

Psalm 91 – Study Guide¹

Psalm 91 begins with a thesis-like introduction that has the capacity to both stand wholly alone or provide a foundation for this psalm which is full of extraordinary encouragement for those who know and love their Lord.

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

From this thesis the whole of the psalm goes on to flesh out the unparalleled advantages of trusting and abiding in God until it reaches a concluding climax in which The LORD directly address the psalm’s subjects and articulates what is expected and what will be enjoyed accordingly.

Psalm 91 provides an unrestricted hopeful expectation for the one who genuinely trusts God – it puts on display just how magnificent his kind graces are for the ones who hold to him in love, who know his name, and who confidently call out to him.

“The theme of this Psalm is God’s protection of the person who cleaves to him in love.”²

Finally, by way of introduction, in examining the totality of Psalm 91 it is striking how exceptionally gracious The LORD is to his own. We need to appreciate that it is not that grace is *sufficient* but that it is *gracious* and that abundance is not to be presumed upon but wondered at. Psalm 91 provides a catalyst for these musings as it expresses this gracious care of The LORD for his own.

Structure and Outlines

David Crowe

- 91:1 The thesis or core of the Psalm – the protective blessing and joy of abiding in the care of the Most High God.
- 91:2-4 The protective care and deliverance of The LORD, my refuge.
 - 91:2 The psalmist’s personal identification with the Almighty who cares for him and all of his covenant people.
 - 91:3-4 A magnificent Deliverer who personally cares – seen through intimate deliverance and protection.
- 91:5-8 An absolute preservation and keeping of those walking in covenant obedience.
 - 91:5-6 There is nothing to fear when in the preservational care of the Almighty.
 - 91:7-8 Though many fall by the side, the righteous remain unmoved, only observing the wicked man’s recompense.
- 91:9-13 The LORD is a safe refuge and a mighty protector, dispatching his supernatural messengers to keep you and assure your victory.
 - 91:9-10 Taking refuge in The LORD secures the welfare of the beloved.
 - 91:11-13 Angelic safekeeping – providing a context of sure victory.
- 91:14-16 The LORD’s personal affirming testimony of his absolute care of those who secure refuge in him.

John MacArthur³

- I. The Lord’s Protection (91:1-13)
 - A. The Confidence (91:1-2)
 - B. The Dangers (91:3-6)
 - C. The Examples (91:7-13)
- II. The Lord’s Pledge (91:14-16)

¹ Prepared by David Crowe for Pray’s Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² The Layman’s Bible Commentary: Psalms, Volume 9. Arnold B. Rhodes. John Knox Press, 1966 (Hereafter: Rhodes), Pg.129

³ The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.824

ESV Study Bible⁴

90:1-2 God Is My Refuge.
90:3-8 He Will Protect You from Danger.
90:9-13 His Angels Will Watch over You.
90:14-16 “Because He Loves Me, I Will Deliver Him.”

Steven Lawson⁵

91:1-2 Faith in a Powerful God
91:3-13 Favor from a Protecting God
91:14-16 Fellowship with a Personal God

Keil & Delitzsch⁶

91:1-2
91:3-9a
91:9b-16

Willem VanGemen⁷

A Invitation to the Protection of God (vv.1-2)
 B Forms of Protection (vv.3-8)
A' Invitation to the Protection of God (vv.9-10)
 B' Forms of Protection (vv.11-13)
 C The Oracle of Salvation (vv.14-16)

Arnold Rhodes⁸

91:1-13 Assurance to Every Man of Faith
91:14-16 A Divine Confirmation

James Boice⁹

91:1-2 The Psalmist's Personal Faith in God
91:3-8 Trust in God Commended
91:9-13 Protection from Dangers: The Condition
91:14-16 God's Promise for Those Who Trust Him

Derek Kidner¹⁰

91:1-2 My Refuge
91:3-3-13 Your Refuge
 91:3-6 Versatile Protection
 91:7-10 Individual Protection
 91:11-13 Miraculous Protection
91:14-16 God's Pledge

⁴ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.1054-1055

⁵ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150, Volume 12. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2006 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs.89-91

⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pgs.602-603

⁷ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg.696

⁸ Rhodes, Pgs.129-130

⁹ An Expository Commentary: Psalms, Volume 2. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1996 (Hereafter: Boice), Pgs.747-752

¹⁰ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 73-150. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 2008. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs.363-365

Structure

While I have drafted five thematic breaks for my outline there appear to be other structural breaks that also necessitate attention when working through Psalm 91.

