

God Our Dwelling Place

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- [0 : 00] Almighty who has the power to fulfill, to accomplish, to deliver on his word. He is Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, who enters into relationship with his people.
- And then he is my God, the psalmist says in verse 2. He is my God, the one who created out of nothing.
- The one who established the universe. The one who is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, ruler of all that there is. He is personally connected to his people.
- God is our shelter. That's what's being promised here. And it's being promised here in a very profound sense amidst the distress that Israel has been experiencing.
- Psalms 91 is the second psalm in the fourth book of the Psalter. The Psalter, I'm sure many of you know, is divided into five books.
- [1 : 07] And here is Psalm 91 in the fourth book. A book that is in part an answer and a beginning of comfort for the people of God in the midst of the terrible distress that they have experienced, which is largely described for us in the third book of the Psalter.
- We might think in particular of the anguished cries that we find in Psalm 79 from the third book of the Psalter, which stand in such stark contrast to all of the promises that we read in this psalm, in the fourth book.
- Listen to the beginning of Psalm 79. Oh God, the nations have come into your inheritance. They have defiled your holy temple.
- They have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds for food, the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth.
- They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. Here is difficulty that puts our difficulties to shame, doesn't it?
- [2 : 25] Here is calamity visited upon the people of God. Jerusalem taken. The temple defiled. The people of God slaughtered in such number that there is no one left to bury the dead.
- How does that relate to our psalm? Aren't we promised in Psalm 91 that a thousand will fall on one side, a thousand on another, but it will not come near you?
- How do we hold these things together? Although as Israel has experienced in her history, they will lose capital.
- They will lose land and temple and king. They will not lose their God. They may lose the habitation of the land filled with milk and honey.
- They may lose the habitation of Jerusalem, the beautiful capital city. They may lose even the presence of God manifested for them there in the temple.
- [3 : 30] They may lose the leadership of the king. They may lose their lives in suffering. And it may seem that all has gone to rack and ruin. But what is the promise of Psalm 91?
- The promise is they will not lose their God. Psalm 90, which opens book four of the Psalter, begins with that great declaration, you, Lord, have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Long before any trouble, in fact. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. And so Psalm 91 takes up that theme, that theme of God, our dwelling place, that he has made us for himself, that he is near to us, that he is with us.

That however difficult the circumstances of this life may be and become, God will remain our dwelling. That the people of God cannot be separated from him.

And it's in the context of God as shelter for his people that this Psalm goes on to say, and therefore you are safe in God. The God who determines to keep you as his people will protect you to accomplish the ends for which he sends you.

[4 : 52] And though there may be dangers in this life, we have very particular and personal dangers spelled out here. The snare of the fowler, a figure for the peril of one's life.

The hunter who goes out for birds, but his arrow seems bent on hitting you. Very particular and personal kinds of danger. To expansive dangers of disease and warfare.

God says here, loved ones, I am your God. And I will give you all that you need. You know, we are not guaranteed that when the earthquake comes, the building won't fall on us.

That when disease comes, it won't strike down heavily upon us. That when affliction comes, it won't bear upon us. But we are guaranteed that when difficulty comes, it will not separate us from the love of God.

It will not separate us from God, who is our dwelling place, our home, our shelter, our protection. And I think also in this Psalm, we are given a number of allusions to the Exodus.

[6 : 04] Clear allusions in terms of plague and pestilence. How could an Israelite read and sing about plague and pestilence and not think about the Exodus and the judgments God visited upon the people in Egypt, bringing his own people out of bondage and slavery?

But there are subtler allusions here too. The word abide in verse one, I think has resonance with the Passover night. The serpent in verse 13 has a certain kind of resonance.

Not the only reference, but at least some resonance with Moses' staff turned into a serpent. Striking your foot against a stone is the formula used for God striking Egypt.

And when Israel reads and sings about seeing the recompense, the punishment of the wicked, how could they not look back to the Red Sea? When Pharaoh and his hosts there were plunged into the waters of the Red Sea, and surely they beheld the recompense of the wicked.

You see, God is here assuring the safety for his people in this essential way, that they will remain his people. Of all the promises here, perhaps the most sweeping that we find in Psalm 91 is in verse 10.

