

Psalm 91

A Prayer of Moses the man of God.

Psalm 91:

The key word to describe this psalm is security.

There are two distinct voices in the psalm, and each speaks to the trusting believer in the LORD.

The first voice assures the faithful of God's protection (verses 1-13).

The second voice is that of the LORD Himself who likewise pledges His watchful care (see verses 14-16).

An important caution is necessary here.

The great promises (of verses 3-13), should not be taken in an absolute sense.

One may not be presumptuous in applying them, Satan has already suggested that (Matt. 4:6-7).

Rather, the believer must recall that deliverance still has to be the will of God and that even if harm should come, he can still be secure (compare Luke 21:16 with 21:18 and Rom. 8:28 with 8:35).

Verses 1-16:

This psalm describes God's ongoing sovereign protection of His people from the ever-present dangers and terrors, which surround humanity.

The original setting may be that of an army about to go to battle.

Most of the terrors mentioned in this psalm are left undefined, no doubt intentionally, so that no kind of danger is omitted from application.

Believers in every age can read this psalm to learn that nothing can harm a child of God unless the LORD permits it.

However, in light of the many references in the Psalms to the future messianic kingdom (compare especially Psalms 96-100), this psalm must be read as being literally fulfilled then.

I. The Lord's Protection (91:1-13).

A. The Confidence (91:1-2);

B. The Dangers (91:3-6);

C. The Examples (91:7-13).

II. The Lord's Pledge (91:14-16).

Verses 1-8:

He that by faith chooses God for his protector, shall find all in him that he needs or can desire.

And those who have found the comfort of making the LORD their refuge, cannot but desire that others may do so.

The spiritual life is protected by Divine grace from the temptations of Satan, which are as the snares of the fowler, and from the contagion of sin, which is a noisome pestilence.

Great security is promised to believers in the midst of danger.

Wisdom shall keep them from being afraid without cause, and faith shall keep them from being unduly afraid.

Whatever is done, our heavenly Father's will is done; and we have no reason to fear.

God's people shall see, not only God's promises fulfilled, but his threatenings.

Then let sinners come unto the LORD upon his mercy-seat, through the Redeemer's name; and encourage others to trust in him also.

Psalms 91:1 "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

“Secret place of the Most High”:

An intimate place of divine protection.

The use of “Most High” for God emphasizes that no threat can ever overpower Him.

“The shadow of the Almighty”:

In a land where the sun can be oppressive and dangerous, a “shadow” was understood as a metaphor for care and protection.

I feel so inadequate to even attempt to explain this most beautiful of Psalms.

This more than most Scriptures, brings great hope and promise to those who believe.

We have discussed before that dwelleth means to continually dwell.

This then is not speaking of a nominal believer, but of a believer in long standing who is sheltered in the secret place of the Most High.

If this was written by Moses, as many believe, he could speak first hand at how wonderful it is to be in such close fellowship with God.

Moses was the only one who went near unto God up upon the mount where he had received the Ten Commandments.

At one point, God put his hand over Moses and passed by, and Moses saw the back side of God.

On two different occasions, Moses was in the very presence of God for 40 days and nights.

Moses had a fellowship with God that all true believers would like to have.

He had been so close that his head shined brightly when he came down the mountain.

No wonder he was known as man of God.

David was another that God took supernatural care of.

The psalmist could have been either man.

This would be my prayer today, O LORD that I might abide in Christ and that Christ might abide in me.

To fellowship with God on this level would be as heaven itself.

Jesus opened the way for us into the Most Holy Place.

Where the shadow of God is means that you are very near unto God.

To be seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus is heaven.

What a wonderful comfort to be close enough to God for His shadow to cover you.

Psalm 91:2 "I will say of the LORD, [He is] my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

Or say to the LORD.

These are the words of the psalmist, expressing his faith in the LORD in the following words, taking encouragement from the safety of the godly man above described.