From my observation there appears to be three major units to the psalm: 91:1-4, 91:5-13, and 91:14-16, each centering on and then articulating The LORD as one's refuge.

Another thematic observation is with the transition of "persons" in the psalm's development (first person, second person, and third person). By way of the "persons" being addressed and speaking there is a clear three-part division and with each section attention needs to be given to who the antecedent of the respective pronouns are referencing as they change with each section.

90:1-2	Third Person (believers) and First Person (psalmist)
90:3-13	Third Person (The LORD), Second Person (believers), and First Person (psalmist)
90:14-16	First Person (The LORD) and Second Person (believers)

James Boice similarly draws out the structural divisions within the psalm in regard to the changing of persons. He provides the following:¹¹

90:1-2 is marked by the pronoun "I" and is expressing the psalmist's personal faith in God.

90:3-13 is marked by the pronoun "you" and is expressing a message from the psalmist to the reader.

90:14-16 is marked by the "divine pronoun I" and is expressing God's direct speech to the reader, to the ones who love and call upon him.

Keil and Delitzsch also demonstrate a similar observation of voice – their breaks are: 90:1 First Voice, 90:2 Second Voice, 90:3-8 First Voice, 90:9 Second Voice, 90:10-13 First Voice, 90:14-16 Third (Divine) Voice.¹²

Another structural element to note is that 91:1-2 appear to be setting the stage for the psalm as a whole, the first half in particular, as they provide an image of a protective bird and a military bulwark – both of which are developed on various levels through 91:10. Then in 91:11, while thematically consistent, the psalm transitions to more of an overt supernatural care and climaxes with the personal words of God to his people.

Now, I think in view of this it is proper to address the reason for my breaking 91:1 and 91:2 apart in my outline. It was on account of the seemingly larger and singular statement that 91:1 provides in the framing of the whole psalm and then 91:2's taking a personal first person addressment to the believing hearers as though to say this is my magnificent God, and as he is yours also, this what you can and should expect.

Finally, by way of structural overview one can observe an interesting dynamic employed throughout the psalm where a subject is opened or introduced and then followed by thematic parallels to strongly drive home the image and its point.

Bird (preservation): Introduced in 91:1, First Parallel 91:3, Second Parallel 91:4

Military Protection (preservation): Introduced 91:2, First Parallel 91:4, Second Parallel 91:5-6

Feet (preservation/trampling): Introduced 91:12, First Parallel 91:13, Second Parallel 91:13

Header

Psalm 91 has no authoritative header and therefore there is no information regarding authorship or historical context.

There have been some allusions to potential Davidic authorship, but nothing of enduring credibility.

The tent references for personal dwelling are interesting, but it could just be the language used here to communicate temporal dwelling and not necessarily that persons were presently dwelling in tents or even that the Temple had not been built at this time.

¹¹ Boice, Pg.747 (credit intended to extend to this whole portion)

¹² Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.601

What is clear is that the covenant community members both corporately and individually are being called upon to actively and faithfully trust The LORD and that such a disposition is fruitful and blessed – in preservation and in fullness of life.

91:1 The thesis or core of the Psalm – the protective blessing and joy of abiding in the care of the Most High God.

Psalm 91:1 beautifully weaves together its words and naturally communicates very strongly because of this. Therefore, I think it is profitable to take the time to examine these words individually and then again see them woven together as a whole.

Dwells: settles, sits, lives, inhabits, remain. An occupied place of residency for an unqualified range of time (sitting to settling).

