

August 26, 2012 by Steve Brandon



Safe In God

Psalm 91

1. The Principle (verse 1)

2. The Pledge (verse 2)

3. The Protection (verses 3-16)

A good number of us have been engaged in memorizing the weekly Fighter Verses put out by Bethlehem Baptist Church. ^[1]Over the past seven weeks, verses from Psalm 91 have been the focus. As a result, many of us have memorized the Psalm. While it is on our minds, I thought that it would be good to preach it.

It's a great Psalm for us to consider. Psalm 91 is one of the most famous of all Psalms. It has been called, "The Soldier's Psalm," as it has been prayed many times by soldiers before entering combat. The Psalm has to do with God's protection to those who abide in Him. Indeed, it's an appropriate Psalm for those who fear the Lord to pray when entering a combat zone. In fact, one woman, Jill Boyce, has a huge heart for the military and the comfort that this Psalm might bring to those in service, that she has made it her mission "to get a [bandana with Psalm 91 printed on it] ... to every serviceman or woman who wants one." ^[2]

As you read the Psalm, I want for you to listen for the promises of protection. They are all over the Psalm.

Psalm 91

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.
You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—
no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

I have entitled my message this morning, "Safe in God," because that is what this Psalm is all about. Verse 1 sets forth the theme of the entire Psalm.

1. The Principle (verse 1)

Psalm 91:1

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

This is the principle of the entire Psalm: If you dwell in God, you will experience His protective care.

This verse is filled with imagery (as is the rest of the Psalm). It uses the imagery of a "shelter." It uses the imagery of a "shadow." This "shelter" is literally a place of "covering." The King James translates this "the secret place." That is, the place of protection, where the destroyer knows nothing about. His attack will be fruitless.

In World War II days, it was common for those in Europe to have bomb shelters. When the enemy aircraft began to attack, air raid sirens would sound, and the civilians would race for their bomb shelters for protection. They were often made of corrugate iron, which was buried in the ground. They were generally quite small; able to hold up to six people. And there they waited for the attack to subside. While deep in the ground, they were safe from the bombs that were being dropped overhead all around them.

That's the imagery used here. Those who dwell in God's shelter will remain in safety, unable to be touched by the dangers around them.

The picture of verse 1 also uses the imagery of a "shadow."

Psalm 91:1

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

That is, the comfortable place -- the protected place.

Our family just returned from a trip to California where the days are hot and the nights are cool. The days are hot because of the intense sun that shines down upon the land, scorching the plants. And there is something about the shade in California that is different than the shade in Illinois. I think that it has something to do with the lack of humidity in the air, and the corresponding intensity of the sun. When you transition from the sunshine to the shade, there is immediate relief from the heat, much more so than there is in Illinois.

Verse 1 speaks of the relief from the danger for those who dwell in God. The condition is one of dwelling -- dwelling in God, abiding in God. This is the principle of the entire Psalm. It's repeated over and over and over again. If you dwell in God, you will experience His protective care.

I thought a few pictures might help you.

As you all know, we have faced a very dry summer, the worst in years. For us in the Midwest, it has meant that the crops won't be so good. For those in the West, it has meant fires. In the past few weeks, fires have been raging in western states like Colorado, Idaho, Washington, California, even as far south as Texas. Hundreds of thousands of acres have been on fire. Thousands of homes have been destroyed in these states. [\[3\]](#)

I have here a picture of a house in Washington about to be destroyed by fire approaching it from the side. Can you imagine? Can you imagine this fire raging toward your house? But, despite the raging fire, the house was protected. It remained standing and appears to be unscathed. [\[4\]](#)

That's the picture of this Psalm. Danger is all around. And yet, for those who dwell in God, there is safety and protection.

Here's another story of Psalm 91. Almost two years ago (Nov. 22, 2010), a tornado touched down north of Rockford. After the tornado, a family in our church invited any in the church family to help in some disaster relief for their friends, Don and Vicki. So, our family went to help clean up from the mess. What I witnessed was amazing. In just a few short seconds, every building on their property was taken down, except for their house.

