

Session 6



The Protection of God's Name

THE POINT

We can trust God to strengthen and help us.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My kids called me “Safety Man” with a grin. Through the years, I’ve taken personal risks on dangerous mission fields and in other settings. Yet, after our children were born, I became apprehensive about their safety and was somewhat overprotective. Although I tried to be reasonable, at times I may have gone overboard.

One incident put matters into perspective. While my wife and I were on a trip, our daughter experienced a serious auto accident near her college. Our first reaction was to go home. I had to protect our child. God reminded me that if I had been sitting beside her, I could not have prevented the accident. If God didn’t guard our children, my efforts would be futile. We prayed with her over the phone and committed her to the Lord.

Nationwide, security has become one of the primary issues in personal choices and public policy. While we should take reasonable measures to protect our families and others, only God can truly ease our minds. We can trust Him in all sorts of situations with our families and with our lives. Placing our faith in Him, we have peace.

QUESTION 1:

What are some things people look to for security?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

PSALM 91:1-6

¹ The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say concerning the LORD, who is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust: ³ He himself will rescue you from the bird trap, from the destructive plague. ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers; you will take refuge under his wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ the plague that stalks in darkness, or the pestilence that ravages at noon.

We might sleep better by avoiding newscasts before bedtime. From local crime to national economic distress to global conflicts, airways scream bad news. Many people rate safety as their chief concern. The writer of Psalm 91 understood our anxieties and shared how to rest in the security of God.

The first two verses testify to God's faithful protection. The speaker then offered advice for the reader. Finally, God interjected His promise of protection in the last three verses. The psalm assures us that God cares for all who place their trust in Him. As the basis for his confidence, the psalmist emphasized four names of God:

- 1. The Most High.** Among nations who believed in many gods, the Hebrews believed in one true God. He is the *Most High*—above all others.
- 2. The Almighty.** People of faith make their dwelling place in the "shadow of the Almighty." Transliterated as *Shaddai*, this name means "the all-powerful One."

3. LORD. "LORD" in capital letters represents God's covenant name. It translates the word *YHWH*, sometimes rendered *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. We can depend on God not because of our merit, but because of His relationship with us.

4. My God. The psalmist also employed the name *Elohim* for God in verse two. Moses used this name in Genesis when referencing the Creator. Because of God's personal relationship with us and His powerful protection of us, we can put our trust in Him.

The writer assured readers they could depend on the Lord. Two word pictures expressed how God interacted with His people:

- God was the Rescuer who delivered them like a bird from a trap; God rescued His people from natural plagues and calamities, as He did from their enemies.
- The second metaphor likens God to a mother bird stretching to protect its young. God will cover us with "his feathers" when we "take refuge" under His wings.

As a result of God's dependable love, we have no reason to fear. The psalmist listed four types of hazards: the terror of the night, the arrow that flies by day, the plague that stalks in darkness, and the pestilence that ravages at noon. His point wasn't to make an exhaustive list but to represent various types of danger that occur day or night. During any of these situations, we can be at peace because of God's care.

QUESTION 2:

What does it look like to dwell and rest in God's protection?

PSALM 91:9-13

⁹ Because you have made the LORD—my refuge, the Most High—your dwelling place, ¹⁰ no harm will come to you; no plague will come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will give his angels orders concerning you, to protect you in all your ways. ¹² They will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the young lion and the serpent.

Most people desire peaceful lives. Far from being sedentary, *peace* means the active elimination of conflict. In a fallen world, we commonly encounter opposition from people and circumstances. Despite challenging situations, believers can rest in God's power because He is able to keep us secure.

This passage isn't a universal promise that harm will never come to people who trust in God. Even when we trust the Lord, we can—and do—encounter pain, suffering, and death. However, we can depend on God's love and power to intercede for us. Sometimes He protects us from evil. Sometimes He strengthens us in the midst of danger. Sometimes He uses our reaction to pain to encourage others.