Shelter: secret(ly) for the advantage of going undetected - presumably the insulated protections of acting with the knowledge of others; protection, covers/conceals.

Most High: almost an indirect reference of reverence for God (properly esteeming, but not quite the intimacy known by the covenant community), of unequal caliber or consequence (the greatest, most elevated, or distinguished), sometimes used in a synonymous coupling with The LORD - clearly identifying the two titles as belonging to the one person of God and thereby also demonstrating the proper magnificence of this esteeming title (Most High) - a strong pattern in the Psalms, this title speaks of exultation.

Abide: to stay or remain.

Shadow: shelter/protection (a picture produced from finding a covering that would produce shade - from what I see) - it appears to be an image of The LORD providing a magnificent covering and that under such we remain or abide in its casting shadow - that which insulates is also shading.

A similar image to the one implored in this passage were used by David in several Psalms

Psalm 17:8 "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the *shadow* of your wings...."

Psalm 36:7 "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the *shadow* of your wings."

Psalm 57:1 "Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in the *shadow* of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by." Here we see the illustration quite clearly - It is not the shadow itself that is providing refuge, but that which casts the shadow where he abides - the shadow is a symbol of the refuge and protection.

Psalm 63:7 "...for you have been my help, and in the *shadow* of your wings I will sing for joy."

We also see the antithesis to this in Isaiah's rebuke to Israel, "'Ah, stubborn children,' declares the LORD, who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the *shadow* of Egypt!" Isaiah 30:1-2

Finally, the image that is in root form here and that develops in the psalm (shadow from wings) is seen in Isaiah 34:15 "There the owl nests and lays and hatches and gathers her young in her *shadow*...."

Almighty: both a title that God chose to self-identify by and that the Patriarchs made use of too in referencing the unparalleled powerful God; this is perhaps no clearer than in Exodus 6 when The LORD addresses Moses, "God spoke to Moses and said to him, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God *Almighty*, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them.'" Exodus 6:2-3

So we have a verse that is dense in language of safe habitation (dwells, shelter, abide, and shadow) and that provides just why this is the best place to be found and remain, because it is the presence of the Most High God, the Almighty. Further this is an intimate safekeeping, it is his shelter and his presence whose proximity and protective posturing cast the shadow under which one finds solace.

Now it is proper to immediately inquire by what means one might so dwell and abide. This is answered by The LORD at the end of the psalm, but the majority of the psalm will advance with the understanding that one is so dwelling and abiding and as such what they can expect.

91:2-4 The protective care and deliverance of The LORD, my refuge.

91:2 The psalmist's personal identification with the Almighty who cares for him and all of his covenant people.

Here we begin with a first person account of how the psalmist has or anticipates entreating The LORD. Note that he appears to exclusively be affirming his dependent relationship with The LORD, no inquiry, no request, and no overtly expressed needs – just acknowledging his safe keeper in whom he can trust.

The psalmist calls The LORD his refuge and fortress and his God – all three titles reflecting their independently trustworthy elements by their very name and nature. Refuge being a place of safekeeping and shelter in time of need, fortress being the mighty structure to withstand onslaughts and attacks of enemies, and God who is chief divine to whom all will give an account (note also that identifying that The LORD is his God is to state that he is one God¹³ and that being one God he is also the only God and therefore wholly trustworthy).

The psalmist is affirming from personal testimony that God is he in whom he trusts.

Trust: to apply absolute or full confidence and the pattern for those trusting The LORD has been deliverance, blessing, salvation, and rejoicing. Further it is the overwhelming testimony throughout the Psalms that the psalmists declare their trust in The LORD God of Israel - a fitting declaration for a book of prayer and praise, a book that gives a backstage vantage point of the soul of the faithful, a people marked by their trusting in God.

To more completely frame the concept of trusting The LORD God we can look to a wonderful example with King Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:5. "*He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel*, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him."

