

God Delivers and Protects

Lesson Text: Psalm 91:1-6, 9-16

Background Scripture: Psalm 91:1-16

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 57:7-12

Psalm 91

¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ³ Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. ⁹ If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling, ¹⁰ no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. ¹⁴ "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. ¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

INTRODUCTION

If we were asked to describe life in one word, one possibility would have to be "uncertain." There are both joys and sorrows in life, and we have no way of knowing ahead of time which is coming next. Our lives include concerns about health, accidents, financial disasters, unexpected breakdowns of appliances and vehicles, crimes, marriage problems of family and friends, loss of friendships, and unexpected deaths – to name a few. It is good that we cannot predict the future, for we would surely become depressed.

In spite of such uncertainties, the child of God who lives in a close relationship with the Lord can still have a sense of security. That comes from knowing that our God is sovereignty in control at all times; nothing is going to happen to us that He does not allow. That, in turn, allows us to enjoy life and experience a great deal of happiness, peace, joy, and contentment. The intimacy of that relationship is closely tied to the believer's commitment to being obedient to God and maintaining a daily walk with Him.

Psalm 91 reminds us of God's protection and care of His children in the face of all the dangers included in this life.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Last week's lesson from Psalm 90 starkly pointed out the difference between the eternal God and frail humanity as God's wrath overrides all human senses. Today's lesson from Psalm 91 moves us forward in emphasizing the fact that God's protection and grace are sufficient in times of great distress if we take refuge in Him. Psalms 91 is a song of trust. Its aim is to encourage the individual to put trust in a God who cares and protects those committed to Him.

TODAY'S AIM

- **Facts:** to show how God delivers and protects us in all situations.
- **Principle:** to underscore that we need to look to God alone for deliverance and refuge.
- **Application:** to grasp that in God's almighty care we have nothing to fear.

Asylum of Protection (Psalm 91:1-2)

The theme of Psalm 91 is stated clearly and concisely here in verse 1. The fact that the only place where one can find protection and security in the midst of threats is the secret place of God.

God is referred to in Psalm 91:1-2 by four names. He is called "the most High," a translation of *elyon*, a word referring to something lofty and supreme, emphasizing His sovereignty. He is also called "the Almighty," from *shaddai*, including God's power (His omnipotence) and sufficiency to handle every situation. The third name is "Lord (Yahweh)," the personal name of God that expresses His self-existence and faithfulness to His promises. The last is "God," *elohim*, the supreme, providential Ruler over all the affairs of mankind.

1. What are the four names the author used to identify God? How do they differ in meaning? (vs. 1-2)

This is a great promise of blessing to believers. Yet, the promise is not made to all who believe, but only to those who are willing to make their abode in the secret place, to sit down or take up residence there. To those who have developed an intimacy of fellowship with and obedience to God. The words shall abide (Heb *lun*) signify to pass the night. They imply a constant and continuous dwelling, and not just a temporary visitation during trouble or calamity. Psalm 91 is a promise to those who take up residence in the secret place.

With the theme stated in verse 1, the psalmist now gives a personal testimony as he makes the theme his own (v. 2). This forms the basis for the exhortations to follow in verses 3–13.

That God is a refuge (c.f. 18:2; 144:2) and a God who can be trusted (c.f. 31:6; 55:23; 56:3; 61:4; etc.) is a frequent theme of the Psalm. Yet, it is of little comfort that God is a refuge or a fortress unless we are to say "He is *my* refuge and *my* fortress... in him will I trust."

2. What does it mean to dwell in the hidden place of the Most High?

Assurances of Protection (Psalm 91:3-6)

Verses 3–8 present a list of adversities. Since these are stated in general terms and bold imagery, the reader undoubtedly can identify with at least one of the metaphors. The snare of the fowler is a trap used for catching birds (compare Psalm 124:7; Hosea 9:8). The psalmist sometimes refers to himself as a defenseless bird (see Psalm 11:1; 102:6, 7). This metaphor thus represents persecution by others.