The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and all the Oriental versions, read, he shall say to the LORD; that is, the man that dwells in the secret place, and under the shadow of the LORD.

The Targum is, "David said, I will say to the LORD," as follows:

"He is my refuge":

A refuge in every time of trouble, outward or toward.

A refuge when all others fail.

And is himself a never failing one, a strong refuge, which none can break through and into, and in which all that have fled there and dwell are safe.

"And my fortress":

What fortifications, natural or artificial, are to a city and its inhabitants, that is God to his people, and much more.

He is round about them, as the mountains were about Jerusalem.

His salvation are walls and bulwarks to them.

Yea, he is a wall of fire about them (Psalm 125:2).

They are kept by his power, as in a garrison (1 Peter 1:5).

"My God, in him will I trust":

His covenant God, his God in Christ, and who would ever continue so.

And was a proper object of both his trust and confidence, both as the God of nature, and as the God of grace.

Who is to be trusted in, both for temporal and spiritual blessings, and at all times.

To which his lovingkindness, power, and faithfulness, greatly encourage and engage.

The Targum is, "in his Word will I trust."

We have spoken before about trust.

To trust goes beyond ordinary faith.

It is like saying, I will rest in the LORD knowing all is well.

Notice the determination of the psalmist in saying, "I will say of the LORD".

He has made a definite stand.

Notice also, the use of “my”.

He may not be refuge and fortress for the world, but He is my refuge and my fortress.

Shadowed by the LORD, no harm will come near you.

To feel absolutely secure in the knowledge that God is protecting you, brings perfect peace.

I will not fear what man can do, with God my refuge and fortress.

Psalm 91:3 "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, [and] from the noisome pestilence."

“The snare of the fowler”:

This metaphor represents any plots against the believer intended to endanger his life.

It depicts a subtle trap, those things that seek to deceive.

“The noisome pestilence” portrays events that, with force, affect everyone in their path.

The reference here (and in verse 6), is specifically to dreaded diseases, plagues and epidemics (compare Jer. 14:12; Ezek. 5:12; 14:19).

The key to all of this is abiding.

If we are continuously with the Lord, and Him with me, I have no worry of faulting and falling into sin.

The enemy, Satan, is constantly trying to trap the believer.

He would not dare come this close to the Lord, to let His shadow cover him.

Part of the Lord's prayer says, deliver us from evil.

This is saying just that.

He will deliver us from all evil, if we abide with Him.

Psalm 91:4 "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth [shall be thy] shield and buckler."

A mother bird spreads her wings over her fledglings to protect them from storms and predators.

She will allow herself to be wounded to protect them.

She keeps them warm and sheltered, and the baby birds feel safe in her embrace (17:8).

Such is God's fierce love for humanity.

The mother hen protects her little chicks by spreading out her wings and then hiding them under her wings.

We are certainly not saying that the LORD is like a fowl, but His love and care for His little ones (all believers), is described as protecting us with His feathers.

This just means that His protection shadows over His own.

His truth is what we base our belief upon.

It is a solid foundation that we can build upon.

His truth will be a shield against the false doctrines of this world.

This shield and buckler is not just a protection, but is more like a fort that protects.

The shield of course, would protect your heart, but the buckler is the fortress.

It appears that He gives double protection to His own.

Verses 5-6:

The Hebrew day does have four equal parts, and this verse reveals that each part is surely under God's protection.

"Night" represents the time between 6 p.m. and midnight.

"Day" represents the time from 6 a.m. to noon.

"Darkness" represents the time between midnight and 6 a.m.

"Noonday" represents the time from noon to 6 p.m.

God provides constant protection, twenty-four hours a day (Isa. 43:2).

Psalm 91:5 "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; [nor] for the arrow [that] flieth by day;"

The terrible things that happen in the night; as fire, storms and tempests, invasion of enemies, murders, thefts, and, robberies.

A good man, when he has committed himself and his family to the care and protection of God by prayer, has no reason to be anxiously careful of these things, or to indulge a slavish fear about them (see Psalm 3:5).