We then later see this trust put on dramatic display when Sennacherib's messengers rebuke the people of Judah for trusting in The LORD and urged them to not let Hezekiah direct their trust to The LORD... Hezekiah responds with prostrating himself before The LORD, wholly trusting him... and Judah is magnificently delivered by their trustworthy God. *See 2 Kings 18.*

"The term my God, in whom I trust displays the utter reliance that is the ideal of biblical faith."¹⁴

Sidebar: The Names of God in 91:1-2

Steven Lawson sees the names and titles attributed to The LORD here as communicating elements of his character and attributes: Most High – God's strength and sovereignty; Almighty – God is the active and self-existent One; and God/Elohim – the strong one, mighty leader, and supreme deity.¹⁵ These are all contributing to the means by which one can confidently trust God.

Finally, we are seeing here the transition from a personal affirmation of faith to a call to others in their personal walk of faith¹⁶

91:3-4 A magnificent Deliverer who personally cares – seen through intimate deliverance and protection.

For or because... he is trustworthy for/because... he delivers.

Deliverance is a consequential element throughout Psalm 91 even when it or even its synonyms are not immediately present – its thematic elements are clearly present as to deliver is to rescue, to provide victorious preservation, and to save. The LORD delivers and this is a dominating element throughout.

¹³ Deuteronomy 6:4

¹⁴ ESV SB, Pg.1054

¹⁵ Lawson, Pg.89

¹⁶ Kidner, Pg.364

Here however the direct treatment of deliverance is present as immediately the psalmist addresses the actions of his trustworthy God: he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and he will deliver you from the deadly pestilence. This is not a recalling of what has happened, but anticipation of what will happen.

The snare of a fowler would be an image for the scheming of an overt opponent or enemy who would proactively seek to undermine or snuff out the welfare of the righteous.

Note that a snare is a reasonable tool for a fowler - not something used to abuse, but a tool to capture his prey. For a fowler to use a snare is to act consistently with what he is and does just as the wicked are conducting themselves consistently when they would seek to undermine the welfare of the righteous, but The LORD delivers.

Note also the continued use of imagery for birds from the protective shadow (91:1), to the attempted snaring (91:3), and next the safekeeping under his pinions and the refuge of his wings (91:4).

The next illustrated element of deliverance is from the deadly or destructive pestilence or plague.

Deadly pestilence is more a natural threat and not one that is necessarily subject to be inflicted by enemies, but because this is a fallen world. However, there were consistent applications of pestilence in judgment as this is a tool of God and not of man.

We see this application of pestilence/plague as a tool of God in several places - the following provides a sampling of this application.

Exodus 9	A plague that killed the livestock of Egypt (but not of Israel as they were supernaturally preserved).
Leviticus 26	A warning to Israel that pestilence will be a judgment for disobedience.
Numbers 14	The LORD threatens to strike down all of Israel with a pestilence in judgment.
Deuteronomy 28	A warning to Israel that pestilence will be a judgment for disobedience.
2 Samuel 24	The LORD sends a pestilence against Israel in judgment and 70,000 men died.
Jeremiah 29	The LORD judges his people with sword, famine, and pestilence.
Ezekiel 5	The LORD judges his people with sword, pestilence, and scattering of the survivors (sword, famine, and pestilence is present in 6,7).

Continuing with the actions of the trustworthy God the psalmist employs the image of a bird using its wings to protect another and this image is immediately followed by a parallel image of refuge being secured under the bird's wings. Further, with this image we see the second of three strategically applied uses of refuge (a major element of the psalm and a structural marker).

Now, the concept of finding refuge under The LORD's wings might be difficult to tether to actual life and application. Therefore, it is helpful to see an overt example of what this looks like: it looks like a young Moabite woman forsaking her father's home and wholly identifying with the Covenant People of Israel as so identified by Boaz, "The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, *under whose wings you have come to take refuge!*" Ruth 2:12

No husband, no home, no people of her own. Only refuge under the wings of a trustworthy God.

