

PSALM 91

Some of the ancients were of opinion that Moses was the penman, not only of the foregoing psalm, which is expressly said to be his, but also of the eight that next follow it; but that cannot be, for Psalm 95 is expressly said to be penned by David, and long after Moses, ^{<300E>}Hebrews 4:7. It is probable that this psalm also was penned by David; it is a writ of protection for all true believers, not in the name of king David, or under his broad seal; he needed it himself, especially if the psalm was penned, as some conjecture it was, at the time of the pestilence which was sent for his numbering the people; but in the name of the King of kings, and under the broad seal of Heaven. Observe,

I. The psalmist's own resolution to take God for his keeper (v. 2), from which he gives both direction and encouragement to others (v. 9).

II. The promises which are here made, in God's name, to all those that do so in sincerity.

- 1.** They shall be taken under the peculiar care of Heaven (v. 1, 4).
- 2.** They shall be delivered from the malice of the powers of darkness (v. 3, 5, 6), and that by a distinguishing preservation (v. 7, 8).
- 3.** They shall be the charge of the holy angels (v. 10-12).
- 4.** They shall triumph over their enemies (v. 13).
- 5.** They shall be the special favourites of God himself (v. 14-16). In singing this we must shelter ourselves under, and then solace ourselves in, the divine protection. Many think that to Christ, as Mediator, these promises do primarily belong (^{<39D>}Isaiah 49:2), not because to him the devil applied one of these promises (^{<406>}Matthew 4:6), but because to him they are very applicable, and, coming through him, they are more sweet and sure to all believers.

~~<90>~~ PSALM 91:1-8

THE SECURITY OF BELIEVERS

In these verses we have,

I. A great truth laid down in general, That all those who live a life of communion with God are constantly safe under his protection, and may therefore preserve a holy serenity and security of mind at all times (v. 1): *He that dwells, that sits down, in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty;* he that by faith chooses God for his guardian shall find all that in him which he needs or can desire. Note,

1. It is the character of a true believer that he *dwells in the secret place of the Most High;* he is at home in God, returns to God, and reposes in him as his rest; he acquaints himself with inward religion, and makes heart-work of the service of God, worships within the veil, and loves to be alone with God, to converse with him in solitude.

2. It is the privilege and comfort of those that do so that they *abide under the shadow of the Almighty;* he shelters them, and comes between them and every thing that would annoy them, whether storm or sunshine. They shall not only have an admittance, but a residence, under God's protection; he will be their rest and refuge for ever.

II. The psalmist's comfortable application of this to himself (v. 2): *I will say of the Lord, whatever others say of him, "He is my refuge; I choose him as such, and confide in him. Others make idols their refuge, but I will say of Jehovah, the true and living God, He is my refuge: any other is a refuge of lies. He is a refuge that will not fail me; for he is my fortress and strong-hold."* Idolaters called their idols *Mahuzzim*, their *most strong-hold* (⁽²⁷¹³⁾Daniel 11:39), but therein they deceived themselves; those only secure themselves that make the Lord their God, their fortress. There being no reason to question his sufficiency, fitly does it follow, *In him will I trust.* If Jehovah be our God, our refuge, and our fortress, what can we desire which we may not be sure to find in him? He is neither fickle nor false, neither weak nor mortal; he is God and not man, and therefore there is no danger of being disappointed in him. *We know whom we have trusted.*

III. The great encouragement he gives to others to do likewise, not only from his own experience of the comfort of it (for in that there might possibly be a fallacy), but from the truth of God's promise, in which there neither is nor can be any deceit (v. 3, 4, etc.): *Surely he shall deliver thee.* Those who have themselves found the comfort of making God their refuge cannot but desire that others may do so. Now here it is promised,

1. That believers shall be kept from those mischiefs which they are in imminent danger of, and which would be fatal to them (v. 3), *from the snare of the fowler*, which is laid unseen and catches the unwary prey on a sudden, and *from the noisome pestilence*, which seizes men unawares and against which there is no guard. This promise protects,

(1.) The natural life, and is often fulfilled in our preservation from those dangers which are very threatening and very near, while yet we ourselves are not apprehensive of them, any more than the bird is of *the snare of the fowler*. We owe it, more than we are sensible, to the care of the divine Providence that we have been kept from infectious diseases and out of the hands of the wicked and unreasonable.

(2.) The spiritual life, which is protected by divine grace from the temptations of Satan, which are as the *snares of the fowler*, and from the contagion of sin, which is the *noisome pestilence*. He that has given grace to be the glory of the soul will create a defence upon all that glory.