[7 : 31] No evil will be allowed to befall you. Well, how can that be? How can that be? And yet, our Lord reiterates precisely that promise, doesn't he, in Luke chapter 10, verses 19 and 20, where Jesus there sends out the 72 to announce that the kingdom of God has come.

And we read, Jesus saying to his disciples, Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that spirits are subject to you, but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.

To the extent that we can see our Lord there providing a kind of commentary on Psalm 91, what he's really saying to his disciples, what really is the message of Psalm 91, is that nothing shall harm you in the performance of the calling to which I have called you.

That is, I will not fail to accomplish my purpose through you. And in the accomplishing of my purpose, no harm at all shall deflect you from doing everything that I have called you to do.

[8 : 59] But do not ultimately rejoice in that, as good as it is. Do not ultimately rejoice in the power of God to work in this way.

No, rejoice ultimately in the fact that your names are written in heaven. That God will forever remain your home in Jesus Christ.

That is what this psalm is so assured about. At the time of the Exodus, Israel didn't have capital or land or temple or king, but God was their dwelling place.

God was their Lord. God was their protector. God accomplished his purpose through them. Of course, this psalm, though, doesn't only allude to the Exodus.

In many ways, it's also an extended series of echoes, a kind of fugue, sort of meditation, on its place in the Psalter and in its imagery on Deuteronomy 32 and 33.

[10 : 02] Deuteronomy 32 and 33. And that's so important because Deuteronomy 32 and 33 come after Deuteronomy 31.

That's the kind of thing we teach at seminary. And Deuteronomy 31 says, disaster will fall on the people when they turn away from God.

That is the prophecy of Moses there. But Deuteronomy 32 and 33 say, after that suffering, after loss, after exile, there shall come days of great blessing for God's people.

I'll hear the words of Deuteronomy 33 from verse 27. The eternal God is your dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms.

And he, God, thrust out the enemy before you and said, destroy. So Israel lived in safety. Jacob lived alone, that is, without enemies, without suffering, suffering, in a land of grain and wine, whose heavens drop down dew.

[11 : 13] Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, the sword of your triumph.

Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. And that is what we have in this psalm. Extraordinary, personal, wonderful promises of blessing to God's people who are in need.

It's so interesting, isn't it, how often we find in the scriptures that we are called to consider the question, what God is like our God? Well, here we have a question to consider, what people are like God's people?

What people are like us? Because we belong to such a great God, who does not leave us in our difficulty, but will remember the promises that he has made.

That he made in the garden. That he made to the nation of Israel. That he made again, and again, and again. that it is God himself who brings forth the seed who shall crush the head of the serpent.

[12 : 34] Delivering us from evil. Fulfilling the words of this psalm. That in God, in our Christ, we too are more than conquerors. For our names have been written in the book of life.

What a God we have. What a people he has made us to be. In all circumstances then, this psalm tells us that God is our shelter, that God is our safety, and then at the end, that God is our satisfaction.

Our satisfaction. I think even when we know the promises of God, there are those times, aren't there, when they can seem like they're just simply too good to be true.

Perhaps a little divorced from reality. A little bit like daydreaming. They don't exactly match our lives.

Certainly don't seem to match every moment of our lives. We don't always feel immune from the terrors of the night. We're not always free from sickness, from distress, from anguish.

[13 : 46] And we can think, well, maybe this is just sort of nice poetry. Maybe it's just a little bit wishful thinking. Sort of like the exaggerated words of a teenage love song.

Maybe these things were true then and there. But we're modern people. Maybe they don't have much to say for us here and now.

When we're tempted to think that, we should turn to the end of Psalm 91. Because in the last verses of Psalm 91, you'll notice there is a shift in the psalm.

There is a new speaker introduced to us in the text. God himself comes to speak, to address the psalmist directly. To remind, to comfort, to remove doubts.

And he says to the psalmist, and he says to us here as his people, don't you see, don't you see that I am with you in your trouble?

[14 : 51] Don't you see that I am here to protect you, to deliver you, that in your weakness I am your strength? That I am your dwelling place?

That I am your shelter? That I am your safety? And when you call on me, I will answer. When you call on me, I will answer you.

Now that is a promise worth holding on to, isn't it? That is a promise worth committing to memory. Because that is God's covenantal pledge to his people.

