

Wednesday Night Live | November 11, 2020

Refuge | Part 2 | God: Almighty

Last week, we learned that God, the Most High, is our refuge. Therefore, we will not fear the fowler's snare, the stalking plague, the arrow by day, nor the terror by night. For the Most High covers us with His wings, and He is our shelter as a buckler and shield.

Today, the list and dangers of our enemies will grow. Yet, God, the Almighty, will prove more than capable of defending those who abide in His long shadow. These "shadow-dwellers" will bear witness as God's omnipotence is put to the test. They will see the wicked fall and the righteous protected. For no man is safer than he who takes shade behind the Almighty.

But, before we get there, as we said last week, the Psalms are meant to be read as a whole and not pieced out bit by bit. Only when you read through a psalm in its entirety from beginning to end will the principles at the heart of a psalm 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 pinions,
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 Highest, 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.”

Not only does the Psalmist tell us about an individual who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, he expounds on this idea a little more by explaining that this individual also **abides in the shadow of the Almighty.**

“Almighty” is a fantastic title for God. However, its etymology has long-proved to be problematic for theologians. The only thing we know for certain is that, before Israel’s monarchy, “Almighty” was more likely to be heard when speaking about God than not.¹

In Hebrew, “Almighty” is pronounced *Shaddai*.² **Literally translated, it means “to treat violently” or to “destroy” (cf. Ru. 1:20-21).**³ Yet throughout the OT, **it is just as connected with God’s promises as it is with His punishments** (cf. Gen. 28:3; 35:11; Num. 24:4; Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15).⁴ What’s more, “Almighty” is the particular name **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** used when they spoke of God (cf. Ex. 6:2).

¹ Bush, Frederic, *Ruth-Esther*, The Word Biblical Commentary, volume 9, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1996), p. 92-93.

² 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. 518.

³ Hubbard, Robert L. Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1988), p. 124-125.

⁴ Bush (1996), p. 92-93.

READ: Genesis 17:1-3 (ESV)

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” ³ Then Abram fell on his face.

Contextually, this was shortly after Ishmael was born. In light of this, I cannot help but think that in telling Abraham that his name is “Almighty,” God was trying to tell Abraham that He was bigger and stronger than Abraham believed. Meaning, the physical problems that come with age are nothing to the Almighty. So much so that Sarah will undoubtedly give birth to a son in her old age because God is without equal in ability. As such, they should not have gone and tried to give Abraham an heir through Hagar. They should’ve trusted in the Almighty to do what He said He would do.

Interestingly, the title “Almighty” is only used twice in the whole book of Psalms. The only other place comes in Psalm 68. There, we can get a sense of the meaning of Almighty.

READ: Psalm 68:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹ The Lord gave the word; Great *was* the company of those who proclaimed *it*:

¹² “Kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who remains at home divides the spoil.

¹³ Though you lie down among the sheepfolds, *You will be* like the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.”

¹⁴ When the Almighty scattered kings in it, it was *white* as snow in Zalmon.

The Almighty’s victory over enemy kings was so great it looked like the tip of a snow-capped mountain. This vivid imagery gives us a clue as to the meaning of the Almighty. He is so powerful that enemy kings fall before him like falling snow. **This means that “Almighty” speaks of God’s omnipotence (cf. Mr. 14:36; Lu. 1:37).** He is entirely in control at all times.

Even *free will* is a means with which the Almighty's omnipotence is expressed. Though we may freely choose our own path, God alone controls the outcome (cf. Pro. 16:33). This is *true* omnipotence: to create beings who have agency over their lives, yet who are unable to frustrate the plans of their Creator. "Only a fool could say that there is no God, when God sustains the breath the atheist uses to deny divine dominion over him."⁵

⁵ Lewis, G.R., “God, Attributes of: Existentially, God is Free, Authentic, and Omnipotent,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, Walter A. Elwell, Editor, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2001), p. 498.

And this omnipotence is not only a quiet authority ruling behind the scenes; it is also a booming voice reverberating with power (cf. 1 Ki. 19:9-18). It is a thunderous presence that evokes fear (cf. Ex. 20:18-21). It is no wonder that many have said that to speak of God as the “Almighty” is to refer to Him as the great “thunderer” as there are few things that can exude more power than thunder.⁶ Or, as another bible commentator explained, Shaddai could also be understood as God of the “mountains.”⁷ Still, others think the most basic meaning of El Shaddai is the God who “devastates.”⁸ And considering the metaphors of mountains and thundering, this all seems to align perfectly with the overall theme of the all-powerfulness of God.

Now, while Almighty is a much rarer word in Psalms, it is *everywhere* in the book of Job.⁹ It clocks in at a staggering thirty-one times. Throughout that book, Job questions God. Why? Because Job wants to learn more about the reasoning behind the tragedy in his own life. None of us could blame him for challenging God, yet that is precisely what God does. God patiently walks Job through all the wonders of creation and explains how truly finite and limited he is. Even if God were to explain everything, Job still could not grasp the logic behind God’s actions.