Next we observe The LORD's faithfulness in the context of his trustworthiness and up to now The LORD's character qualities/attributes have been addressed in the form of their action (he will deliver and he will cover), but here it is a direct reference to the quality/attribute of faithfulness itself (this as opposed to "he will be faithful"). However, this quality/attribute does take action - "it is" a shield and a buckler. In other words, the faithfulness of God is a means of active protection from hostile assault. Its preservation is through outright and direct defense: shield and buckler. This dual application of image is not unlike 91:2 (refuge and fortress) - shield and buckler, almost redundant items, different, but of a like nature.

Faithfulness: truthful, trustworthy.

Note that the faithfulness of God is the surety that he will do as he has said – he will fulfil his word and he will maintain his covenants.

91:5-8 An absolute preservation and keeping of those walking in covenant obedience.

91:5-6 There is nothing to fear when in the preservational care of the Almighty.

Here there is a listing of preservational blessings that are enjoyed:

Not fearing the terror of the night.

Not fearing the arrow that flies by day.

A contrasting or balancing parallel (fears of the night and fears of the day).

Not fearing the pestilence that stalks in darkness.

Not fearing the destruction that wastes at noonday.

A contrasting or balancing parallel (fear of the darkness and fears of the noonday)

Note that these two parallels parallel each other.

What is clear is that there is an absolute nature to the preservational and safekeeping by God for his people. This is observed through the diversity of dangers and the scope of time – both comprehensively laid out through parallel references. However, what is not quite as clear is the precise nature of these images beyond them being of a like nature to those elements of 91:3-4 where it was both an overt enemy and natural dangers.

It appears that these are very general and ominous examples that are framed with the full span of the natural experience... I would presume that the intent is to express a comprehensive comfort from all the various things that threaten one's life or welfare in their natural existence.

Various commentators offer a variety of conclusions, but none that are particularly satisfying. However, the NET Bible sees some of this language as the language of warfare and siege including some of the tactical elements of striking at different times of day or night. Continuing with this conclusion they go on to state that the noonday infliction could be a pestilence like outbreak that entrapped cities were more vulnerable to while under siege.¹⁷ This is thematically reasonable, but even in this context the epidemic is not a tool of man, but of the natural world under the direct control of its Creator.

Finally, at the risk of being overly simplistic, what we have is some terrifying language that lacks the reach to affect the beloved. It is the ravenous beast who is very much an active threat, but whose chain restricts its capacity to pursue and overtake – these are real threats, but ones that are restricted by the Almighty.

The tension therefore is how does this comprehensive care work itself out... as the faithfulness of God does not diminish when hardships, challenges, and like things do come. Further, we see throughout the Psalms that there is no shortage of such experiences by many walking in faithfulness themselves. So there is a tension present and we will address this shortly as we continue to work through the psalm.

91:7-8 Though many fall by the side the righteous remain unmoved, only observing the wicked man's recompense.

This appears to be a continued reference back to the pestilence and destruction, possibly also the language of warfare. Note that though these numbers appear exorbitant for a context of warfare, recall similar language regarding Saul having killed his thousands and David his ten thousands (1 Samuel 18).

Whatever the threat, be it pestilence, warfare or both, the point is that it is very substantial and will not have been able to authoritatively access the one who is trusting God.

Further, maintaining a contextual flow it would appear that this pestilence or threat will ravish the wicked; and it appears to be regarded as a just due, a recompense against them, and will be regarded as such and not just an unknown tragedy. It is both a reflection of preservation and justice.

¹⁷ NET Bible Notes

Further, because the beloved's offenses have been accounted for and they themselves have been justified they are not subject to judgment. Therefore, it is stated that he will only look with his eyes and that this is the extent of his experience with these matters - no contact, no struggling with it, just observing it.

In terms of Redemptive History Israel would have had a dramatic point of recollection regarding like incidents from the judgment experience of Egypt and the Exodus account – when the nation surrounding them (Egypt) suffered extraordinary plagues and disasters all the while they endured unharmed to the final culmination of death surrounding them and they themselves were left alive and strong, untouched by so many of these severe plagues, unaffected observers. Other times bear this out too and while not having the historical context of the dating of this particular psalm we nevertheless can recall the angels of God wiping out whole armies in 1 Kings 19 and the terrifying picture of divine judgment in Ezekiel 9 where destroyers are sent out to kill all who were not broken over the offenses of Jerusalem. Each of these being examples of this, “You will only look/observe with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.”

