

Psalm 91 in *The Jewish Study Bible*
(*Tanakh* Translation, 1985)

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.”

Ps. 91: God protects from all harm those who trust Him. The many terms for protection, shelter, refuge, and the like emphasize the theme. A speaker in the first person addresses an audience, encouraging them to trust God so no harm will befall them (vv. 1-13); God responds (vv. 14-16), reinforcing the speaker's words. According to some commentators, *the shelter of the Most High* (v. 1) is the Temple, and the psalm was part of the liturgy for entering or departing from the Temple. It is not clear how metaphorical the language is or whether it reflects popular religion and superstition; whether the dangers are from demons or from the ordinary dangers of plague, war, and wild animals. **1-2:** *Shelter . . . protection . . . refuge and stronghold:* For the Temple as a place of protection see Pss. 27.5; 31.21. *Most High* (“elyon”) and *Shaddai* are old epithets for God, borrowed from the Canaanites, who applied them to the head of their pantheon. **4:** *Wings* may be a metaphor for divine protection, the outspread wings of a bird (Pss. 17.8; 36.8), or may refer to the wings of the cherubim on either side of the Ark (Exod. 25.17-22). **5-6:** God protects at all times: night and day, *darkness* (when there is no light), and *noon* (the brightest light). *Terror by night*, perhaps an attack by demonic forces (Song 3.8). *Plague* and *scourge* may also be demons. 7-9: Even if all those who do not have God's protection fall (and the numbers are exaggerated), the one who trusts in God will be safe. **8:** The wicked, those who lack trust in God. 11-12: The psalmist's “guardian angels” (Exod. 23.20; Pss. 34.8; 103.20); perhaps the protectors against the demonic forces mentioned in vv. 5-6. 14-16: God, speaking in the first person, responds to the psalmist, reassuring him of God's protection. **16:** *A ripe old age*, length of days is a sign of God's favor, and is especially welcome after Ps. 90, which dwells on the shortness of human life.