

# PSALMS

## Chapter 91

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

**Ps 91** A glowing testimony to the security of those who trust in God. It was probably written by one of the temple personnel (a priest or Levite) as a word of assurance to godly worshipers. Because the “you” of vv. 3–13 applies to any of the godly who “make the Most High your dwelling” (v. 9; see 90:1), the devil applied vv. 11–12 to Jesus (see Mt 4:6; Lk 4:10–11). Structurally, the psalm is divided into two halves of eight verses each, with the opening couplet of the second half (vv. 9–10) echoing the theme of vv. 1–2. In the first half, the godly are assured of security from four threats (vv. 5–6)—though thousands fall (v. 7). In the second half, they are assured of triumphing over four menacing beasts (v. 13). The oracle of vv. 14–16 offers climactic assurance. (CSB)

This strong confession of faith and example of a life entrusted to God’s protective safety urges all readers to seek the Lord’s refuge when fearful times arise. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, God as our protection; vv 3–13, God’s power over the many perils of life; vv 14–16, God’s promises for anyone who trusts in Him. (TLSB)

Psalms 90 and 01 are connected by references to God as a dwelling and a refuge. Psalm 91, however, offers relief from the intensity of Psalm 90. (PBC)

**91:1-13** – The psalmist describes the security of believers with two pictures. Believers are pictured as birds who escape from the trap of a hunter and find

shelter under the wings of the mother bird. The hunter and his trap may well represent Satan and his schemes. Believers are also pictured as people trapped in a besieged city, who nevertheless are delivered from plague and the assaults of the enemy. Together these two pictures represent all the dangers a believer faces in this life. (PBC)

**91:1-2** *shelter ... shadow ... refuge ... fortress.* These metaphors depict the sure defense found in the Lord God. The shadow is not ominous, but comforting, as that of the shadow of a mother bird's wings (v 4; 17:8). Four names for God correspond to the metaphors, and each gives the basis for the strong confession of faith in God's protection. "Almighty" and "Most High" esp depict God's incomparable power over any threat or danger. (TLSB)

**91:1** *shelter.* The temple (as in 27:5; 31:20; see also 23:6; 27:4), where the godly find safety under the protective wings of the Lord (see v. 4; 61:4). (CSB)

*Most High.* See v. 9; see also note on Ge 14:19. (CSB)

*shadow.* See note on 17:8 (A conventional Hebrew metaphor for protection against oppression—as shade protects from the oppressive heat of the hot desert sun. Kings were spoken of as the "shade" of those dependent on them for protection.). (CSB)

*Almighty.* See NIV text note and note on Ge 17:1. (CSB)

**91:3** YOU – Not specified; the psalm can be read as personal encouragement to every believer. (TLSB)

*fowler's snare.* Metaphor for danger from an enemy (see 124:7). (CSB)

A trap to catch birds, referring to hidden dangers or sudden lethal attacks. (TLSB)

*pestilence.* These two threats are further elaborated in vv. 5–6. (CSB)

A general term for illness and deadly diseases. At its worst, the pestilence is an epidemic. The Hebrew consonants of "pestilence" also spell "word," which the enemy used for snaring God's people. (TLSB)

**91:4** *with his feathers.* See note on 17:8 (Metaphor for the protective outreach of God's power.). (CSB)

WINGS – Possible reference to the wings of the cherubim over the ark of the covenant in the temple (symbolizing a protective shield in a sacred place or more broadly to any mother bird protecting her chicks. (TLSB)

RAMPART – ESV has BUCKLER – A bowed, round shield.