Pestilence, by contrast, is not something we normally think of as being inflicted on one person by another (although there are cases of that happening). Rather, pestilence or plague is seen as being inflicted by God (see Exodus 5:3; 9:3, 15; Psalm 78:50; Habakkuk 3:5). It can be deadly (noisome). Just as birds are helpless before a well-constructed trap, so human beings are helpless before destructive pestilence. This is particularly true in a time before antibiotics and vaccines, which is most of human history.

Even today there are many diseases that are beyond our control. A literal pestilence can be terrifying (see v. 6, below). God is the one able to deliver from both persecution and plague.

3. In what way are the enemies the psalmist referred to like a fowler? (v. 3)

Yahweh is portrayed as a mother hen that protects her brood with outspread wings (see Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; also see Jesus' use of this metaphor in Matthew 23:37–39 and Luke 13:34, 35). The imagery is a strong one for protection, but the believer in Yahweh must willingly seek the refuge under His wings! That's the idea of shalt thou trust. Notice that Jesus says "you would not" in the two New Testament passages above.

When we willingly seek that protection, we discover that God is true to His promise of providing it. His faithfulness is like a "shield and rampart" (defense). A shield is the perfect symbol for protection.

4. In what way is God (Yahweh) referred to? (v. 4)

In typically poetic style, the psalmist beautifully portrays that God's protection of those who dwell in the secret place is constant, never failing day or night. "*You will not fear the terror of night,*" a probable reference to robbers (cf. Job 24:14-16; Jer. 49:9; Ob. 5), "*nor the arrow that flies by day,*" perhaps a reference to open warfare (cf. Job 6:4). We have already encountered the word "pestilence" in verse 3. The deadly implications of that word are enhanced by the acknowledgment that it "walks in darkness." The idea seems to be that no one sees it coming.

The certainty of death is associated with these metaphors. If we fear the threat of diseases and plagues today, even with knowledge of modern medicine, think of how much more the ancient peoples fear such attacks on the body! Ultimately, however, the threat of pestilence or destruction that wastes—whether at night or noonday—is irrelevant to those who trust God. We are not to fear such things, for God is with us and we are with God—under His wings!

5. What imagery did the author use to explain God's constant care? (vs. 5-6)

The Sure Place (Psalm 91:9-13)

The Hebrew word translated "if" (v. 9) is the structural word for the psalm. The overall context here is that of something being conditional. The people to whom the psalmist is speaking are to fear none of the things mentioned in verses 3–8 because of the fact that they already have put their trust in Yahweh ("you have made the Lord"). They are seeking Him as their refuge (the theme of the psalm). The condition for receiving the promised deliverance from evil is to make the Lord one's refuge or habitation.

6. What are the conditions for receiving God's deliverance? (vs. 9-10)

God protects us during our daily walk. He has many ways of doing this, one of which is through the sending of angels. The following texts mention angels providing protection from harm: Genesis 24:7; 48:16; Exodus 14:19; Psalm 34:7; Isaiah 63:9; Matthew 4:11; Acts 12:7; Hebrews 1:14.

However, we must take care not to misapply this promise. Wherever we go in life, there is always the possibility of stubbing one's toe against a rock, either physically or spiritually (see Psalm 35:15; 37:24; 38:16; Proverbs 3:23; etc.). It was this passage that Satan used in his temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew and Luke recorded this, explaining that Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and challenged Him to throw Himself off since God had promised in His Word to send angels to bear Him up (Matthew 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11). Though Satan quoted Scripture, he did so out of context and twisted its meaning. He made it sound like it justified testing God instead of the intended meaning of the psalm, which is to trust Him.

7. What did the author say about the help believers receive from angels? (vs. 11-12)

Here the psalmist figuratively portrayed ferocious enemies. Lions and many kinds of snakes (“cobra”) can be hazardous to our health and well-being! In the same way, those who know us and the testimony we bear for Christ may hate everything we stand for and want to destroy us. The psalmist had probably seen times when God’s children had been viciously attacked in attempts to destroy them. He had also seen these animals and the devastation they could do to their prey. It was a realistic analogy.