91:9-13 The LORD is a safe refuge and a mighty protector, dispatching his supernatural messengers to keep you and assure your victory.

91:9-10 Taking refuge in The LORD secures the welfare of the beloved.

Continuing with this narrative is the distinguishment between the one enjoying grace and the wicked: (because) they have made The LORD their dwelling place, their refuge. Finding solace and refuge in The LORD is not consistent with wicked behavior - such seeking is indicative of certain character qualities and finding oneself in this place also works an effectual work that includes experiencing the fruits for divine preservation.

There is also an enthusiastic editorial notation as the psalmist jumps in here again and appears to be excited to declare that he too has so trusted The LORD and he is his refuge. Here also the psalmist refers to The LORD as the Most High as he did in 91:1. It is the Most High God in whom he has found his safe dwelling.

Note that here is also a coupling together of refuge and dwelling place - seemingly to emphasize the larger context of this good fortune. It is rooted in the relationship of one trusting the trustworthy God and taking solace and refuge in him, which is also apparently a means of abstaining from evil and therefore its consequences too.

It is further articulated that on account of this entrusting oneself to The LORD, no evil will be allowed to befall them or plague come near their tent. Therefore, this must be a trust rooted in genuine and redeeming faith so as to be so kept and so preserved and to distinguish them from evil.

Finally, this element appears to be the cap of a larger subtheme of plague and pestilence that perhaps covers from 91:5-10.

Plague: divine hardship imposed on one under judgment, or disease which is natural in this fallen world (particular emphasis on leprosy), even stripes of discipline.

Sidebar: Tension of Complete Deliverance and Difficult Experiences

As alluded to earlier there is an inherent tension to such spectacular language of preservation and safekeeping in view of the experience that exceeds from common to universal, namely the godly and the faithful do experience hardship and suffering in this world. Regarding this Willem VanGemeran states, as John MacArthur has, that the hope in Psalm 91 is that there can be confidence that nothing happens to the beloved and trusting without the Lord's knowledge, and nothing escapes the ordinances of his will.¹⁸ I do concur, but I think that it's imperative to not just make this statement and expect it to stand alone as it can have the appearance of an exception with the intent of “rescuing the psalm.” Whereas the statement stands because of the testimony of the rest of the Psalter and the Scriptures as a whole. It stands because of

¹⁸ VanGemeran, Pg.699

the expected blessings expressed in Psalm 1, because The LORD demands submission to the Son in Psalm 2, because though the man of God will have to travail dark valleys his Good Shepherd is with him in Psalm 23, because The LORD hears and delivers from great distress in Psalm 34, because The LORD is King in Psalm 72, and because amidst the terrible struggles that will come our bearings are secured in truth per Psalm 73.

Curiously James Boice takes an altogether different conclusion within the same family of possibilities, that this is not an absolute deliverance from all like things, but a “habitual deliverance.”¹⁹ In other words, the consistent pattern of the beloved is that they are consistently enjoying a like deliverance, but not necessarily every time – it is a defining mark in terms of consistency.

Now, while Boice had an interesting resolution to the apparent tension it appears to be a rebranding of the same conclusion, but less intimate and more demanding in terms of resolving with the text. I am sympathetic to his statement, but find it insufficient.

91:11-13 Angelic safekeeping – providing a context of sure victory.

Thematically this section appears to make a general tie in with the larger theme of keeping and preservation as plagues and like matters are not necessarily physical threats in the same way that this image of being preserved from incidental physical accident/injury.

We observe here that The LORD will in some way give charge or imperative instructions to his angels to guard/protect those entrusting themselves to him in faith. This is not restricted to “special persons” – it is qualified only by trusting believers.