That he is our God and we are his people. That he has bound himself to us by oath. The mighty king, the suzerain, the great one, enters into a covenant, a relationship, with a weak and needy people.

So you see, God has entered into a covenant with us. The covenant of grace. Promising salvation when by grace we call on him in faith. And he says, not only do I bid you to call on me in your distress, but I give you the very gift of faith to do so.

[16 : 08] Despite your failing, despite your sin, despite the chastisement that shall fall upon you, I am with you. I am your satisfaction. For I have made you for myself.

And I'll give to you great gifts of blessing, of life in me, of deliverance in my son. And so even now we hear the words of this psalm, also the words of the prophet Zechariah, fulfilled in our presence.

Zechariah 13, 9. They will call on me and I will answer them. I will say, this is my people. And each one of them will say, the Lord is my God.

Or again in Psalm 145, verse 18. The Lord is near to all who call upon him. Or again in Joel 2, 32.

And Romans 10, 13. All that call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And so profoundly is that displayed for us in that great picture of the new heavens and the new earth in Isaiah 65.

[17 : 25] Before you call to me, I will answer. While you are yet speaking, I will hear you. That is the assurance.

That is the confidence we have. That God is so near that he has bound himself to us by oath. A reality that the Israelites knew only by type and shadow.

But we know it so much more fully through our Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? Having been brought into the new covenant made by his blood. As the Apostle Paul thinks of this in Romans 8, if God is for us, if he did not spare his own son to deliver us, but gave him up for us all, if we call on him and he will answer us, if nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, what could possibly be against us?

What could possibly stand against us as God's people? If trouble, if hardship, if persecution, if danger comes to you and loved ones, these things will come to you, God shall remain your dwelling place.

God shall remain your dwelling place. Because we have a city, a home, the new Jerusalem, a city that doesn't look altogether like the cities of this world as we find them now.

[19 : 04] All throughout history, all throughout Scripture, you see, we have those who want to build their own cities, who want to establish their own homes, who would raise their own tower, who would build their own bridge to find their way to God, to try to find a dwelling place, a point of fixed security in this life.

This is the basic instinct of us all, all the way back to the descendants of Cain, that ultimately brings only futility. And then there are those who, like Seth in Genesis 4, begin to call upon the name of the Lord.

And in that cry for mercy, for help, God says to us, not only have I bridged the chasm that you could not in my son, but I stoop down to you in your calamity.

I promise, I vouchsafe to you on my honor, on my word, so that if I go back on my word, I would not be God. I shall give you a home, a dwelling place with me in glory forever.

That is what Eden pointed to. that is what the glory cloud pointed to. That is what the tabernacle pointed to.

[20 : 25] That is what the temple pointed to. And so in verses 14 and 15 and 16 of this psalm, Psalm 91, here we find some seven glorious promises in these verses.

And then God says, with long life, I will satisfy him. I will satisfy him. Full satisfaction for the people of God.

That is what God promises us. That is what God wants us to go forward knowing. That God will satisfy us with a fullness in his promises. With the fulfillment of hope.

With provision. With rest. with peace. The goal of Emmanuel, God with us, forfeited by Adam, forfeited by Israel, God's intimate presence with his people will be fulfilled for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think of the refrain of Revelation chapter 21 verse 3. Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. The consummation of all things where we dwell with our Father in heaven through our Lord Jesus Christ forever in glory.

[21 : 55] So Psalm 91 then is a psalm of great assurance for us as pilgrims, as sojourners who have not yet arrived at that home, but we have a passport to it.

We have guaranteed entry to it. We participate in that home life even now by the power of the Spirit. It's a psalm for those who find themselves in the midst of difficulties, but who have a great God who shall satisfy them, who shall bring them through the terrors of the night to be with them as their dwelling place.

And so as we go out this evening and into the new week, go out with these promises, that God is our dwelling place, that God will remain our dwelling place, and that God will protect us from every danger for the accomplishment of the calling to which he has called us, and that God will give us everlasting life in Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen. Let's pray together. O Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are our help in times of need, that you are our satisfaction, that you have provided your Son to be our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we ask that you would give us hearts to receive all of your promises, to live obedient lives of gratitude for such a great salvation. We ask this in Christ's name.

[23 : 44] Amen. Would you please stand with me as we sing our final song of praise, A Mighty Fortress?

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