**“LIFT UP YOUR EYES TO THE HILLS”**

**PSALM 121**

**Pastor Keith E. Gephart**

INTRODUCTION

This psalm is truly delightful, and focuses primarily upon Yahweh’s keeping and care for His own. Perowne states:

“This beautiful Psalm is the trustful expression of a heart rejoicing in its own safety under the watchful eye of Him who is both the Maker of heaven and earth, and the Keeper of Israel. The Creator of the Universe, the Keeper of the nation, is also the Keeper of the individual” (p. 373).

His proper name “Yahweh,” the faithful God of His covenant with His special people with whom He has entered in to a relationship, appears 5 times in Psalm 121—vv. 2, 5, 5, 7, and 8. The verb “keep, guard, protect” is used 6 times—vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 7, and 8. This significant repetition is blunted in its effect by some translations that change the rendering is some verses. The force of the same verb must be retained since its continual repetition is designed by the author to iterate “the truth of God’s loving care for the individual, and so to banish all shadow of doubt, fear, anxiety, lest in the vast sum the unit should be forgotten” (P. p. 373). The psalm promotes assurance for the believer even as it confesses both the greatness of and tender care of Yahweh. The assurance given in this psalm is good not only for the brief trip up to Jerusalem, but for the entirely of one’s life, and even for the time of transition from this earthly life to the life in the presence of Yahweh, as seen in such passages as 49:15 and 73:24.

This psalm is likely a pilgrimage psalm of those on their way up to Jerusalem to worship at one of the key annual festivals. It is possible that the entire psalm is spoken by the author concerning himself, “in a single heart” (*NASB St. Bib.* p. 872) similarly to the soliloquies of Psalms 42:5, 11 and 43:5. One person speaks throughout and speaks of himself in vv. 3ff. Most likely the intent was that they would begin to recite or sing it once they obtained the first view of the hills of and the city of Jerusalem—possibly at the last camping place (L. 866). Perowne expresses this idea well:

“At evening, as they are about to make preparations for their last night’s encampment, they behold in the far distance, clear against the dying light of the western sky, the holy hill with its crown of towers. The sight fills them with a sense of peace and security….Tomorrow, in the words of the next Psalm, they will sing, ‘Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem” (p. 374).

Psalm 122 adds, “To which the tribes go up, even the tribes of the LORD—an ordinance for Israel—to give thanks to the name of the LORD”. It seems hardly coincidental that these psalms are placed in their current order, even though Psalm 122 is written by David.

Another special characteristic of this psalm is the repetitive nature of several words and clauses with ascending emphasis such as “help” in vv. 1-2, “slumber” in vv. 3-4, “shade” and its protection in vv. 5-6, and the “keeping/protection of Yahweh in vv. 7-8.

**GOD, THE FAITHFUL YAHWEH OF HIS PEOPLE, IS YOUR “KEEPER.” TRUST IN HIM AND BE CONFIDENT!**

1. OUR SOURCE OF HELP (1-2)
2. The lifting up of the eyes. We may compare Psalm 123:1 where the psalmist lifts up his eyes to Yahweh who is “enthroned in the heavens.”
3. The Hills (Ps. 87:1)—that is Zion and maybe the surrounding mountains as well.
4. The source of one’s “help”—Yahweh who dwells there in His temple.

* The last word of verse 1 and the first word of verse 2 is “help” this dramatic placement gives a very strong emphasis to the word. This same noun speaks of “help from the sanctuary” in Ps. 20:2—i.e. from Yahweh who dwells there, of “help in the name of Yahweh who made heaven and earth” in 124:8 (cf. v. 2 here), and of Yahweh as “our help and our shield” in 33:20 and 115:9, 10, 11.

1. He is also the Maker of heaven and earth—the entire universe

* He offers personal help, wise help, and immeasurable help.
* He has made all of the hills!
* The author was not uncertain of the source of his help; that is not why he asked the question.
* Numerous passages speak of Him as the creator of “heaven and earth” (e.g. 124:8; 134:3 in these “psalms of ascent”; and also 33:6-9; 89:11-13; 96:4-5; 104:2-9; 115:15; 136:4-9; 146:6; II K. 19:15=Is. 37:16; II Chr. 1:12).

1. OUR SUPPLY OF HELP (vv. 3-8)
2. Prevention from Slipping (3a)

* Poor roads for pilgrims; the Lord watches every step of our lives.
* The word means “tottering, shaking.”
* Ps. 55:22 states that Yahweh never gives over the righteous “for shaking,” and Ps. 66:9 shows that Yahweh keeps us and does not allow our feet to shake/totter lest the enemy should find joy in such faltering (38:16).

