

# ***“A Psalm of Security”***

## **Psalm 91**

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### **Introduction:**

One thing that all of us here this morning have in common is the desire to live in safety and security. When we go to buy a car, we look at the safety features—perhaps we want airbags, and we want some good brakes, and maybe we want some kind of traction control system. When we buy a house, we want smoke detectors, and carbon monoxide detectors, and we want to make sure that the new home is not a death trap. When we send our kids to school, we want them to be safe. We want them to go to a school where they can learn without being afraid of being attacked on the bus on the way home from school at the end of the day. Perhaps some of you noticed the story in USA Today earlier this week, the story about a new company that specializes in building what are referred to as **“Doomsday Shelters.”** They have revived an old trend from the Cold War, and they will build you a shelter that will protect you and your family for up to a year. It will protect you from just about anything, including a nuclear attack, a killer asteroid, or even a tsunami. Even though the shelters range in price from around \$400,000 up to just over \$41 million, the company says that (even in spite of the recession) their sales have doubled every year for the past five years. They explain that the average shelter runs about \$10 million. I do not plan on building one too soon, but in nearly every aspect of life, most of us value being safe and secure in whatever we may be doing.

This morning, as we look together at the word of God, I would invite you to think with me about a Psalm from the Old Testament, a Psalm that is sometimes referred to as being **“A Psalm of Security,” Psalm 91**. With most of the Psalms, we might assume that they were written by King David, and many of them are. But in most translations of the Bible, as you look at the heading to **Psalm 91**, you will notice that an author is not listed. As I started doing the research for this morning’s lesson, I quickly learned why, and the reason is: Many people believe that **Psalm 91** was written by Moses. Most of us are familiar with **Psalm 90**, and we know that **Psalm 90** was written by Moses. In **Psalm 90**, Moses is begging for God’s protection. Moses is begging for God’s mercy. And when we look at **Psalm 90** and then continue reading, it appears as if **Psalm 91** is God’s answer to the begging for safety that Moses does in **Psalm 90**. In fact, many people believe that **Psalm 91** was written to encourage the Children of Israel as they were leaving Egypt on their way to the Promised Land. In **Psalm 90**, Moses asks for the Lord’s protection, and **Psalm 91** is God’s way of saying, **“You got it! That is a prayer that I will answer!”**

And so with this in mind by way of background, let us all please look together at all 16 verses of **Psalm 91**, a Psalm most likely written by Moses to encourage God’s

people as they prepared to leave Egypt for the Promised Land. And as we look at this **Psalm** together, I hope, first of all, that you will be able to say, "**Wow, that really fits with the exodus from Egypt,**" and then, secondly, I hope that all of us will recognize this as a very important **Psalm** that is repeated in the New Testament. By the way, this **Psalm** has been referred to as the "**Devil's Psalm.**" If you want to know why, please look with me at **Psalm 91**...

- 1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.***
- 2 I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,  
My God, in whom I trust!"***
- 3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper  
And from the deadly pestilence.***
- 4 He will cover you with His pinions,  
And under His wings you may seek refuge;  
His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.***
- 5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night,  
Or of the arrow that flies by day;***
- 6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.***
- 7 A thousand may fall at your side  
And ten thousand at your right hand,  
But it shall not approach you.***
- 8 You will only look on with your eyes  
And see the recompense of the wicked.***
- 9 For you have made the LORD, my refuge,  
Even the Most High, your dwelling place.***
- 10 No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent.***
- 11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you,  
To guard you in all your ways.***
- 12 They will bear you up in their hands,  
That you do not strike your foot against a stone.***
- 13 You will tread upon the lion and cobra,  
The young lion and the serpent you will trample down.***
- 14 "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him;  
I will set him securely on high,  
Because he has known My name.***
- 15 "He will call upon Me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.***
- 16 "With a long life I will satisfy him  
And let him see My salvation."***

As we look back over this **Psalm**, again, I hope you were able to see how well this fits with the possibility that it was written by Moses to encourage the people on their way out of Egypt, I hope you were able to recognize the part of this **Psalm** that is

repeated (actually by Satan) in the New Testament, but as we study, I would like for us to divide the **Psalm** up by sections as we allow God's word to actually mean something in our lives today.

**I. First of all, as we look at the first four verses, we realize that GOD IS OUR REFUGE.**

And right here at the beginning, right here as we start, I should point out that the entire **Psalm** is conditional. As with nearly every blessing that is ever given in the Bible, this **Psalm** does not apply to everybody, but as Moses says in **verse 1**, "***He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.***" In other words, not everyone will "***abide in the shadow of the Almighty,***" but only those who " ***dwell in the shelter of the Most High.***" And so the blessings of this **Psalm** are conditional and apply only to those who live continually with God. If we could speak with the architect of this bunker [PPT PHOTO], I am sure that he would say that you need to be in the bunker in order to be protected by it.

