

Unit Theme: Non-Davidic Psalms

August 25, 2024 (Lesson 13)

THE REFUGE OF GOD’S PRESENCE

- 1. God Is Our Refuge** (Psalm 91:1-6)
- 2. God Is Our Protector** (Psalm 91:7-12)
- 3. God Is Our Deliverer** (Psalm 91:13-16)

Central Truth: The presence of God is a place of refuge, strength, and deliverance for the believer.

Focus: Describe the security of God’s presence and experience His pervasive peace.

Evangelism Emphasis: Through Jesus Christ, people can experience salvation and peace with God.

Golden Text: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1).

This psalm has no attributed authorship. In some editions of the Bible, David is listed as the author, but the oldest manuscripts leave the author of this psalm as anonymous. With its placement following Psalm 90, a song of Moses, there is a tradition that this psalm should be understood as a reflection on the Exodus—God’s deliverance and provision for the people of Israel as they left Egypt and traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. Likewise, it would be an appropriate song for a people in exile traveling from Babylon toward Jerusalem in the early sixth century BC. In either case, Psalm 91 is a song of trust in God. Other songs of trust include Psalms 23, 27, 46, 63, and 103. These songs “encourage the people of God to adopt a new orientation to the life of faith, an orientation based on unqualified trust in Yahweh” (Lee Roy Martin, *The Spirit of the Psalms*).

1. GOD IS OUR REFUGE

A. Living in God’s Shadow (Psalm 91:1-3)

1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him

will I trust. 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

In verses 1 and 2, the psalmist addresses God with four names: “Most High” (Hebrew, *Elyon*), “Almighty” (*Shaddai*), “Lord” (*Yahweh*), and “my God” (*Elohim*). The various divine names emphasize the kingship of Yahweh. The Lord is *Elyon*, the Most High God who is exalted over all the earth and over all the gods of the ancient world (Pss. 83:18; 97:9). The Almighty Yahweh scatters the kings of the earth (68:14). Yahweh is the Great I AM—the God who is ever-present. God’s people can have the utmost confidence in the faithfulness of Yahweh.

The emphasis here is on living in the presence of God. The words “dwelleth” and “abide” (91:1) connote the status of the person who is trusting in God’s protection and provision. *Dwelleth* speaks to “habitation,” a settled place in which two individuals live together. *Abide* signifies “lodging,” or overnight accommodations. The use of the two words together speak to those in pilgrimage and those who have arrived. As they journey, they lodge in God’s presence night after night. When they arrive, they make the presence of God their permanent habitation. The psalmist speaks of the dwellings as the “secret place,” “the shadow,” “my refuge and my fortress.” The “secret place” (v. 1) is a covering, or a hiding place where the people of God find shelter during times of trouble (cf. 27:5; 31:20). As the people of Israel traveled through the wilderness, they camped in the presence of God—a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22). When Elijah fled from Jezebel, he found shelter under a juniper tree and in a cave. In both places, God provided food, water, and safety (1 Kings 19:1-8).

Those who trust in Yahweh will abide in His “shadow” (Ps. 91:1), or shade. This speaks to someone who draws near to God. The imagery is of a child walking in their parent’s shadow. As long as the child remains in Mom or Dad’s shadow, that child is safe from threats and harm.

Also, for a traveler in the Ancient Near East, the heat of the sun was a constant threat. To abide in the shade was a welcome rest. This is a common theme throughout the Old Testament (Ps. 17:8; Isa. 49:2; Hos. 14:7-9).

The metaphors of “my refuge and my fortress” (Ps. 91:2) with “shield and buckler” (v. 4) have military connotations. *Refuge* and *fortress* refer to military encampments. The *shield* and *buckler* (or rampart) speak to protective devices in warfare; that is, the armor of God (cf. Eph. 6:13-17). Yahweh is the armor of Israel.

Yahweh is the God who defends His people. Moses sang out, “The Lord [Yahweh] is a warrior; the Lord [Yahweh] is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea” (Ex. 15:3-4 NASB). As the Philistines approached Israel to attack, “the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines . . . and they were smitten before Israel” (1 Sam. 7:10). When David challenged Goliath, he declared, “All this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord’s, and he will give you into our hands” (17:47).

