

From a **Messianic Jewish perspective** Psalm 91 is a profoundly prophetic text that finds its ultimate, literal fulfillment in **Yeshua (Jesus) the Messiah**. It simultaneously serves as a blueprint for how believers can walk in the same divine protection by abiding in Him. Within the traditional Jewish *Siddur* (prayer book), the psalm holds a prominent place as an **apotropaic prayer—a spiritual shield chanted during specific times of transition, vulnerability, and spiritual warfare.**

The Messianic Jewish Exposition of Psalm 91

Messianic Judaism sits at the intersection of Jewish heritage and faith in **Yeshua** as the Promised Seed. From this viewpoint, Psalm 91 is broken down into three core dimensions:

1.1. The Messiah as the Ultimate "Dweller"

The psalm opens by describing one who perfectly dwells in the "*secret place of the Most High*" (*b'seter Elyon*). Messianic believers view **Yeshua** as the only human who ever perfectly and unceasingly abided in total obedience and intimacy with the Father. Where general humanity falls short, **Yeshua** is the "Second Adam" who completely inhabited the shadow of the Almighty.

1.2. The Wilderness Temptation and Satanic Misquotation

In the New Testament (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10–11), Satan explicitly quotes verses 11 and 12 to Yeshua on the pinnacle of the Temple: "*He will give His angels charge over you...*".

- **The Messianic Insight:** Satan recognized that Psalm 91 was inherently Messianic.

However, as Messianic teachers point out, the devil deliberately omitted a vital clause from verse 11: "**to keep you in all your ways.**"

- The Messiah's "ways" were strictly bound to the will of God. By refusing to hurl Himself down to force a miracle, Yeshua demonstrated that true Messianic authority relies on absolute submission, not testing God.

1.3. Trampling the Serpent (Verse 13)

Verse 13 declares, *"You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra... the serpent you shall trample underfoot."* Messianic theology directly links this to the **Proto evangelium (Genesis 3:15)**, which prophesied that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. **Yeshua's** victory over sin, death, and demonic oppression is seen as the literal

realization of this verse. He later extends this spiritual authority to His disciples in Luke 10:19 (*"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions"*).

1.4. The Final Promise of Salvation

The psalm concludes with God speaking: *"I will deliver him... with long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation."* In Hebrew, the phrase *"show him My salvation"* translates literally to **"show him My Yeshua"** (*v'arehu b'yeshuati*). Messianic believers see this linguistic link as a beautiful, literal stamp of the Messiah's name embedded into the climax of the text.

Psalm 91 in the Siddur: Liturgical Occasions

In mainstream rabbinic tradition and the *Siddur*, Psalm 91 is known as *Shir Shel Pega'im* (The Song of Plagues or Evil Encounters). Because Jewish liturgy views the night, the

changing of the Sabbath, and death as times when spiritual or physical dangers loom, the psalm is sung on **four specific occasions**:

- **The Bedtime Shema (*Kriat Shema al HaMittah*)**: It is recited every single night before going to sleep. It acts as a petition for God to send His angelic guardians to watch over the vulnerable soul during the dark hours of rest.
- **Motza'ei Shabbat (Saturday Night Service)**: Chanted at the conclusion of the Sabbath as the secular week begins. According to Jewish mysticism, the protective spiritual holiness of the Sabbath recedes at nightfall, leaving people exposed to the mundane world. The psalm is sung to carry the Sabbath's divine protection into the upcoming week.

- **Pesukei D'Zimra (Verses of Praise):**
Recited during the morning services of **Shabbat, Yom Tov (Festivals), and Hoshana Rabbah**. It serves to elevate the consciousness of the congregation into a state of absolute trust before entering direct communal prayer.
- **Jewish Funeral Processions:** The text is chanted seven times as a casket is carried to the grave. It serves to comfort the grieving, honor the deceased, and pray that the departing soul is escorted safely into the spiritual realm by God's angels.

Here is the deeper look into the Hebrew word connections, the New Testament mirrors, and the historical Talmudic origins of Psalm 91.