But deliverance is available for the one whose confidence is in God. We can know victory in the deepest of valleys and the greatest of trials. David could walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil (Ps. 23:4); so can we.

8. How did he portray evil enemies? (v. 13)

Affirmation of Protection (Psalm 91:14-16)

Here we have another “because,” which indicates a new part of the psalm’s structure. Verses 14–16 represent what is called an oracle of God. It is the climax of the psalm, for God is giving His own assurance of protection from every conceivable evil that is hurled at those who take refuge in Him. The oracle confirms the psalmist’s assertions in verses 3–13. God delivers those who cling to Him! He delivers them by setting them securely on a high place out of the way of harm (compare 2 Samuel 22:34; Psalm 18:33; Habakkuk 3:19). God, indeed, protects and defends His people because they know His name. His name is not Allah, Baal, Zeus, or “the man upstairs.” His name is God—Yahweh. To know Yahweh is to trust Him.

9. To whom are God’s promises of special care and provision directed? (v. 14)

In Need of Protection

There are a few people who seem to be so able to take care of themselves that they apparently don’t need anyone to protect them. André the Giant was one of those. His appearance was intimidating. Billed as being 7’4” and weighing 500 pounds, he was one of the world’s most famous professional wrestlers in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In private life, he could also hold his own. On one occasion, four men in a bar were hassling him. Although he tried to avoid a confrontation, he eventually chased the hecklers out to their car. André grabbed the car and turned it over with the four men inside.

Yet, this big man suffered a premature death at age 46, as a result of the medical condition that caused his abnormal size. Even this powerful man was powerless in the face of death. May we have no illusions that we can protect ourselves in that regard! There is still only one who is able to deliver us from these frail bodies into eternal life. —C. J. F.

When Christians make God their prayer refuge, God answers (v. 15). Notice that God does not promise to take the trouble away from us. Rather, He will be with us in trouble. So once again God promises to deliver, even honor, His people. God grants us His favor in all phases of the distress.

Psalm 90:12 (last week's lesson) challenges us to "number our days" aright. We do this by trusting daily in God as a refuge. This is how He satisfies us (v. 16 of today's lesson).

But even better than that, He wants to reveal His salvation. Jesus' name means "saves." It is to Him we must cling. God is our protector, both now and through eternity. The length of our eternal life will certainly be enough to satisfy anyone!

10. In what ways does God honor His people (vs. 15-16)?

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Putting our faith in the Lord is putting ourselves in a place of perfect safety (Psalm 91:1-2).
2. Unexpected trials reveal to us God's compassionate concern for His children (vs. 3-4).
3. God is in control and limits our suffering; so we need never fear (vs. 5-6, 9-10).
4. God Himself will see that nothing prevents His faithful ones from honoring Him (vs. 11-13).
5. Trials will come, but we are assured of God's presence and help (vs. 14-15).
6. What is important is not how many days God gives us but how many days we give Him (v. 16).

CONCLUSION

Let God Be Your Security Blanket

The presence of evil in this world is a fact of life for all, but especially for God's people who seek to live righteously. Sometimes the danger includes premeditated entrapment by evil people or epidemic diseases of a fallen world (Psalm 91:3,6). Some attacks come in the dead of night, others at midday (vs. 5,6). Harm and disaster is never far away (v. 10).

There is no time or place on this earth when we are not endangered by evil. Yet for all these threats God is still our protector. His promises are certain. He will rescue and protect those who know His name (v. 14). When we cry out for help, He will answer by being with us, delivering us, and even honoring us in the end (v. 15). How can we not trust God to be our refuge and fortress (vs. 2,9)?

PRAYER

Almighty God, hear our prayer for protection. We are bombarded continually by evil. Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings. Be our shield and wall of protection. Give us victory over those who would harm us. Show us Your salvation. For the sake of Your kingdom and in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Know that God knows.