

Psalm 121

Gods sustaining power
A Song of degrees.

Psalm 121:

This psalm fits well against the backdrop of a pilgrimage for it is concerned with the uncertainties one faces on such a journey.

It moves naturally from the need for help (see verses 1-2), to the promise of God's protection (see verses 3-8).

Verse (1b) should probably be retranslated as a question, which is quite permissible.

The psalmist is not looking at the hills as a source of help but as a source of threat or harm.

Then he raises the question: "From whence cometh my help?":

Verse 2 is his immediate answer.

Verses 1-8 (see note on Psalm 120-7).

The author and circumstances are unknown.

This song strikes a strong note of assurance in 4 stages that God is help and protection to keep both Israel and individual believers safe from harm.

- I. God – Helper (121:1-2);
- II. God – Keeper (121:3-4);
- III. God – Protector (121:5-6);
- IV. God – Preserver (121:7-8).

Verses 1-2:

As the psalmist anticipates his journey through "the hills" to Jerusalem, a route filled with anxiety, he seeks for help, perhaps looking around and within, and then finally looks up.

His "help", all help, comes from above.

Both nature and a person's very life are God's handiwork; as He has the power to aid His people at all times (146:6).

Psalm 121:1 "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

Not to the hills and mountains in Judea, looking about to see if the inhabitants of them.

Or any bodies of men, appeared upon them to his help in distress.

Rather to the hills of Moriah and Zion, where the ark of God, the symbol of his presence, was.

And to whom he looked for assistance and deliverance.

Or to heaven, the holy hill of the LORD, and to him that dwelleth there (see Psalm 3:2).

The lifting up of the eyes is a prayer gesture (John 11:41); and is expressive of boldness and confidence in prayer, and of hope and expectation of help and salvation (Job 11:15).

"From whence shall my help come?":

Not from hills and mountains, not from men, for vain is the help of man; not from kings and princes, the great men of the earth, nor from the most powerful nations.

But from the LORD (as in Psalm 121:2), which may be an answer to this.

Sometimes, when we are in the valley of despair, as the psalmist was in the last chapter, everything looks hopeless.

This verse above is the answer, not only for the psalmist, but for all who are in trouble.

In this life, we will go through valleys, but we must always look up for help, and climb back up to the mountaintop.

Do not keep looking downward in a downcast fashion, look up to the hills, for help is on its way.

Let's look at something Jesus had to say about the very same thing in the following verses.

Luke 21:26-28 "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."

This is speaking of a time when trouble is everywhere you look.

There is only one help for the psalmist, or for anyone else, who is surrounded with problems.

Look up and rejoice, God will come to your rescue.

Psalm 121:2 "My help [cometh] from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

"My help":

The psalmist does not look to the creation, but rather the Creator for his help.

Who helps his people out of the hands of all their enemies, and also out of both all their troubles and afflictions.

He helps them in the performance of duty, in the exercise of grace, in bearing the cross, in fighting the Lord's battles, and on in their journey.

He helps them to all blessings, temporal and spiritual.

To all needful supplies of grace here, and glory hereafter.

And this help he gives is quick and present, suitable and seasonable, is sufficient, and sometimes with, and sometimes without means.

And they have great encouragement to expect it from him, since he is able to give it, being the Maker of heaven and earth.

For what is it that he cannot do, who has made them both?

And besides, he has promised to help them, and he is faithful that has promised.

He has laid help on Christ for them, and set up a throne of grace, where they may hope to find grace and mercy, to help them in time of need.

And they have had past experiences of his help and salvation.

LORD here, is Jehovah.

To add, which made heaven and earth, adds to the name Jehovah the Word.

John 1:1-3 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "The same was in the beginning with God." "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."

The spoken Word of God created the heaven and earth.

God said, "let there be", and it was so.

The God that was Creator of everything, including me, would be the best help a person could possibly have.

Notice, there is no doubt in his statement.

He does not say, maybe He will help me.

He says cometh, which means continues to come.

My help continues to come from the LORD.

Psalm 121:3 "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber."