2. That God himself will be their protector; those must needs be safe who have him for their keeper, and successful for whom he undertakes (v. 4): *He shall cover thee*, shall keep thee *secret* (⁴²⁵⁰Psalm 31:20), and so keep thee safe, ⁴²⁷⁶Psalm 27:5. God protects believers,

(1.) With the greatest tenderness and affection, which is intimated in that, *He shall cover thee with his feathers, under his wings*, which alludes to the hen *gathering her chickens under wings*, ⁴²⁵⁰Matthew 23:37. By natural instinct she not only protects them, but calls them under that protection when she sees them in danger, not only keeps them safe, but cherishes them and keeps them warm. To this the great God is pleased to compare his care of his people, who are helpless as the chickens, and easily made a prey of, but are invited to trust under the shadow of the wings of the divine promise and providence, which is the periphrasis of a proselyte to the true religion, that he has come to *trust under the wings of the God of Israel*, ⁴⁸¹²Ruth 2:12.

(2.) With the greatest power and efficacy. Wings and feathers, though spread with the greatest tenderness, are yet weak, and easily broken through, and therefore it is added, *His truth shall be thy shield and buckler*, a strong defence. God is willing to guard his people as the hen is to guard the chickens, and as able as a man of war in armour.

3. That he will not only keep them from evil, but from the fear of evil, v. 5, 6. Here is,

(1.) Great danger supposed; the mention of it is enough to frighten us; night and day we lie exposed, and those that are apt to be timorous will in neither period think themselves safe. When we are retired into our chambers, our beds, and have made all as safe as we can about us, yet there is terror by night, from thieves and robbers, winds and storms, besides those things that are the creatures of fancy and imagination, which are often most frightful of all. We read of *fear in the night*, ^{218B}Song of Solomon 3:8. There is also a *pestilence that walketh in darkness*, as that was which slew the first-born of the Egyptians, and the army of the Assyrians. No locks nor bars can shut out diseases, while we carry about with us in our bodies the seeds of them. But surely in the day-time, when we can look about us, we are not so much in danger; yes, there is an *arrow that flieth by day* too, and yet flies unseen; there is a destruction that wasteth at high-noon, when we are awake and have all our friends about us; even then we cannot secure ourselves, nor can they secure us. It was in the day-time that that pestilence wasted which was sent to chastise David for numbering the people, on occasion of which some think this psalm was penned. But,

(2.) Here is great security promised to believers in the midst of this danger: “*Thou shalt not be afraid*. God by his grace will keep thee from disquieting distrustful fear (that fear which hath torment) in the midst of the greatest dangers. Wisdom shall keep thee from being causelessly afraid, and faith shall keep thee from being inordinately afraid. Thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow, as knowing that though it may hit thee it cannot hurt thee; if it take away the natural life, yet it shall be so far from doing any prejudice to the spiritual life that it shall be its perfection.” A believer *needs not* fear, and therefore *should not* fear, any arrow, because the point is off, the poison is out. *O death! where is thy sting?* It is also under divine direction, and will hit where God appoints and not otherwise. Every bullet has its commission. Whatever is done our heavenly Father's will is done; and we have no reason to be afraid of that.

4. That they shall be preserved in common calamities, in a distinguishing way (v. 7): “When death rides in triumph, and diseases rage, so that *thousands and ten thousands* fall, fall by sickness, or fall by the sword in battle, *fall at thy side, at thy right hand*, and the sight of their fall is enough to frighten thee, and if they fall by the pestilence their falling so

near thee may be likely to infect thee, *yet it shall not come nigh thee*, the death shall not, the fear of death shall not.” Those that preserve their purity in times of general corruption may trust God with their safety in times of general desolation. When multitudes die round about us, though thereby we must be awakened to prepare for our own death, yet we must not be *afraid with any amazement*, nor make ourselves subject to bondage, as many do all their life-time, *through fear of death*, ^{<3075>}Hebrews 2:15. The sprinkling of blood secured the first-born of Israel when thousands fell. Nay, it is promised to God's people that they shall have the satisfaction of seeing, not only God's promises fulfilled to them, but his threatenings fulfilled upon those that hate them (v. 8): *Only with thy eyes shalt thou behold and see the just reward of the wicked*, which perhaps refers to the destruction of the first-born of Egypt by the pestilence, which was both the punishment of the oppressors and the enlargement of the oppressed; this Israel saw when they saw themselves unhurt, untouched. As it will aggravate the damnation of sinners that with their eyes they shall behold and see the reward of the righteous (^{<2138>}Luke 13:28), so it will magnify the salvation of the saints that with their eyes they shall behold and see the destruction of the wicked, ^{<2162>}Isaiah 66:24; ^{<1880>}Psalms 58:10.