Angels: supernatural creatures entrusted as special messengers and agents on behalf of The LORD - possessing unique abilities not enjoyed by natural man.

Without further qualification we see angels’ role in protecting, “the angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.” Psalm 34:7

We also observe that angels serve as agents for discipline and justice, “Let them be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away! Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!” Psalm 35:5-6 and “He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.” Psalm 78:49

Guard: to keep, watch, or care.

The means by which the angels are providing preservational care is articulated here: on their hands bearing them up - keeping them from so much as striking their foot against a stone. Likely an image of preservation and deliverance, but not necessarily an actual event that would be expected to happen. In view of this it may be a fair question to consider if it was in this regard that Satan was abusing the context or in another matter. Might they have literally and actually bore one up as deemed necessary? Possibly, but it appears from the revelation that we have available that most angelic intervention is not necessarily so directly recognized. The idea appears to be deliverance and intervention in safekeeping more than how and when. Further, the larger issue is not an angelic spectacle, but the dispatching of a tool in service of the God who is trustworthy and this is among his chosen means to so demonstrate his faithfulness.

Psalm 91:11-12 in the Temptations of Jesus

We again see the need to balance these magnificent graces and words of preservational care with the whole of Scripture. This is seen when 91:11-12 are abused by none other than Satan himself. Note that what he is doing is taking a passage in its immediate context without regard to the larger context of the Psalms and the Scriptures as a whole. It is a text of preservation and blessing in keeping the beloved safe and secure. However, just as the verses do not stand independent

¹⁹ Boice, Pg.748

of the psalm, so neither does the psalm stand independent from the Scriptures. Psalm 91 is not in conflict with the many other psalms cited in my addressing of 91:10 above and neither is it in conflict with Deuteronomy 6:16. We are called to be mighty in the Scriptures not a *Scripture*.

Appearing to continue the thread of angelic preservation the psalmist states that while the foot is preserved from injury it will itself injure.

Treading on the lion.

Treading on the adder.

Trampling underfoot the young lion.

Trampling underfoot the serpent.

So what are these more intensive images portraying? While this is not a spectacular or overly satisfying answer, it is not clear. There is no shortage of allegorical like speculation, but it appears less clear to me. You have parallel references for severely threatening creatures which are put under submission and defeated with the feet that have been divinely preserved from striking a rock – preserved and powerful. This appears to be the core of the matter and it is centered on a pattern where we observe the introduction of a subject (91:12) followed by emphatic parallels (91:13). We see therefore that The LORD has provided a means of both preservation and unimaginable victory, treading and trampling on powerful and dangerous opposition.

Steven Lawson qualifies as much as I feel comfortable doing by stating that these images are not to be taken literally, but as a figurative image of the sure victory over their enemies.²⁰

So we have observed preservation from the obscure but wildly dangerous threats (91:5-7) and now victory over that which man would naturally flee from in reasonable fear, but to which he claims victory.

91:14-16 The LORD's personal affirming testimony of his absolute care of those who secure refuge in him.

"The fullness and depth of his redemption find reality in those who long for his redemption."²¹

This begins the final section which is The LORD speaking directly regarding the one who trusts him and what he will directly/personally affirm he will do for such a one. Further details regarding this relationship are also drawn out throughout this section (91:14-16).

This section starts off with almost a cause and effect relationship of action:

Because he holds fast to me in love 91:14.

I will deliver him 91:14.

I will protect him 91:14.

Because he knows my name 91:14.

I will answer him when he calls to me 91:15.

I will be with him in trouble 91:15.

I will rescue him 91:15.

I will honor him 91:15.

I will satisfy him with long life 91:16.

I will show him my salvation 91:16.

The LORD is pleased to act and he states very clearly for whom he acts: the one holds fast to him in love and the one who knows his name.

²⁰ Lawson, Pg.91

²¹ VanGemeren, Pg.700

This “holding fast love” is a love that is expressing desire, a pursuing love in various contexts. Further, as the usage of this term appeared to bear out in other passages, both Willem VanGemeran and John MacArthur identify this love as a deep longing love – specifically a deep longing for God, a clinging to God.²²

This love fosters deliverance and protection from The LORD.