READ: Job 40:1–5 (ESV)

¹ And the Lord said to Job: ² “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.”

³ Then Job answered the Lord and said: ⁴ “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. ⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”

Who are we to find fault with the Almighty? We are no one. Should we ever presume to find fault with the Almighty, may we—just as Job did—lay hold of our mouth and never let go.

But, in our passage today, the Psalmist is not speaking about an individual who is questioning God. Instead, he's talking about someone who is under the “shadow of the Almighty.” This means all of that power and authority hides us from harm. And though we cannot understand the Almighty's rationale, we can still find asylum amid his shadow. We can hide there, safe, and secure. Individuals such as these are in the Almighty’s favor and under his protection.

⁶ General Editors, “El Shaddai,” *Ligonier Ministries*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/el-shaddai/>, [accessed, November 10, 2020].

⁷ Ryrie, Charles C., *Basic Theology*, (Chicago, IL; Moody Press, 1999), p. 52.

⁸ McComiskey, T. E., “God, Names of: El Shaddai,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, Walter A. Elwell, Editor, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2001), p. 506.

⁹ 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.

Famously, Jonah got underneath the shadow of a plant as he awaited Nineveh's judgment (cf. Jon. 4:5-6).¹⁰ This provides us with a vivid metaphor to explain the shelter of those who find refuge in God. They are covered as a shadow covers the ground, and no one is exposed. The Almighty casts such a long shadow that none of his children are left to bake in the sun.

And because we are “shadow-dwellers” who find shade beneath the wings of the Almighty, we’re told that...

READ: Psalm 91:7-8 (ESV)

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.

Whether by war (vs. 5) or plague (vs. 6), those who dwell outside the shadow of the Almighty will not survive, whereas no harm will even come near us “shadow-dwellers.”¹¹ Moses' protégé would later encourage Israel's children as they took the promised land that “the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, just as he promised you.” (Josh. 23:9-10) All those who are enemies of you are enemies of God. And though the odds may be either 1 versus 1,000 or 1 versus 10,000, you will be victorious because God fights on your behalf (cf. Rom. 8:31). In this way, you will be like a young boy named David who once told an old king, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will [also] deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” (cf. 1 Sam. 17:37) And like Goliath before David, all the enemies of God will fall as threshed wheat during a harvest. As the adversaries are culled, we will have our feet secured, and our confidence assured.

In fact, just like David saw as he stood before a fallen giant and just like Joshua saw as he stood before the fallen walls of Jericho (Josh. 6), those who are covered by the shadow of the Almighty will look and see with their own eyes the “recompense of the wicked.” You will witness their defeat first hand.

¹⁰ Goldingay (2008), p. 41.

¹¹ Goldingay (2008), p. 41.

No better example of this kind of "seeing" can be found than when Israel crossed a sea that a Pharaoh would immediately be drowned by shortly after.

READ: Exodus 14:5-14, 21-31 (ESV)

⁵ When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" ⁶ So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, ⁷ and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. ⁸ And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the people of Israel while the people of Israel were going out defiantly. ⁹ The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and his horsemen and his army, and overtook them encamped at the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

¹⁰ When Pharaoh drew near, the people of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they feared greatly. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. ¹¹ They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt?" ¹² Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." ¹³ And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. ¹⁴ The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

...

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. ²² And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. ²⁴ And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, ²⁵ clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."

²⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.” ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

³⁰ Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

The Almighty controls the seas. For those within the shelter of His shadow, they will be safe, and they will be witnesses of God’s omnipotence. They will see the power of God and no longer fear what man could do *to them* but instead they will fear what the Lord can do *for them*.

Why are such people spared, but others are destroyed? Because...

READ: Psalms 91:9-10 (ESV)

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.

So, what’s the takeaway?

The shadow-dwellers of the Almighty are saved from evil and bear witness to the fall of the wicked.

Because we have made the Lord our dwelling place and the Most High our refuge, no evil will descend upon us, and no illness will approach our home. No Pharaoh can attack us when the Almighty watches our back. No army can assail us when we are protected by the Shadow of the Almighty. A thousand may attack us, ten thousand may rush upon us, but they will all fall before the power of the Almighty.

And while this is no guarantee that no evil will ever befall us, we can rest assured that nothing occurs outside the purview of a sovereign God. Even if the stones thrown from our slings miss its mark and the giants overtake us, our trust in the Almighty will not waiver. Even if the armies

cross the seas and devour our lives, our confidence in the Almighty will not be shaken. We have no trust in this life, but we know that we will be secure in the life to come. Death may come upon us, but it will only ever touch us *once*. After that, we will be forever free and forever alive, basking in the light of the Almighty.