

Psalm 91:5-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-91/psalm-915-7/>

Even in the face of death, we can know that we are in God's hand, and He has our best interest at heart.

The first two verses of Psalm 91 asked and answered the question, “Who will be protected by the Lord?” The answer is “Whoever trusts in Him, who dwells in His presence.”

Verses 3 and 4 underscored that it is Yahweh’s self-giving, gentle but unopposable strength that alone lifts up those committed to trust and rest in His providential caring. It is His faithfulness in which we can trust.

This section, verses 5-7, illustrates some ways the faithful benefit from the loving and fatherly activity of God as life mounts its many challenges. The recurring promise of the Bible is not exemption from the suffering encountered in living. It is rather the promise of God’s faithfulness that provides hope. It is this hope that carries the faithful through such experiences. During His ministry on earth, Jesus reminded His disciples of that truth: “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Verses 5 and 6 state:

*You will not be afraid of the terror by night,
Or of the arrow that flies by day;
Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.*

This accomplishes an artful parallelism of poetic imagery and symmetry within and then between each verse. The one trusting in the Lord can overcome fear both of nightly *terror* as well as daytime attacks. The daytime attacks—here portrayed as *the arrow that flies by day*—paint a picture in verse 5 of unrelenting assault during every moment of every day. The hours of dark exacerbate the sense of dread; one cannot readily see what dangers lurk in and lunge out from the shadows of darkness. That which is unrecognized and unknown—*terror by night*—is often far more unsettling to the human spirit than that which is clearly perceived and known. Yet the calamity which is known, such as suffering an assault, is no less threatening to life and limb.

What trusting in the Lord and dwelling in His shadow provides is the foundation to *not be afraid* in the face of such difficulties. We can not fear, since we know that God has all things in His hands, and will not allow anything into our lives that we cannot handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). Further, God causes all things to work together for good (Romans 8:28). So no matter the circumstances, we can know by faith that it is for our good (James 1:2, 12).

We can also not fear *the pestilence that stalks in darkness* (v. 6). This echoes a refrain from verse 5 in which *pestilence ... stalks* its victims from within the shadows of night, unseen and

terrifyingly ambiguous. *Darkness* here is treated literally. But it can also be symbolic of a lack of understanding. In pre-scientific ages disease was largely explained in metaphysical terms, mysterious and ominously threatening.

To complete the refrain's foreboding echo, the psalmist casts *destruction that lays waste at noon* in the role of that catastrophe which is self-evident and perhaps inescapable.

Verses 5 and 6 then emphasize that the one who trusts in God can set aside fear in any circumstance, day or night.

There is great light and liberating hope promised in this two-verse pairing, spanning daunting circumstances of both night and day. The connective link that opens the way to a clearly redemptive outlook is established in the leading phrase of verse 5: *You will not be afraid*. Despite the harsh realities of life wherein the known and the unknown can be equally as threatening to one's sense of well-being, Yahweh's committed followers who choose to trust and rely on Him will not be left to despair.

It is the Lord's faithfulness in caring for His people upon which His people rightfully rely:

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."
(Deuteronomy 31:6)

Verse 7 offers a resounding testimony of assurance: *A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you*. The faithful may see tragedy everywhere and even suffer profound personal losses. The terms *at your side* and *at your right hand* are intentional in conveying proximate intimacy amidst terrible loss.

The first term, *at your side*, refers to proximity. The tragedies of life are not merely remote happenings to be pondered from afar. Sorrow and loss visit every person.

The second term refers to location, *your right hand*, establishes intimacy. The *right hand* was readily used to describe another as holding a favored position and status, even as the subject of love. Losses experienced *at your right hand* were personal devastations. These devastations, however, cannot overcome the providential inclination of the Lord toward His own. His faithfulness is always there. If we will choose to dwell in it, it will deliver us from despair.

While life might well serve up what seem untenable circumstances, these will not come close to defeating Yahweh's eternal purposes of good for His people. This well-known verse from Jeremiah was promised by God as a part of God's message to Judah of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and exile of its inhabitants:

"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."
(Jeremiah 29:11)

To he who dwells in the Lord, trusting in Him, such devastating circumstances *shall not approach you*. Faith in God's faithfulness provides a shelter that cannot be breached. Even in the face of death, we can know that we are in God's hand, and He has our best interest at heart.

Biblical Text

⁵ You will not be afraid of the terror by night,

Or of the arrow that flies by day;

⁶ Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness,

Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side

And ten thousand at your right hand,

But it shall not approach you.