The Hebrew Word Connections to the Name
"Yeshua"

The climax of Psalm 91 contains a profound linguistic connection that Messianic believers consider a literal signature of the Messiah embedded in the text.

The Literal Text

In Psalm 91:16, God makes a final, ultimate promise to the one who loves Him:

- **Hebrew:** וְאַרְאֶהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי
- **Transliteration:** *V'ar'ehu b'yeshuati.*
- **English Translation:** "And I will show him
My salvation."

The Linguistic Link

The Hebrew root for "salvation" is יָשַׁע (yasha). The name יֵשׁוּעַ (Yeshua) is a direct, masculine noun derived from this exact root, meaning "He will save" or "Salvation."

When a Messianic believer reads verse 16 in its original tongue, it reads with a dual,

prophetic layer: *"With long life I will satisfy him, and I will show him My **Yeshua**."*

The Conceptual Fulfillment

In Luke 2:29–30, an elderly Jewish man named Simeon (*Shimon*) is moved by the Holy Spirit in the Temple when he sees the infant **Yeshua**. He cries out: *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace... **For my eyes have seen Your salvation**."* Simeon was experiencing the literal, physical manifestation of the promise made in Psalm 91:16.

New Testament Mirrors of Psalm 91

The themes of Psalm 91—refuge, angelic protection, and victory over spiritual enemies—reverberate deeply across the New Testament. The writers of the **Apostolic Scriptures** frequently utilized the language of

this psalm to describe the life of believers in Messiah.

Psalm 91 Verse	New Testament Mirror	Spiritual Dynamic
v. 1–2: "He who dwells in the secret place... I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge...'"	John 15:4: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself... neither can you, unless you abide in Me."	The Secret Place: For the New Testament believer, the "secret place" (<i>b'seter</i>) is no longer a physical location or the earthly Tabernacle, but a position of being "in Messiah" through the Holy Spirit.
v. 13: "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot."	Romans 16:20: "And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly."	Trampling the Enemy: Paul mirrors the imagery of trampling. Because Yeshua crushed the ultimate serpent, the body of believers (the Kehilah/Church) walks in that shared authority.
v. 11: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways."	Hebrews 1:14: "Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"	Angelic Guardians: Hebrews confirms that the angelic protection promised to the King in Psalm 91 is actively extended to all who inherit salvation through Him.

Historical Origins: Why the Talmud Classifies it as a "Song of Plagues"

In rabbinic literature, specifically the Babylonian Talmud, Psalm 91 is famously designated as שִׁיר שֶׁל פְּגָעִים (*Shir Shel Pega'im*)—"The Song of Evil Encounters" or "The Song of Plagues" (Talmud Shavuot 15b).

The Demonic Context of the Ancient Near East

To the ancient Israelites and the later Sages of the Talmud, "pestilence" and "destruction" were not just physical biological hazards; they were deeply associated with territorial demonic forces.

- The Talmud explains that Psalm 91 was specifically designed to be recited as a spiritual shield to **drive away demons** (*mazikin*) and malevolent spirits that roamed in the darkness.

The Interpretation of Verses 5 and 6

The Sages broke down verses 5 and 6 into specific classes of spiritual warfare:

- "**The terror by night**" was interpreted as *Lilith*, a nighttime demonic entity.

- **"The arrow that flies by day"** was viewed as the weapon of the angel of death.
- **"The pestilence that walks in darkness"** and **"the destruction that lays waste at noontide"** were personified as specific demons named *Ketev Meriri* (The Bitter Destruction)—a demon believed to hold power during the heat of the afternoon.

The Practice of King David

According to midrashic tradition, King David composed this psalm while he was clearing the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite to build the altar (which would become the site of the Temple). As he dug into the earth, he feared disrupting ancient, chaotic spiritual forces. He chanted Psalm 91 to **subdue the spiritual principalities** occupying the land, ensuring the holiness of the Temple site.