^{<1910>}PSALM 91:9-16

THE SECURITY OF BELIEVERS

Here are more promises to the same purport with those in the foregoing verses, and they are exceedingly great and precious, and sure to all the seed.

I. The psalmist assures believers of divine protection, from his own experience; and that which he says is the word of God, and what we may rely upon. Observe,

1. The character of those who shall have the benefit and comfort of these promises; it is much the same with that, v. 1. They are such as make *the Most High their habitation* (v. 9), as are continually with God and rest in him, as make his name both their temple and their strong tower, as dwell in love and so dwell in God. It is our duty to be at home in God, to make our choice of him, and then to live our life in him as our habitation, to converse with him, and delight in him, and depend upon him; and then it

shall be our privilege to be at home in God; we shall be welcome to him as a man to his own habitation, without any let, hindrance, or molestation, from the arrests of the law or the clamours of conscience; then too we shall be safe in him, shall be kept in *perfect peace*, ^{230B} Isaiah 26:3. To encourage us to make the Lord our habitation, and to hope for safety and satisfaction in him, the psalmist intimates the comfort he had had in doing so: “He whom thou makest thy *habitation is my refuge*; and I have found him firm and faithful, and in him there is room enough, and shelter enough, both for thee and me.” *In my father's house there are many mansions*, one needs not crowd another, much less crowd out another.

2. The promises that are sure to all those who have thus made *the Most High* their *habitation*.

(1.) That, whatever happens to them, nothing shall hurt them (v. 10): “*There shall no evil befall thee*; though trouble or affliction befall thee, yet there shall be no real evil in it, for it shall come from the love of God and shall be sanctified; it shall come, not for thy hurt, but for thy good; and though, for *the present, it be not joyous but grievous*, yet, in the end, it shall yield so well that thou thyself shalt own *no evil befall thee*. It is not an evil, an only evil, but there is a mixture of good in it and a product of good by it. Nay, not thy person only, but thy dwelling, shall be taken under the divine protection: *There shall no plague come nigh* that, nothing to do thee or thine any damage.” *Nihil accidere bono viro mali potest — No evil can befall a good man. Seneca De Providentia.*

(2.) That the angels of light shall be serviceable to them, v. 11, 12. This is a precious promise, and speaks a great deal both of honour and comfort to the saints, nor is it ever the worse for being quoted and abused by the devil in tempting Christ, ^{406B} Matthew 4:6. Observe,

[1.] The charge given to the angels concerning the saints. He who is the Lord of the angels, who gave them their being and gives laws to them, whose they are and whom they were made to serve, *he shall give his angels a charge over thee*, not only over the church in general, but over every particular believer. The angels *keep the charge of the Lord their God*; and this is the charge they receive from him. It denotes the great care God takes of the saints, in that the angels themselves shall be charged with them, and employed for them. The charge is *to keep thee in all thy ways*; here is a limitation of the promise: They *shall keep thee in thy ways*, that is, “as long as thou keepest in the way of thy duty;” those that go out of

that way put themselves out of God's protection. This word the devil left out when he quoted the promise to enforce a temptation, knowing how much it made against him. But observe the extent of the promise; it is *to keep thee in all thy ways*: even where there is no apparent danger yet we need it, and where there is the most imminent danger we shall have it. Wherever the saints go the angels are charged with them, as the servants are with the children.

[2.] The care which the angels take of the saints, pursuant to this charge: *They shall bear thee up in their hands*, which denotes both their great ability and their great affection. They are able to bear up the saints out of the reach of danger, and they do it with all the tenderness and affection wherewith the nurse carries the little child about in her arms; it speaks us helpless and them helpful. They are condescending in their ministrations; they keep the feet of the saints, lest they *dash them against a stone*, lest they stumble and fall into sin and into trouble.