The Targum is, "thou shall not be afraid for the fear of devils that walk in the night."

So Jarchi interprets this, and the next verse, of such; as do others of the Jewish writers.

A man that trusts in the LORD need not be afraid of men or devils: a fear of evil spirits is natural to men, and very early appeared.

"Nor for the arrow that flieth by day":

The judgments of God, such as the sword, famine, and pestilence; these are called the arrows of God (Deut. 32:23).

Because they move swiftly, come suddenly, and strike surely, and are open and visible.

They are sent by the LORD, and are ordered and directed by him, and hit and hurt whom he pleases, and none else.

And therefore, such who dwell in the secret place of the LORD, and under his shadow, need not be distressed about them.

The Targum interprets it of the arrow of the angel of death, which he sends out in the day (see Hebrews 2:14).

So Jarchi understands it of a demon that flies like an arrow.

To know that you are protected by the LORD, would mean that you would have perfect peace.

There is no fear, where there is perfect peace.

Look with me at the following Scripture and know that no weapon of the devil, or his crowd, can hurt you.

Isaiah 54:17 "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue [that] shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.

This [is] the heritage of all of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness [is] of me, saith the LORD."

Terror is an extreme form of fear.

Fear is the opposite of faith.

If you trust God, you have an extreme form of faith.

There is no terror in extreme faith.

Psalm 91:6 "[Nor] for the pestilence [that] walketh in darkness; [nor] for the destruction [that] wasteth at noonday."

Some think, and not without cause, that what is figuratively expressed in the preceding verse is here explained; and, indeed, the "pestilence" may well be called the "terror by night".

The name of the plague, at a distance, is terrible; the near approach of it is more so; when it enters a country, city, or town, what fleeing is there from it?

And in the night season it is more dreadful than in the day; not only to think of it in the gloomy watches of the night, but to see the vast numbers carried out to be interred, and to hear the dismal cry, Bring out your dead.

And so it is here said to "walk in darkness"; in the darkness of the night, or to arise from dark and unknown causes.

When it moves and walks through cities, towns, and villages, and there is no stopping it: and this also may be the "arrow that flieth by day"; which flies as swift as an arrow, and that flies as swift as a bird.

This is taken out of the LORD's quiver, has its commission and direction from him, and does execution by night and by day.

The plague that smote the firstborn in Egypt was in the night; and that which was in David's time, and might be the occasion of penning this psalm, began in the day (Exodus 12:29).

"Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon day":

As the pestilence, which may be increased, and rage the more, through the heat of the day; and which destroys great numbers wherever it comes.

Seventy thousand were taken off in three days by the plague occasioned by David's numbering of the people.

The Targum states, "of a company of devils that destroy at noon day;"

Some think respect is had to a pestilential hot wind, common in the eastern countries, which begins to blow about eight o'clock in a morning, and is hottest at noon.

Which instantly suffocates persons, burns them, and reduces them to ashes presently, which the Arabs call "sammiel", or a poison wind.

Many crimes are committed at night, because the criminals want the cover of darkness so to hide them.

Some are so full of drugs, that they do their dirty work right out in the brightness of day.

This is a sign of the times we live in.

Crime is rampant, but what a comfort to know that we will be spared all of this.

Psalm 91:7 "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee."

The left side, as the Targum; so the Arabic version, and Jarchi and Kimchi; which sense the opposition and distinction in the next clause direct unto.

This is not to be understood of falling in battle, as some interpret it, but by the pestilence before spoken of.

"And ten thousand at thy right hand":

Which shows both the great devastation made by the plague where it comes, and the special care and providence of God in preserving his people from it.

Of which David had an experience, when vast numbers of his people were destroyed by it on the right and left.

"But it shall not come nigh thee":

It may come near the place where good men are, or else it could not be said that a thousand should fall on their side, and ten thousand at their right hand.