For the **Messianic believer**, this Talmudic history adds massive weight to **Yeshua**'s wilderness temptation. When Satan used this specific psalm against **Yeshua**, he was using a text that both traditional Judaism and spiritual reality recognized as the ultimate anti-demonic weapon. **Yeshua**'s refusal to succumb proved He was the ultimate master over those very "**plagues**" and entities.

The **Aramaic Targum of Psalm 91** provides an explicit look into the supernatural realm, while the four distinct names of God in the opening verses establish a foundational Messianic architecture of protection.

The Aramaic Targum of Psalm 91: The Confrontation with Demons

The *Targumim* are ancient Jewish translations and paraphrases of the Hebrew Scriptures

into Aramaic, dating back to the Second Temple and early rabbinic periods. While the original Hebrew text uses poetic, natural terms like "terror," "arrow," and "pestilence," the Aramaic Targum to Psalms 91 actively strips away the metaphors to reveal the explicit spiritual warfare taking place behind the scenes.

The text translates the core verses as follows:

- **Verse 5 (Hebrew):** *"You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day..."*
- **Verse 5 (Targum Aramaic):** *"Be not afraid of the **terror of demons** who walk at night, of the arrow of the **angel of death** that he looses during the day..."*
- **Verse 6 (Hebrew):** *"Nor the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday."*

- **Verse 6 (Targum Aramaic):** *"Of the death that walks in darkness, of the **band of demons** that attacks at noon."*
- **Verse 10 (Hebrew):** *"No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your tent."*
- **Verse 10 (Targum Aramaic):** *"No evil shall befall you, and **no plague or demons** shall come near your tent..."*

The Messianic Overlap

When the Targum shifts the focus to physical commands over specific demonic entities, it directly validates why **Satan chose this specific psalm during the Temptation of Yeshua** in the wilderness (Matthew 4:6).

By twisting a text universally recognized as the ultimate weapon against demonic forces, **Satan** attempted to use Yeshua's own armor against Him. Yeshua's subsequent handling of

demonic spirits throughout the Gospels—
casting them out with a single word—
demonstrates Him operating as the ultimate
master of the very forces the Targum names.

The Messianic Meaning Behind the 4 Names of God

In the first two verses of Psalm 91, the author
uses a highly concentrated, intentional
progression of **four distinct Hebrew names
for God**. In Messianic theology, these names
are not redundant synonyms; they are a
multi-layered revelation of the Messiah's
nature, identity, and authority.

[Elyon] --> The Sovereign King Melchizedek Line



[Shaddai] --> The All-Sufficient Nurturer Multiplier



[Yahweh] --> The Eternal, Covenant-Keeping Lord



[Elohim] --> The Righteous Creator and Judge

1.1. 1. עֵלְיוֹן (Elyon) – "The Most High"

- **Scriptural Origin:** This name signifies supreme majesty and absolute sovereignty above all other powers. It first appears in Genesis 14:18 during Abraham's encounter with the mysterious priest-king **Melchizedek**, who was the priest of *El Elyon*.
- **Messianic Meaning:** Hebrews 7 reveals that **Yeshua** is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is the ultimate King of Righteousness and Peace. Because **Yeshua** ascends to the right hand of **Elyon**, He is seated far above all principalities, powers, and demonic names. To dwell in the secret place of *Elyon* is to be safely hidden in Christ's cosmic supremacy.

1.2. 2. שַׁדַּי (Shaddai) – "The Almighty" / "All-Sufficient"

- **Scriptural Origin:** Traditionally translated as "Almighty" from the root meaning strength, ***Shaddai*** also correlates linguistically to the Hebrew word for "breast" (*shad*), implying a nurturing, all-sufficient provider who sustains, protects, and causes life to multiply.
- **Messianic Meaning:** **Yeshua** mirrors this dynamic when He laments over Jerusalem, saying He longed to gather her children together "**as a hen gathers her brood under her wings**" (Luke 13:34), echoing the exact protective shelter imagery of Psalm 91:4. Messianic teachers view ***Shaddai*** as the complete sufficiency of Messiah's grace; He is the firm, unshakeable fortress who provides

everything necessary for life and godliness.