I called Don yesterday to get the story on what happened on that day in 2010. He said that he was the only one at home that day. He was outside doing work. But, the weather was looking dark and threatening. So, he went inside to check the weather. Once inside, the wind started picking up, but he still didn't think that it was too bad. He looked out the south window and saw that it was gray.

As the wind continued to pick up, Don was on his way to the basement. Before he was all the way down the stairs, the tornado hit their property. They lost more than 100 trees. They lost their barn. They lost their garage. They lost an out building. But, they lost nothing in their house. They only had some minor damage to some shingles and siding.

The tornado ravaged their property. And yet, God's hand of protection was surrounding their house. Now, two years later, they are still affected by the devastation of the tornado on that day, But, with the house intact, there have been only minor disruptions to their daily lives. They still had a place to sleep and to rest. They still had a kitchen to use. None of their personal belongings were destroyed. Don said, "It

was amazing how it was all protected."

What makes this story appropriate is that Don and Vicki are believers in Christ. They are very involved in their church. They host a prayer ministry in their home. Several of their children are (or have been) in full-time ministry. They have made the LORD their refuge, and God has been their shelter. They have made the LORD their refuge, and God has placed them in His shadow.

This is the one to whom the promises of Psalm 91 are made. To those who trust in the Lord.

Psalm 91:1
He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

This is the testimony of the Psalmist. For the sake of hanging your thoughts, I'm calling it, ...
2. The Pledge (verse 2)

The Psalmist pledges to dwell in God.

Psalm 91:2
I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

The pledge comes at the beginning of the verse, "I will say to the Lord." In other words, "This is the commitment that I'm making: God is and will be my refuge God is and will be my fortress. God is and will be the only one to whom I will turn. God is and will be the only one in whom I will trust."

Again, I trust that you will see the imagery here. "Refuge" and "Fortress" are words of safety and strength. The refuge is a place where you can go for safety when there is danger around you. The fortress is a place which is heavily fortified and safe from the attacks of the enemy.

This is his pledge. "I am committing myself to trust in the Lord as my source of strength. I'm not going to trust in my own strength. I'm trusting in His strength." I believe that this helps us to see what it means to "dwell in God." It means that we trust in Him in all times for all things.

Have you made that sort of pledge to the Lord? Or, does your life evidence a trust in yourself?

There are many who trust in themselves. They trust in their own abilities. They trust in their own strength. They trust in their own intelligence, rather than trusting in the Lord. This is the American way: self-trust. Ingrained in our culture is a "You can do it!" attitude. Nike's slogan captures it well, "Just do it!" Our culture presses us to trust in ourselves and in our own power.

But, God's ways are different. He doesn't want us to trust in ourselves. He wants us to trust in Him! That's what the Psalmist is here modeling for us, ...

Psalm 91:2
I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

Trusting in yourself will bring the curse of God. Listen to Jeremiah 17:5-8, ...

Jeremiah 17:5-8
Thus says the Lord:
"Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the Lord.
He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.
He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.
"Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit."

The imagery of Jeremiah may be different than the imagery of Psalm 91, but the message is the same. Those who choose to trust in themselves will face the curse of God. But, those who place their trust in the Lord will find security and strength in Him -- even when the world

comes crashing down around them.

And here is the aim of my message this morning: I want all of us to be trusting in the LORD and not in yourselves. I want all of you to be able to say to the LORD, ... "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" (verse 2).

This verse does have a special place in the lives of our family, especially my mother. I know that this may be a bit morbid and strange, but it makes a great point.

A few years ago, my parents purchased their burial plots, just south of their home about a quarter of a mile. And they chose their tombstone. Each of them have chosen a verse to place under their name on the tombstone. My mother has chosen Psalm 91:2, (in the NIV) "I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

Now, I want for you to think about this for a moment. As long as this earth stands, as long as her grave remains undisturbed, this will forever be my mother's testimony: "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." She has set her testimony in stone. She has declared it for all the world to see. Whatever will be remembered of my mother, as people pass by her grave, will be this: "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

And so, I ask you. Is this your testimony? Have you said this? Do others know about this? Is it more than mere words? Is this truly your life?