The plague that killed the firstborn in Egypt was near the dwellings of the Israelites, though it entered not into them.

And that in David's time was near him, though he was not infected with it.

But the meaning is, that it should not come so near such as to seize their bodies and they fall by the distemper.

There being a particular providence oftentimes concerned for their safety, which guards them from it (see Ezek. 9:4).

Not but that good men may fall in a common calamity, and by an epidemical distemper; but then it is for their good, and not their hurt.

They are taken away from the evil to come, and are delivered from a worse plague than that by which they fall, the plague of their own hearts, the evil of sin.

And so the Targum adds, "shall not come near to hurt", though it understands it of devils.

I am just sure this is the way Noah felt when the flood came.

Many were drowned all around him and his family, but God had made provision for Noah.

I said it before, but it bears repeating.

Noah was saved in the flood, not from the flood.

Just as God made provision for Moses, He will make provision for His own now.

When the 10 plagues came on Egypt, the plagues did not harm the Hebrews.

God made provision for them, and they were not harmed by all of these plagues.

Again they were safe in the midst of the plagues.

It is like God has drawn boundary lines around you and therefore enemy cannot come across those boundaries.

We are in this world of problems, but we are not part of this world of problems.

I have thought so many times, how some doctors work among hundreds of people with contagious diseases and never catch the disease.

Perhaps that is a little of what this is saying.

Psalms 91:8 "Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked."

"Only with thine eyes":

The righteous are so safe in disaster all around them, that they are only spectators.

The wrath of God is stored up for the wicked.

Christians have tribulations in this life, but they do not feel the wrath of God.

Rewards come in two different ways.

The reward of the righteous is eternal life in heaven.

The reward of the wicked is the lake of fire.

Verses 9-16:

Whatever happens, nothing shall hurt the believer; though trouble and affliction overtakes, it shall come, not for his hurt, but for good, though for the present it be not joyous but grievous.

Those who rightly know God, will set their love upon him.

They by prayer constantly call upon him.

His promise is, that he will in due time deliver the believer out of trouble, and in the meantime, be with him in trouble.

The LORD will manage all his worldly concerns, and preserve his life on earth, so long as it shall be good for him.

For encouragement in this he looks unto Jesus.

He shall live long enough; till he has done the work he was sent into this world for, and is ready for heaven.

Who would wish to live a day longer than God has some work to do, either by him or upon him?

A man may die young, yet be satisfied with living.

But a wicked man is not satisfied even with long life.

At length the believer's conflict ends; he has done for ever with trouble, sin, and temptation.

Psalm 91:9 "Because thou hast made the LORD, [which is] my refuge, [even] the most High, thy habitation;"

So the words, according to Kimchi, also are directed to the good man; giving the reason of his safety, because he trusts in the LORD, and puts himself under his protection.

But they should rather be rendered, and the accents require such a reading, "because thou, LORD, art my refuge".

And so are either the words of the good man that trusts in the LORD.

Or rather of the psalmist himself, seeing his safety in the midst of danger, and thus ascribing it to the LORD.

Whose providence was in a peculiar manner over him.

Whose power protected him, and he was as an asylum or city of refuge to him; so that nothing could hurt him.

"Even the Most High, thy habitation":

It should be rendered, "thou hast made the Most High thy habitation"; being an apostrophe of the psalmist to his own soul, observing the ground of his security.

The Most High God being made and used by him as his habitation, or dwelling place, where he dwelt, as every good man does, safely, quietly, comfortably, pleasantly, and continually.

The Targum makes them to be the words of Solomon, paraphrasing them thus, "Solomon answered, and thus he said, thou thyself, O LORD, art my confidence; in a high habitation thou hast put the house of thy majesty."

Psalm 91:10 "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

The evil of sin cleaves to the best of saints, the evil of temptations besets them, and the evil of afflictions comes upon them, as chastisements from the LORD.

For they must expect to receive evil, in this sense, as well as good, from his hands.