When the Aramean army surrounded the city of Dothan in order to capture the prophet Elisha, he declared, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16 NKJV). Verse 17 explains, “The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

When the Moabites and Ammonites “came against Jehoshaphat to battle,” the prophet Jahaziel declared, “Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. . . . Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:1, 15-17).

Yahweh will deliver His people from “the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence” (Ps. 91:3). The “snare” is a reference to the entrapment of enemies; the “noisome pestilence” refers to plagues or disease. These are ambiguous metaphors that suggest God will deliver His people from all types of threats—enemies or natural causes.

§ *How can we abide in the shadow of Almighty God?*

B. Shielded by God’s Faithfulness (Psalm 91:4-6)

4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

The psalmist likens the protection of Yahweh to that of a great bird who shields its young with its wings and feathers. This is a common motif in Scripture. In Genesis 1:2, “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” gives the image of a great bird hovering, or soaring, over the seas of the primeval earth (J. E. Hartley, *Genesis*). Moses described God’s saving of the people of Israel as being born “on eagles’ wings” (Ex. 19:4). In Deuteronomy 32:11, God is described as a mother eagle who “stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.” Jesus used this imagery to describe His desire to care for the people of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37).

The psalmist declared God’s “truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” The word *truth* is often translated as “faithfulness.” This speaks to God’s solemn pledge and eternal covenant to bless and protect Israel, beginning with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and reaffirmed with David, who declared, “For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?” (2 Sam. 23:5 ESV). Again, David

testified, “You, O Lord, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness and Your truth will continually preserve me” (Ps. 40:11 NASB). God’s loyalty to Israel was expressed in terms of mercy, grace, and truth.

God is faithful, and His presence is like a divine armor that surrounds His people; therefore, “thou shalt not be afraid” (91:5). There is much to fear in this world. The psalmist speaks of threats—terrors, violence, plagues, and destruction. “The terror by night” speaks to unseen and sudden attacks from supernatural beings. The angel of the Lord went out at midnight to kill the firstborn of Egypt, but the Israelites were protected (Ex. 11:1-7). The “arrow that flieth by day” (Ps. 91:5) speaks to military attacks in which armies were showered by arrows. King Ahab of Israel was killed by an arbitrary arrow in battle against the Syrians (1 Kings 22:34-37).

Plagues (“pestilence,” Ps. 91:6) were common in the ancient world and known to kill entire populations (2 Sam. 24:15-17; 2 Chron. 21:14-19). “Destruction” may speak of warfare (36:17-20), or natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (Isa. 29:6). The point is that life can be threatened at any time, without warning, by a variety of means. Even so, the righteous can trust in God’s protection and need not be terrorized by such events. The psalmist declared, “Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes” (112:6-8 NIV).

Under the Lord’s Wings

When the Western prairies were being settled, a terrible fire swept across the plains, destroying everything before it. Some time afterward, a man was viewing the ruins of his cabin and barn, and seeing the charred body of a hen, he kicked it with his foot, and out from under her

body ran a brood of little chickens. She died for them, as a true mother. This pictures the love of God and Jesus giving His life for the human race.—*The Bridegroom's Messenger* (April 1936)

2. GOD IS OUR PROTECTOR

A. The Unbeliever's Reward (Psalm 91:7-8)

7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

Yahweh is the Most High and Almighty God. There is no enemy and no evil He has not overcome. However, the protection of Yahweh (v. 7) does not extend to the wicked (v. 8). The terrors, violence, plagues, and destruction that threaten life are the judgments of God against the wicked, who will perish by the thousands and tens of thousands. Just as Yahweh judged the people of Egypt with a variety of plagues, so God judged the wicked of Judah and Israel.

The wicked live under the anger of God (7:11). “The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands” (9:16). Sin is its own judgment. “The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked, those who love violence, he hates with a passion. On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot” (11:5-6 NIV). The violent die violently. “The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow. . . . Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken” (37:14-15). The righteous will witness God's violent judgment against the wicked.