1.3. 3. יהוה (Yahweh / Adonai) – "The Covenant LORD"

- **Scriptural Origin:** The personal, four-letter covenant name of God (the Tetragrammaton). It speaks to the eternal self-existence of God ("**I AM THAT I AM**") and His absolute faithfulness to keep promises made to His people.
- **Messianic Meaning:** In the Gospels, **Yeshua** continuously utilizes the absolute phrase "**I AM**" (*Ani Hu*), revealing that He is the physical manifestation of Yahweh walking among humanity. When the author says, "*I will say of Yahweh, He is my refuge,*" the Messianic believer recognizes that our covenant relationship

and refuge are anchored directly through the mediated work of **Yeshua**.

1.4. 4. מִיְהוָה (Elohim) – "The Supreme Creator / Judge"

- **Scriptural Origin:** The plural noun of majesty used in Genesis 1:1, representing God's absolute power as Creator, Ruler, and Righteous Judge of the universe.
- **Messianic Meaning:** John 1:1–3 declares that **Yeshua** is **the Word** who was with God and *was* God (Elohim), and through Him all things were created. In verse 2, the psalmist changes the suffix to make it personal: *Elohai*—"My God". Messianic theology emphasizes that through the Messiah, the cosmic, distant Creator (Elohim) becomes a deeply personal, intimate shield (*Elohai*) in whom we can place absolute trust.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran radically transformed our understanding of how Second Temple Jews interacted with Scripture. Scroll **11Q11** (also known as **11QPsAp^a** or the **11Q Apocryphal Psalms**) is a small, cigar-shaped manuscript dated between 50 and 70 CE.

Scholars have reached a near-consensus that this scroll is a **liturgical manual for exorcisms and healing rituals**. It contains four distinct songs intended to protect against or drive away evil spirits. The first three songs were entirely unknown before the scrolls were unburied—but the fourth and final song is a variant version of **Psalms 91**.

- **The Structure: The "Davidic Compositions" for the Afflicted**

The scroll explicitly links its contents to King David's legendary spiritual authority over evil spirits (such as when he played the harp to drive a harmful spirit away from King Saul). Another scroll found at Qumran (*David's Compositions* in 11Q5) notes that David wrote "**four songs for making music over people afflicted by demons**". 11Q11 is believed to be that exact collection.

The scroll's placement of Psalm 91 at the very end indicates that it was the **climax of the exorcism ritual**. The priest or practitioner would chant the first three secret incantations to bind the entity, and then unleash the structural authority of Psalm 91 to finalize the spiritual deliverance.

- **Key Differences in the 11Q11 Variant of Psalm 91**

The Dead Sea Scrolls version of Psalm 91 is not identical to the modern Masoretic Text found in standard Hebrew Bibles. The variants found in 11Q11 intentionally heighten the context of active demonic warfare:

- **Attribution to David:** The Qumran text explicitly opens the psalm with "**Of David,**" a phrase missing from the standard Hebrew Masoretic text. This cements the text as a royal weapon of spiritual warfare passed down from Israel's legendary king.
- **"You Shall Not See Evil":** In verse 10, where modern Bibles say "*no evil shall happen to you,*" the 11Q11 text reads: "**You shall not see evil...**" In the ancient worldview, "seeing evil" meant coming face-to-face with a terrifying demonic manifestation.

- **The Power of the Oath:** In the surrounding fragments of the scroll, terminology like the Hiphil participle of *shava* ("**to force an oath/adjure**") is utilized. This indicates that the psalm was used as a binding vocal command—an incantation designed to break a demon's legal hold over an individual.
- **The Addition of "Selah":** The scroll inserts the musical/liturgical pause "**Selah**" directly after verse 4 ("*...His faithfulness is a rampart. Selah*"), implying it was explicitly performed as a live, spoken ritual in front of a community or an afflicted person.
- **The New Testament and Messianic Link**

The reality of 11Q11 completely changes how we read Jesus' ministry in the Gospels. The Qumran community was using Psalm 91 to fight demons at the **exact same time Yeshua** was walking the earth.

