

In God We Trust
Psalm 91:1-16

Let me read the passage from The Message:

**You who sit down in the High God's presence,
 spend the night in Shaddai's shadow,
 Say this: "God, you're my refuge.
 I trust in you and I'm safe!"**
**That's right—he rescues you from hidden traps,
 shields you from deadly hazards.
 His huge outstretched arms protect you—
 under them you're perfectly safe;
 his arms fend off all harm.**
**Fear nothing—not wild wolves in the night,
 not flying arrows in the day,
 Not disease that prowls through the darkness,
 not disaster that erupts at high noon.
 Even though others succumb all around,
 drop like flies right and left,
 no harm will even graze you.
 You'll stand untouched, watch it all from a
 distance,
 watch the wicked turn into corpses.
 Yes, because God's your refuge,
 the High God your very own home,
 Evil can't get close to you,
 harm can't get through the door.
 He ordered his angels
 to guard you wherever you go.
 If you stumble, they'll catch you;
 their job is to keep you from falling.
 You'll walk unharmed among lions and snakes,
 and kick young lions and serpents from the
 path. "If you'll hold on to me for dear life,"
 says God,
 "I'll get you out of any trouble.
 I'll give you the best of care
 if you'll only get to know and trust me.
 Call me and I'll answer, be at your side in bad
 times;
 I'll rescue you, then throw you a party.
 I'll give you a long life,
 give you a long drink of salvation!"**

That all sounds really good, doesn't it? Yet, as I was studying this passage, I have to honestly say that I have wrestled with the truth of this passage and the

reality of what is I see elsewhere in Scripture and what I see happening around me to those who trust in God and look to Him for protection.

There is no context to put this psalm in perspective as to when it was written, nor even who wrote it. We don't have a time stamp to look at the event and say this is the author or the occasion for the writing. Some suggest that it was Moses who also wrote the preceding psalm, but there isn't any real hard evidence to support that **Psalm 91** was authored by him. Others suggest that maybe it was a priest or Levite, and that the nature of the psalm seemed to fit well with **Psalm 90** so when the psalms were compiled it seemed natural as a follow up to the words penned by Moses.

Now, when you read this psalm, it almost makes it sound like if you trust God nothing bad will happen to you, that this is your best life yet. Notice again what the psalmist says:

- Verse 3** – He will save you from the fowler's snare.
- Verse 3** – He will save you from deadly pestilence.
- Verse 5** – You will not fear the terror of night.
- Verse 5** – You will not fear the arrow by day.
- Verse 6** – You will not fear the pestilence that stalks the darkness.
- Verse 6** – You will not fear the plague that destroys at midday.
- Verse 7** – Whatever causes 10's of thousands to fall will not harm you.
- Verse 8** – You will see the wicked punished.
- Verses 9-10** – If you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will come to you.
- Verse 13** – You will tread on the lion and cobra.

Keep that in mind and let me take a brief walk with you through Scripture and note some of those who trusted God and yet had bad things happen to them. Abel trusted God and was murdered by his brother. Joseph trusted God and yet he was hauled off to Egypt as a slave and later landed himself in prison after being falsely accused.

Moses knew God face to face and found himself in exile.

David was a man after God's own heart and he was hunted by his own people and then by his own son.

Jeremiah trusted God and was thrown in a pit to die. The Apostles trusted God, but each one ended up being martyred for their faith in Christ. John was the only one who died a natural death, but only after he had been burned by oil (hoping he would die but survived) and exiled on the prison island of Patmos. Paul trusted God and Scripture recounts the many times he was persecuted, imprisoned and then martyred for his faith.

Hebrews 11 is a short record of those who had faith. At the end of the chapter we read that many were tortured, imprisoned, beaten, stoned, sawed in two, or killed by the sword. They were destitute, mistreated and persecuted for their faith.

Read the updated *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* and you discover many from the early church beginning in the 2nd century to the end of the 20th century of people whose trust in God led to their martyrdom.

According to the Esther project through Gordon-Conwell Resources and World Christian database, they estimate that some 70 million Christians have been martyred since the church began. More than half occurred in the 20th century under communist and fascist regimes, with somewhere between 100,000 and 160,000 each year.

Open Doors ministry indicates that over 300 Christians are martyred every day for their faith.

Psalm 91 doesn't seem to apply to them.

Did they lack faith? Was their faith misplaced?

Does God seem to go back on His Word?

