

Wednesday Night Live | November 4, 2020

Refuge: Part 1 | Psalm 91:1-6 | God: Most High

Uncertainty is like a plague. It infects our minds and whittles away what confidence we have. Left to run amuck, this kind of doubt gives way to fear. And fear can grip the heart so much so that we feel as if we cannot breathe.

What are we to do then? Go to God our refuge.

He is there like a mother bird concealing her young from a summer storm. He is there on the battlefield as a bulwark of protection from our enemies. Should the hunter set a trap, God will be there to rescue us from that sly hand. We have nothing to fear from the darkest night nor from the hottest day when God is our refuge. We can find shelter and a covering in His names.

There is no better place where this idea is illustrated than in Psalm 91.

Interestingly, Psalm 91 has many similarities to Psalm 46.¹ However, the critical difference between the two is that Psalm 91 relates specifically to an individual's life rather than a large community. This can be seen particularly in that Psalm 46 uses words like "our" and "us," whereas Psalm 91 uses personal pronouns such as "I," "my," "me," and "you."

Furthermore, where Psalm 41 is filled with full expressions of a community's unwavering trust in God, Psalm 91 is filled with unambiguous declarations of God's promises to an individual.² I tell you this upfront because I want you to see over the next four weeks what God's intentions are for you as a singular person under His care and not necessarily for Christians by and large. God cares as much for the one as He does for the whole.

Furthermore, the different messages in this series are divided by each of God's four names listed in the introduction of this Psalm. Each name has a corresponding passage later on in the same Psalm, which expounds further on that specific name's primary principle. With that said, do not think the Psalm is meant to be parsed out in this way. No. The entire Psalm, every word, phrase, and each name of God is nailing down the

¹ Goldingay, John, *Psalms*, The Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, Volume 3, Tremper Longman III, Editor, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 39.

² Goldingay (2008), p. 39.

one principle: God is our protection. He is the haven unbroken. He is the fortress unassailable. He is the refuge unyielding.

Before diving into the first name, Psalms are meant to be read as a whole and not pieced out bit by bit. Only when you read through from beginning to end will the principles reveal themselves.

READ: Psalm 91 (ESV)

- 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 he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.
- ⁴ He will cover you with his [feathers],
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
- ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- ⁸ You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.
- ⁹ Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—
- ¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
- ¹² On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

¹⁴ “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.

¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”

The Psalmist begins by telling us about an individual who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High.”

“Most High” was the name Melchizedek used of God in Gen. 14. Before some of God's other titles came into vogue with the Israelites, this was the most natural way of speaking about God. It is also one of the most common methods of talking about God in the book of Psalms.³ This title speaks of his incredible power and oversight over all things (cf. Ps. 18:13; 47:2).⁴ Melchizedek knew God as “Creator of heaven and earth”; thus, when we say God is Most High, we speak about his primacy in all things. He is the first cause. No one nor thing existed before He. No one is higher than he is.

READ: Psalm 97:9 (ESV)

For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.

He is the pinnacle of all things. No one is greater than He is. This is why throughout the Psalms, you'll find expressions where God alone is to be honored, glorified, and praised.

READ: Psalm 83:18 (ESV)

that they may know that you alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth.

He who created the molecules and atoms which make up the universe can also turn them in the direction they should go. He is the force by which all things continue to exist (cf. Col. 1:17). The

³ Goldingay (2008), p. 41.

⁴ VanGemeren, Willem A., *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 5, Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Editors, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2008), p. 697.

Sun does not burn because of fusion. The earth does not orbit the Sun because of gravitational forces. They move through space and time along predestined tracks laid by a Divine hand.

We're told that the Most High is a "shelter" for those who dwell in His presence. Shelter speaks of concealment from danger.⁵ It is a hiding place for those who come to the Most High. We can come to hide who under One who never hides.⁶ **As such, no danger can reach us.**

READ: Psalm 91:3-6 (ESV)

³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.

