

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Psalms of Trust, Psalm 139, Session 18, 6-min. Video Overview

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All right, today we're putting on our detective hats; we're going to dive into a couple of the most famous psalms, and with a little help from the work of theologian Dr. Bruce Waltke, we're going to crack the case and uncover the incredible stories hidden just beneath the surface. So let's jump right into our first mystery, Psalm 91. The big question here is, who is talking? The whole poem is full of pronouns like I, you, and me, but it never actually tells us who's who.

It's almost like we're eavesdropping on this intense divine conversation, and we've got to figure out who the speakers are. So our first investigation: Psalm 91, decoding the voices. Let's get into it and follow the clues to figure out who's talking and what this poem is really all about.

So how do we solve this? Well, according to Dr. Waltke's analysis, the key is realizing there isn't just one or two speakers; there are three. He says it's this amazing, dynamic conversation happening between a king, a prophet, and, yeah, God himself. Let's break down who says what.

Okay, so voice number one. The person who says, I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge. Waltke identifies this speaker as a king.

And how do we know? It's all about the context. I mean, the poem talks about arrows flying past and thousands of soldiers falling at his side. This isn't just some regular person having a bad day.

This is a military commander right in the middle of a massive battle. And right after the king speaks, another voice jumps in. This time, it's speaking directly to the king using the word you.

This second voice makes all these promises of God's protection, you know, from hidden dangers and a deadly plague. Waltke says this has to be a prophet stepping in to deliver a message from God to encourage the king. Okay, but what about that destructive plague? This is where it gets really interesting.

Dr. Waltke's theory is that this isn't just some vague poetic term for sickness. He thinks it's referring to a very specific and absolutely terrifying historical reality for ancient armies: the bubonic plague. And he's got evidence to back this up.

He connects the dots through history. For example, the Greek historian Herodotus talks about an entire Assyrian army being wiped out by mice. And what do we now associate with mice and rats? The plague.

The Philistines even made little gold images of rats and tumors when they got sick after capturing the Ark of the Covenant. The psalm itself gives us clues describing the plague as

walking in the darkness, you know, as it slowly spreads, and then rushing at noon when it explodes into a full-blown epidemic. So the theory here is pretty incredible that God may have actually used the bubonic plague as a weapon to miraculously save Israel from its enemies.

So as Dr. Waltke puts it, this whole thing is antiphonal. What does that mean? It means this wasn't just a poem to be read silently. It was basically performance art.

You've got the king speaking, then the prophet responds, and then, as we'll see, God himself speaks. It was all designed to be a dynamic call-and-response piece, probably performed right there in the temple. But as this divine drama unfolds, you start to realize something.

This isn't just any king. The kind of protection being promised here is, well, it's absolute. It describes a king who seems to be completely invincible.

And that brings up a really big problem. The king in Psalm 91 sounds invincible, untouchable. He tramples on lions and cobras.

But you know, that doesn't really line up with the rest of the Bible, or history for that matter. In another psalm, Psalm 44, the king is totally defeated. Good people, like John the Baptist, were beheaded.

Countless saints throughout history were martyred. So who is this king who can't be touched? Well, for Waltke, all the clues point to one conclusion. This can't be just any earthly king.

The psalm has to be pointing forward to a unique messianic figure. He identifies this invincible king as Jesus Christ. Think about it.

Jesus was untouchable by his enemies until the very moment he chose to voluntarily lay down his life. And get this: when Satan tempts Jesus in the desert, which psalm does he quote to him? This one, Psalm 91. Even Satan recognized who this psalm was really about.

All right, case number two. Let's shift gears to another incredibly famous poem, Psalm 139. Now this one feels very different.

It's super personal, almost like reading a diary. But don't let that fool you. Dr. Waltke shows us that hidden inside is a perfectly brilliant architectural structure.

He reveals that this psalm is just meticulously built. It's not random at all. It's made up of four stanzas, and each stanza has exactly six verses.

And they're not just separate thoughts. They build on each other, step by step, to make this profound argument about who God is and who we are. It goes from God's knowledge of you to his presence with you, his creation of you, and then finally how that applies to real life.

So the first half, those first two stanzas, they lay down these two absolutely staggering truths. First, God's omniscience. He knows you completely.

Every move you make, every word you say, even the thoughts you haven't formed yet. And second, his omnipresence. He is always, always with you.

There's literally nowhere you can go to escape his presence. Not the highest heaven, not the depths of the grave. The point is, you are never, ever alone.

So the question is, how can the psalmist be so certain about all this? Well, the psalmist then moves from these abstract ideas to the ultimate proof. The reason God knows you and is with you so completely is that he's not just watching you from a distance. He's the one who made you.

And this realization leads to the psalmist's incredible reaction. It's not fear. It's pure awe.

In Waltke's translation, he says, I praise you because I'm fearfully extraordinary. Your works are wonderful. He understands that he was personally intricately woven together in the secret place of his mother's womb.

He sees himself and every one of us as God's masterpiece, his magnum opus. And the only response is just to break out in praise. But it goes even deeper than that.

The psalm then makes this incredible claim that all of your days were written in God's book before a single one of them had even happened. Just think about that. It suggests this incredible divine plan, a sovereignty and a purpose for your life that was set in motion before you even existed.

Okay. So after all this deep, profound reflection on God's nature, the psalmist kind of wakes up. He takes all this amazing theology and slams it right into the middle of his messy, dangerous real life.

You see, he's surrounded by violent people, and he starts by praying for God to deal with them. But then in the final verses, he does this amazing pivot. He turns the spotlight away from his enemies and shines it right on himself.

He prays, "Search me, God, and know my heart. See if there is any offensive way in me." Instead of just pointing fingers, he invites God's scrutiny into his own soul.

It's this incredible moment of honesty and a deep desire to be truly aligned with God. Now, bringing this into the modern day, Dr. Waltke applies this specific understanding of God's creation in the womb to current ethical discussions. Based on these verses, he states that because God is portrayed as being involved from the moment of conception and as having a unique plan for every child, this psalm presents a profound argument for the sanctity of life from its very beginning.

So we're left with this final powerful question. If what these psalms reveal is true, if we are known this completely by a God who is both a mighty protector and our intimate creator, a God who has a purpose for us, how does that change the way we see ourselves? And maybe just as importantly, how does it change the way we see every other person we meet?