**91:5-6** God’s security surrounds us whenever danger comes. (TLSB)

**91:5** *terror*. As in 64:1 (“threat”), reference is to attack by enemies; thus it is paired with “arrow.” These two references to threats from war are arrayed alongside “pestilence” and “plague” (v. 6), two references to mortal diseases that often reached epidemic proportions. (CSB)

The demonic realm could cause this fear, but it includes all unseen danger lurking in the darkness. (TLSB)

*night ... day*. At whatever time of day or night the threat may come, you will be kept safe—the time references are not specific to their respective phrases (see also v. 6). (CSB)

**ARROW** – Danger also comes from war. An arrow is a silent and deadly attack weapon. (TLSB)

**91:7** *ten thousand*. Hebrew poetic convention called for 10,000 following 1,000 in parallel construction (see notes on 90:10; Am 1:3). Cf. 1Sa 18:7. (CSB)

In Hebrew poetry, the larger number follows the smaller as a way to emphasize the amount. The psalmist confesses the Lord’s protection no matter how many are affected by war or plague. (TLSB)

**91:8** **PUNISHMENT** – God will punish those judged wicked. (TLSB)

**THE WICKED** – Those who have rebelled against God and cut themselves off from His steadfast love and mercy (1:1). (TLSB)

**91:9** *dwelling*. See 90:1 and note. (CSB)

Those who take refuge in the Lord are not exempt from these dangers, but will be protected in the midst of them. God will not let these threats separate us from Him so that we end up like the wicked (Rm 8:31–39). (TLSB)

**91:11–12** Quoted by Satan in Mt 4:6; Lk 4:10–11. (CSB)

In answer to demonic terrors of the night, God sends His angels to watch over His people. Satan used this psalm to tempt Jesus (Mt 4:5–7). Jesus welcomed the angelic help when He needed strength during His redemptive suffering and sacrifice for the lost (Mt 4:11). However, He would not test the Father’s love for Him by forcing God to protect Him as Satan proposed (Mt 26:53–54). Chemnitz: “With one hand they [the angels] protect the believers ... and with the other they pursue and attack Satan and godless men.... As you go about your daily work, the angels carry you in their hands” (*LTh* 1:178). (TLSB)

God sends forth His angels, His ministers, to protect the pious. Where angels are mentioned in the Scripture they appear in relationship with believers. God sends forth His angels for the service of those who should be heirs of salvation. God sends His angels to protect them on the way, which He has prescribed to them. Hence, those who walk on their way, i.e., God's way, are assured of the angels' protection. Once, when the devil quoted this verse of the Psalm, He omitted "in all thy ways". Whoever does not walk on God's way cannot expect angels to guard and keep him. (Stoeckhardt)

**91:11** *his angels*. See note on 34:7 (God's heavenly representative, his "messenger," sent to effect his will on earth.). (CSB)

Scripture does not state each believer has one particular angel who watches over him, but the idea of guardian angels who watch over believers is scriptural. (PBC)

**91:12** *against a stone*. On the stony trails of Canaan (see Pr 3:23). (CSB)

**91:13** TREAD...TRAMPLE – Dangerous animals are often used to symbolize adversaries who attack unexpectedly. In addition to protection, God gives strength to stomp these enemies in victory. (TLSB)

*lion ... cobra ... great lion ... serpent*. These double references to lions and to poisonous snakes balance the double references of vv. 5–6, and complete the illustrative roster of mortal threats (see Am 5:19). (CSB)

Elsewhere in Scripture both of these animals are representatives of Satan. (PBC)

**91:14–16** Employing the form of a prophetic oracle, the author (see introduction) supports his testimony by assuring the godly that it is confirmed by all the promises of God to those who truly love and trust him. (CSB)

Promises from God. God assures all who trust in Him that He will be an ever-present help, fulfilled in Jesus (Jn 10:28–29). (TLSB)

This is fulfilled when God delivers us from every evil of body and soul and brings us safely into his heavenly kingdom. Although eventually death will overtake every believer except those still living when judgments say dawn, Christ will bring us through death into our eternal home. (PBC)

**91:14** *protect him*. Lit. "raise him to a high, secure place." (CSB)

*my name*. See note on 5:11. (CSB)

How quickly life can go from smooth and routine to troubled and fearful! How encouraging it is to know of God's protection. Our security comes from His promises kept. Jesus trampled Satan once and for all when He gloriously rose from the dead. We walk in victory even during dangerous times because He is with us and will not let us be separated from His love. • Thank You, Lord, for Your security and strength in this perilous world. Amen. (TLSB)