

ABIDING IN THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY

Sovereign Security

Psalm 91

The *historical background* of this **Psalm** is *uncertain* and the *author* is *anonymous*. But regardless of the setting, the message is clear...the *basis of security* for the *believer* is found in God's *character* (**vs. 1-2**), His *care* (**vs. 3-8**), His *protection* (**vs. 9-13**), and His *love* (**vs. 14-16**). This is a **Psalm** to be read *when facing times of great danger* and *being confronted with the powers of evil*.

I. FAITH IN A POWERFUL GOD: (**vs. 1-2**) *Faith based on God's character.*

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty (vs. 1**)...**

In the face of *mounting dangers*, the *psalmist* declared his *personal trust* in God. He did so with a *sharp focus* on the *divine character* of God...using *three names* for God.

- **Most high...El Elyon**...emphasizing God's *all-powerful strength* and *sovereignty*...His *invincibility*.
- **Almighty...El Shaddai**...picturing God as the *active, self-existent* One.
- **God...Elohim**...the *strong one, mighty leader, supreme deity*.

Hebrew names depict the *character* of the one named. Especially with God, His names *describe* His *character* and how He is at *work*. It gives the believer *trust*. It gives the believer *security* in God's *strong, sure protection*... what it means to *dwell close to God, under His wings (**vs. 4**)*...His *invincible armor*...*under the shelter* of His *divine care*.

Notice the *images of closeness* in this **Psalm**. **Shelter** and **shadow**...they imply that you are *right next* to God.

So, to be in the **shadow** of God means to be *covered by a hedge of protection* by God...*safe* from everything that threatens us.

I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" (vs. 2**)...**

This statement proclaims a *dynamic, deep faith*...a *reliance* on God's *invincible might* to be the *psalmist's refuge*.

Refuge...Heb. *mahseh*, refers to a *strong, secure structure that provides shelter from the elements*. It represents a *place to flee* for *protection*. In a *figurative sense*, as it's used here, it *refers to a shelter from one's enemies* who seek to *harm* and *destroy*, even *kill*. This word is used to emphasize God's *watch care* over His people.

Fortress...Heb. *metsudah*, a *castle, stronghold*...a *citadel*.

And notice the *personal pronouns*...*"my" refuge*...*"my" fortress*...*"my" God*.

You ever think about how *bold* and *audacious* it is to refer to God in a *possessive sense*? We typically don't refer to many people in the *possessive*...only those to whom we are very close to...*my wife, my children*. As long as I've known Jonathan and Kathy...Janis...and others...I don't go around calling them...*my Jonathan*...*my Kathy*.

In whom I trust...this *firmly connects* the *psalmist* to God in the midst of his *threatening circumstance*.

This is what *true faith* is...*connecting* and *committing* one's self to God with *full reliance* on His ability to *provide* and *protect*.

II. FAVOR FROM A PROTECTING GOD: (vs. 3-13)

God's care and protection.

For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence (vs. 3)...

The *psalmist* described the *protection* he was *confident* that he *would receive* from God as he *lives/dwells* in the Lord's *presence*.

Delivers...Heb. *nasal*, means to be *snatched away, pulled away, rescued, saved*, or to *escape*.

This word was *used numerous times* by **David** when he *petitioned* God to *rescue him from his enemies who sought to take his life*.

In other **Psalms**, the same word is *used* in a sense to speak of *deliverance* from one's *sins* and *transgressions*.

Considering the *numerous times* this word is used in the **Psalms**, the theme of *deliverance* is one of the *dominant themes* throughout the **Psalms**.

From the snare of the trapper...an image that pictures a hunter who *stalks his prey*.

From the deadly pestilence...from the harm of a *life-taking epidemic*.

He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark (vs. 4)...

I love this image...God will put us **under His wings** like a mother bird *covering her young*...like an eagle *protecting* its young.

The image of God holding us **under His wings** is unique in that it's a *feminine analogy*. I point this out because the *majority of metaphors* for God in the Bible are *masculine*. But here, there's a *tenderness* about God that can be best

reflected in a *mother's love*. Remember, God created both male and female, *differently*, but both **in His image**...and parts of His *character are reflected* more fully in one gender than the other. Parts of God are reflected more fully in the *woman* just like parts are reflected more fully in the *man*. That's why God made us different. We're a *better picture* of God *together* than *one gender is alone*.