But the evil of punishment never touches them; and therefore, when any public calamity befalls them in common with others, yet not as an evil of punishment; it is not an evil to them, it is for their good.

"Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling":

How should it, when they dwell in God, and have made him, the Most High, their habitation (Psalm 91:1).

Otherwise it may come nigh their temporal dwellings (see note on Psalm 91:7).

Though it may not enter into them; and, should it, yet not as an evil, or by way of punishment (see Prov. 3:33).

Many a minister of God has been called to the death bed of those with all sorts of dread diseases.

The promise of God is that, if we live with God continually, there shall no plague overtake us.

What if he did take some terrible disease, it would just hurry the time when he would be with the LORD forevermore.

The promise is that the plague will not come near your house, as long as your house is a habitation of God.

God would feel very uncomfortable in many homes today.

Praise God! He is welcome in our home.

Verses 11-12: This promise of angelic protection was misquoted by Satan in his temptation of the Messiah (see Matt. 4:6).

Psalm 91:11 "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Created spirits, so called, made by the LORD, and are at his command.

Who are ministering spirits to his people, who encamp about them, and are concerned in the preservation of them; they being committed to their care and charge by him who is LORD of heaven and earth.

Satan applied this passage to Christ (Matt. 4:6).

Nor did our LORD object to the application of it; and it can hardly be thought that he would have ventured to have done it, had he been aware that a misapplication might be objected; or that it was not the received sense of the place.

What he is to be blamed for, in quoting it, was the wrong purpose for which he produced it, and for leaving out the next clause, which he saw was against his design.

"To keep thee in all thy ways":

In walking and travelling from place to place, as Providence calls and directs.

And in all civil ways, in all lawful business and employment of life.

In all spiritual ones, as the ways of God and religion.

What Satan tempted Christ to was neither of these ways; it was not a natural way of going, nor the duty of his office, nor any of the ways of God.

Notice from the next two verses, that angels are ministering spirits.

They are to minister to those who are the saved.

Hebrews 1:13-14 "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?" "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Every person who is a believer has angels who minister to him.

These are to help the believer, and to protect them as well.

Psalm 91:12 "They shall bear thee up in [their] hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

Which denotes the strength and power of angels to carry the saints in their hands.

Their tender care of them, such as a parent or nurse have of children.

The helpless condition of the people of God, who are like infants, and need to be dealt with after this manner.

The condescension of angels to take such an office on them, in submission to the will of God.

The constant view they have of the saints, being always in their hands, and so in sight.

Thus, they bear them, up in life, and at death carry their souls to Abraham's bosom.

"Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone":

Lest they fall into sin, or into any calamity and distress; lest the least hurt or mischief befall them, or the least injury be done them (see Prov. 3:23).

The Targum interprets it of the evil concupiscence, or corruption of nature, which is like a stone (see Ezek. 36:26).

This just means that they help us in our walk through life.

Many times, the nudging we feel is an angel warning us of disaster ahead.

The road through life might be pretty rough, but their hands lift us above the problems, so that we can make it to the other side.

Psalm 91:13 "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

"Tread ... lion and adder":

In general, a metaphor for God's protection from all deadly attacks (see notes on Psalm 58:4).

Our enemies may be ferocious, but God has sent us help to walk right over these adversaries.

The dragon and the adder is speaking of Satan.

With the help of the angels God has dispatched, we can withstand the devil, and then he will flee from us.

David knew that no mere lion could defeat him, because he had God on his side.

The main thing we must remember, is that the devil is a defeated foe.

Walk over and past these problems that crop up in this life.

We are more than conquerors through Christ who strengthens us.

Those of us, who have been born again in Christ Jesus, need not fear what the world can do to us.

Jesus won our victory at Calvary.

Psalm 91:14 "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name."

"He hath set his love upon me":

God Himself is the speaker in this section (verses 14-16), and He describes the blessing He gives to those who know and love Him.