The beloved know The LORD's name.

“To know his name is to recognize his revealed character.”²³

To have a more personal/intimate awareness of The LORD, to be in relationship with him, a relationship that bears the fruit of proper fear and trust.

1 Kings 8:43 The nations knowing The LORD's name and fearing him.

Psalm 9:10 "And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Psalm 33:21 "For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name."

The fleshing out of the relationship continues including its wonderful certainties:

Calls are answered.

In trouble he is present

He rescues.

He honors.

We observe here that there are magnificent assurances: calling and being answered (rings very clearly through of Jesus' own words in the gospel accounts regarding prayers and petitions) and being present with him during trouble.

Not to detract from these kind graces, but it is very important to take note of these assurances in view of the earlier elements of the psalm as they make it plain that it is not that there will be an outright absence of trouble, but that The LORD will answer in times of trouble and he will be present in such times. However, as also articulated above he will also keep his own through the trouble - preserving them from the more extreme elements of trouble's potential.

Further it is critical to recognize that for one to be rescued there has to have been a need for rescuing, something has happened that there is a need of rescuing and The LORD personally expresses that he will do just this for those who hold fast to him in love and know his name.

The undoing of Trouble, Distress, Adversity

Psalm 9:9-10 "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of *trouble*. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you."

Psalm 34:6 "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his *troubles*. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and *delivers* them."

Psalm 34:17 "When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their *troubles*."

Psalm 37:39 "The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of *trouble*."

Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in *trouble*."

Psalm 50:15 "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of *trouble*; I will *deliver* you, and you shall glorify me."

Psalm 86:7 "In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me."

Psalm 120:1 "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me." Psalm 120:1

The psalm continues from here, going beyond rescuing or delivering to honoring. The LORD is pleased to honor his faithful. An inconceivable grace that the only one worthy of honor is pleased to confer honor on the one he has rescued.

²² MacArthur, Pg.825; VanGemeran, Pg.700

²³ Rhodes, Pg.130

VanGemeran states that the “honors” here are rewards from wise living,²⁴ and this would appear to be a fitting contrast with the observation of the wicked receiving their own just recompense (91:8). However, at this time rather than just affirming this grace it should be quite striking that The LORD of glory chooses to reward any. Too often our worship would appear to communicate that redemption just was not enough, that divine reward is insufficient, that we want more and we want it now. May a proper view of God and his kind workings restore a proper perspective and preparation for worship of the trustworthy God who delivers and rewards.

The conclusion is that The LORD will satisfy him with long life and show him his salvation.

With length of days he will be satisfied or filled. This can stand to mean more than just many days, but full and satisfied days.²⁵

Finally the most magnificent kindness is stated (better than safekeeping, better than freedom from plagues, better than superior victories) the beloved of God will see his salvation and God has said so himself.

The believing have seen the recompense of the wicked (91:8) and now The LORD will show him his salvation (91:16) Salvation: God's saving and powerful deliverance.

Salvation is also said to include all the blessings of God – primary emphasis being on immediate context, but comprehensive in application.²⁶

Conclusion

Psalms 91 provides the believer an exuberant confidence in our faithful God's comprehensive provision and care. So much so that we too might burst into the conversation with the psalmist stating, “the Most High, who is my refuge...” (91:9) as it is a precious reality to testify that, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.” (91:1). However, this also provides a clearer context and understanding of the exceptional pain of the Messiah's words to the Covenant People to whom this first came. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matthew 23:37-39) May we be found faithful to plead for the Israelites whose hearts are hardened to these precious realities even as we find joy in the shadow of the Almighty's wings. It is a kind grace that we enjoy this high privilege and a tragedy when we fail to see it as such. Lord keep our hearts grateful even as you keep us from the plague, the arrows, and the snares.

²⁴ VanGemeran, Pg.701

²⁵ Boice, Pg.752

²⁶ Rhodes, Pg.130