

February 24

Lesson 13 (NIV)

OUR RESCUING GOD

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 8:31–39

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 91:1–

16

PSALM 91:1–8, 11–16

- ¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of
the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the
Almighty.
- ² I will say of the LORD, “He is my
refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”
- ³ Surely he will save you
from the fowler’s snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
- ⁴ He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will
find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your
shield and rampart.
- ⁵ You will not fear the terror of
night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the
darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at
midday.
- ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right
hand,
but it will not come near you.
- ⁸ You will only observe with your
eyes
and see the punishment of the
wicked.
- ¹¹ For he will command his angels
concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
¹² they will lift you up in 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 great lion
and the serpent.
- ¹⁴ “Because he loves me,” says the LORD,
“I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he
acknowledges my name.
- ¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will
answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor
him.
- ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”



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KEY VERSE

He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. — Psalm 91:15

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit 3: Songs That Glorify the God of Love

LESSONS 11–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Outline God's promises to protect.
2. Identify dangers from which Christians need God's protection.
3. Propose one way his or her church

can extend the Lord's rescuing protection to those in need.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Our Protection and Salvation
- B. Lesson Context

I. Safe Place (PSALM 91:1–8)

- A. Basis of Protection (vv. 1, 2)
- B. Forms of Protection (vv. 3–8)
Protection for the Lowly
A Fateful Day

II. Trustworthy Protector (PSALM 91:11–13)

- A. With the Help of Angels (vv. 11, 12)
- B. Against Nature's Predators (v. 13)

III. Sure Promises (PSALM 91:14–16)

- A. Basis of Blessing (v. 14)
- B. Forms of Blessing (vv. 15, 16)

Conclusion

- A. God Is Our Protection and Salvation
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Babylon	<i>Bab-uh-lun.</i>
Constantine	Kawn -stun-teen.
Habakkuk	Huh-back-kuk.
Lamentations	Lam-en-tay-shunz.
Maxentius	Mak-sen-tee-us.

Introduction

A. Our Protection and Salvation

People understand protection and security in different ways. Children often feel most secure when in the strong and trusting arms of their parents, possibly holding a threadbare blanket or teddy bear. Parents might feel most secure in a safe neighborhood, with doors that lock and money in their savings account. A backpacker seeks protection from a storm under a rock overhang that can block the elements.

As Christians, however, we know that our ultimate protection and security come from God. It is no wonder that the Bible uses images of strength to describe him: rock, refuge, fortress. No blanket or padlock can compare with the strong protection available from God.

Elisabeth Elliot (1926–2015) was well known for sharing the gospel with an indigenous tribe in Ecuador some 60 years ago. The title of her book *Shadow of the Almighty* alludes to the description of God in [Psalm 91:1](#). As such, it highlights her belief in God’s protective grace, even in dangerous circumstances. Elliot understood that God was not distant, but very close—a steadfast refuge. And she lived out her trust in radical ways. [Psalm 91](#)

B. Lesson Context

The historical setting of [Psalm 91](#) is unclear, but the literary context sheds light on its meaning. The preceding psalm, [Psalm 90](#) (which begins Book IV of the Psalter), is a lament. As such, it reflects mournfully about the fleeting nature of life, which withers under the wrath of God because of sin. That psalm ends with a petition for renewal from God. [Psalm 91](#) seems to be a response to the lament of [Psalm 90](#).

[Psalm 91](#) is comprised of four stanzas, which are distinguished by shifts in speaker. These four are verses 1, 2; 3–8; 9–13; and 14–16. Analyzed in a more technical way, the structure of [Psalm 91](#) has as its touchstone a certain Hebrew conjunction that can be translated in various ways. Depending on context, some possibilities for translating this word are “for,” “that,” “if,” and “when.” This word also can be an emphatic “indeed,” “truly,” or “surely,” again depending on context. In [Psalm 91](#) this conjunction is translated “surely,” “if,” and “because” in verses 3, 9, and 14, respectively.

We should also keep in mind that the psalms are poetry, and one of the defining features of Hebrew poetry is *parallelism*. As discussed in previous lessons, this is often seen where one line corre-

sponds in some way with the line that follows, as the second line repeats the thought(s) of the first line in different ways. Parallelism can also feature contrasting ideas or even show how one event or action leads to a certain consequence. While English poetry is often identified by the rhyming of words, Hebrew poetry has been described as the “rhyming of ideas”—that’s parallelism.

