

Psalm 91 in 11Q11 The Believer's Cry for Deliverance by Jennifer Shepherd (2001)

This study will discuss the text of Psalm 91 in three textual witnesses: the MT-150 Psalter, the Septuagint and 11QapocrPs. In the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 91 details great doctrine and theology. The sense one gets from reading the Psalm is that it was originally a liturgical composition used in public worship. On a personal level, the individual who recited this Psalm did so to claim the deliverance it declared and to bring comfort in a distressing situation. The literal evils and dangers arrayed against the individual gradually began to be endowed with supernatural meaning as Psalm 90 (91) in the Septuagint demonstrates. Moreover, the Hebrew Bible gives evidence of the development of an adversarial character named "Satan" and later Jewish literature develops his character and his evil work against the followers of YHWH.

The Qumran sectarian scrolls confirm a strong belief in demonic activity aimed at the followers of YHWH. The writings contain information about Satan and his demons, what their activities were, how their attacks may be prevented and how individuals may be delivered when under demonic attack since dangers and evils were understood as the work of Satan. 11QapocrPs is an example of the latter – it is an exorcism Psalm and the significance of finding Psalm 91 in 11QapocrPs lies in what it demonstrates about the power of the Psalm. In this scroll, Psalm 91 detailed the protection and deliverance afforded the believer. Whether one or more speakers recited this Psalm, it served to comfort the one under demonic attack, and most importantly, it made known to any evil force that YHWH had the power and desire to act. In the face of this truth, the enemy was powerless and the believer would be delivered from whatever danger he/she faced.