- i. The Most High Will Deliver
- a. Fowler's Snare
- b. Deadly Pestilence

<INSERT PICTURE>

Considering that these two come in sequence suggests they are linked. The most likely link is that danger comes at us not only from *conscience* beings but also from *careless* forces. One sets a trap, fully aware of the prey they intend to capture; the other is indiscriminate, utterly without a specific target but yet only desires to destroy. In both these cases, God Most High will deliver us out of the schemes of broken men and the chaos of a broken world.

Famous Plagues throughout History

- The Black Death killed an estimated 20 million people, one-third of Europe's total population in the mid-1300s. There was so many dead that they left them on the sides of the road.
- The Spanish Flu of 1918 resulted in over 50 million deaths worldwide. Hundreds of thousands died in the united states alone.
- Since immerging in November of last year, COVID-19 has killed over a million people.

How unusual that we here in the modern era would now have a shared experience with those throughout time. Pandemics, epidemics, and plagues used to be the norm. From our time to the NT era, to even during the time of Psalm 91. People had as much to fear from disease as they did from other people. Yet, even those faceless viruses that have ravaged our world since

⁵ Goldingay (2008), p. 41.

⁶ Tanner, Beth LaNeel, *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2014), p. 700.

the beginning of time cannot hope to kill those who "dwell in the shelter of the Most High." He delivers from the fowler's snare and the terminal illness.

⁴ He will cover you with his [feathers],
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

- ii. The Most High Will Cover
 - a. Like a bird
 - b. Like armor

How interesting that after speaking about a fowler's snare, the Psalmist likens God to a great bird. This mighty bird spread His wings over us and gives us "refuge." <INSERT PICTURES>

Then the Psalmist compares God's protection to that of shield and buckler. <INSERT PICTURES>
A shield was larger, the full height of a man, and made of more robust materials than a buckler.⁷ A buckler was hardly more prominent than a fist and was strapped there to provide easier maneuvering. A shield could be linked together created a shield wall that could easily deflect arrows and rocks thrown by an enemy. A buckler was intended for one-on-one combat. It was used in defense in deflecting sword thrusts and an offense in punching one's opponent.⁸

We're told by the Psalmist that it was God's "faithfulness" that acts as a shield and buckler.

A defensive piece of armor would be useless if it broke or bent easily. You'd want to be tried and true. As sure as one could make it.

In other words, like a bird and shield, the Most High covers us. He wraps us in a protective embrace. He hides us behind impenetrable walls.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noontime.

What's the takeaway?

We will not fear terrors in the night nor dangers in the day.

⁷ Goldingay (2008), p. 44.

⁸ Clements, John, "The Sword & Buckler Tradition – Part 1", 2002, ARMA: *The Association for Renaissance Martial Arts*, <http://www.thearma.org/essays/SwordandBuckler.htm#.X6MIKy9h3VI>, [accessed, November 3, 2020].

Here again, the "disease" is mentioned. But unlike before its anthropomorphized and given sentience. It is not only an indiscriminate menace, but now it's become an intelligent presence that "stalks" its prey.

The arrow was the pinnacle of weaponry for thousands of years. It could be shot as far as 200 yards away with such force it could put a man to the ground. Often, arrows would be tipped with poison to put down prey or an opponent that had only be nicked. Famously Alexander the Great had to deal with these poisonous projectiles when he hit India.⁹ Needless to say, among a soldier's greatest fear was an arrow that brought disease. And these are not subjective fears one might imagine or conjure from the depths of our imagination.¹⁰ These are terrors that are real. They are not boogie men who haunt our waking dreams but waking threats that seek our life at every turn.

But for the one who dwells in the Most High's shelter, he has no fear of such things. This individual does not fear the terrors that stalk us in the night nor worry over the threats that fly towards us in the noonday sun. Why? Because God is his refuge.

⁹ Wikipedia contributors, "Arrow poison," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Arrow_poison&oldid=981044080 (accessed November 4, 2020).

¹⁰ Goldingay (2008), p. 44.