Here, the Psalmist makes His pledge, "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'" (NIV) "I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.'" (ESV)

Oh, if anything, this is my longing -- that we would be a community of those who trust in the LORD. Oh, that all of you would make this your desire. It is a good thing to be "Safe in God."

Verses 3-16 describe the security that we have in the Lord. We have seen The Principle (verse 1) and The Pledge (verse 2). Now let's look at, ...

3. The Protection (verses 3-16)

Here we see fourteen verses which speak over and over and over again of the protection that God will provide for those who trust in the Lord. In these verses I have counted 24 promises of protection.

Psalm 91:3-16 (promises in parentheses)

- (1) For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
- (2) and from the deadly pestilence.
- (3) He will cover you with his pinions,
- (4) 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,
- (6) nor the arrow that flies by day,
- (7) nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
- (8) nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.
- (9) A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- (10) You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.
Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—
- (11) no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
- (12) no plague come near your tent.
- (13) For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
- (14) On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.
- (15) You will tread on the lion and the adder;
- (16) the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.
- (17) "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
- (18) I will protect him, because he knows my name.
- (19) When he calls to me, I will answer him;
- (20) I will be with him in trouble;
- (21) I will rescue him
- (22) and honor him.
- (23) With long life I will satisfy him
- (24) and show him my salvation."

These promises span the gamut. Protection from disease (verse 3). Protection from the terrors that come by night (verse 5). Protection from the attacks that come by day (verse 5). Protection from the wicked (verse 8). Protection from fierce animals (verses 12-13). At times, this protection comes in the form of angelic protection (verse 11).

The last three verses contain God's personal promise of protection. God, Himself, is speaking, ...

Psalm 91:14-16

"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him;
I will protect him, because he knows my name.
When he calls to me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will rescue him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

God, Himself makes the promise that He will protect and rescue those who place their refuge in Him. God, Himself, will "deliver him" (verse 14). God, Himself, will "protect him" (verse 14). God, Himself, will "answer [his call]" (verse 15). God, Himself, will "be with him in trouble" (verse 15). God, Himself, will "rescue him" (verse 15). God, Himself, will "honor him" (verse 15). God, Himself, will "satisfy him" with long life (verse 16). God, Himself, will "show him salvation" (verse 16).

In this way, the Psalm is very much like the old hymn, "How Firm a Foundation." The first stanza of the hymn is a statement concerning God's protective care.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

But then, every stanza after that is written as if God, Himself, is speaking. They are promises of protection.

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

Even down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

You say, "How can this be? How can God make such large, sweeping promises?" It's because of the sovereignty of God. It's because of the supremacy of God. Because God is in control of all things, He is able to protect you.

Because "the eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3), God knows all about the fowler, who sneaks about to capture you" (verse 3). Because "the darkness is not dark to [the LORD]," and because "the night is as bright as the day [to the LORD]" (Psalm 139:12), there is no terror of the night that will come upon you without His notice (verse 5). Because every plague comes from "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19), you have no need to fear the pestilence (verse 3) or plague (verse 10). Because "his angels, [are] mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word!" (Psalm 103:20), He can "command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways" (verse 11).

It has been said that Psalm 91 is the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." God is actively working in the lives of those who love Him. God is actively working in the lives of His people, those whom He has called.

We can trust Him that all that comes our way is from the hand of a good God. We can trust Him, because He is sovereignly working in all ways, which is what Romans 8 is all about. But, remember, Romans 8 has its conditions. God causes all things to work together for good, "for those who love God" and, "for those who are called."

These exact same conditions are found in Psalm 91 as well. I trust that you can see right there in verse 14 the condition for such a rescue. "Because he holds fast to me in love" and, "Because he knows my name." The first condition is love for God. The second is a true knowledge of God.

Those are different ways of saying that God is my refuge. "I hold fast to the LORD." "I know the name of the LORD." "I trust in the LORD." "He is my refuge." To those who trust in Him, the promise of deliverance and protection found in Psalm 91 is vast. The protection spans the spectrum -- from a little thing like stubbing your toe (verse 12) to a grand thing like protection from all evil (verse 10).