The point of this passage involves the intentional choice of making the Lord our dwelling place. Repeating elements of the preceding section, the psalmist emphasized names of God to focus on God's attributes. Using the covenant

name of God—*YHWH*—the writer reminded God's people of their faith relationship to Him. Because of our relationship with Him, we can rely on His consistent faithfulness.

The psalmist reiterated his basis of confidence because the "Most High" was his refuge. A shelter from storms of human or natural origin, our God can overcome any danger we encounter. We demonstrate faith by making Him our dwelling place.

Some people may misconstrue verse 10 to be an absolute promise they will never experience harm or problems. Consequently, when they experience trauma or illness, their faith wavers. God allows us to go through difficulties, but He never abandons us. He strengthens and upholds us. In many instances, God delivers us. In all cases, He remains faithfully present with us. As Paul reminded the Romans, God works all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).

Verses 11-12 can be applied in two ways. In the immediate context, the psalmist illustrated how God lifts us up to save us from danger. God sometimes uses angelic beings to intercede for us. The reference to dashing one's foot against a rock demonstrates the way God cares even about our steps.

We also recognize this passage as being a part of Satan's temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:6). The devil misused Scripture for his nefarious purposes. Testing Jesus's trust of the Father, Satan tried to get Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the temple. Reaching back to this passage, he sought to make Jesus put the Father to the test. Christ understood the intention of Psalm 91:11-12 and refused to be tricked. He knew God's Word cannot be employed to force God into a box or make Him behave as we want.

God's angels supported Jesus in His trials, as they do us. In the wilderness temptation, they ministered to Jesus after He successfully stood against the enemy. God also uses supernatural forces to help us. The descriptions of protection

in verse 13 exemplify ways God intercedes on our behalf. We can rest securely in the presence of the Lord because of several truths:

- The Lord established a covenant relationship with us in Christ.
- The Most High possesses supreme power because He is above all.
- We have security by remaining in Him.
- We can experience life without fear because God cares for us.

Our confidence rests not in our abilities, but in His loving power. Our role is to remain in Him and trust in His faithfulness.

QUESTION 3:

What challenges have you been able to overcome because of God's protection?

PSALM 91:14-16

¹⁴ Because he has his heart set on me, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name. ¹⁵ When he calls out to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and give him honor. ¹⁶ I will satisfy him with a long life and show him my salvation.

Responding to the psalmist's statement of faith, God interjected a response. Using the third person could apply the statements to the writer or the reader. In fact, it applies to all who have

set their hearts on God. The list of promises is not all-inclusive but represents ways God works on our behalf. Each statement portrays God's assurances to people who trust Him.

Engage

STRENGTH IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

We live in challenging times with ongoing threats from viruses, political fighting, civil unrest, and world conflict, just to name a few. Rank these things in terms of your concern. Then write a prayer, handing them over to God.

___ war ___ viruses ___ political fighting ___ civil unrest

___ crime ___ poor economics ___ natural disasters

___ other: _____

My Prayer:

- **He will deliver us and rescue us.** *Deliverance* suggests a dangerous situation that threatens someone's well-being. This term describes God carrying the person safely away, like a shepherd might pull a lamb away from a predator.
- **He will protect us.** Once we are delivered, God protects believers because we know His name. Like a high tower that guards a city, the Lord watches over His people. Our relationship with Him begins with coming to know Him, not just knowing *about* Him.
- **He will answer us.** In this ongoing relationship, we can call on God in our need and He promises to answer. We can be confident God hears His children. What good parent ignores the cries of a child? God's answer doesn't mean He always acts on our prayers like we want, but He does hear us, and He always answers us.
- **He will be with us in trouble.** God's promise to be with us in times of trouble may be the most assuring promise in this section. Sometimes we feel totally alone when distress surrounds us. Friends and family may be absent, but God never leaves us or forsakes us. In His presence, we need never be afraid or discouraged (Deut. 31:8).
- **He will give us honor.** The Lord not only rescues us from danger, but He also bestows honor in the process. Some commentators see this action to mean a restoration to honor. However, the syntax suggests God bestows something lacking. When God rescues, He lifts up our downcast heads in dignity.

