

LOOKING BEYOND THE HILLS (PSALM 121)

| SUMMER IN THE PSALMS |

Psalm 121 ESV

A SONG OF ASCENTS. ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. ³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵ The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. ⁸ The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

INTRO:

This psalm is part of a collection known as the songs of ascents.

- These were pilgrimage songs.
 - 3 main feasts had mandatory attendance: Passover, Pentecost (weeks), and Feast of Booths (tabernacles)
- Ascents or Steps
 - Ascending up to Jerusalem
 - Ascending up the steps to the Temple
- These were happy and joyous times
 - **But travel had its challenges and difficulties**
 - It was costly
 - Conditions sometimes perilous - steep roads, weather conditions
 - Certain regions were inhospitable to travel through (dangerous)
 - Roads would've have been increasingly congested as caravans combined
 - Once in Jerusalem, lodging would've been difficult.
 - ***Note: It's not always easy or convenient to get to church.***

- Sometimes the companions in your dodge caravan are ungrateful, unwilling, hostile, too hot, too cold, somehow wet, claim to be underfed, and increasingly noisy.
- Sometimes its hard to find a good parking spot.
- But its a good and glad thing to be in the house of the Lord with his people.
- I'm glad you're with us today!

As we begin the message, I want you to notice that there is a tension, problem, or anxiety in the heart and mind of the pilgrim.

- The psalmists assumes and anticipates the problems they are facing.
 - (heat of the sun, darkness of night, and evil around them)
- The road to Jerusalem isn't easy.
- The worshippers are coming to God with problems and challenges.
- They are coming to God, seeking help, BECAUSE THEY NEED HELP!

Again, that is not unlike this very room today:

- There are problems and struggles
- There are anxieties and fears
- There are spiritual battles
- The question the Psalmist raises at the very beginning (assuming the problem and terror)... who is your helper?

1: WHO (OR WHAT) ARE YOU LOOKING TO FOR HELP?

Psalm 121:1 ESV

¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

The phrase "lift up my eyes" usually implies 'with longing', but a number of scholars think it could also be combined 'with fear' due to the nature and context of this Psalm.

- Q: What has you looking for hope?

- Q: What has you anxiously looking for help?
- Further... Q: Where are you looking?

To the hills (mountains)

- Interestingly, this phrase in this psalm is debated by scholars as the object of hope or causation for fear.
- In a military context, the mountains and high places could offer refuge from pursuers in the form of hiding places or defensible positions.
- For the pilgrim, the mountains could refer to the very mountains that surround Jerusalem and of the region itself... meaning their eyes are towards Jerusalem and ultimately the temple... Their eyes are towards Zion!
- However, those very same high places were often:
 - associated with the pagan gods
 - associated with the idolatry that took place their
 - Therefore COULD be seen in a cosmic sense... who in the heavens are able to help me?
- Others see 'the mountains' as representative of the very problems/obstacles/challenges that they were facing.

Before looking to the psalmist's answer, it's worth noting that we often look to the wrong sources for help.

Psalms 20:7-8 ESV

⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. ⁸ They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.

- Note here: horses and chariots aren't bad if we're talking about them as useful tools (for war).
 - They become untrustworthy and unreliable if you are looking to them for victory.
 - Horses and Chariots are terrible gods.
- Let me help you understand the thought:

- I asked ChatGPT to modernize this verse with relevant applications that people put their confidence and trust in other than God.
- Chat GPT:
 - Some trust in technology, and some in bank accounts, some in political leaders, and some in personal branding, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise and stand firm.
- Technology, bank accounts, politicians, personal branding amongst many other applications are not inherently bad or evil.
 - We could add:
 - Doctors, therapists, employers, stock markets, etc.
 - They are tools, strategies, resources, human leadership/advisors.
 - But none of them are trustworthy gods.
 - Those who trust in 'false gods' will be brought to their knees and fall.
- Those who trust in Jesus will rise and stand firm.
 - God is the rock... a firm foundation.

2: THE LORD IS ABLE TO HELP YOU!

Psalm 121:2-4 ESV

² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. ³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Listen, as stated in [Psalm 20:7-8](#), the horses and chariots won't save you. In psalm 121, the mountains won't save you nor any other so called god deliver you. Neither will the high places in Zion nor the temple itself.

- Things and people associated with God can't save you.

- Rituals, offerings and religious deeds can't save you.

Jeremiah 7:4 ESV

⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

Rather:

Acts 4:12 ESV

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Psalms 121:2 ESV

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

- Only Yahweh, the Lord of hosts, the maker of heaven and earth, the One who dwells in Zion... who has given of himself, sent his Son to redeem and rescue us by shedding his blood. He is able to save and deliver you!

Why look simply to the mountains, when you can look to the MAKER of the mountains!

Psalms 65:5-7 ESV

⁵ By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; ⁶ the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; ⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples,

Psalms 97:5 ESV

⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.

Micah 1:3-4 ESV

³ For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. ⁴ And the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

- If the Lord can create and command the mountains, if His very presence makes them quake and melt... how much more so is he able to help you in your troubles?

He is trustworthy - He is able!

- Will not let your foot be moved – he is a steady rock, sure foundation, firm footing that you can count on.
- He will not slumber – there's not a moment you're out of his watchful eye and care.

He cares for you! Yes you!

- He who keeps you: you is singular
- He who keeps Israel: obviously plural (to the people)
- He who watches over Israel, watches (keeps/cares for) the individual.
- IF YOU are in Christ, YOU are under His watchful care and keeping!

3: THE LORD IS (AND WILL BE) YOUR KEEPER!

Psalm 121:5-8 ESV

⁵ The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. ⁸ The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

Notice the assurance that He IS your keeper and the promise that He WILL keep you forevermore!

- Keep = to keep, preserve, to watch, guard, protect, to attend to
- Keep you from EVIL
- Keep your LIFE
- Coming and going, now and forevermore

Psalm 46:1-3 ESV

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart

of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

- A very present help in trouble
- Though the mountains be moved and the oceans roar.

Psalm 46:7 ESV

⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Psalm 46:11 ESV

¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

RESPONSE:

- Prayer card response
- Everybody fill out and place in one of the baskets