This is either an address of the psalmist to his own soul; or to any other good man, his friend and acquaintance, assuring of stability, and of final perseverance in grace to glory.

The LORD keeps the feet of his saints from falling: he will not suffer them to be moved out of the spiritual estate in which they stand.

Nor off of the Foundation and Rock of ages, on which their feet are set, and their goings have been established.

Nor out of the house of God, where they are as pillars.

Nor out of his ways, where he upholds their goings.

Moved in some sense they may be, yet not "greatly moved"; their feet may be "almost" gone, and their steps "well-nigh" slipped, and yet shall not fall finally and totally, or so as for them to perish (see Psalm 62:2).

“Moved”:

Compare Psalms 37, 23, and 24.

"He that keepeth thee will not slumber":

Neither angels nor men are the keepers of the saints, but the LORD himself.

He is the keeper of every individual saint, of every regenerate person, of every one of his sheep, of every member of his church.

He keeps them by his power, he preserves them by his grace, he holds them with his right hand.

Guides them by his counsel, keeps their feet from falling, and brings them safe to glory.

And a watchful keeper he is, he does not so much as slumber; he keeps them night and day, lest any harm them (Isa. 27:3).

In Hebrews chapter 13, we read that He will never leave us, or forsake us.

God is a present help.

He is always there to help us night and day.

If you are standing on the Rock that cannot be moved, you will not slip.

The Great Shepherd never sleeps or lets the wolves come in and get the sheep.

He is ever watchful over His sheep.

The assurance is, that He will be with us even unto the end of the earth.

Psalm 121:4 "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

“Slumber”:

Compare the appearance of sleep, Psalm 44:23.

The living God is totally unlike the pagan gods/dead idols (compare 1 Kings 18:27).

This does not just mean physical Israel, who the presence of God was continually with on their way to the Promised Land.

Spiritual Israel (Christians) are on a journey to their promised land (heaven).

God is with His own every step of the way to make sure our journey is completed.

The presence in the wilderness was the fire by night and the cloud by day.

The presence with the believer, now, is the Holy Spirit which is our Comforter and our Guide.

He will guide us to eternal life in heaven (our promised land).

Verses 5-6:

Traveling across the arid desert toward their city, the pilgrims’ great danger was exposure to the elements, and particularly the heat.

They could be scorched if they did not find “shade”.

Psalm 121:5 "The LORD [is] thy keeper: the LORD [is] thy shade upon thy right hand."

Thy Preserver; thy Defender.

He will keep thee from danger; he will keep thee from sin; he will keep thee unto salvation.

"The LORD is thy shade":

The LORD is as a shadow: as the shadow of a rock, a house, or a tree, in the intense rays of the burning sun (see the notes at Isaiah 25:4).

"Upon thy right hand":

Partly to uphold thy right hand, which is the chief instrument of action.

And partly to defend thee in that place where thine enemies oppose thee.

This represents the place of human need (see Psalm 109:6; and compare Psalms 16:8; 109:31).

LORD here, is Jehovah.

The promise is that the evil one cannot snatch you away from God.

He is our Keeper.

Look, with me, at the following 2 Scriptures that tell exactly what I want to say here.

John 10:28-29 "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any [man] pluck them out of my hand." "My Father, which gave [them] me, is greater than all; and no [man] is able to pluck [them] out of my Father's hand."

The shade here, means a protector from harm.

The right hand always has to do with the spirit.

This then, would be saying that God Himself protects the spirit of His followers.

Psalm 121:6 "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night."

With its rays, which it shoots forth like darts, and which fly swiftly, and pierce and hurt.

Hence Apollo, the same with the sun, is represented with a bow and arrows; so the rays of the sun seem to be called in (Hab. 2:11).

"Nor the moon by night":

This clause should be supplied, as a learned man observes, thus, "neither shall the moon cool thee by night"; for that has no warmth in it, and cannot smite with heat, as the sun does.

For even, as he observes, its rays focused by a magnifying glass will not communicate the least degree of sensible heat to bodies subjected thereunto.