Now, before we look at the details of the protection, we need to deal with a problem. If anything, the Psalm overstates the promises. John Piper explained the difficulty in the Desiring God blog a few weeks ago. He said, ...

As a church we are memorizing Psalm 91 again. It's part of our Fighter Verse program. Again we face the seeming unreality of these promises. Ordinary readers start to stumble and need help. At least I do. Here are the sorts of promises we are memorizing:

Verse 3: "He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence."

Verse 7: "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."

Verse 10: "No evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent."

Verse 12: "On their hands angels will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

Verse 14: "I will deliver him; I will protect him."

Does Psalm 91 mean that those who trust God won't be snared, won't get a disease, won't fall in battle, won't experience evil, won't lose tent-mates to the plague, won't crash against a stone, but will always be delivered and protected?" [\[5\]](#)

Do you see the problem? Does this mean that little Emma, who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes this week wasn't dwelling in the LORD? Does this mean that those who break their arms or legs or visit the emergency room aren't finding their refuge in God? Does this mean that those who are the victims of a crime haven't made the LORD their fortress? (verse 10) Does this mean that those who die young never really trusted in the LORD? (verse 16). Of course not.

The solution to the problem is to look at Jesus. Piper goes on to talk about the temptation of Jesus, when Satan quoted from this very Psalm. Do you remember when Jesus was in the wilderness, tempted by the devil? The account is recorded in Matthew, chapter 4. "Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," [Psalm 91:11]. And "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone [Psalm 91:12]."' (Matt. 4:5-6)

Satan took Psalm 91:11-12 as an absolute promise of God's protection. He challenged Jesus to jump from the temple, trusting in these absolute promises. And yet, Jesus refused the bait. Instead, Jesus replied, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:7, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16).

I trust that you see what Jesus was doing. He was taking the entire Bible into account, not merely one verse pressed to its extreme. And that's what we need to do with these promises here in Psalm 91. We need to take the entire Bible into account, and let them form as a governor for how absolutely we might take these verses. Piper continues, ...

"Instead of following Satan's use of Psalm 91, Jesus embraced the path of suffering. The thorns penetrated his scalp. The whip lacerated his back. The rod struck on his head. The nails pierced his hands. The spear severed his side. And he was killed by his enemies.

So clearly the seemingly face-value meaning of Psalm 91 did not come true for the most godly person who ever lived." [\[6\]](#)

Now, that's not at all to deny the truthfulness of Psalm 91. God's hand of protection was upon Jesus throughout His life. On one occasion when preaching in Nazareth, those in His hometown were enraged and "filled with wrath" (Luke 4:28). So, "they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away" (Luke 4:29-30).

This was Psalm 91 in the life of Jesus. God's hand of protection was upon His life. He simply "passed through their midst" (Luke 4:30). Nobody laid a hand upon Jesus, because of His father's protecting hand.

On another occasion, Jesus was in the temple, speaking with the religious leaders. Upon making a statement regarding His eternality, the Jews picked up stones to throw at Jesus. But Jesus "hid himself and went out of the temple" (John 9:59). Again we see the truths of Psalm 91 in the life of Jesus. God was protecting Him in the temple. When Jesus hid Himself, God kept those in the temple from finding Him.

On several occasions, the Jews attempted to arrest Jesus, but God's sovereign hand was upon Him, and they were prevented from doing so. "They were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come" (John 7:30). And, "These words [Jesus] spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come" (John 8:20). That is Psalm 91 coming true!

God was protecting Jesus throughout His ministry. And yet, Jesus knew when His time was up. Jesus knew when his hour had come. Jesus knew when He was going to die. Jesus said to His disciples, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). Jesus was

referring to His death. And when it was time for Jesus to die, the promises of Psalm 91 fell short. Jesus was caught in the snare of the religious leaders (contra verse 3). The crowds came by night and arrested Him (contra verse 5). The crowds stood tall and demanded that He be crucified (contra verse 7). Evil fell upon Jesus as He was crucified (verse 10). No angel came to rescue Him from the cross (verse 11).