I. Safe Place (PSALM 91:1-8)

A. Basis of Protection (vv. 1, 2)

1. Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

These first lines of Psalm 91 “rhyme” (see above) with the shared imagery of the Lord’s protection for those who seek refuge in him. This echoes Psalm 90:1, which describes the Lord as Israel’s “dwelling place” from generation to generation.

The Hebrew word translated *shelter* carries the idea of a secret place to hide, per translations of the same word in Psalms 27:5; 31:20; and 32:7. This fact relates to the burning questions of Psalms 88:14 and 89:46, which ask why God is hiding. As the unidentified psalmist declares that God is a shelter, he implies that God is not hiding; rather, we

hide in him. The opening *whoever* generalizes this fact. Everyone who seeks the protective *shadow of the Almighty* will find it.

Notice that the one protected must actively seek the protection of the Lord. God’s people are not passive participants in relationship with him, but active covenant-keepers. Throughout this psalm, the author alternates between the actions of the worshipper and the actions of God, thus highlighting the dynamic covenant relationship. On the idea of *shadow*, see also Psalm 63:7; Isaiah 49:2; and Lamentations 4:20.

What Do You Think?

Practically speaking, how can you rest in God’s “shadow” in the coming week?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts or biblical principles have you found useful when you need physical, spiritual, or emotional rest?

2. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

This, the final part of the psalm’s first stanza (see the Lesson Context), distills the previous metaphors into the simple, though sometimes difficult, idea of *trust*. The psalmist seeks *refuge* in the Lord specifically by trusting in him.

Notice the transition of imagery from the previous verse, with those of *refuge* and *fortress* being more military in nature (compare 2 Samuel 22:2, 3). The Lord's steadfast strength is highlighted.

These images bring to mind the confidence that the people of Judah once had in the protection and surety of Jerusalem and the temple. Before the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon, God's people mistakenly saw the holy city and the temple as their security and as proof of God's presence and protection (Jeremiah 7:4). After the exile, however, the Israelites come to understand that God himself is their true protection and security.

What Do You Think?

What procedure can we adopt to ensure we thank God for his protection?

Digging Deeper

In the prayer pattern *adoration / confession / thanksgiving / supplication* (ACTS), what percentage of your typical prayer involves the third of those? What does this say to you?

B. Forms of Protection (vv. 3-8)

3a. Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare

The psalmist now expands on the protective imagery introduced in the first

stanza. In so doing, he likens the reader to a bird delivered from *the fowler's snare* (compare Psalm 124:7; Hosea 9:8). The Lord is able to deliver his people from the trap of human enemies.

3b. and from the deadly pestilence.

Pestilence, by contrast, is not something we normally think of as being inflicted on one person by another (although we know of "biological warfare" in the modern era). Rather, pestilence or plague is seen as being inflicted by God (see Exodus 5:3; 9:3, 15; Psalm 78:50; Habakkuk 3:5). It can be *deadly*. Just as birds are helpless before a well-constructed trap set by enemies, so human beings are helpless before destructive pestilence. This is particularly true in a time before antibiotics and vaccines, which is most of human history.

4a. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;

God is now likened to a mother bird protecting her young in the shelter of her *wings* (compare Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7; and Ruth 2:12). Jesus uses this same imagery to describe his desire to protect the people of Jerusalem, though their hearts are too hardened to seek him (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). In so doing, Jesus echoes God's desire that people actively trust in him for protection.

PROTECTION FOR THE LOWLY

Recently, a robin flew out of the tall shrubbery sheltering my front porch, causing me to notice a hidden nest. In it were two tiny birds slouched down, with their open beaks waiting for a meal to drop in.

When I again passed the nest later, I heard bird noises coming from a nearby bush. And there was a robin perched, worm in mouth, on a branch. It seemed to be calling to its young to lie still until danger passed. Sure enough, as soon as I was a safe distance away, the adult bird glided into the nest and fed the waiting offspring.

This is not an unusual scene; researchers and various other observers often catch glimpses of the various species of the animal world in unusual and unexpected places. We laugh and are amazed at the way adult animals guard and protect their young in the face of potential predators. But think about it: if animals instinctively know how to protect their young, how much more does God know how to do so for those created in his image! Even when (or especially when) we are feeling helpless, he is the one who remembers us “in our low estate” ([Psalm 136:23](#)).

—C. M. W.

4b. his faithfulness will be your

shield and rampart.

Returning to military terms, *shield* is the perfect symbol for protection. Regarding *rampart*, the Hebrew word being translated appears only here in the Old Testament, which makes its meaning difficult to determine. Perhaps the idea is that of a wall or bulwark that protects a city.