I think we all know the answer to both. **Hebrews 11:38-40** sums it up nicely: **"The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were COMMENDED (emphasis added) for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something BETTER (emphasis added) for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."**

So when I read this psalm and the seeming ease of life for the person who trusts God and a verse like **John 16:33** where Jesus says that **"in this life you will have trouble,"** there seems to be a disconnect.

Or is there?

So how can this psalm seem to advocate trusting God resulted in deliverance versus what we see in real life, that life has its troubles? After my study, I think I understand better what **Psalm 91** is saying. In the narrow interpretation, this psalm isn't for us specifically, it's for Israel. It's a promise for God's Covenant people. If they as a nation trusted Him, He would be their protector and deliverer, their provider and peace giver.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

The rest of the chapter explains that if they will not trust or obey God, He would heap curses on them.

So while I believe this psalm is specific to Israel, I also believe there is a broader application for the Christian who trusts God as we see from **II Tim. 3:16-17** that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for instruction. Let's see what we can glean from this passage that is of benefit to us today.

Before we look at the passage, let me share a quote from Charles Spurgeon. **"Faith is triumphant in trial. When reason has her feet fastened in the stocks of the inner prison, faith makes the dungeon walls ring with her happy notes as she cries, 'I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will make music.'** Faith pulls the dark mask from the face of trouble and discovers the angel beneath. Faith looks up at the cloud and sees that 'it is with mercy and will break in blessings on her head.' There is a subject for song even in the judgments of God toward us. For, first the trial is not as *difficult as it might have been*; next, the trouble is *not as severe as we deserved*; and our affliction is *not as crushing as the burden that others have to carry*. Faith sees that in the deepest sorrow there is no punishment. There is not a drop of God's wrath in it; it is all sent in love. Faith finds love gleaming like a jewel on the breast of an angry God. Faith wears her grief 'like a badge of honor' and sings of the sweet result of her sorrows, because they work for her spiritual good. Faith says, 'For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.' So faith rides out in victory, trampling down earthly wisdom

and carnal knowledge, and singing songs of triumph where the battle rages.”

All that to say, that while we would like no bad thing to happen to us, our hearts can still resonate with the psalmist who says in **Psalm 91:1** that the person **“who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”**

Consider with me the haven we have in God.

I. THE HAVEN WE HAVE IN GOD – vv. 1-2

A haven is a harbor that provides protection from the storms of an open sea. The psalmist tells us that God is such a haven. We see that in these verses through the names the psalmist uses to describe and define what God does or who He is to the person who trusts in Him. The writer of Hebrews explains that **“without faith (trust), it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is (that He exists) and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (in faith).”** (Hebrews 11:6)

First, God as our haven is an abiding presence.

A. God As Our Haven Is An Abiding Presence – v. 1a

“He who dwells in the shadow of the Most High”

Even a new student to Scripture can quickly discover that God is always with us.
He will never leave or forsake us.
He is with us in the storms.
He walks with us in death’s dark shadow.
There is nothing to fear because He is with us.
In **Psalm 139** we can’t go anywhere, because there is no place we can turn that God isn’t already there.

Those are just a few of the many examples that remind us of God’s abiding presence.

Let me remind you again of the words of Betsy ten Boom who said **“There is no pit so deep that God isn’t deeper still.”** His abiding presence is always with us, even in our storms. He doesn’t leave us at the doorstep of trouble and tell us to have a nice journey and will meet us on the other side.

The word the psalmist chose here for God is Elyon or “Most High”. It’s a term that refers to Him as the possessor of heaven and earth. He is its Creator and as such, He has not, nor will He ever abandon what He has made. Because you are in Christ you have His abiding presence through the indwelling Holy Spirit. You belong to Him and He will always be with you, even as an ever-present help in trouble.

It has been suggested by scholars that the shelter referred to here is the Temple where God’s presence was evident in the Ark. Paul tells us that we are the temple of God and as such He is present with us all the time. That He is the Most High, means there is no one equal to Him or above Him.

This verse encourages God’s people to constantly and consciously be aware of God’s presence. It encourages us to dwell or remain in His shelter. There is no safer place. **Are you living under His shelter, or are you venturing outside on your own?** God as our haven is an abiding presence.

Second, God as our haven is an Almighty power.

B. God As Our Haven Is an Almighty Power – v. 1b

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

I like that word ‘rest.’

The Amplified translates it “remain stable and fixed.”

The KJV uses the term “abide.”

Jesus put it this way **“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28)

After being out in the sun for hours mowing, or weed whacking, or roto tilling the garden, you can see me sitting on a couple of cement blocks with my back up against the garage with a bottle of water. The place where I am sitting is shielded from the hot sun. I am resting in its shadow.