- **He will satisfy us with a long life.** Through God's intervention, the believer may experience a "long life." Interestingly, God promises to "satisfy" the faithful one. Some people live many years but experience bitterness and sorrow. God's presence provides a superior quality of life, not merely an extended quantity of life.
- **He will show us His salvation.** Finally, the Lord will "show" His salvation. Each of these words is important. Some people are saved, but they fail to see salvation's evidence in daily life. Sin, sorrows, or doubts rob them of the joy of their salvation (Ps. 51:12).

Our satisfaction and security lie not in self-effort but in God's mercy. We are not saved, sanctified, or secured by anything we generate through personal endeavors. Instead, we are His workmanship, created and kept in Christ for God's glory and our good (Eph. 2:10). Even when we feel like collapsing, God—who began this work in us—promises to continue doing so until the coming of the Lord (Phil. 1:6).

QUESTION 4:

What practices or habits can help us trust God for security, instead of ourselves?

QUESTION 5:

How will knowing God's name help your walk with Him?

LIVE IT OUT

We can trust God to help us in our difficulties. Each name of God furthers our appreciation for His love and care. Work through one or more of these applications to deepen your trust in Him.

- **Look in.** Meditate on what makes you feel insecure. What causes you to be afraid?
- **Look up.** Use Bible resources to look up other names of God. Look up to Him in prayer and surrender your cares to Him.
- **Look out.** Look out for a friend who is experiencing difficulties. Encourage your friend by sharing these insights.

Rather than being overprotective or constantly worried, use this study to increase your trust in God. Cast your cares on Him, for He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7).





THE MOST HIGH

by Daniel P. Caldwell

The Psalmist declared God's protection from enemies such as the lion.

In our modern society, names are used primarily to designate or to identify someone. Names usually identify the family from which we come. A name also usually identifies whether we are male or female, although some names do not even provide this help. Aside from these observations, names tell us little more about a person.

In the ancient Near East in general, the people placed a greater emphasis on the name of a person. One's name was more than a means of identification. The name could be descriptive of the person's character or the kind of life the individual would lead. Giving a name was to be taken seriously.

Even a change in one's character or life could result in a change of their name. Abram's name was changed to Abraham when the blessing was given to him (Gen. 17). Jacob's name was changed to Israel after his struggle at the Jabbok (Gen. 32).

If the names of people were this significant, then the names used for God were held in even higher esteem. Knowing the name of God was more than simply identifying Him. It was a means of enabling the person to establish a proper relationship with Him. At one point in the Israelites' history, an extraordinary reverence for one name for God, *Yahweh*, developed. The Hebrews refused to verbalize this personal name for God for fear that the sacredness of the name would be marred.

The ancient Hebrews had many names for God. Each name was important and representative of His character. One book using a wide variety of His names is the book of Psalms. Known as the hymnbook of ancient Israel, some of the greatest expressions of praise and faith in God are uttered in these verses. The psalms were collected over a period of many years and were either read or sung during the Israelites' time of worship at the temple

and later in the synagogues. The psalms continue to influence our Christian worship as well.

Many different types of psalms are found in the Old Testament. The majority of the psalms are of praise and thanksgiving. Psalm 91 is known as a praise or thanksgiving psalm. This type of psalm offers praise to God either directly or indirectly. It offers praise for His nature and His attributes or for trust in His past, present, or future deeds.

In the opening two verses of Psalm 91, four Hebrew names are used for deity: "most" or "Most High" (*Elyon*), "Almighty" (*Shaddai*), "LORD" (*Yahweh*) and "God" (*Elohim*). The latter three names are commonly used for God throughout the Old Testament. The first is not as common.

The psalmist addressed God as "most" or "Most High" twice in the passage (91:1,9). Was this name for God to be understood as a title, or as a description of God's character? Several versions capitalize the name and refer to it as a proper or personal name for God, "Most High."¹ The King James Version emphasizes the name as descriptive of His character, "most High."

