

Encamps

“The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and rescues them.”

Psalm 34:7

Encamps—As a child, I often went camping with my family. We set up our tent and rolled out the sleeping bags. We were always careful to make sure we had water and as much natural protection as we could find. The description of the camps of Israel is quite similar. As God’s people traveled, they constantly moved the camp from one location to another. Each time they set up a new campsite, they looked for water and natural protection. But they had something in their camp that my family did not have. They had God’s tabernacle.

The word in this verse translates “encamps” as *hana*. It comes from a word that means, “to bend.” In many cultures, the campsite was a circle (it bent around itself). But the Old Testament tells us that this is not the shape of the camps of Israel. The camps of Israel were squares. The shape of these camps was based on the position of the Tabernacle. Since the Tabernacle was God’s holy place, each side of the camp maintained a distance of respect and reverence from God’s position in the center of the camp. The importance of the camp was not based on its geographical location but rather on its proximity to God’s presence. This presence determined many of the actions that were allowed or prohibited within the camp. The camp was too close to God to allow any sin or impurity to enter.

This verse from Psalms paints a wonderful picture of God’s protection. It tells us that the angel of the Lord sets up camp around us. On all sides, we are protected from sin and impurity. It can’t get into our dwelling place because the angel of the Lord stands guard at the edge of the camp. But this protection is not offered to everyone. It is available only to those who “fear” Him, a word that means, “to show respect and reverence.” Once again we see the image of the campsite of Israel. We are inside the camp, but the camp is still based on proper reverence to its center, God’s presence in us. Unless that awe and reverence is present, the camp is not a camp of the Lord and the angel of the Lord is not guarding its borders.

Camping can be a powerful metaphor of spiritual significance. But we do not need to set up a tent in order to see this metaphor in our lives. The New Testament constantly refers to us as “foreign residents” in this world, dwelling in tents (our physical bodies) temporarily while we wait for our permanent home. Now we see the picture as it applies today. We are the camp. Our bodies are the campsites. God dwells within us. Because of his presence, we live a life of reverence and respect. And Jesus makes it all possible. He sets up the boundaries of our campsite and protects them. His protection keeps sin and evil at bay. We are pure within our camp because He has rescued us.

Rejoice. The Angel of the Lord has set up a protective barrier around you. God’s presence dwells in your center. Your campsite is secure.