

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Psalm 91 – Part 1

I. Introduction: Today we begin our study through the 91st Psalm. This Psalm is one of the most beloved of Psalms and it is rich with outstanding promises from the Lord. Before we actually begin our study, it's important that we understand some things about the Psalms in general. What is a Psalm? Scholar James Smith writes: **"The term *psalmos* was used in the Greek translation to render the Hebrew *mizmor*, the technical term for a song sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments."**¹ The actual Hebrew word, however, is *tehillim*, which means; **"praises" or "songs of praise."**² The book of Psalms is sometimes called the song book of the Old Testament. Another very important fact about the book of Psalms is the fact that it is a book about the Lord Jesus Christ. Roger Ellsworth writes;

"And what is its message? The Book of Psalms, as is the case with every other book of the Bible, is a message about the Lord Jesus Christ. We must find the Lord Jesus here because he found himself here. As he walked with two of his disciples on the day of his resurrection, Jesus 'expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24:27). Later that day he appeared to other disciples and said: 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me' (Luke 24:44)."³

II. Who wrote Psalm 91?

A. The author is uncertain. Some scholars believe that David may have wrote it. Jewish scholars, however, generally believe it was Moses. We know that Moses wrote **Psalm 90** which makes it the oldest Psalm, around 1410 BC. If Moses wrote **Psalm 91**, it too, would be amongst the oldest of Psalms. Derek Kidner writes;

"This is a psalm for danger: for times of exposure and encirclement or of challenging the power of evil. Some of its language, of strongholds and shields, reminds us of David, to whom the Lxx ascribes it; other phrases echo the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, as did Psalm 90; but it is in fact anonymous and timeless, perhaps all the more accessible for that."⁴

III. The Main Theme – This is referred to as the **"Psalm of Protection."** Expounding on this, Craig Broyles writes:

"The dominant image describing the obligation of the believer is that of taking 'refuge' (vv. 1–2, 9, cf. v. 4)....God's protection is further spelled out by images of a hiding place, a shadow from the burning sun, a military fortress (all in vv. 1–2), a bird protecting her young (v. 4a), military defenses (v. 4b), and angels (vv. 11–12). The images depicting threat derive from a hunt (the fowler's snare, v. 3a), disease (the deadly pestilence, v. 3b; the pestilence and the plague, v. 6), battle (your shield and rampart, which protect against the arrow that flies by day, vv. 4–5), and deadly animals (the lion and the cobra, the great lion and the serpent, v. 13). The variety of images allows this psalm to be used for any situation of threat."⁵

IV. Exposition.

A. Verse 1- **"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."**

1. The word **"dwells"** means; **"to live, inhabit, dwell, stay."**⁶ So, the Psalmist is referring to one who lives or stays in the **"secret place."** What is the **"secret place?"** This is defined as;

¹ James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co., 1996), 183.

² William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2nd Edition, 1996), 430.

³ Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Psalms*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 13.

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalm 73-150: A Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1973), 331.

⁵ Craig C. Broyles, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1999),

⁶ William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 953.

“hiding place, secret place, shelter; covering, veil”⁷ Many translations use the word **“shelter.”** This speaks of staying in a place of closeness with God. In bringing this over to the New Testament, the walk of divine love is the shelter, the realm of closeness with God.

“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” – I John 4:16 (cf. John 15:1-12; II John 6).

2. **“...the Most High...”** – This name for God is one of the most common names for God in the Old Testament. It was first introduced in **Genesis 14:18-20** where Melchizedek is called **“...the priest of God Most High...” (verse 18)** and, in turn, blessed **“...Abram of God Most High...” (verse 19)**. After that, Melchizedek blessed (or, praised) God Most High, Who had delivered Abraham’s enemies into his hand. **(verse 20)**. Each name for God reveals a certain aspect of His character. The Hebrew is ***El-Elyon***. Concerning this name, Dr. Lester Sumrall writes:

“This name Elyon literally means ‘supreme God’ or ‘most loved God.’ Notice why Melchizedek believes God is the ‘most high’ and the ‘possessor of heaven and earth.’ He points out to Abram in verse 20 that God ‘hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand.’ And when you consider the frightful odds that Abram was up against—three hundred and eighteen household servants to fight the armies of the mightiest nations of that day (verses 1, 14)—you realize how great Abram’s God had to be! Pagan kings believed their gods helped them in battle. If they were defeated, they believed it was because their enemy’s god was stronger than their own. So Melchizedek knew he spoke on good authority when he said Abram served ‘the Most High God,’ *Elyon*.”⁸

3. **“...shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”**

- a. The word **“abide”** means; **“lodge, spend the night.”**⁹

- b. The word **“shadow”**; **“conveys the ideas of shade, protection, and defense”**¹⁰

“Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

Psalm 91:1 – New Living Translation

- c. **“...the Almighty.”** – Here we have a second name for God in this Psalm. The Hebrew for this name is, ***El-Shaddai***. God first revealed Himself this way to Abram as is recorded in **Genesis 17:1** in regard to the covenant He had made with Abram. The word ***El*** is the singular for ***Elohim*** which some scholars define as; **“all-Powerful Creator.”** Regarding the word **“Shaddai”**, Nathan Stone writes:

“[T]he title *Shaddai* signifies one who nourishes, supplies, satisfies. Connected with the word for God, *El*, it then becomes the ‘One mighty to nourish, satisfy, supply.’ Naturally with God the idea would be intensified, and it comes to mean the One who “sheds forth” and “pours” out sustenance and blessing. In this sense, then, God is the all-sufficient, the all-bountiful.”¹¹

1) When we put this together we could say that God is the all-Power Nourisher, Sustainer and Supplier as we **“...dwell in the secret place of the Most High**

and

abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

⁷ Ibid., 1004.

⁸ Lester Sumrall, *The Names of God* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 65-66.

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, “1096 לַיְלִי” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 474.

¹⁰ John E. Hartley, “1921 שַׁדַּי” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 767.

¹¹ Nathan Stone, *Names of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1944), 34.