The use of *Elyon* as a personal name for God is a topic prompting much debate in Old Testament study. Referring to God by this divine title or as a description of His character would not be problematic for us. The difficulty is noted in the earlier usage of the name.

The term *Elyon* in the Hebrew means highest or uppermost.² Since the Hebrew were a Semitic people and their language was a Semitic language, other Semitic people groups in ancient Israel used this term to designate their deities as well.



In the ancient Near East, most nations worshiped a number of gods. At the same time, there was usually a chief god who was identified as their high god. The Canaanites used this title to refer to the Exalted One, their highest god of the pantheon. Their usage implied multiple gods or polytheism. However, the Israelite usage of this term was monotheistic, acknowledging only one God.

An example of this understanding is noted in the earliest reference to God as “most” or “Most High.” In Abram’s encounter with the king of Salem, Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-24), the king was identified also as a priest of “God Most High” and blessed Abraham in this god’s name (vv. 18-20). This is possibly understood to be the highest god of their pantheon.³ Abram responded to Melchizedek saying he had sworn to the LORD God Most High, the God he had worshiped and had followed since leaving his homeland.

During a major part of the Old Testament period (before the exile), this name for God was rarely used. The name “most” or “Most High” is used only forty-five times in the Old Testament.⁴ More than half of these occurrences are found in the book of Psalms. It seems to have gained renewed usage during the postexilic period (Dan. 4:17,24-25,32).

Many aspects of God are noted when He is referred to as “Most High” in the Old Testament. He is acknowledged as the Creator of heaven and the earth (Gen. 14:22).

David and Goliath’s battle in the Valley of Elah–Tel Azekah. This is the valley where the famous battle took place.

Knowing the name of God was more than simply identifying Him. It was a means of enabling the person to establish a proper relationship with Him.

He is the Lord of protection who delivers His faithful followers from the presence of their enemies (Ps. 9:2-3; 18:13-14). He is the God who brings assurance to His people through His sovereignty over the nations (47:2-3), through His redemptive acts (78:35), and by meeting the various needs of His people (57:2). As a result of His wonderful aspects, He is the God worthy of sacrifice, love, and praise (Ps. 50:14). In Psalm 91, many of these aspects of God are found.

Psalm 91 has no title, nor does it have any internal mark to assist in identifying the precise author and the exact historical occasion. While the psalm is general in its application, select verses seem to emphasize an individual who was facing a terrifying form of enemy.

If interpreted literally, the enemies God provides protection against are numerous. The militaristic terms (91:4b,5,7) suggest protection in battle. Several phrases indicate an unknown disease or plague (91:3b,6,10). In addition to these problems, the psalmist mentioned the natural calamities, the snakes, the lions, and the possibility of harmful accidents (91:11-13).

In spite of the ills faced, the psalmist's trust in the protection of the Most High gives courage and hope. His protection is seen as a shelter and a shadow (91:1-2). In the scorching sun, the shadow was a place of refuge and a great friend to the weary traveler. His care for the psalmist is prominent because He cared for him night and day

(91:5-6). God never slumbers. His watch is constant even when His servants sleep and cannot pray for safety.

The psalm concluded with some enduring promises from God (91:14-16). He will deliver and protect him. When the psalmist cried out to God, He would answer him. He would be with him in times of trouble; He would deliver him and honor him.

However, the promises are conditional. The psalmist enjoyed these blessings because he loved the Most High. God must be the object of supreme affection and devotion. No less allegiance is acceptable.

Daniel P. Caldwell is vice president of Church Relations; dean, Cooper School of Missions and Biblical Studies, William Carey College, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

1. For examples of this usage, see Psalm 91:1,9 in the *New American Standard Bible, New International Version*, and in the *Revised Standard Version*.
2. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms, New Century Bible Commentary*, Ronald E. Clements and Matthew Black, eds., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 99-100.
3. Clyde T. Francisco, "Genesis" in the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Clifton J. Allen, gen. Ed., vol. 1, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 161-62.
4. Not all references are to be understood as referring to God. A few passages are designating a chief deity in a Pantheon, such as Genesis 14:18-20.