Notice that it is specifically God’s *faithfulness* that is described in terms of these defensive armaments. God is true to his promises. His faithfulness to these is seen nowhere more clearly than when he sends his own Son to take on human flesh, die for the sins of humanity, and rise again in triumph over sin, Satan, and death.

5, 6. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday.

In addition to being strong and sure, God’s protection is constant; this is the idea behind these images: *of night, by day, darkness, and midday*. The *terror* is a general image of something dreadful.

At first thought, we may conclude that *the arrow* describes a threat from a human enemy, but the Bible sometimes uses that word figuratively to refer to flashes of lightning in storms (see [Psalm 18:14](#); [77:17](#), [18](#); [144:6](#)). Thus it may not be

far off to suggest that the expression *the arrow that flies* refers to what we call “the storms of life.” *The pestilence* is the same just discussed in [Psalm 91:3](#). *The plague that destroys* seems to be a parallel way of saying pestilence.

What Do You Think?

What are some steps you can take to transform fear to trust the next time you feel threatened?

Digging Deeper

Which of those steps apply to everyone, and which may apply only to you? Why?

When we find ourselves in dangerous situations, fear is a God-given emotion that helps protect us. So fear in and of itself is not sinful. The point is that we need not fear enemies of any kind. God is greater than all enemies.

7. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

The deaths of *a thousand* and *ten thousand* who might perish at the *side* or *right hand* (that is, in close proximity) of God’s protected ones can be the result of military actions, a plague of some sort, or a natural disaster. It doesn’t matter. God is present for his people in all crises.

Salvation of the faithful and punishment of the unfaithful are two sides of the same coin. When enemies are pun-

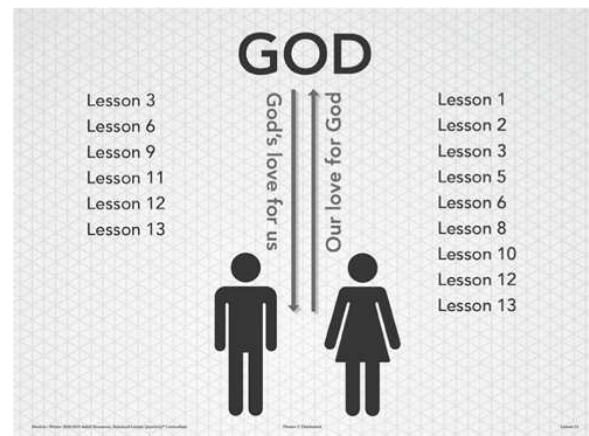
ished, God’s people are protected from them ([Psalm 37:37-40](#)).

8. You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

The Hebrew behind the word *punishment* is difficult to translate because this is the only place it occurs in the Old Testament. But the meaning is clear enough from context: the appropriate recompense for *the wicked* is punishment. Sooner or later, evildoers will indeed get what’s coming to them.

Unfortunately, God’s people are sometimes distracted by the fact that those who do wicked works are often prosperous. That fact is noted in the Bible (examples: [Job 21:7](#); [Psalm 73:12](#); [Jeremiah 12:1, 2](#)). We can rest assured that God knows this and has plans to deal with it in his time (example: [Habakkuk 1:1-2:20](#)).

The important thing is not to question God’s justice in the meantime. Should we do so anyway, we may find our questions turned back on us, as in [Job 38-42](#)!



Visual for Lesson 13. Start a discussion by pointing to this visual as you ask, "Which of this quarter's lessons taught you the most about love? Why?"

A FATEFUL DAY

October 28, 312 was a bad day for Emperor Maxentius. While games celebrating the anniversary of his accession to the throne were being held, the crowds could not fail to see the challenging army of Constantine bearing down upon Rome. Though Maxentius had twice survived a siege, he made the surprising choice to confront Constantine's forces.

The place where Maxentius made his stand was the Milvian Bridge outside Rome. Constantine, a skillful tactician, sent into battle his cavalry followed by his infantry. Maxentius's forces retreated toward the city, but the bridge collapsed. Maxentius drowned in the muddy waters of the Tiber River, by some accounts pulled under by the weight of his own armor. Maxentius's bad day became a victory march into Rome for Constantine. He ended up being uncontested as emperor, reigning until AD 337.

Armies throughout history have used assorted weaponry to guard strongholds, plunder riches, and gain territory. But even the battle plans and equipment cannot guarantee success. Emperor Maxentius's protective armor may have

hastened his death, ironically doing the opposite of its intended purpose.