[3.] That the powers of darkness shall be triumphed over by them (v. 13): *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder*. The devil is called *a roaring lion, the old serpent, the red dragon*; so that to this promise the apostle seems to refer in that (~~ROM~~ Romans 16:20), *The God of peace shall tread Satan under your feet*. Christ has broken the serpent's head, spoiled our spiritual enemies (~~COL~~ Colossians 2:15), and through him *we are more than conquerors*; for Christ calls us, as Joshua called the captains of Israel, to come and set our feet on the necks of vanquished enemies. Some think that this promise had its full accomplishment in Christ, and the miraculous power which he had over the whole creation, healing the sick, casting out devils, and particularly putting it into his disciples' commission that they should *take up serpents*, (~~MARK~~ Mark 16:18. It may be applied to that care of the divine Providence by which we are preserved from ravenous noxious creatures (*the wild beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee*, ~~JOB~~ Job 5:23); nay, and have ways and means of taming them, ~~JAMES~~ James 3:7.

II. He brings in God himself speaking words of comfort to the saints, and declaring the mercy he had in store for them, v. 14-16. Some make this to be spoken to the angels as the reason of the charge given them concerning the saints, as if he had said, "Take care of them, for they are dear to me, and I have a tender concern for them." And now, as before, we must observe,

1. To whom these promises do belong; they are described by three characters: —

(1.) They are such as know God's name. His nature we cannot fully know; but by his name he has made himself known, and with that we must acquaint ourselves.

(2.) They are such as have set their love upon him; and those who rightly know him will love him, will place their love upon him as the only adequate object of it, will let out their love towards him with pleasure and enlargement, and will fix their love upon him with a resolution never to remove it to any rival.

(3.) They are such as call upon him, as by prayer keep up a constant correspondence with him, and in every difficult case refer themselves to him.

2. What the promises are which God makes to the saints.

(1.) That he will, in due time, deliver them out of trouble: *I will deliver him* (v. 14 and again v. 15), denoting a double deliverance, living and dying, a deliverance in trouble and a deliverance out of trouble. If God proportions the degree and continuance of our troubles to our strength, if he keeps us from offending him in our troubles, and makes our death our discharge, at length, from all our troubles, then this promise is fulfilled. See ^{498B}Psalm 34:19; ^{581E}2 Timothy 3:11; 4:18.

(2.) That he will, in the mean time, *be with them in trouble*, v. 15. If he does not immediately put a period to their afflictions, yet they shall have his gracious presence with them in their troubles; he will take notice of their sorrows, and *know their souls in adversity*, will visit them graciously by his word and Spirit, and converse with them, will take their part, will support and comfort them, and sanctify their afflictions to them, which will be the surest token of his presence with them in their troubles.

(3.) That herein he will answer their prayers: *He shall call upon me*; I will pour upon him the spirit of prayer, *and then I will answer*, answer by promises (^{498B}Psalm 85:8), answer by providences, bringing in seasonable relief, and answer by graces, *strengthening them with strength in their souls* (^{418B}Psalm 138:3); thus he answered Paul with *grace sufficient*, ^{470B}2 Corinthians 12:9.

(4.) That he will exalt and dignify them: *I will set him on high*, out of the reach of trouble, above the stormy region, on a rock *above the waves*, ~~2336~~ Isaiah 33:16. They shall be enabled, by the grace of God, to look down upon the things of this world with a holy contempt and indifference, to look up to the things of the other world with a holy ambition and concern; and then they are set on high. *I will honour him*; those are truly honourable whom God puts honour upon by taking them into covenant and communion with himself and designing them for his kingdom and glory, ~~8126~~ John 12:26.

(5.) That they shall have a sufficiency of life in this world (v. 16): *With length of days will I satisfy him*; that is,

[1.] They shall live long enough: they shall be continued in this world till they have done the work they were sent into this world for and are ready for heaven, and that is long enough. Who would wish to live a day longer than God has some work to do, either by him or upon him?

[2.] They shall think it long enough; for God by his grace shall wean them from the world and make them willing to leave it. A man may die young, and yet die full of days, *satur dierum* — *satisfied with living*. A wicked worldly man is not satisfied, no, not with long life; he still cries, *Give, give*. But he that has his treasure and heart in another world has soon enough of this; he would not live always.

(6.) That they shall have an eternal life in the other world. This crowns the blessedness: *I will show him my salvation*, show him *the Messiah* (so some); good old Simeon was then satisfied with long life when he could say, *My eyes have seen thy salvation*, nor was there any greater joy to the Old-Testament saints than to see Christ's day, though at a distance. It is more probably that the word refers to the better country, that is, the heavenly, which the patriarchs desired and sought: he *will show him* that, bring him to that blessed state, the felicity of which consists so much in seeing that face to face which we here see through a glass darkly; and, in the mean time, he will give him a prospect of it. All these promises, some think, point primarily at Christ, and had their accomplishment in his resurrection and exaltation.