That we are in the shadow of the Almighty, suggests that we are right up next to Him as He stands

between us and the trouble we are facing. The word ‘rest’ conveys the idea of staying or living in one spot. The shadow of the Almighty also suggests this rest to be a place of peace.

Psalm 4:8 “In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

Isaiah 26:3 “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.”

Philippians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And here’s an invitation that everyone of us should accept when we face trouble: **Mark 6:31 “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, He (Jesus) said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’”**

The word the psalmist uses for God here is Shaddai – Almighty, the all-sufficient one, the One who is adequate for every situation. He is the One who supplies all our needs (**Philippians 4:19**). The one who sustains us with His grace.

II Corinthians 12:7-9 “To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’”

By God’s side, standing in His shadow, there is nothing to be afraid of. His shadow is the grace we need in our times of trouble.

God as our haven is an Almighty power.

Third, God as our haven is an able protection.

C. God As Our Haven Is an Able Protection – v. 2 “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”

Here, the psalmist uses two more names of God. The first is Jehovah – Lord. It is the name by which He revealed Himself to Moses – the I AM. He is the Lord of promise, the One who cannot lie. He is the covenant making, promise keeping Lord. He is the One who will never go back on His word, the One who said that what He had promised, He would do. Not one promise that He has made will fail. Not one promise that He has made will be altered.

Numbers 23:19 “God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and then not fulfill?”

The Hebrew people consider Jehovah to be the greatest name because He is the God who exists, the God who is eternal and unchangeable, the God who is the covenant keeper. It is a name that speaks of promise and as such that name offers protection.

John Phillips supports this by writing: **“He is the God who has pledged Himself to do certain exceeding great and wonderful things for His own, that which cannot be thwarted by any demon in hell, any adversary on earth, or any failure in us. How about that for a hiding place.”**

In this verse is the fourth name for God used by the psalmist. It’s the name Elohim – God. It’s the name used some 2700 times. It is first introduced in **Genesis 1** in the days of creation. It always appears in the plural form with a singular verb. So looking at **Genesis 1:1** we see that **“in the beginning God created”** making reference to the fact that the three persons of the Godhead – Father, Son, and Spirit – each had an active role in creating the universe. There is one God, existing in three persons. It is a name which speaks of His awesome power, that there is nothing too hard for Him. It is a name whose greatness and glory are beyond comprehension.

It is within this name that we find our refuge and fortress in time of trouble. **Verses 1 and 2** are a declaration of faith by the psalmist based on the names of God. It is a declaration of faith that we would be well advised to have as our own, to know the God in whom we trust, a God in whose name is our haven. A God who is our able protection.

As we come to **verses 3-13**, I would suggest to you something you already know, because to one degree or another, we have all experienced it. Trouble is something we cannot avoid and are not immune to. But what I would also suggest to you is something you also already know and have also experienced that no matter what peril we may face, God sees us through it. In these verses we see the hope we have in God.

II. THE HOPE WE HAVE IN GOD – vv. 3-13

Hope as it appears in the Bible is not vain or wishful thinking.

It's wishful or vain thinking to hope Michigan will repeat this year as the National football champions. It's wishful or vain thinking to hope my vehicle will someday average 30 miles to the gallon.

It is wishful or vain thinking to hope that I'll ever finish a sermon in under 30 minutes, unless there's some emergency that disrupts it.

The difference between that kind of hope and Biblical hope is what one author calls the **God factor**. Biblical hope is confident trust in what God says. That kind of hope is crucial to our faith. It all hinges on the faithfulness of God to keep His word.

In an article by Clarence Jones, Jr., he writes that Biblical hope **“gives us the ability to look at any situation and know that regardless of how it may appear God is going to come through. This is the essence of what hope is.”**

He goes on to say that when trouble comes, it comes after the hope we have in God that He'll come through on His promises and keep His word. Trouble always attacks our faith. What we need to see in these verses is the hope we have in God, and the faith we have that is sustained by trusting in Him.

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

NIV “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

While I am biking and watching the news, I unfortunately, do not get to pick what commercials are aired. One commercial is about a product men can purchase to help with baggy eye. The ad tells us that we just need to wash our face and take a little dab of

the cream and rub it in for 30 seconds and in days you'll see a noticeable difference. The commercial ends by saying that **“seeing is believing.”**

The kind of faith Scripture talks about is believing that does not require seeing first. We don't need to see it because the promise is made by the One who made it, and He stands behind what He says. You don't need a money back guarantee with Him. The hope we have believes what God and His Word says. And that's what **verses 3-4** tell us. God as our hope has amazing promises.