And yet, that's not to say that Psalm 91 isn't true. It is to say that we need to temper our use of this Psalm. Not every word is an absolute promise for all time for all of God's people. In many ways, I think that the verses here are like Proverbs. They are general truths that reflect the general course of life. However, they ought not to be taken as absolutes for every circumstance of life.

It is true that Christians (in general) suffer from fewer diseases than the ungodly, because of the way that they choose to live. It is true that Christians (in general) face much less anxiety than the ungodly, because they know of God's sovereign control of all things; they know of the fear that ends all fears. It is true that Christians (in general) are spared the consequences of evil and wickedness, because of the protections that are around them.

And yet, they face many of the same tragedies as well. Christians are swept away in tsunamis. Christians are killed in random acts of violence. Christians see their homes burned down. But, there are those times when they have the special blessing of God upon their lives and they are protected from great tragedy.

Warren Wiersbe said it well: "When the child of God is in His will, then he is immortal until his work is done." [\[7\]](#) Such was true of Jesus. He knew the divine protection of the LORD until His work was done.

Such was true of Paul. Do you remember when Paul came to Corinth for the first time? He faced the typical persecution that he faced in other cities. He was "opposed" and "reviled" and rejected by the Jews (Acts 18:6). But, some believed, including Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8). Typically, Paul was run out of town when facing such persecution. But, his fate in Corinth was different. One night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:9-10). This sounds like the promises of Psalm 91.

Indeed, if you are a believer in Christ; if you have made the Lord your refuge; if you are dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, then you can trust in the LORD to protect you from all You are immortal, until your work is done. You should trust all of the promises of Psalm 91 in your life.

I remember facing fears as a young boy, especially at night. I remember the times when my father would come and seek to calm my fears. And one of the things that he did for me was to pray the Lord's prayer together.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
They will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the glory and the power forever and ever.
Amen" (Matt 6:9-13).

One of the reasons why he prayed this with me is because at that time in his life, my father didn't know much other Scripture to pray! Perhaps today it would be different. Knowing what we know today, perhaps Psalm 91 would be prayed in times of fear. And it is so good for the many of us who have memorized Psalm 91 to have it at our disposal to recite to our children in their distress.

It's a good Psalm to pray for our fears. Psalm 91 is a help to us and should lead us to trust the Lord for His protection at all times. Because, there have been times in the lives of believers when these verses have been fulfilled completely and supernaturally. And what God has done in the past, He may well do in the future.

So, let's take some examples of what God has done from the verses in this Psalm. Verse 3, ...

Psalm 91:3-4
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

This verse speaks about the enemy that sneaks up on you, unseen. The fowler is another name for the bird-hunter who lies in wait for the bird or who walks through the field, hoping to stir the birds up from their nests. They come with wicked and deadly intents.

Do you remember when David was fleeing from Saul? Saul was hunting him down in the wilderness, seeking to destroy Him. David and his men were forced to hide from him in the caves in the wilderness. At one point, Saul even came into the very cave where David was hiding (1 Samuel 24:3). And yet, David was protected from his deadly spear.

David's testimony would sound much like Psalm 91. David wrote Psalm 57, "when he fled from Saul, in the cave" (Psalm 57 superscription). He said, ...

Psalm 57:1-3, 6, 9-11

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
till the storms of destruction pass by.
I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.
He will send from heaven and save me;
he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah

...

They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed down.
They dug a pit in my way,
but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah

...

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;
I will sing praises to you among the nations.
For your steadfast love is great to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

David sought refuge in the shadow of His wings (Ps. 57:1; 91:1), and God saved him from the snare of the fowler who was hunting him down.

Verse 3 in Psalm 91 continues to speak about the "deadly pestilence."

Psalm 91:3

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

Like the fowler, the deadly pestilence comes by stealth to destroy. It is the microscopic disease that comes from nowhere, and inflicts its deadly harm upon those it seizes.

Do you remember when Moses was in the desert with Israel and the fiery serpents came upon the people? (Numbers 21:6). When the serpents bit the people, the people of Israel died (Numbers 21:6). And yet, when the people repented (Numbers 21:7), the Lord instructed Moses to, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). "So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."