Yet some say the moon is not only moist, but heats bodies as the sun.

The Septuagint version is, "the sun shall not burn thee by day, nor the moon by night".

And burning may be ascribed to the cold frosty air in a moonlight night, as to the north wind.

“By day ... by night”:

Around the clock protection.

The key word in this is smite.

Smite means to strike you lightly, or severely.

Day and night God is our Protector.

The elements of nature would cooperate with the believer, and not be harmful to them.

Just as the Spirit of God was with physical Israel, He will be with and protect spiritual Israel that are (Christians).

Verses 7-8:

God’s care includes His limitless ability to “preserve” believers from “all evil” and extends not just to all settings of life but for all time, both now and forevermore.

“Going out and ... coming in” is an idiom that speaks of the regular routines of life.

While this seems to have a temporal sense at first glance, there are indications that it looks beyond to eternal life, e.g., all evil (verse 7), and forevermore (verse 8).

Psalm 121:7 "The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul."

The Word of the LORD, as the Targum.

Not from the evil of affliction, though from that as a penal evil; or as a real one, it being made to work for good.

But from the evil of sin; not from the being or commission of it; but from its dominion and damning power, or from a final and total falling away by it.

And from the evil of the world; not from tribulation in it, and not from the reproach or persecution of it.

But from the wickedness and lusts that are in it.

And from the wicked men of it, their power, rage, and fury: and from the evil one, Satan.

Not from his temptations, but from sinking under them, and perishing by them (see John 17:12).

"He shall preserve thy soul":

He preserves the bodies of his people, oftentimes from diseases and disasters, and from death, till the appointed time comes.

And then he preserves their dust in the grave, and raises it up at the last day.

But more especially their souls, and the redemption and salvation of which he undertook, and then has affected.

And which are preserved by him safe to his coming, kingdom, and glory.

Psalm 121:8 "The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore."

Preserve thee in going out and coming in; in going from thy dwelling and returning to it.

In going from home and coming back, that is, everywhere, and at all times.

Compare (Deut. 28:6; see the notes also at Job 5:24).

"From this time forth, and even forevermore.":

Through this life and forever.

This is the gracious assurance which is made to all who put their trust in God.

At home and abroad; in the house, in the field, and by the way; on the land and on the ocean.

In their native country and in climes remote; on earth, in the grave, and in the eternal world, they are always safe.

No evil that will endanger their salvation can befall them.

Nothing can happen to them here but what God shall see to be conducive to their ultimate good.

And in the heavenly world they shall be safe forever from every kind of evil, for in that world there will be no sin, and consequently no need of discipline to prepare them for the future.

Evil may be all around you, but the LORD will build a hedge around you.

Psalms 91:7 "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee."

Just as the LORD made a separation from the firstborn of Egypt and the firstborn of the Hebrews, He will make a separation for us as well.

Preserve means keep.

The sum total of this is, that he will keep our soul.

When I look at this, I see the 23rd Psalm.

He is our Shepherd.

He leads me where I should go.

He leads me to green pastures, He leads me to clear water, He watches over me while I rest.

The wolves cannot get me because He protects me.

When the Shepherd is there, it's then I fear no evil even though I am walking through the shadow of death.

He not only leads me to this green pasture once, but over and over as I need food.

He watches His sheep, as they go out and come in, to make sure they are all there, and that they are in good shape.

If they wander off, He goes after them.

I shall not want, because He provides all my needs.

Notice, that when I am in His presence, He restores my soul.

He leads me in the straight and narrow path of righteousness.

He even prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

He fills my cup so full that it runs over.

If I belong to the Great Shepherd, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 121 Questions

1. When we are in the valley of despair, things look _____.
2. My help cometh from the _____.
3. What would be the best help a person could have?
4. Where, in the Bible, do we read that He will never leave us, or forsake us?
5. If you are standing where, you will not slip.
6. What was the presence of God in the wilderness seen by the children of Israel?
7. What is the Presence with the believer now?
8. What is the shade mentioned in verse 5?
9. What does the author see in verse 7 and 8 of the 121st Psalm?