In *December 1988*, there was a major fire in **Yellowstone National Park**. After the fire, *two firemen* were walking through the destruction and noticed, on a tree stump, a unsettling sight. There was a *charred bird*, sitting completely upright, as if nothing had happened. One of the men knocked the bird over, and underneath it was *three little chicks*...all *three alive*! The *mother bird* had *protected* her *babies* from the *fire* by taking the fire in their place.

You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon (vs. 5-6)...

These verses describe a *protection* that brings a *settled peace*...especially when one is *most vulnerable*...**the terror by night**.

Regardless of the situation...**the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon**...God is our *sure protection*.

A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked (vs. 7-8)...

So overwhelming is God's *intervention*...His *protection* is *mightier* that any harm that could *come near*.

You will only look on with your eyes...In the presence of such danger, you will *only observe* this onslaught...not as a *victim*, but as an *untouched victor*.

For you have made the Lord, my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent (vs. 9-10)...

With mounting confidence, the *psalmist repeated* his opening *declaration of faith*.

My refuge...the same word that was used in **verse 2**.

Evil...Heb. *ra*, means that which is *harmful, bad, wicked, or corrupt*. It's used to describe *evil words...evil thoughts ...and evil actions*.

With this *impregnable position* of *total reliance*, the Lord's *shield of protection* will act as a *hedge of protection*.

For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone (vs. 11-12)...

In part, this *sovereign protection* will be carried out by His *angels* whom the Lord will *command* and *commission to guard you in all your ways*.

These are *two* of the *verses* Satan *quoted* to Jesus when he was *tempting* Him in the *desert*...but *shrewdly omitted* this last phrase...**in all your ways (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10-11)**.

This *divine protection* extends only to the place of *trusting* and *obeying* God.

You will tread upon the lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down (vs. 13)...

This is to be seen *figuratively* and *not literally*, these threatening beasts *pictured* the psalmist's *adversaries*,

antagonist, and *opponents*...and the *many dangers* brought upon him by his *enemies*.

III. FELLOWSHIP WITH A PERSONAL GOD: (vs. 14-16) *God's love*.

Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him securely on high, because he has known My name (vs. 14)...

A *sudden shift in speaker* now takes place. It moves from the *psalmist* speaking, to God Himself. Note the *reciprocal nature* of the *mutual fellowship* that exists between the Lord and the one who *loves* Him.

Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him... *True faith* involves a *deep, mutual love* between God and the *believer*. The *believer* who *loves* God...whose *commitment* is to the Lord...will find that His *faithful protection* is theirs.

He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him (vs. 15)...

God continues as the speaker, saying that the person who *loves* and *acknowledges* Him...**will call upon Me, and I will answer**. Such is the *binding covenant relationship* that exists between the Lord and His people. God will *hear* and *answer the prayer* of the believer who is **in trouble...and will rescue him** and then **honor him** with *divine favor*...especially when *suffering for His name's sake*.

With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see My salvation (vs. 16)...

God concluded with the *promise* that He will continually *pour out* His *grace* in such *sufficiency* throughout his **long**

life that he will be *content*...and that he will be *secure* in his *salvation*.

Let me share a story from a man named **Sam James**...an **IMB missionary** in **Vietnam** for **40 years**. I got this story from **Jeremy** and **Christina**.

While in **Vietnam**, **Sam** tried, as much as possible, to stay in **Saigon** because most of the *roads* going out of the city were *not secure*. But on several occasions a young lady from the city of **My Tho** in the **Mekong Delta**, asked him to *come* and *speak* to the *students* of the *secondary school* there. It would be a *dangerous trip* because the *Communists* were terrorizing that area. But as he prayed over the matter, he felt God *wanted him to go*.

On *Christmas Day* in **1965**, **Sam** called the *Vietnamese security office*, and they said they *had not had any reports* of *Communist activity* for *several weeks*. Their only advice was to *travel during daylight hours*. Before starting out for his trip, however, **Sam** got up and did what he always did in the morning...*read his Bible*, and the text for day was **Psalm 91**.

