

Psalm 121 • The Lord is Your Keeper

Introduction

Psalms 120-134 are each labeled as “A Song of Ascent”. As Jews made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, these are the songs sung while traveling the roads slowly leading up to Jerusalem, culminating in their arrival at the Temple. One of the important functions of each of these 15 Psalms is in the way they prepare the worshiper for the culmination of their travel into the very presence of God, to have the right attitude in bringing their sacrifices to Him. So often we forget that what we think are delays in our life are really His patience waiting for our heart and mind and soul to take hold of the proper attitude and heavenly perspective. In reality, we are on a journey preparing us for eternal life in His presence.

Overview

Read through the entire Psalm and make note of the word that is used most to describe God's actions:

1. “He who **keeps** you” (v.3)
2. “He who **keeps** Israel” (v.4)
3. “The LORD is your **keeper**” (v.5)
4. “He will **keep** your soul” (v.6)

There are also 3 other phrases which closely compliment these thoughts:

5. “He will **not allow**” (v.3)
6. “The LORD will **protect** you” (v.7)
7. “The LORD will **guard**” (v.8)

The primary theme of this Psalm is the Lord as our personal Keeper, a truly inspiring meditation when coming into the very presence of the Lord, or to His temple as would be the case of the pilgrims preparing themselves for such an encounter.

¹I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;
From where shall my help come?

[Read v.1]

Q: There are at least 3 probabilities as to the meaning of “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains”. Can you list them?

1. It could be the prayer of someone needing to be rescued, looking to the high ground for a sign that help has arrived.
2. It could be a reference to the fact that so many idols and temples built to false gods were established on hilltops, and that to trust false gods is to hope for help that will never come.
3. Most likely, Jerusalem being located at the top of a mountain, and the fact that private worship often took place in one's home by opening an eastern window and gazing towards Jerusalem, that it is an affirmation of all the positive attributes of God as symbolized in Jerusalem and the Temple on their mountain.

²My help comes from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.

[Read v.2]

Q: Of all the myriad of qualities and attributes of the character and nature of God that COULD be mentioned, why in this context is it significant that He is here affirmed as the Creator?

A: Our help is not coming from someone merely familiar with our situation, or merely experienced in similar matters, but the One Who created everything that has gone into creating the very situation we find ourselves in. There is no higher expert to assist us than the Creator Who obviously knows every detail of what the situation is, as well as the precise solution.

Application: From where do **YOU** expect help to come in any of the issues or trials currently going on in your own life? Do you realize that if you're not fixated—looking exclusively to Him—that you're looking for the solution in someone/something else? Do you seek help from the Creator Himself or one of His created?

³He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.

[Read v.3]

Q: We're seeking help for one reason or another, for one circumstance or another. How does His assistance to "not allow your foot to slip" relate to the kind of help He will provide?

A: It's not a promise that all the physical problems associated with our situation will be automatically erased, but that He will reinforce our spiritual character so that we will not "slip" in our faith and walk during these times.

Point: In the course of the tests and trials of such great Biblical characters such as Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and so on, the common characteristic they share is concern for maintaining their spiritual walk even more than overcoming the difficult circumstances before them. It's always God first, self second.

Application: Is our first concern in a time of crisis the quality of our faithfulness or the desire to escape?

⁴Behold, He who keeps Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep.

[Read v.4]

Q: What comfort do we derive from v.3-4 that the Lord "will neither slumber nor sleep" in regard to either Israel collectively or each of us individually?

A: There is no day and night, no times of working and times of sleep from working with God. He is present, available, and working all the time. It's not a matter of us catching Him at the right time, but that we are always obedient in order to receive Him according to **HIS** timing.

⁵The LORD is your keeper;
The LORD is your shade on your right
hand.

[Read v.5]

Q: What is the meaning of "shade on your right hand"?

A: The right hand is always a biblical symbol of one's power and strength. "Shade" can also be translated here as "shadow". Taken altogether, it's the reassurance that we are always standing in His shadow, that He is always present with us, and that **HE** is the source even behind our individual strength.

⁶The sun will not smite you by day,
Nor the moon by night.

[Read v.6]

Q: Are we REALLY concerned that the sun and moon are sources of problems for us?

God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also.

—Genesis 1:16

Throughout the Bible the sun and the moon are used to represent rulers or powers over the physical environment. Just as Joseph's dream identified his father as the sun, his mother as the moon, and his brothers as stars. Since our help is the Creator, these things are in His control and subordinate to Him. Even authorities that seem beyond our ability to deal with are brought under control through Him.

Application: *Are there any situations, any factors that you're not fully trusting in God's overriding authority? Is there a persistent issue in your life that might be traced back to the fact that you think the influences are too big even for God to help?*

⁷The LORD will protect you from all evil;
He will keep your soul.

[Read v.7]

Q: How does this expand on the thought initiated in v.2?

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

—Matthew 10:28

Jesus Himself said that His kingdom is not of this world. It's more important to make it into the next kingdom than to achieve temporary peace in this present age. We have **ETERNAL** assurance of help, not temporal.

Q: What is significant about the word "protect" in this instance?

A: He knows that without His help, evil could overcome us. It's one of the things that can appear overwhelming to us if we had to face it alone; but He Who is greater can be trusted to protect us from even the worst spiritual and/or moral influences.

⁸The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in From this time forth and forever.

[Read v.8]

Q: To the people living during Old Testament times—even until recently in history—what would “your going out and your coming in” mean to them?

A: One’s house and/or city in which they lived was their safe haven, the place most fortified for their protection from wild beasts or even marauders. It was therefore normal for them to have to go out of these safe havens to the place they actually worked—to grow crops, tend cattle, chop wood, etc.—and at the end of each work day return to that place. People in those times were the most vulnerable while going to and from work.

WE must go to and from God’s work but have the assurance that He will keep us in the process as we are working in the world and safely return back together to His church.

Q: What might be significant about the last word “forever”?

A: This Psalm is not just an affirmation for this part of our life in Christ while on earth, but for our entire life with Him in eternity. This is why the most important protection He provides is for our faith and soul.

Overall Application

- *On what are your eyes and thoughts fixed? Do you realize it’s in direct proportion to your faith in God?*
- *Do you wonder if God slumbers, why He doesn’t act as quickly as you would like or deem necessary? How should you interpret the time that goes by before you see His help arrive?*
- *How would you live if you truly believed that you are currently in, and have never actually left, His shadow? What difference will that make going forward?*