

The Believer's Security in the midst of Pestilence

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He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. 5 Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; 6 Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. 7 A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. 8 Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. (**Psalms** 91:1-8)

A great truth is laid down in general, that all those who live a life of communion with God are constantly safe under his protection and may therefore preserve a holy serenity and security of mind at all times (Ps. 91:1).

He that dwells, that sits down, in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty; he that by faith chooses God for his guardian shall find all that in him which he needs or can desire. Note,

1. It is the character of a true believer that he dwells in the secret place of the Most High; he is at home in God, returns to God and reposes in him as his rest; he acquaints himself with inward religion and makes heart-work of the service of God, worships within the veil and loves to be alone with God, to converse with him in solitude.

2. It is the privilege and comfort of those that do so that they abide under the shadow of the Almighty; he shelters them and comes between them and everything that would annoy them, whether storm or sunshine.

They shall not only have an admittance, but a residence under God's protection; he will be their rest and refuge forever. The psalmist's comfortable application of this to himself (Ps. 91:2): I will say of the Lord, whatever others say of him, "He is my refuge; I choose him as such and confide in him. Others make idols their refuge, but I will say of Jehovah, the true and living God, He is my refuge: any other is a refuge of lies. He is a refuge that will not fail me; for he is my fortress and strong-hold." Idolaters called their idols Mahuzzim, their most strong-hold (Dan. 11:39), but therein they deceived themselves; those only secure themselves that make the Lord their God, their fortress. There being no reason to question his sufficiency, fitly does it follow, In him will I trust. If Jehovah be our God, our refuge, and our fortress, what can we desire which we may not be sure to find in him? He is neither fickle nor false, neither weak nor mortal; he is God and not man, and therefore there is no danger of being disappointed in him. We know whom we have trusted. The great encouragement he gives to others to do likewise, not only from his own experience of the comfort of it (for in that there might possibly be a fallacy), but from the truth of God's promise, in which there neither is nor can be any deceit (Ps. 91:3-4, &c.): Surely he shall deliver thee. Those who have themselves found the comfort of making God their refuge cannot but desire that others may do so. Now here it is promised, That believers shall be kept from those mischiefs which they are in imminent danger of and which would be fatal to them (Ps. 91:3), from the snare of the fowler which is laid unseen and catches the unwary prey suddenly and from the noisome pestilence, which seizes men unawares and against which there is no guard. This promise protects

(1.) The natural life and is often fulfilled in our preservation from those dangers which are very threatening and very near, while yet we ourselves are not apprehensive of them, any more than the bird is of the snare of the fowler. We owe it, more than we are sensible, to the care of the divine Providence that we have been kept from infectious diseases and out of the hands of the wicked and unreasonable.

(2.) The spiritual life, which is protected by divine grace from the temptations of Satan, which are as the snares of the fowler, and from the contagion of sin, which is the noisome pestilence. He that has given grace to be the glory of the soul will create a defense upon all that glory. That God himself will be their protector; those must needs be safe who have him for their keeper and successful for whom he undertakes (Ps. 91:4): He shall cover thee, shall keep thee secret (Ps. 31:20), and so keep thee safe, Ps. 27:5. God protects believers,

(1.) With the greatest tenderness and affection, which is intimated in that, He shall cover thee with his feathers, under his wings, which alludes to the hen gathering her chickens under wings, Mt. 23:37. By natural instinct she not only protects them, but calls them under that protection when she sees them in danger, not only keeps them safe, but cherishes them and keeps them warm. To this the great God is pleased to compare his care of his people, who are helpless as the chickens, and easily made a prey of, but are invited to trust under the shadow of the wings of the divine promise and providence, which is the periphrasis of a proselyte to the true religion, that he has come to trust under the wings of the God of Israel, Ruth 2:12.

(2.) With the greatest power and efficacy. Wings and feathers, though spread with the greatest tenderness, are yet weak, and easily broken through, and therefore it is added, His truth shall be thy shield and buckler, a strong defense. God is willing to guard his people as the hen is to guard the chickens and as able as a man of war in armor. 3 That he will not only keep them from evil, but from the fear of evil, Ps. 91:5-6. Here is,

(1.) Great danger supposed; the mention of it is enough to frighten us; night and day we lie exposed, and those that are apt to be timorous will in neither period think themselves safe. When we are retired into our chambers, our beds, and have made all as safe as we can about us, yet there is terror by night, from thieves and robbers, winds and storms, besides those things that are the creatures of fancy and imagination, which are often most frightful of all. We read of fear in the night, Song 3:8. There is also a

pestilence that walketh in darkness, as that was which slew the first-born of the Egyptians and the army of the Assyrians. No locks nor bars can shut out diseases, while we carry about with us in our bodies the seeds of them. But surely in the day-time, when we can look about us, we are not so much in danger; yes, there is an arrow that flieth by day too, and yet flies unseen; there is a destruction that wasteth at high-noon, when we are awake and have all our friends about us; even then we cannot secure ourselves, nor can they secure us. It was in the day-time that that pestilence wasted which was sent to chastise David for numbering the people, on occasion of which some think this psalm was penned. But,

(2.) Here is great security promised to believers in the midst of this danger: "Thou shalt not be afraid. God by his grace will keep thee from disquieting distrustful fear (that fear which hath torment) in the midst of the greatest dangers. Wisdom shall keep thee from being causelessly afraid, and faith shall keep thee from being inordinately afraid. Thou shalt not be afraid of the arrow, as knowing that though it may hit thee it cannot hurt thee; if it take away the natural life, yet it shall be so far from doing any prejudice to the spiritual life that it shall be its perfection." A believer needs not fear, and therefore should not fear, any arrow, because the point is off, the poison is out. O death! where is thy sting? It is also under divine direction and will hit where God appoints and not otherwise. Every bullet has its commission. Whatever is done our heavenly Father's will is done; and we have no reason to be afraid of that. That they shall be preserved in common calamities, in a distinguishing way (Ps. 91:7): "When death rides in triumph, and diseases rage, so that thousands and ten thousands fall, fall by sickness, or fall by the sword in battle, fall at thy side, at thy right hand, and the sight of their fall is enough to frighten thee, and if they fall by the pestilence their falling so near thee may be likely to infect thee, yet it shall not come nigh thee, the death shall not, the fear of death shall not." Those that preserve their purity in times of general corruption may trust God with their safety in times of general desolation. When multitudes die round about us, though thereby we must be awakened to prepare for our own death, yet we must not be afraid

with any amazement, nor make ourselves subject to bondage, as many do all their life-time, through fear of death, Heb. 2:15. The sprinkling of blood secured the first-born of Israel when thousands fell. Nay, it is promised to God's people that they shall have the satisfaction of seeing, not only God's promises fulfilled to them, but his threatenings fulfilled upon those that hate them (Ps. 91:8): Only with thy eyes shalt thou behold and see the just reward of the wicked, which perhaps refers to the destruction of the first-born of Egypt by the pestilence, which was both the punishment of the oppressors and the enlargement of the oppressed; this Israel saw when they saw themselves unhurt, untouched. As it will aggravate the damnation of sinners that with their eyes they shall behold and see the reward of the righteous (Luke 13:28), so it will magnify the salvation of the saints that with their eyes they shall behold and see the destruction of the wicked, Isa. 66:24; Ps. 58:10.