my voice, and I know who they are. They follow me, and I give them eternal life. They will never be lost, and no one will tear them away from me.

—GOD’S WORD Translation

Translated from the Greek term *harpazō*, *pluck* carries the strong sense of seizing or carrying away by force. In Jesus’ parable of the sower, he says of the seed sown by the wayside, “Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away [*harpazō*] that which was sown in his heart” ([Matthew 13:19](#)).

17 | **John 14:1, 27**

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Translation

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. . . . I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

—New Living Translation

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: . . . Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. . . . I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. . . . Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Translation

After saying this, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time is here. Give your Son glory so that your Son can give you glory. . . . Holy Father, keep them safe by the power of your name, the name that you gave me, so that their unity may be like ours. . . . I’m not asking you to take them out of the world but to protect them from the evil one. . . . I’m not praying only for them. I’m also praying for those who will believe in me through their message. I pray that all of these people continue to have unity in the way that you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they may be united with us so that the world will believe that you have sent me.”

—GOD’S WORD Translation

Jesus’ prayer acknowledges the deep need for unity among believers. A Bible authority writes: “Here the unity is already given, not something to be achieved. The meaning is ‘that they continually be one’ rather than ‘that they become one.’”

Sources note distinctions between this prayer and the Savior’s petition in the garden of Gethsemane recorded in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those three reports place some focus on Jesus’ agony. But while John’s Gospel refers briefly to Jesus’ troubled soul (see [12:27](#)), this account emphasizes the glory of God and His Son, which was to be manifested in the coming passion events.

from Section 6

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Translation

The LORD guards you.

The LORD is the shade that protects you from the sun.

The sun cannot hurt you during the day,

and the moon cannot hurt you at night.

The LORD will protect you from all dangers;

he will guard your life.

The LORD will guard you as you come and go,

both now and forever.

—New Century Version

20 | **Isaiah 55:12**

Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Translation

. . . you shall go out [from the spiritual exile caused by sin and evil into the homeland] with joy and be led forth [by your Leader, the Lord Himself, and His word] with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

—Amplified® Bible Classic

“Go out” or “go forth” was a common allusion to the Exodus from Egypt (see example in [Ezekiel 20:10](#)). In this verse it connotes the return from captivity in Babylon (see also [Isaiah 48:20](#)). Where the first departure held some degree of doubt and danger, the second is to be accompanied by joy and peace. And all nature will

witness and celebrate this long-awaited event.

Read a related article, “A mother’s prayer for refugees” by Susan Booth Mack Snipes, at jsh.christianscience.com/a-mother-s-prayer-for-refugees.



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