And in a similar way, as we go back and look again at those first four verses, we discover that God is our "***refuge.***" And as we examine that opening paragraph, we find that God is described in several ways, that He is addressed with various names. First of all, for example, the Lord is described as being the "***Most High.***" The Lord is addressed this way at least 36 times in the Bible, and the idea is that God is above everything, that God owns everything, that He looks out over everything that is His. We also find in **verse 1** that God is described as being the "***Almighty.***" This is the Hebrew word "***SHADDAI,***" and it refers to the idea that God is our provider, that God is the one who gives us what we need. In **verse 2**, Moses refers to the "***LORD.***" In the NASB, whenever you see the word "***LORD***" in all capital letters, it goes back to the Hebrew word **YAHWEH** or **JEHOVAH**. The word is used more than 6,500 times in the Bible and conveys the idea that God simply IS. As we sometimes sing, He is the Great I Am. He is eternal. The word "***God***" in **verse 2** is the Hebrew word **ELOHIM**, and it conveys something of the Lord's great power. The word is used to refer to God more than 2700 times in the Bible.

These are the words (the names) that are used to identify God in the opening verses, but please notice how the Lord is described. In the first four verses, the Lord is described as our "***shelter,***" our "***refuge,***" our "***fortress,***" our "***shield,***" and our "***bulwark.***" All of these are places of safety, places where we would run perhaps during a storm or during some kind of attack. To those who run to a place of safety, it is good to be on the inside, but to those who may be attacking from the outside, the shelter is strong. And so the idea is that God's people are able to run to the Lord for help. He is strong, He is above everything, He will never change, and He is offering to protect His people just as a bird protects its young. In **verse 3**, Moses refers to God covering us with His "***pinions***" and with His "***wings.***" My understanding is that a pinion and a wing are basically the same thing. Literally, a pinion is something you fly with, and a wing is some kind of extremity. And so the idea is that God is willing to cover us, He wraps us up, and He holds us close.

Today, we know what it means to run to some kind of shelter. Several weeks ago, we were away from home as our children were home alone, and we could see on the news that a storm was heading toward our house. It was coming in from Mount Horeb and was heading for Verona and Fitchburg. We had our children go to a place of safety—down there in a corner of the basement, in a windowless room, over there behind the furnace. Moses is saying that in a time of trouble God is that place. God is our shelter. We do not run AWAY from God, but we run TO God.

We think about the Children of Israel. As they were getting ready to leave the land of Egypt, God told them to kill a Passover lamb, they were to paint that blood on their doorposts, and then they were to take refuge inside that house. They were safe on the inside, and they were to stay there until the morning. That is the way it is with Jesus. In **Ephesians 1**, Paul explains that all spiritual blessings can only be found *“in Christ.”* Elsewhere, Paul explains that we are baptized into Christ (**Romans 6:1-7**), and so our sins are covered by His blood as long as we stay on the inside. First of all, then, God is our refuge.

**II. As we go back to Psalm 91, I would like for us to consider a second basic lesson here, and that is, as we look at verses 5-10, we get the very clear idea that God is not only our REFUGE, but GOD IS ALSO OUR PEACE.**

In a time of trouble, God is our peace and our courage. Of course, as we look at **Psalm 91**, we realize that most of us will never have our feet caught in a snare, most of us will never be overtaken by some kind of deadly pestilence, most of us will never have arrows flying at us, most of us will never be stalked at noon, and most of us will never have tens of thousands falling dead all around us, but that does not seem to be the main point of this **Psalm**. Whenever we look at a paragraph from the Bible, we need to ask ourselves, **“Why did the Holy Spirit decide to preserve this for us? Why is this in the Bible?”** And as we look at **Psalm 91**, we realize that dangers may change, the possibilities for bad things happening are literally endless and will change over time, but God does not change! I would imagine that it has probably been decades (if not hundreds of years) since anyone has been killed by an arrow right here in Madison, but God still cares what we are going through. Regardless of what danger we may face, God is able to keep our faith strong through all of it. I don't know about you, but to me, the list here in **Psalm 91** seems at least a little similar to Paul's list in **Romans 8**, as Paul asks the question **“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”** And of course the answer is that none of these things can separate us from the love of God. But notice: Paul does not say that these things will not happen, but he says that these things will not be able to separate us from the love of Christ.

In the same way, **Psalm 91** does not mean that God's people will never suffer under any circumstances, but it means that God can bring us peace and courage in our suffering. In **Psalm 91:5**, for example, Moses does not say that there will not be any arrows to fly by day, but he says that we do not need to be overcome by the fear

of those arrows. He does not say that there will not be any night terrors, but he tells us that God will be with us. In the same way, Paul does not say that we as Christians will never suffer persecution, or famine, or peril, but he says that these things will never separate us from the love of God. As Paul also wrote in **Philippians 4:6-7**, ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*** That also seems to be the point of what Moses says here in **Psalms 91**. When we are overwhelmed with trouble, we as God's people have the ability to run to God for help. He is our refuge, but He also brings us peace and courage during any time of trouble.