A. God As Our Hope Has Amazing Promises – vv. 3-4

In these verses, the psalmist talks about man-made traps like the fowler's snare, nets used to catch birds.

In the book *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*, there is the story of Father Chiniquy, who broke from the church, and how God delivered him many times from the church's attempts to trap and hurt him, intent on killing him. He was publicly stoned 23 times. They tried to ruin his character. For 18 years he was harassed by the Sheriffs, under bail, in prison awaiting lawsuits built on lies against him. He was brought before judges 32 times. Seventy-two times former colleagues brought false witness against him. Here's what he said about the allegations: **“But God be thanked, every time, from the lips of the perjured witnesses, we got the proof that they were swearing falsely at the instigation of their confessors.”** God delivered him from the fowler's snare.

The psalmist also talks about pestilence, which are diseases or plagues. I've read accounts of pastors who stayed in their parishes to help their flock during the Bubonic plague and how God spared them through all the devastation.

I have had COVID twice. Robyn has been spared even while working around patients who had the disease and living with a husband who had it as well. A coincidence? I don't think so.

The psalmist says that God covers you with His feathers. It's that picture of promised protection. Now that doesn't mean if you trust God that He will spare

us from every concocted scheme or disease, but He does promise that He will be with us in it. There is an important word in **verse 4** that speaks to His promises. It's the word **"faithfulness."** We can hope in God because He keeps His promises all the time. **Lamentations 3:23** reminds of God's great faithfulness. Our hope is in God's amazing promises.

Second, we see God as our hope has abundant peace.

B. God As Our Hope Has Abundant Peace – vv. 5-10

Those first words lay the foundation for our peace: **"You will not fear"** and then he goes on to explain what we don't have to fear. You have heard me say as I have heard said that there are 365 verses in the Bible that tell us not to fear or to be afraid or to worry or to be anxious because God is with us.

I already mentioned **Isaiah 26:3** and **Philippians 4:6-7**, both of which remind us that when we trust God, we have His peace that settles an otherwise anxious heart. His presence through the Holy Spirit, the promises and protection given because of who He is are all means by which He gives us His peace. It is abundantly available for every troubling situation we encounter like those listed in these verses. His peace is abundant.

God comes in His angelic protectors.

C. God As Our Hope Has Angelic Protectors – vv. 11-13

God is the one who commands His angelic host the task of providing protection.

Daniel knew the protection of an angel who closed the mouths of lions in the dungeon.

Caught in a violent storm at sea, Paul said an angel of God had been sent to comfort and confirm that they would be safe in the storm.

An angel was sent to Peter while in prison awaiting the dawn when he expected to be executed but was instead delivered to safety.

Even Jesus spoke about the angels who would deliver Him from crucifixion if He but called on His Father to deliver Him.

I wholeheartedly believe that it was an angel who

protected my grandfather one winter night when his ankle tether failed in the nursing home. It was supposed to sound an alarm in the dementia ward if he passed certain doors, but it didn't work and he was able to get outside. As he was walking down a road a police car pulled up and the female officer asked where he was headed, recognizing that he was from the nursing home. She got him back safely. When my parents were informed by the nursing home about what happened, they called the station to thank the officer. They said there was no female officer on duty that night. Maybe you have your own story. As those who trust in God, we have hope in God's angelic protectors.

Let me close with a couple thoughts from **verses 14-16** and the help we have in God.

III. THE HELP WE HAVE IN GOD – vv. 14-16

Two thoughts come to mind from these verses about the hope we have in God.

A. God As Our Hope Has Abounding Passion – v. 14

God is now speaking in these closing verses. And in what He says confirms the psalmist's faith. He has observed the trust of those looking to Him in their time of trouble and comments on their love for Him. He then responds with His own demonstration of love by rescuing them. **Can God confirm our faith?** That God cares for His own shows His deep love for us.

We may not be rescued from the trouble that we are experiencing but we have the promise of His abounding love for us. Such love, as we have said, means He won't abandon His people. He who loves us with an everlasting love is our help in trouble. Why? It's what we see in **verses 15-16**.

B. God As Our Hope Has Ample Provision – vv. 15-16

Whatever we are going through God has all the resources we need. **Romans 8:31-39** reminds us that nothing can separate us from His love. The greatest of those provisions is His salvation. God says He will honor such faith and that will come when we will be granted to sit on the throne (**Revelation 3:21**). We may not have a long life, but it will be a full life when we trust God as our haven, our hope, and our help.