1. Prevention of Slumber and Sleep (3b-4)
2. Does not go off guard for a moment.
3. Verse 3 is not a wish or prayer, but a statement of certainty. The psalmist speaks here to himself.

* Delitzsch notes that the psalmist’s “Ego, calm in God, promises to him comfort, by unfolding to him the joyful prospects contained in that hope in Jahve.”

1. Not momentary slumber, or actual sleep. Yahweh needs no sleep, and takes none; He is too busy taking care of His own, even though He rules all of creation. In Him the faithful may trust totally.
2. Note “Keeper” at the end of each verse for emphasis.
3. He is the Keeper of all Israel, but also the Keeper of the individual person.
4. Yahweh is unlike the pagan God Baal who evidently was sleeping while the priests of Baal were dancing about the fire in a frenzy and cutting themselves (I K. 18:27).
5. Yahweh is a Keeper who is better than any human sentry; He never slumbers or sleeps and is always on guard. Compare Ps. 132:4 where the psalmist uses the cognate nouns for “slumber” and “sleep.” Job refers to Yahweh as “the Watcher of men.”
6. Provision of Shade (5-6)
7. Yahweh—the faithful God of the covenant, is on “sentry duty”. The author places the divine name Yahweh first in the sentence for emphasis as though he had said “the Lord Himself, and then places the term that provides this psalm its key theme second—“your keeper.”
8. He is our “shade.” This word shows the relationship of Yahweh with His people for whom He provides divine protection. In several places the shade is provided figuratively by the “wings” of Yahweh as though He were caring for his people like a protective mother bird (see 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 63:7). Here He provides such “shade” by His person as also in Ps. 91:1; in the latter verse “shade” is placed parallel with “shelter of the Most High.”
9. He is on our “right hand”—the hand of power, close by, protecting, defending us (109:6; 110:5), and shading us.
10. Neither sun by day nor moon by night can “smite” us.
11. Sun stroke, then as now, is a serious danger (cf. II K. 4:18—widow’s son; Jonah in 4:8—his head).
12. The effects even of the moon and other associated dangers at night.

* It is likely that the verse reflects an ancient belief that the moon could have an adverse effect on the mind; note the English expression ‘moonstruck’, and also the term “lunatic” that speaks of mental issues supposedly due to the moon’s influence. Many have noted the effect of the gravitational pull of the moon that pulls the tides of the oceans, and there seems to be more than mere superstition to the fact that more strange things occur when there is a full moon.
* The two together stand for all kinds of dangers day or night.
* Whatever circumstances, whatever time.

1. Protection from All Evil (7)
2. Not simply moral evil, but all sorts of “bad things.”
3. He guards our “soul”—our entire person, inward and outward.
4. He does not cushion the believer from all troubles and trials, but works all things to our good. Even Psalm 23:4 does not promise that he need not traverse the “dark valley,” but when traveling through it Yahweh is with him and protects him. Kidner aptly comments,

“The two halves of v. 7 can be compared with Luke 21:18f where God’s minutest care (‘not a hair of your head will perish’) and His servants’ deepest fulfilment (‘you will win true life’, NEB) are promised in the same breath as the prospect of hounding and martyrdom (Lk. 21:16f”; 432).

1. Pervasive Protection (8)

For the third time within two verses (7 and 8) Yahweh is the direct subject of “keeping/protecting” them. Alexander notes that such repetition is “as if to silence the misgivings of a weak or tempted faith, by the reiterated declaration of this cheering truth” (p. 510).

1. “Going out and Coming in”—all of our enterprises. ”

* He speaks of all that the person does in his life and everywhere he goes—whether up to Jerusalem as on the particular journey to a feast on the occasion of the singing of this psalm of ascent, or in any other activity of one’s life.
* It is possible that the psalmist might even have in his purview “the dawn and sunset of one’s days”; however, the final words of this verse take “good care of this journey” (K. p. 432).

1. “From this time forth and forever!

CONCLUSION

What a comfort this psalm is. **The believer is secure—eternally secure**!

Yahweh has never promised an easy road or a road always pleasant with pleasing temporary outcomes; but the ultimate outcome is blessed and assured, and even the temporary outcome is guaranteed to be for one’s good and God’s glory.

This divine keeping and protection will not be temporary, but it will endure “from this time forth and forever” (see other examples of this expression in 113:2; 115:18; and 125:2).

* The present needs are covered, as well as all troubles and “evil” circumstances that might arise in the future.
* And, there would never be an end of such divine keeping, for the believer would eventually enter into the divine presence in heaven (cf. Ps. 73:24).
* Kidner concludes, “It would be hard to decide which half of it is the more encouraging: the fact that it starts ‘from now’, or that it runs on, not to the end of time but without end; like God Himself who is (cf. Ps. 73:26) ‘my portion for ever’” (Ibid.).