When news of accidents, catastrophes, and crime reach our ears, it is easy to drift into a state of perpetual uncertainty or unease. Worry becomes self-reinforcing, a vicious circle, unless we turn over our anxieties to God (see [Psalm 2:1-6](#); [Daniel 2:21](#)). God's protection surpasses all human efforts at security in this world. Of course, that's easy to say when threats seem distant. Whether we actually can rest on that assurance is proven only in the crucible of danger.

—C. M. W.

II. Trustworthy Protector

(PSALM 91:11-13)

A. With the Help of Angels (vv. 11, 12)

11. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;

Moving to the middle of the third stanza takes us to observations regarding the role of *angels* in our protection. These are created, heavenly beings who can take visible forms to do God's work. In addition to delivering messages ([Luke 1:19](#); etc.), they are depicted as strong protectors and warriors ([Daniel 6:22](#); etc.) In the verse before us is assurance that God's protection includes angelic resources.

12. they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

It is tempting to test God's promises of protection to verify them. Satan tempted Jesus that way by quoting [Psalm 91:11, 12](#) to him in [Matthew 4:6](#): "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus responded with [Deuteronomy 6:16](#): "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" ([Matthew 4:7](#)).

Now if Jesus had jumped from the top of the temple, God's angels most certainly could have caught him. (He could have caught himself for that matter!) God's angels were apparently nearby throughout the whole ordeal, and they ministered to Jesus' needs afterward ([Matthew 4:11](#)). Jesus was proving to Satan that God called the shots. Jesus chose to trust God rather than test him. God invites certain tests ([Malachi 3:10](#)) but not others. We must know the difference.

What Do You Think?

What will you teach others about the concept of "guardian angels" as a result of studying [Psalm 91](#)?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do [2 Kings 6:15-17](#); [Psalm 34:7](#); [Daniel 6:22](#); [Matthew](#)

[18:10](#); [Acts 12:11](#); and [Hebrews 1:14](#) inform or cause you to change your conclusions?

B. Against Nature's Predators (v. 13)

13. You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

The previous two verses tell us that God will defend his people even to the extent of sending his heavenly agents to protect us. In the verse before us, God's protection moves from the defensive to the offensive: not only will God keep his people from harm, but he will empower us to defeat the fiercest of foes!

No one doubts that *the lion* is "king of the beasts." The *cobra* is an extremely poisonous snake (see [Job 20:14, 16](#); [Psalm 58:4](#); [Isaiah 11:8](#)). *The great lion* is one that is in its prime. *The serpent* is a large snake (compare [Deuteronomy 32:33](#); [Jeremiah 51:34](#)). These creatures are used figuratively to represent any and all persons and powers that threaten God's people.

III. Sure Promises (PSALM 91:14-16)

A. Basis of Blessing (v. 14)

14. "Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him; I will protect him for he acknowledges my name.

him for he acknowledges my name.

Here begins the final stanza of the psalm (see the [Lesson Context](#)). This marks a transition of speakers from the psalmist to God himself.

This verse elaborates on the result of trusting in the Lord, in parallel thoughts. The larger context is that of something being conditional. The condition for receiving the promised deliverance from evil is to have placed full devotion in the Lord. The expression *he acknowledges my name* denotes intimacy of knowing about someone. In other contexts, variations of this expression carry the ideas of trust, reverence, or covenant faithfulness (examples: [Psalm 9:10](#); [Isaiah 52:6](#); [Jeremiah 16:21](#)).

God knows his true followers by their love for him and by their understanding of who he is. Those who actively trust, love, and serve him will find refuge in his protective salvation. To this we can compare Jesus' strong words in [Matthew 7:21, 22](#): "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father.'"

What Do You Think?

How will you express your love for the Lord in the month ahead?

Digging Deeper

How do [Mark 12:30](#); [John 14:15](#); and [1 John 5:3](#) inform your answer?

B. Forms of Blessing (vv. 15, 16)

15, 16. "He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

These verses climax the psalm. They should be read together in order to appreciate the intensification of the Lord's promises. The two opening phrases establish the relationship that is the focus of [Psalm 91:14](#): when God's people *call on* him, he is faithful to *answer*. God is not aloof or disinterested. He initiated the relationship with his people and established a means of communication. The lines of communication of prayer, worship, and reading God's Word remain open today.

Several promises follow the opening phrases. These can be seen broadly as two categories: blessings for the present life and certainty of ultimate salvation. Notice that God does not promise that his faithful people will never experience *trouble*, but that He will be with them in the midst of it.