God Is Just

God's compassion flows out of His goodness, and goodness without justice is not goodness. God spares us because He is good, but He could not be good if He were not just.—A. W. Tozer

B. The Believer's Dwelling Place (Psalm 91:9-12)

9 Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; 10 There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. 11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. 12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

God's protection is guaranteed to those who live in His presence. The psalmist is not offering naïve promises that encourage a person to deny the afflictions of life. Rather, he is encouraging the faithful to face life's dangers while simultaneously relying on the presence of Yahweh. The righteous may suffer many troubles and afflictions, but God will hear their cries and deliver them. Even as the wicked are condemned, those who place their confidence in God will be rescued and not condemned (Ps. 34:15-22). In the end, the wicked shall perish; conversely, the righteous shall flourish.

Yahweh has charged His angels to protect His people. Angels are the servants of Yahweh—His envoys, or ambassadors. They are spiritual beings, resembling flames of fire (104:4), and sometimes take on the appearance of humans. Throughout the Bible, fire represents God's presence and power. An angel found Hagar abandoned in the wilderness and saved her from certain death (Gen. 16:7-10). Angels saved Lot and his family from the judgment that was coming upon Sodom (19:15). An angel protected the people of Israel during their wilderness wanderings (Ex. 14:19; 23:20). An angel ministered to Elijah as he was fleeing from Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1-8). An angel destroyed the Assyrian army when they threatened Jerusalem (Isa. 37:36). An angel delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace and Daniel from the lion's den (Dan. 3:28; 6:22).

After His temptation in the wilderness, angels ministered to Jesus (Matt. 4:11), and an angel ministered to Him in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). In fact, the devil used the words

of Psalm 91:11-12 to tempt Jesus (Matt. 4:6). When Jesus returns, angels will be sent throughout the earth to gather all of God's people (Mark 13:27).

The angels shall "keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. 91:11) is a metaphor for the pilgrimage of life. As we journey through this life, the angels will protect our feet (v. 12). In the ancient world, an injury to one's foot could be devastating, even life-threatening. One miraculous aspect of the Lord's intervention on Israel's behalf is recorded in Deuteronomy 29:5: "I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn off your feet" (ESV).

§ *When Satan twisted the meaning of Psalm 91:11-12, how did Jesus respond (Matt. 4:6-7)? What can we learn from this?*

3. GOD IS OUR DELIVERER

A. The Righteous God's Name (Psalm 91:13-14)

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

Because angels protect the feet of the faithful, the faithful "will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent" (v. 13 NIV). To place something under one's feet is to have dominion over it, to take authority over it (Pss. 8:6; 47:3; 1 Cor. 15:25). Lions were among the most dangerous of beasts in ancient Israel, often preying upon the herd animals. The image of the lion evokes ferocity, destructive power, and irresistible strength. Lions were symbols of royalty and ruthless national power. The lion's roar provoked fear and dread. The lion is a carnivore who violently devours its prey. The lion is a symbol of diabolical activity (2 Tim. 4:17; 1 Peter 5:8).

The “adder” (cobra) and “dragon” are serpents, which throughout the Bible represent evil, demonic, and satanic power (Gen. 3:1; Rev. 12:9). The cobra is known for its venomous bite and was thought to have enchanting properties. As terrible as poisonous snakes and lions might be, they are not comparable to the Almighty God who created them (Gen. 1:21, 25). God has given to His covenant people authority over all such powers (Mark 16:18; Rom. 16:20).

With verses 14-16, the psalm changes voice to first person as God is declaring His covenant faithfulness. The covenant relationship between God and His people is conditioned in love. Faithful believers love God with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22). They are devoted to God and they cleave to Him. Likewise, faithful believers can completely trust in God’s unfailing love.

God has revealed His covenant name—*Yahweh*—to His people, and they acknowledge Him (Ps. 92:1-3). The name *Yahweh*, and its short form *Yah*, occur over 6,800 times in the Old Testament—more than any other word. The short form is common in offering praise—*Hallelujah*; that is, “Praise Yahweh!” God’s “glorious” name (72:19) is to be blessed, praised, exalted, magnified, glorified, rejoiced over, and exulted in. His name must be thanked, hallowed, feared, loved, remembered, proclaimed, declared, waited on, walked in, desired, and sought. To “know” God’s name means to be in harmonious relationship with His character and purposes (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*). To acknowledge the name of God is to acknowledge the holiness of God, and not take His name (*Yahweh*) “in vain” (Ex. 20:7), which is to use God’s name falsely—as in false prophecy (Matt. 7:22-23), or without proper authority (Acts 19:13-16). Because the righteous exalt the holy name of God, He will protect them and act to deliver them from the lion and serpent, and all enemies they represent.

