

Psalm 91:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Analysis

Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. This verse climaxes the psalm's catalog of dangers with imagery of absolute victory over the most terrifying predators—both literal beasts and symbolic spiritual enemies. The progression from defensive protection (earlier verses) to offensive triumph reveals God's people moving from sheltered safety to empowered dominance.

"Tread upon" (תַּךְרֵךְ/tidrokh) means to walk on, march, tread down—implying authority and conquest. The same verb describes God treading on the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), demonstrating sovereign mastery. "Trample under feet" (תִּרְמֹס/tirmos) intensifies the image: not merely stepping over but crushing underfoot. This echoes Genesis 3:15's promise that the Seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head—messianic prophecy of Satan's ultimate defeat.

"The lion" (שָׁחַל/shachal) and "young lion" (כְּפִיר/kephir) represent raw physical power. Lions were ancient Israel's most feared predators—symbols of strength, ferocity, and deadly danger. Yet Samson tore apart a young lion (Judges 14:6), David killed lions protecting his sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-36), and Daniel survived the lions' den (Daniel 6:22)—all prefiguring the believer's Spirit-empowered victory.

"The adder" (פְּתַח/pethen) is a venomous serpent, likely the Egyptian cobra—associated with Egypt's magicians who opposed Moses (Exodus 7:11-12).

Venomous snakes represent hidden, treacherous evil—the subtle danger that strikes without warning. Psalm 58:4 compares wicked men to "the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear."

"The dragon" (תַּנִּן/tannin) can mean sea monster, serpent, or dragon—often symbolizing chaos, evil empires, or satanic powers. Isaiah 27:1 prophesies: "The LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent... and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." Revelation 12:9 identifies "the great dragon... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan."

Jesus referenced this verse when He commissioned the seventy: "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19). This wasn't literal snake-handling but spiritual authority over demonic powers. Romans 16:20 promises: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly"—echoing both Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 91:13.

The four creatures represent comprehensive dangers: the lion (open violence), young lion (youthful aggression), adder (hidden treachery), dragon (spiritual evil). Together they symbolize every threat—physical, moral, and supernatural. The believer who dwells in God's secret place (v.1) receives authority to triumph over all adversaries.

Historical Context

Psalm 91's imagery of dangerous beasts reflects ancient Near Eastern realities. Lions roamed Palestine until the Crusades (12th century), making them immediate threats to shepherds, travelers, and villagers. Venomous snakes—vipers, cobras, adders—killed many in the ancient world where medical treatment was primitive.

The 'dragon' (tannin) appears throughout Ancient Near Eastern mythology—Babylonian Tiamat, Egyptian Apophis, Canaanite Leviathan—representing chaos and evil. Israel's prophets consistently demythologized these figures, asserting Yahweh's absolute supremacy over all chaos monsters. Ezekiel 29:3 calls Pharaoh "the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers," using dragon imagery for political enemies.

Early Church fathers universally interpreted this verse as messianic prophecy and Christian spiritual warfare. Justin Martyr (c. 155 AD) saw Christ trampling Satan. Augustine connected it to Genesis 3:15's protoevangelium. Medieval commentators linked it to spiritual combat against demons, temptations, and heresies. Reformation commentators emphasized both Christ's victory and believers' participation in that triumph through union with Him.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does this verse's progression from defensive protection (earlier verses) to offensive victory reveal the fullness of God's salvation?
2. What do the four creatures (lion, young lion, adder, dragon) symbolize in terms of different types of spiritual and physical dangers believers face?
3. How did Jesus apply this imagery in Luke 10:19, and what does spiritual authority over serpents and scorpions mean for believers today?
4. How does this verse connect to Genesis 3:15 (the serpent's head crushed) and Revelation 12:9 (the great dragon defeated)?
5. What is the difference between biblical spiritual authority over evil and dangerous practices like snake-handling or presumptuous risk-taking?

Interlinear Text

עַל	שְׁמַל	תַּךְ רָגִים	תְּרַמֵּס
H5921	upon the lion	H6620	Thou shalt tread
H7826	and adder	H1869	shalt thou trample under feet
the young lion and the dragon		H7429	
H3715		H8577	
כָּבֵד יְמִינֵךְ			

Additional Cross-References

Luke 10:19 (Parallel theme): Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Mark 16:18 (Parallel theme): They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Daniel 6:22 (Parallel theme): My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

1 Samuel 17:37 (Parallel theme): David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

2 Timothy 4:17 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

Romans 16:20 (Parallel theme): And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Romans 3:13 (Parallel theme): Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Isaiah 27:1 (Parallel theme): In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.

Revelation 12:9 (Parallel theme): And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Psalms 58:4 (Parallel theme): Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;

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