The deadly pestilence had come upon Israel, yet God provided the way of escape -- a mere glance upon the bronze serpent. For those who trusted in the Lord and looked up at the bronze serpent, they were delivered from the deadly pestilence. But, for those who refused to look, the pestilence would destroy them.

God delivers from the fowler and from the deadly pestilence (verse 3), becoming a shield and buckler for those who seek refuge in Him. The shield covers them and protects them. The buckler wraps around them to keep them safe. Look at verses 5 and 6, ...

Psalm 91:5

You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

Again, we see the one who comes and attacks as well as the disease that comes to destroy. Whether they come by night or by day, the one who has placed his trust in the Lord need fear no fear.

I think of the history of Judah, when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against her. He taunted her. He said that Judah would be destroyed. He said that it was vain to trust in the LORD (2 Kings 19:8-13). And yet, Hezekiah trusted the LORD. His prayer was a marvelous expression of how the LORD was his refuge.

2 Kings 19:15-19

O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. So now, O LORD our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone.

Having affirmed that the LORD was his refuge, God took him under the shelter of his wings and protected him. And He did it in a miraculous

way, that all might know that it wasn't the great might of Hezekiah that thwarted the Assyrians. Rather, it was the mighty hand of the LORD that accomplished it all.

One night, the angel of the LORD went out among the Assyrian camp and struck dead 185,000 in the camp. It was enough to turn Assyria away from their ways. When these things took place, "Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home" (2 Kings 19:36). He knew that he couldn't match power with the awesome hand of the LORD.

That was Psalm 91 in action. When God is on your side, there is no need to fear the sudden, unexpected attack of the enemy. Nor, of the attack of the pestilence and destruction (as it speaks about in verse 6).

Psalm 91:6
nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

At this point, the plagues come to my mind. When God sent torments upon the house of Egypt. Often, God smote the Egyptians, while those of Israel were in safety. We see this in verse 10.

Psalm 91:10
no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.

For instance, take the fourth plague: the plague of flies. God sent swarms of flies upon of the houses of those in Egypt. They were in the king's house, in the servant's house, in the people's house. They swarmed all over the people and in their houses and on the ground (Exodus 8:21). But, none of the flies were found in Goshen, where Israel lived (Exodus 8:22). The pestilence struck the Egyptians, but not those in Israel.

Or, take the fifth plague: the pestilence on the livestock. Again, the hand of the Lord fell upon the Egyptian livestock: "the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks," so that "all of the livestock of the Egyptians died" (Exodus 9:3, 6). But, in the land of Israel, no animal was afflicted and none of them died (Exodus 9:6).

The same thing happened when God sent hail upon the land (the seventh plague). "The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail" (Exodus 9:25-26).

The same happened with death of the firstborn. Those who sought refuge in the LORD by brushing the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts, were spared. But, those of Egypt, who didn't put the blood on their doorposts, awoke to death in their homes: death of every firstborn. Such is the power of God. Those who take refuge in the LORD need not fear "... the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday" (Psalm 91:6).

Psalm 91:7-8
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.

The scene at the Red Sea comes into my mind. Do you remember the scene? Because of the plagues that came upon the Egyptians, they let the people of Israel go. And yet, after the Hebrews had left the land, Pharaoh had a change of mind. He said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" (Ex. 14:5)

Exodus 14:6-8
So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. 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.

And yet, the LORD protected the Israelites.

Exodus 14:19-20
The angel of God ... moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel.

All night long, this cloud prevented the Egyptian army from coming any closer. The LORD divided the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21). And the people of Israel passed through, "the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left" (Ex. 14:22). But, when the Egyptians pursued them into the sea, they were thrown into confusion and their chariot wheels were clogged (Ex. 14:24-25). Then, Moses stretched out his hand, and "the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen" (Ex. 14:28). "Of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them

into the sea, not one of them remained" (Ex. 14:28). Yet, Israel was safe and sound.

Psalm 91:7-8

A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.

They saw the wicked Egyptians receive their just reward. They were killed in the sea. Verses 11 and 12 speak of angels coming and guarding your way.