The name of God has the power to save those who call upon Him: “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32 NIV). God saves humanity “for his name’s sake, to make his mighty power known” (Ps. 106:8 NIV). Unbelievers are urged to “repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of [their] sins” (Acts 2:38 NIV). Jesus commanded all who come to Him must be baptized in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19 NIV). In the name of Jesus Christ, those who are diseased and afflicted are healed, demons are rebuked, and the dead are raised (Acts 3:6-8; 9:36-42; 16:18). Christians are known by His name (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). Jesus promised, “The one who is victorious . . . I will write on them the name of my God . . . and I will also write on them my new name” (Rev. 3:12 NIV).

§ *Is it possible to know God without loving Him? Why or why not?*

B. God Hears and Answers (Psalm 91:15-16)

15 He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. 16 With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.

God’s will to act on behalf of His people is expressed in a series of “I wills”: *I will answer, I will be present, I will deliver, I will honor, I will satisfy*. God will answer the cries of His people with “great and mighty things” beyond our ability to anticipate or comprehend (Jer. 33:3). God hears the cries of the oppressed. In the days of Moses, “The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them” (Ex. 2:23-25 NIV). This redemptive theme occurs throughout the Bible.

God's will to be present "in trouble" (Ps. 91:15) is a source of courage, strength, and comfort to His people. Here the psalmist acknowledges even as we dwell in God's presence, we are not immune from tribulations. The lions and serpents are out there, seeking to destroy us. We are engaged in spiritual warfare, but God is always with us in our trouble. The wicked continually seek to oppress the righteous, but God is present and His judgment will oppress the wicked. No place of trouble is beyond God's presence. The psalmist David said God is present in the heights of Heaven and present in the depths of Sheol (139:7-8). In verses 5 and 6, he declared, "I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too—your reassuring presence, coming and going. This is too much, too wonderful—I can't take it all in!" (TM).

Likewise, nothing can thwart God's will to deliver His people. The armies of Egypt were powerless against the might of Yahweh as He protected the escaping Israelites (Ex. 15:1-13). The power of death cannot overwhelm the life-giving Creator. God has honored His people by declaring them to be His treasured possession among all the nations of the earth—"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6 NIV). God will satisfy His people with peace (Hebrew, *shalom*) which is expressed in a long life and righteous reward (Deut. 6:1-2).

When Satan Knocks

The Christian now has resources available to live above and beyond this world. The Bible teaches that whosoever is born of God does not practice sin. It is like the little girl who said that when the devil came knocking with a temptation, she just sent Jesus to the door.—Billy Graham

NO THREAT TO GOD

When the ancient scribes collected the various psalms into the collection we have today, they intentionally placed Psalm 91 to follow Psalm 90 (last week's lesson). Psalm 90 focuses on

human mortality and weakness. Psalm 91 focuses on God's power and might to protect righteous men and women from the tribulations and terrors of this present life. Yahweh is a victorious warrior. The battle rages on, the wicked continue to reject God's sovereignty over the earth, the heathen continue to rage, and the powers of darkness are on the prowl. None of this is a threat to the rule of God. None of this is a threat to the flourishing of God's people. God rules, the Son of God is our Mediator, the Holy Spirit is our ever-present Helper, and God's angels are charged with our care. Hallelujah!

Daily Devotions

- M. Song of Victory (Exodus 15:1-3)
- T. God, Our Strength and Refuge (2 Samuel 22:31-34)
- W. Confidence in God Results in Victory (2 Chronicles 20:5-15)
- T. Jesus Promises His Abiding Presence (Matthew 28:18-20)
- F. Christ Provides Peace and Access (Romans 5:1-5)
- S. Reason to Rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4-7)