

FINDING GOD IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

(Psalm 91 and Matthew 2.13-23)

The future is very certain - heaven! But there's a difference between the near and the distant future.

Today we study a Psalm meditating on finding God, and a family working it out in practice.

"Do not boast about tomorrow..." Proverbs 27.1 (remember Glasgow, Pakistan schoolroom, Iraq church...or even just going to the doctor)

Canon Andrew White vicar of Baghdad - surely one of the bravest men on planet?)

Look at Psalm 91. 3 preliminary points:

Note the poetic repetition, eg v1, 2, 5, 6, 7 (NB Saul in 1 Sam 18.7-9 misunderstood this feature of Hebrew poetry!) - it gives time for thought/makes sure we get the point.

Chiasmus, v14 Because... I will... I will... because (ABBA) [see too v 13 in RSV] - elegant arrangement of ideas.

Shaddai, one of the names of God, often used in Genesis - God to Abraham, Isaac blessing Jacob, God to Jacob, Jacob to his sons, Jacob to Joseph (Genesis 17.1; 28.3; 35.11; 43.14; 48.3; 49.25) - "Shaddai is the God whose power is sufficient in every human weakness" (New Bible Commentary).

3 commands, and 7 promises:

1, 9, 14 Dwell! Make him your dwelling/refuge! Love him/cleave to him in love! (RSV)

How? By praying/talking with him/we *know* (RSV) his name. Dwell = live close to.

1-13 The promise of protection (from enemies, traps, nightly terrors, battle [cf Karen and the Red Arrows nearly crashing into Brighton pier], illness, sudden death, harm [cf Robin aged under 2 falling down the stair well], wild beasts).

"But Christians DO suffer from these things!" Yes, the rest of the Bible talks of God's servants suffering (e.g. John the Baptist, Stephen, James, Paul etc).

Ps 91 doesn't promise immunity: "The promise is not security *from* but security *in*" (NBC).

14-16 promise rescue (NB Psalm 50.15 - useful verse!), protection (Latin *pro-tego* = I cover in front), answered prayer (Who feels their prayers bounce off the ceiling?), his presence (Who is lonely? cf Lance, a friend of mine who heard David Sheppard say on radio that he had asked Jesus into his life and never been lonely thereafter), vindication/honour (when we are cold-shouldered by family/friends/colleagues), satisfyingly long life (Latin *satis* = enough), salvation (ultimate, eternal, as in John 14.2)

How it worked out in one particular family: Joseph in Matthew 1 and 2: righteous, kind and thoughtful (1.19-20); 4 dreams - he listened to God, and he obeyed (1.24, 2.14, 2.21).

Like car headlights - you can't see round the next bend, but you can see far enough. Joseph was finding the way, and God had the future under control.