When **Yeshua** appoints his disciples and tells them, *"I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions,"* (Luke 10:19), He is explicitly quoting **Psalm 91:13**. When the disciples return, they exclaim with shock: **"Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!"** (Luke 10:17).

The disciples immediately recognized that **Yeshua** was handing them the functional realization of Psalm 91—not as an abstract poetic metaphor, but as active, literal power over the demonic realm, just as the Dead Sea Scrolls intended.

Archaeological discoveries across Egypt, the Levant, and the wider Mediterranean have revealed that **Psalm 91 was the most widely used biblical text on physical amulets for personal protection in antiquity**. Known as **Psalm 90** in the ancient Greek Septuagint translation, **this text was physically worn by early Jewish and Christian believers as a tangible shield against sickness, violence, and demonic entities.**

The Power of the "Incipit" (Opening Lines)

When archaeologists unearth ancient papyrus, parchment, or metal pendants, they rarely find the entire psalm copied out. Instead, they find the **incipit**—the opening words or first verse of the text.

In the ancient world, writing the initial phrase of a sacred text functioned as a **metonymic key**. It was believed that the full spiritual

power, authority, and angelic protection of the entire chapter were packed into its opening syllables. If you wore the first line, you were effectively cloaked in the whole psalm.

Key Archaeological Discoveries

1.1. The Coptic and Greek Papyrus Amulets (Egypt)

In Late Antiquity (roughly the 4th to 7th centuries CE), Egypt's dry climate perfectly preserved small, folded slips of papyrus.

- **The Discovery:** Ritual specialists or local priests would write out the incipit of Psalm 91:1 (*"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High..."*), fold the paper into tiny squares, and place them into small leather pouches or bronze capsules.
- **The Combo Amulets:** Scholars like Dr. Joseph E. Sanzo have documented unique

artifacts where **Psalm 91 is bound together with Christian texts**. One notable 6th-century Greek papyrus amulet contains the opening lines of Psalm 91 written right alongside **The Lord's Prayer** (*Matthew 6:9*) and the opening lines of the four Gospels.

1.2. The Byzantine Amuletic Armbands

Archaeologists have uncovered elaborate metallic armbands made of silver or bronze dating to the Byzantine era (mid-6th to mid-7th century).

- **The Inscription:** One spectacular artifact found in Egypt features a unique Greek translation that actually **intertwines Psalm 91:1 with the rabbinic Shema** ("*Hear, O Israel...*").
- **The Context:** These armbands were worn openly on the arm. They served a dual

purpose: they broadcasted a deep religious identity while functioning as a continuous ***apotropaic*** (evil-averting) guard against the physical plagues and matching spirits of the era.

1.3. Jewish Childbirth Amulets and Silver Pendants

In Jewish archaeological contexts from the same period, Psalm 91 phrases were frequently engraved onto small silver pendants or written on parchment hidden within domestic quarters.

- **Targeted Protection:** These were heavily deployed as **childbirth amulets**. Because infant and maternal mortality was exceptionally high, families placed abbreviated verses of Psalm 91 around the birthing bed or pinned them to the newborn's swaddling clothes to ward off

the "terror by night" (traditionally associated with demonic child-stealers).

1.4. 4. Near Eastern Incantation Bowls

Though not worn on the body, archaeologists have excavated hundreds of terracotta "**magic bowls**" from Mesopotamia (5th–8th centuries CE) buried upside down under the thresholds of houses.

- **The Trap:** Written in a spiral script on the inside of the bowl were verses from Psalm 91 (most notably verse 7: "*A thousand may fall at your side...*"). The bowl was placed face down to symbolically "trap" any malignant force or plague demon trying to cross into the home.

The Shared Judeo-Christian Strategy

What these physical artifacts prove is that early believers did not view the spiritual world through an abstract lens. Whether they were Jews wrapping the Hebrew text around their child's wrist, or early Christians writing the Greek Septuagint translation on papyrus, they both viewed **Psalm 91 as an active, living kinetic weapon**. Keeping the physical words on their skin or over their doors was an expression of absolute trust that God's covenantal shield moved with them through the hazards of the ancient world.