God has already secured our salvation in Christ, but he has not yet eradicated evil and suffering from his creation. That is why we can trust him in the midst of suffering. He is with us, he will deliver us, and he will honor us.

Conclusion

A. God Is Our Protection and Salvation

In this fallen world, God's people are surrounded by evil, danger, and suffering. [Psalm 91](#) is an emphatic reminder that God is trustworthy and mighty to save. Christians should expect to share in Christ's suffering, even unto death ([Matthew 16:24, 25](#); [1 Peter 2:19-21](#)). But we should also expect God's protective blessings. Rather than contradictory realities of the Christian life, the existence of persistent sin in the world alongside the victory of Christ is a dynamic tension.

Elisabeth Elliot understood this tension and fiercely trusted in God as her refuge. She knew firsthand that God's protection did not preclude suffering and death in this life. Her book mentioned in the Introduction is a biography of her late first husband, Jim Elliot, who was killed by the very people with whom he tried to share the gospel. After his death, Elisabeth Elliot returned to her husband's murderers. She was frightened, but she was faithful. She knew of the dangers, but she also knew of God's trustworthy protection and salvation.

For twenty-first century Christians, it is all too easy to seek protection in something other than God himself. It is tempting to trust in financial security, military defenses, reputation, or even in church

membership. Service to the church is an important responsibility of all Christians; but as we give of our time, talent, and treasure, we take care that our trust is in God himself and not in what we think our works earn.

B. Prayer

Almighty God, you are our true protection and salvation. Please strengthen our trust and protect us against the evil and danger that surrounds us. Equip us to be agents of your protection and bold proclaimers of your salvation to the ends of the earth. For all that you have done for us and for all you promise to do, we give you thanks and praise. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God is greater than all circumstances.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Say, “Our homes and various other structures protect us from many dangerous things— protection that is so commonplace that we may take it for granted. What are some of those dangerous things, great and small?” Jot responses on the board. (*Possible responses*: weather, animals, criminals, disease, etc.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Methods of Protection” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work on the seven matches individually for no more than one minute. Then invite volunteers to share their responses to the question below the matches.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, “The writer of [Psalm 91](#) uses metaphors to depict God’s sheltering influence against physical and spiritual dangers that surround us. Let’s see how that works.”

Into the Word

Have students take turns reading aloud the verses of today’s lesson text,

[Psalm 91:1–8, 11–16](#). Then divide the class into three groups of three or four learners each. Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following instructions for three groups. (Larger classes can form more groups and give duplicate assignments.)

The Protected-By Group: What poetic images in [Psalm 91:1, 2, 4](#) describe the various ways God protects us? How do these metaphors help us understand God’s protective influence?

The Protected-From Group: What poetic images in [Psalm 91:3, 5, 6](#) indicate the things God protects us from? How do these metaphors help us understand the physical and spiritual dangers from which God ultimately protects us?

The Promise Group: What promises from God are included in [Psalm 91:7–16](#)? How do they help us understand the protection of God, even when disaster and evil seem to be winning?

Launch the exercise by pointing out that each set of instructions has two questions: a “what’s so?” question followed by a “so what?” question. Allow several minutes for intra-group research and discussion, then ask groups to share findings in whole-class discussion.

Answers to the “what’s so?” questions: *Protected-By Group*: a shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress, feathery wings, shield, rampart; *Protected-From Group*: fowler’s

snare, pestilence, terror, arrow, plague; *Promise Group*: protection despite the odds, seeing justice done, angelic guardian, deliverance from dangers, love, honor, long life, salvation. *Responses* to the “so what?” questions may vary widely.

word indicates. (If time does not permit using the activity this way, give each learner a copy as a take-home.)

Into Life

Have the following on display from the beginning of class: five pennies, five aspirins, five matches, and five puzzle pieces. (You may need more or fewer of each, depending on class size.)

Say, “Let’s close the class in prayer, asking the Lord for protection and rescue in a particular area of life. If you need God’s protection and rescue from a financial problem, come up and take a penny; for a health concern, come up to get an aspirin; for a relational issue, pick up a match; for any other problem, take a puzzle piece. Hold these while praying silently for God’s protection and rescue in your areas of difficulty.” Allow enough time for participants to do so before closing the class in prayer yourself.

Option. Time allowing, distribute copies of the “In Need of Protection” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs to see who can finish the quickest. Conclude by challenging learners to pick one of the words in the puzzle as a prompt for praying for God’s protection in the area of life that