

THEISM

God Protects

People struggle against daily calamities and evil forces. “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Sometimes trouble is extensive, perhaps even intensive. Sometimes trouble is of one’s own making, while at other times not of one’s own fault. Whatever the case, people typically look to family, friends, and community for safety and consolation in troublesome times. Whenever hardships, trials and storms of life come upon believers in God, they look also, and especially, to Him for protection from harm’s way.

God is often portrayed in Scripture like a place of refuge (Psalm 91:9; 142:5) where He protects the righteous from their troubles. In defensive language, God’s refuge is like a fortress, like a high tower, like a rock, and like a bird that hides its young under its wings. These metaphors of refuge are sometimes used together in Scripture and sometimes used separately.

Like a fortress of defense (Psalm 31:2), God is a stronghold, providing strength (2 Samuel 22:3), deliverance (Psalm 18:2), and refuge in affliction (Jeremiah 16:19). Because God is a fortress, one may trust (Psalm 91:2) and resort to him continually (Psalm 71:3).

Like a tower, high (Psalm 144:2) and strong (Psalm 61:3), God provides shelter from the enemy. Because “the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

Like a rock (Psalm 18:31, 19:14; 28:1; 31:2, 3; 144:1), God provides salvation (Psalm 18:46; 62:2, 7) and defense (Psalm 62:2, 7; 94:22) in time of need. “The Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (Psalm 92:15). “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4, see also vs. 15, 18, 31). Because God is strong and stable like a rock, people are protected whenever they depend upon God’s perfect and unchanging truth and justice.

Like a bird that shelters and protects its young under its wings, God hides his own under the shadow of his wings (Psalm 57:1). The Psalmist observed that “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty . . . He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall take refuge; his truth shall be your shield and buckler” (Psalm 91:1, 4). Boaz blessed Ruth, saying, “The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12). Malachi contrasted the plight of the wicked with the blessedness of the righteous when he wrote that a day was coming when the proud would burn like stubble, “but to you who fear my name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves” (Malachi 4:1-2). Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem to himself “as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). Because of God’s loving kindness, “the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings” (Psalm 36:7; see also Psalm 61:4). Because the Psalmist was sheltered in the shadow of God’s wings, he could rejoice (Psalm 63:7).

In Scripture, God’s protective refuge is portrayed not only like a place, but also like an instrument of war. Like a shield, (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2) God delivers his people from their enemies. “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise him” (Psalm 28:7). The Psalmist observed, “How they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’” But then he

reflected, “But you, O Lord, are a shield for me, my glory and the one who lifts my head” (Psalm 3:1-2). Because God is a shield, he can be trusted (Psalm 18:2) to save from violence (2 Samuel 22:3). The Psalmist cried to the Lord, “and he heard me from his holy hill” (Psalm 3:4).

Like a horn,” God’s salvation is symbolized (2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2). In the ancient world, a horn was a versatile instrument, used as a cup (1 Samuel 16:1; 1 Kings 1:39) or as a trumpet in time of war (Joshua 6:5; 1 Kings 1:34) 15). Metaphorically, a horn symbolized an individual’s personal situation (1 Samuel 2:1; Psalm 75:4-5; 89:17, 24; 92:10) or power (Daniel 7:11, 20-21). When speaking about the forthcoming birth of Jesus, Zacharias said that God had “raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:69).

God “guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of his saints” (Proverbs 2:8). Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:26-28) and meant it for evil but God meant it for good – to preserve posterity for his people (Genesis 45:5, 7; 50:20). Moses informed Israel that “the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive (Deuteronomy 6:24). Specifically, he said, “If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight . . . , I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you” (Exodus 15:26, see also Deuteronomy 7:15). When the Philistines invaded a gathering of the Israelites, the Lord “thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.” Samuel then erected a stone between Mizpah and Shen, “and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us”” (1 Samuel 7:7-12). God preserves those who trust in him. The righteous may therefore call upon the Lord. “Preserve me, O God, for in you I put my trust” (Psalm 16:1). “Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you” (Psalm 25:21).

Just as God protects the righteous, so “He does not preserve the life of the wicked . . . ” (Job 36:6). “The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, but he overthrows the words of the faithless” (Proverbs 22:12). “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). Moses warned the Israelites that if they did not “carefully observe all the words of this law . . . , then the Lord will bring . . . back on you all the diseases of Egypt . . . until you are destroyed (Deuteronomy 28:58-61). After God enabled the Israelites to conquer Canaan, they turned from him to idolatry. When they did, he delivered them into the hands of their enemies on numerous occasions, (Judges 2:14; 4:2; 6:13; 10:7). When Solomon forsook the Lord, God raised up adversaries against him (1 Kings 11:14; 23, 26). When people became idolatrous, God “gave them up to uncleanness,” and “to vile passions” (Romans 1:25-26). When they “did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind” (Romans 1:28).

God’s protection of the righteous provides many blessings. Because God is a refuge, people are safe in him. Even though the righteous may be troubled, they can be like the Psalmist who “lay down and slept” and afterwards declared, “I awoke, for the Lord sustained me” (Psalm 3:5). As a rock, God protects by making “my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and sets me on my high places” (Psalm 18:31-33; see also Psalm 116:8; 2 Samuel 22:34). As a shield, the Lord is “the one who lifts up my head” (Psalm 3:3). Moreover, “he has put a new song in my mouth” (Psalm 40:3), surrounding “me with songs of deliverance” (Psalm 32:7; see 2 Samuel 22:1-51).