The word for "loved" means a "deep longing" for God, or a "clinging" to God.

Many bear the name who really do not truly love Him.

This does not mean that those of us, who have given our love to Jesus, are perfect, it means that we have taken on His righteousness.

He delivers us for no other reason than that we love Him.

Jesus gave us permission to use that wonderful name.

There is power in the name of Jesus.

The 14th chapter of John tells us so much about the power in that name.

I will give just one here.

John 14:13 "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

When you pray in that name, believe that ye receive, and you shall have whatever you ask.

Just one more Scripture on this, and we will go on.

John 16:24 "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

Psalm 91:15 "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I [will be] with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him."

God is to be invoked by prayer, and to be called upon in every time of trouble, in faith and with fervency, in truth and uprightness, and sincerity of soul.

And he himself directs and encourages to it, and promises an answer, which he always sooner or later gives.

For he is a God hearing and answering prayer (see Psalm 50:15).

"I will be with him in trouble":

The Lord knows his people in adversity.

He visits them in their affliction, grants his gracious presence with them, supports them under it, that they are not overwhelmed by it.

He bears them up and through it, and makes all things work together for their good.

"I will deliver him, and honor him":

Deliverance is again promised, to denote the certainty of it.

And with this addition, that the Lord will honor such that know him, and love him.

All his saints are honored by him, by taking them into his family, and giving them a name better than that of sons and daughters of the greatest potentate.

By clothing them with the righteousness of his Son.

By adorning them with the graces of his Spirit.

By granting them communion and fellowship with himself, and by bringing them to his kingdom and glory.

Notice this does not say, maybe I will answer.

It says I will answer.

Notice also, that there will be trouble, but God will be with us in the trouble.

He will deliver us out of our trouble.

As a Father cares for a child, is what we can expect.

We are His children.

Saints are first called of God, then we must accept that call.

When we answer His call, we become His children.

Now we can call on Him to help us, for we are His.

He will answer the call of His children, when they use the name of His firstborn, Jesus Christ.

Psalm 91:16 "With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."

“Long life”:

Long life was a specific promise to the Old Testament saint for obedience to the law (e.g., Exodus 20:12; Prov. 3:2).

The prophets also promise it to God’s people in the future messianic kingdom (compare Isaiah 65:17-23).

Whatever the amount of years for this earth, there will be an eternal life in heaven for those who are the saved.

Salvation is for whosoever will.

The long life mentioned here is forever.

Psalm 91 Questions

1. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall do what?
2. What does dwelleth mean?
3. What type of a believer is verse 1 speaking of?
4. Who do many believe wrote the 91st Psalm?
5. Why could Moses express this from firsthand knowledge?
6. What was Moses known by that showed close fellowship with God?
7. What did the author say would be their prayer today concerning this relationship with God?

8. What a wonderful comfort to be close enough to God for His _____ to _____ you.
9. How is trust different from faith?
10. To feel absolutely secure in the knowledge that God is protecting you, brings what?
11. What is the key to God taking care of us?
12. He will deliver us from all evil, if we _____ with Him.
13. Does verse 4 mean that God is a bird?
14. What does it mean?
15. What will God's truth be a shield against?
16. What is the shield and buckler, more than just simple protection?
17. The shield protects the _____.
18. The buckler is the _____.
19. Thou shalt not be afraid of the _____ by night.
20. What is terror?
21. What is trust?
22. Why are many crimes committed at night?
23. Noah was saved ___ the flood, not _____ the flood.
24. The wrath of God is stored up for the _____.
25. What are we promised will not come near our dwelling, if we make God our habitation.
26. What are angels?
27. Who do they minister to?
28. What will they do, so that you won't dash your foot against a stone?
29. The enemy may be ferocious, but _____ sent us help.
30. Where do we find Scriptures telling us of the power in the use of the name of Jesus?
31. Saints are first _____ of God.
32. When we use the name of His _____, God will answer our prayer.