

The Committed Believer is Safe and Secure in God's Protection

Psalm 91

Psalm 91 - [selected verses]: *"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust..."*

He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and rampart. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day...

Because you have made the LORD, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you... He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.

Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him... and show him My salvation."

Background Notes

There is no doubt that we live in turbulent times. It seems that many of the small joys in life are being replaced by doubt, anxiety, and fear. "Safety" is now a relative term. A few weeks ago a festive day in one of our most historic cities was shattered by terror and chaos, and the century-old tradition of the Boston Marathon was forever scarred. The question on most of our minds can only be, "What next?"

As analysts offer dire predictions of further terror, how should believers respond? Should we be afraid? Should we change our daily routines? Should we avoid public gatherings? What about safety in our churches?

Psalm 91 offers comfort and direction for believers who are feeling vulnerable and fearful – whatever the reason may be. It's an excellent psalm to send to a believer who is in a dangerous situation – someone who is serving the Lord in an unstable part of the world, or a "first responder," or in military service.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers must guard against distortions and distractions.

Satan used verses from Psalm 91 to test the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, in an attempt to distract Him from His earthly mission. Satan tempted the Lord to jump from the highest point of the Temple, because, Satan said, *"It is written, 'For he*

will command his angels to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone” (Luke 4:11-12). Satan twisted the meaning of this promise of Scripture - but the Lord was not deceived! He was well aware of Satan’s tactics, and He refuted Satan with the **correct** use of Scripture. The Lord replied, *“Do not put the Lord your God to the test”* (Deuteronomy 6:16).

As followers of Jesus, we too should be alert and on our guard. Satan is prowling around, seeking a vulnerable believer that he can ravage and destroy (1 Peter 5:8). One of Satan’s favorite strategies is to undermine our trust in God’s unfailing love and care. He will distract our attention from the Lord by creating an atmosphere of turmoil and fear. He can use the media, anti-Christian organizations, misguided extremists, frightening diagnoses – and even misquoted Scripture. Thus he destroys the trust and peace of heart that God intends us to enjoy.

To **detect** Satan’s schemes, believers must know God’s Word. To **defeat** his schemes, believers must trust God’s promises.

2 Timothy 3:13-16: *“...evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of... you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

Remember:

- To detect Satan’s schemes, believers must know God’s Word.
- To defeat his schemes, believers must trust God’s promises.

2. Believers don’t have to be afraid.

“You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day” (v5).

After reading that verse you may be thinking, “But I’m still afraid!” “*Terrors by night*” and “*arrows by day*” dominate the daily news. Bullets, bombs, and senseless attacks fill our world with fear and uncertainty. Although those things may happen around us, Psalm 91 teaches that **believers don’t have to be afraid**. We can be immune to the fears of life.

Notice - this psalm does **not** say that God’s people will **never** encounter terrors or arrows! What it **does** say is that we **don’t have to be afraid** of them! Why? Because committed believers live in the shelter of the Most High. They abide in the shadow of the Almighty. Committed believers take refuge in the Lord, and they trust in Him: *“I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust” (v2).*

Four different Hebrew names are used for God in verses 1-2. These names emphasize His **power** and **sovereignty**:

“Most High” (*Elyon*): the omnipotent and sovereign God.

“Almighty” (*El Shaddai*): the all-powerful God.

“LORD” (*Yahweh*): the self-existent God who redeems His people.

“God” (*Elohim*): the majestic and mighty Creator-God.”

What stronger protection could we ever need?

Verse 4 paints a beautiful picture of safety: *“He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.”* As young eagles take refuge under the strong wings of their parents, so we find rest when we entrust ourselves to our Father’s all-powerful care. Instead of focusing on fear, we can focus on God’s “feathers.”

Believers who look to the Lord for protection do not have to be afraid.

3. Believers are “immortal” until their work on earth is done.

As believers, we understand that we are eternally immortal, but for this doctrinal point we’re using the word “immortal” in reference to our physical life on earth.

Psalm 91 appears to go further than teaching that the believer does not have to be afraid of life-threatening situations or death. It seems to assure us that the Lord will deliver committed believers out of these situations. But this poses an apparent problem, because believers are not always delivered from dangerous situations, are they? Godly believers have died at young ages from tragic accidents or illnesses, and countless believers of all ages have been martyred.

How can we resolve this apparent contradiction? Here are a few of the explanations that Bible scholars have suggested. A full answer may include a combination of all these points.

- a. The promises of Psalm 91 are **general Old Testament principles** of God’s protection and long life for the godly believer. However, **they are not absolutes**, with no exceptions. In His sovereign ways, God may choose to allow a threatening situation - and even death - for greater reward for the believer, and for His glory.
- b. Physical protection is only part of the promise in Psalm 91. Life for the believer is eternal, and physical death is only a transition. Nothing in this world can take away or end a believer’s “life” – it is safeguarded forever. The Lord Jesus promised, *“Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:28)*. And *“I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish.” (John 10:28)*. He also taught, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28)*.
- c. Believers are “immortal” until their work in life is complete. The Bible teaches that God is sovereign. Thus God has a sovereign plan for each believer’s life. *“We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10)*. Thus, believers are “immortal” until their earthly work is done.

Daniel was thrown to the lions - but he wasn't killed, because it was not God's time for Daniel to die. His life's work for the Lord was not yet done. Jonah was tossed into the stormy sea, but he didn't drown because his mission in life was not finished. The apostle Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, but the venom wasn't fatal - because Paul's work for the Lord was not complete.

While our decisions may factor into God's sovereign will for our lives, believers are "immortal" until their work on earth is done.

Practical Application

Don't be anxious about anything!

Whenever we're anxious or afraid, the apostle Paul advised: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, that transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Bring your anxious thoughts and fears to the Lord! If His peace is guarding our hearts and minds, we won't be shaken by the chaos that surrounds us, no matter what the circumstances may be.

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD Himself, is the Rock eternal" (Isaiah 26:3-4).