Psalm 91:11-12

For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

The New Testament speaks often of how angels are servants, designated to serve us. In Hebrews 1:14 they are described as "ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation." I love how Jesus described angels in Matthew 18:10. Regarding little ones, "their angels always see the face of [God] who is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). They are gazing at the face of the LORD, just waiting for the command to go and help the saints on earth. You never know to what extent angels have been protecting you.

Psalm 91:13

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

Who can forget Daniel? Because of His trust in the LORD, he found himself thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6). He spent an entire night in with the hungry lions. But the LORD protected Him.

These promises of protection are amazing. But, above all comes the promise of ultimate salvation. Verse 16 says, "With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." This is the promise to all who place their hope and trust in Jesus Christ. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

I think of the Pilgrims. God's hand was surely on them. No Pilgrim died on the voyage over to America—a miracle in that day and age. They had a great sense of unity. The Pilgrims were blown off course, which forced them to pen the immortal words of the Mayflower Compact, which they wrote in the cabin of the ship. The Indians in the area they landed were very hostile, yet most of them off the coast of Cape Cod had died off in a plague that swept through there a few years before the Pilgrims came. So the Pilgrims didn't have to contend with fierce Indians, which was a constant problem for other settlers in other regions. Furthermore, the land upon which these Indians lived was cleared and ready for farming. The Pilgrims met Squanto, the English-speaking Indian, who helped them in so many ways to survive. Peter Marshall tells us: "Now Squanto came and offered them his services. They were desperate. They had nothing to eat. They had no more idea how to live in this wilderness than to fly to the moon. Squanto taught them how to track eels in the wet flats when the tide went out, what berries were edible. All the Indian lore. Most important, he taught them how to plant the Indians' winter staple, corn, which Europeans had known nothing about." [8]

God's hand of protection was on the Pilgrims. They believed in the Lord, leaving their homeland in search of religious freedom, trusting in His promises. The LORD protected them.

Contrary to the Pilgrims was the Donner party. I read about them recently. The Donner party traveled in a wagon train to go West, seeking their fortune. Unlike the Pilgrims, these people weren't especially religious. Instead, they were rich and arrogant, seeking their own material prosperity. Instead of travelling the old, trusted route, they heard of a "shortcut" over the Sierra mountains--Hastings cutoff--and chose to take a different way than the rest of the caravan. This poor decision cost many their lives. An early winter came on their way. They were not prepared for the weather, and they ran into 30 feet of snow! In an early snowstorm due to poor leadership, they lost their cattle, which were buried in the snow during a snowstorm. There was little unity in the group. Even though their group was quite small, parties broke off and chose to camp several miles from each other. Half of those in the group died of starvation. The hand of God was clearly against this group. They did not hold to His promises. They lived in a way that was self-focused rather than focused on the Lord. They saw fit to find their refuge in their own strength. And they suffered for it.

May we be Pilgrims, and not like those in the Donner party. Trust in God and His protection. [9]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 26, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.fighterverses.com>

[2] http://www.thepsalm91bandana.com/About_Psalm_91.html

[3] <http://www.nbcdfw.com/weather/stories/17-Missing-in-Bastrop-Fires-1554-Homes-Destroyed-129616998.html>

[4] <http://twentytwowords.com/2012/08/19/house-survives-wildfire-despite-everything-around-it-being-utterly-scorched/>

[5] <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/your-executioner-may-laugh-you-to-scorn-for-quoting-psalm-91>

[6] Piper, *Ibid*.

[7] Warren Wiersbe, http://www.backtothebible.org/index.php/component/option,com_devotion/qid,14/task,show/resource_no,228/Itemid,75/

[8] <http://jerrynewcombe.com/column-providence%20and%20pilgrims.html>

[9] After my message, someone asked me about this illustration, contrasting the Pilgrims and the Donner party, as half of the Pilgrims died, just like half of the Donner party. I had thought about this. The difference between these two groups is that the Pilgrims set out on a dangerous journey. When they landed, there were great dangers all around! Survival was a miracle! However, the Donner party was different. Had they remained with the rest of the wagon trail, their chance of survival across the country was close to guaranteed, as many had travelled that route before. Instead, their own foolishness put them in great peril.