

Psalm 91:1

O you who dwell in the shelter of the Most High
and abide in the protection of Shaddai—

² I say of the LORD, my refuge and stronghold,
my God in whom I trust,

³ that He will save you from the fowler's trap,
from the destructive plague.

⁴ He will cover you with His pinions;
you will find refuge under His wings;
His fidelity is an encircling shield.

⁵ You need not fear the terror by night,
or the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ the plague that stalks in the darkness,
or the scourge that ravages at noon.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your left side,
ten thousand at your right,
but it shall not reach you.

⁸ You will see it with your eyes,
you will witness the punishment of the wicked.

⁹ Because you took the LORD—my refuge,
the Most High—as your haven,

¹⁰ no harm will befall you,
no disease touch your tent.

¹¹ For He will order His angels
to guard you wherever you go.

¹² They will carry you in their hands
lest you hurt your foot on a stone.

¹³ You will tread on cubs and vipers;
you will trample lions and asps.

¹⁴ “Because he is devoted to Me I will deliver him;
I will keep him safe, for he knows My name.

¹⁵ When he calls on Me, I will answer him;
I will be with him in distress;

I will rescue him and make him honored;

¹⁶ I will let him live to a ripe old age,
and show him My salvation.”

This is a psalm of confidence in that it the psalmist expresses assurance that God will protect him. As part of our liturgy, it provides us with the same kind of assurance. Whatever the threat to our security - whether wild animal, human, weapon of war, disease, or even a psychological distress - God will protect us. This is not just a general, overarching protection, but a specific one in which God assigns angels to watch us wherever we go: we will not even trip on a stone. As someone who trips plenty, I might question how well this psalm speaks to me. But we should remember that in poetry, an idea can be true despite the exaggeration of an image.

We live, however, surrounded by disease, and we all know people who have become sick, and we all know the numbers. To claim that no disease will touch our tent seems beyond our level of confidence. That is a fair critique. But a confidence psalm like this is useful nonetheless. We can choose - in a situation like this one - to be crippled by fear, constantly worrying about the numbers and the threats, or to walk around (inside our homes) with our heads held high eager to take in as much of life as we can despite social distancing. What if God's statement at the end of the psalm is not so much a divine response but a natural consequence of the confidence? Studies have shown that we have better outcomes when our mindset is better!