### **III. As we look back at Psalms 91, there is a third basic idea here, and that is: In a time of spiritual challenge, GOD IS OUR STRENGTH.**

Or in other words, we can put our trust in God's resources. There is no problem that God is not able to bring us through spiritually stronger than we were at the beginning. At least on God's side of the equation, the power is unlimited, and it goes all the way down even to the smallest of issues. We notice in **verses 11-13** that God will command His angels and (if God deems that it is appropriate) they will prevent us from even bumping our feet against a stone. Today we might say that God can prevent us from even stubbing our toes. Now, we could literally spend several months studying the role of angels in the Bible and in the lives of God's people today, but the role of angels is not the main point of this passage. And I would say that others have misunderstood and misapplied this passage over the years, starting with Satan himself. You might remember that this is the **Psalms** that Satan quoted to Jesus when he tempted the Lord in the wilderness. Satan had memorized this passage. How many of us here this morning have memorized this passage? Have you? I haven't, and I have been studying this passage for a week and a half. But Satan used this **Psalms** (from memory) and he used it to try to convince the Lord to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple, to make a show of His power. But you may remember how the Lord responded in **Matthew 4:11**, ***"Jesus said to [Satan], 'On the other hand, it is written, "YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST."'"*** In other words, this **Psalms** from Moses is not a guarantee that we will never hurt ourselves in spite of what stupid choices we make, but it is a promise that God has the power to do what is right for us.

And yet even today, Satan is still trying to get us to think that God will never let us get hurt in spite of the choices we make. We hear Satan making the challenge today, ***"Go ahead, do whatever you want, and it will be okay. God only wants you to be happy. Party all you want, and do whatever you feel like doing, because God loves you."*** But again, that is not what Moses was saying here, and Jesus proves it. Otherwise, Jesus would have jumped off of the temple. But as the Lord said, we are not to put God to the test.

As a side note, I should point out a valuable principle here, and that is: The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible. Remember: When Satan quoted Scripture to Jesus, Jesus came back with another Scripture. The Scripture that Satan had quoted was being misapplied, and so the Lord came back with another passage that clarified the first passage. And another good example is found in verse 13. Some people have taken verse 13 to mean that we can handle snakes in our worship services. After all, Moses said that we will trample on the cobra and the serpent. However, there is a huge difference between God being with us in some kind of spiritual struggle and us going out and picking up poisonous snakes on purpose. As Jesus said, ***“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”*** God, though, does have the power to bring us through any kind of spiritual struggle. We think of 1 Corinthians 10:13. God never says that we will never be tempted, but He promises that with any temptation there will be a way of escape. It is up to us to find that way of escape and take it.

#### **IV. There is another lesson we can learn from Psalm 91, and that is, as we look at verses 14-16 we find that GOD IS OUR SAVIOR. ➤PPT➤**

In these last three verses, the Psalm changes and is now written from God’s point of view. In the last three verses, God is talking, God is responding, and in these last three verses, the Lord turns to the author of this Psalm and makes several promises. Because of God’s relationship with Moses, the Lord promises to save him from what he was facing, the Lord would bring him through on the other side. According to verse 15, God will answer those who call on Him for help. If we make the call, the line will never be busy, but God has promised to answer that call. Of course, that puts it back on us. God is there, but we must make the call.

Several months ago, I attended a neighborhood association meeting for the neighborhood right here around the church building, and we had a guest speaker who was a director from the 911 center. We also had our neighborhood officer come to speak to us, and she said something very interesting about her work as a police officer. She repeated something that they had emphasized even from the police academy. She said, ***“Only God and dispatch know where you are [as a police officer], and if dispatch doesn’t know where you are, then you and God had better be pretty close!”*** Her point was that officers always need to be checking in with dispatch in case there is ever a problem. I would apply that to our Christian faith. We need to be checking in with God. God needs to always know where we are, and verse 15 tells us that He will always be with us in trouble—not that we will avoid all trouble, but that He will be with us in trouble. And it all goes back to the fact that we have a relationship with God. As we learned in the very first verse, all of this applies to those who ***“dwell in the shelter of the Most High.”***

#### **Conclusion:**

When we started our study this morning, we thought about how important it is for us to feel safe. We talked about airbags, and smoke detectors, and safe schools, and

these things are very important. However, I hope we also now have a better understand of spiritual security. Like Moses, whenever we find ourselves in a time of spiritual trouble, this morning's **Psalm** has encouraged us to go to God as our refuge, as a place of safety. We have learned that we can go to God for peace—even if He does not remove whatever we are going through, He can be with us through it. We have learned that God is our strength; that is, God has the resources to bring us through whatever we may be facing. And then finally, we have also learned that God is our Savior. Those who have a relationship with God, those who choose to dwell in the shelter of the Most High will be brought through safely on the other side.

Under the New Covenant, we accept God's offer of salvation by repenting of our sins and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. At that point, the Lord then adds us to His church (He brings us into the bunker, we might say), and we then do the best we can to live the Christian life with His help. If you have any questions, we would love to study with you sometime this week, if you would like for us to pray together with you about some concern in your life right now, we can do that also. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)