He set out for his trip, leaving *early in the morning*, and at first *all went well*. He got pretty far into the countryside, going past rice patty after rice patty, and he *felt no danger*. He *got to within 2 miles of the village* when *rounding a curve*, he was horrified to see a *roadblock* less than **300 yards** away. Dirt was *piled as high* as his *Volkswagen van* and *extended across the road*. This was a common *Viet Cong method*...to *build a mountain of dirt* across a road, *stopping all the traffic*. Then they would *force everyone out of their cars at gunpoint*, *preach Communism* to them, and then *rob every one of their valuables*. Often the soldiers *shot* anyone they *didn't like*...*especially Americans*.

A *wave of fear* swept over **Sam**, and his *body began trembling* almost *uncontrollably*. His *foot shook* so bad he *couldn't keep it on the brake pedal*. He finally *stopped about five feet* behind the *lone car in front of him*; but he *had never felt as much fear* in his life as he did at that moment. He thought of his *wife* and his *children*. He could make out a *large number* of *camouflaged communist troops* scattered in the brush. Looking in his rearview mirror, he *saw that about a dozen cars* had stopped behind him; and he knew the soldiers would make their move at any moment.

Suddenly **Psalm 91** came back to mind: *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!’ For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence... You shall not fear...”*

Sam realized that his *terrible panic* was the result of *not trusting God's perfect will*. He knew that God *guides us down to the details of our lives* and that *absolute surrender* and *absolute faith* brings *absolute peace*. And *that marvelous peace suddenly settled over him*. **Sam** *looked to his right* and *saw no movement among the soldiers* hidden in the bushes. He *looked to his left* and *saw a little path* the farmers used to drive their water buffalo to and from work in the fields. So he slowly turned his wheels in the direction of that path and slipped the car into its lowest gear. He *expected at any moment* to hear the *sound of gunfire*, but it *never came*. No other cars moved. Hitting the pathway, he hit the gas pedal and *veered into a thick banana grove*, well past the roadblock. The *ravines* and *gaps* in the road were *so steep* he thought he'd *topple over*. His head was

literally bouncing off the top of the car, leaving *scars* that remain to this day!

And then he was *back on the road*, going into the village. He stopped the car and *felt so weak* he could only rest his face on the steering wheel and *thank God* for His *deliverance*.

He made his way to where the *believers were gathered*, and at that moment a *series of heavy explosions* shook the ground...followed by *gunfire* and *grenades*. Heavy clouds of *thick black smoke* towered into the sky. He *didn't expect* the school officials *to go on* with the *program*. But all the students there were *ready to listen*, as if *oblivious* to the *violence*. He *preached* and a number of students *expressed an interest* in following Christ.

When the *service was over*, the *clouds of smoke* had *cleared*, the *gunfire had stopped*, and the *Communists were gone*. Some of the older students *offered to escort Sam past the roadblock*. Arriving at the *roadblock*, they learned that a *contingent of South Vietnamese soldiers* had opened fire on the *Vietcong*. The two sides had *engaged in a battle*, and the *cars* and *people* were caught in the *crossfire*. The *first three cars* (his had been 2nd) had been *burned* and *destroyed*, their *occupants killed*.

Sam later testified that **Psalm 91** had given him the *calmness* to *settle his nerves* and to *think* about what he *should do* and to have the *courage to do it*.

LESSONS WE NEED TO LEARN:

- **Trust God's PROTECTION**. Nothing can come into our lives unless it comes through God's hands first. Whatever He allows into our lives is there by divine appointment to work for our good and His glory.

- **Trust God's POWER**. As we abide under God's hedge of protection, we are enabled by divine grace to bear up under the greatest of trials and testing. In our weakness God's strength is made perfect. He gives greater grace that enables us to press on in the midst of the storm.
- **Trust God's PEACE**. Peace is more than the absence of trouble. It's the presence of an impenetrable calm in the midst of our trouble in which God steadies and satisfies our hearts with Himself. We have a divine peace that surpasses all comprehension.