

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms ***
*** Topic: Looking to God * Psalm 121 * 6/15/25 ***

MAIN POINT

We need to look to God as our source of help and trust His sovereign power during good times and bad.

INTRODUCTION

If you could travel to one place that you think would help you draw closer to God, where would it be and why?

Can you think of a time when you were traveling far away from home, and you found yourself walking through a place that seemed dangerous to you?

People tend to choose travel destinations for business, pleasure, or to visit family. Sometimes we might travel to a destination for religious reasons, such as a mission trip, or to a place such as Israel to hopefully draw nearer to God. In ancient Israel, devout Israelites were required by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 16:16) to embark on pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times a year. They would celebrate Passover and Pentecost in the spring, and the feast of Tabernacles in autumn. The people would generally travel in groups for safety, and as they started ascending up the mountain to Jerusalem, they would sing these “Songs of ascent.”

Psalms 120-134 are grouped together as these Songs of Ascent. Our lesson today will be looking at Psalm 121, which is one of these Psalms.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES FROM THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

As these verses are read, ask the readers to describe some of the things the people were singing about as they ascended the mountain to Jerusalem.

- Psalm 120:1: Praying for God’s help during times of distress
- Psalm 122:1: Rejoicing as we go to God’s house
- Psalm 124:1-2: Praising God for helping His people
- Psalm 125:2: Praising God for surrounding His people
- Psalm 128:1-2: Remembering the blessings we receive for following God
- Psalm 130:4-5: A prayer of repentance
- Psalm 134:1-2: Praising God in His temple

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 121:1-2 (INTRODUCTION OF THE PSALM)

Looking at verses 1-2, what were the people singing about as they sang this song of ascent?

They were looking to God as their source of help.

Why do you think the psalmist opens his Psalm by mentioning where he is looking for help?

Commentators interpret verse one in two different ways. One view is, the Psalmist is looking up to the temple in Jerusalem. The other view is he is gazing up into the hills trying to find a source of help, and then he realizes it is only God who can help him. Either interpretation comes back to the same truth. We need help, and God is our only true source of the help we need.

“Satan will endeavor to keep our eyes upon our sorrows that we may be disquieted and discouraged; be it ours firmly to resolve that we will look out and look up, for there is good cheer for the eyes, and they that lift up their eyes to the eternal hills shall soon have their hearts lifted up also.” Charles Spurgeon, Commentary on Psalm 121

Why is the fact that God is the Creator of heaven and earth (verse 2) a great place to start while singing about God as our Helper?

By reminding us that the Lord made heaven and earth (v. 2), the Psalmist demonstrates that God is all powerful.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 121:1-8

Note to study leader: *As the people answer the following question, consider making a list of their answers on the white board.*

Looking through all eight verses, what specific things does the psalmist praise God for as he considers God as his helper?

- God is our creator (verse 2)
- God won't let our foot slip (verse 3)
- God watches over us (verse 3)
- God doesn't slumber or sleep (verse 4)
- God is our shade (verse 5)
- God protects us (verse 6)
- God will keep us from all harm (verse 7)
- God watches over our life (verse 7)
- God watches over our coming and going (verse 8)
- God watches over us both now and forevermore (verse 8)

How would you summarize the attributes of God on this list that make Him a perfect helper?

Our all-powerful, all-knowing God cares deeply for us and constantly looks after us.

What verb is repeated in verses 3, 4, 7, and 8? What does this verb communicate about God's involvement in our lives?

The Hebrew word used over and over again is the verb “shamar”, which means “to keep, guard, watch over, or attend to carefully.” This shows us God's full attention is constantly on us. This isn't remotely possible for finite beings like us, but this is how perfectly our infinite God attends to us.

“From the constant recurrence of the word ‘keep’, we are led to name this song ‘a Psalm to the keeper of Israel’.” Charles Spurgeon, Commentary on Psalm 121

How important is it to us that God doesn't slumber or sleep (verse 4)?

If God can't constantly keep His attention on us, we aren't really being protected by Him.

“We should not stand a moment if our keeper were to sleep; we need him by day and by night; not a single step can be safely taken except under his guardian eye.” Charles Spurgeon, Commentary on Psalm 121

What point is being made in verse 5 where we read God is our shade?

“He not only protects those whom he is the keeper of, but he refreshes them: He is their shade. He is always near to his people for their protection and refreshment, and never at a distance; he is their keeper and shade on their right hand; so that he is never far to seek.”
Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Psalm 121*

What point is being made in verse 6 about God protecting us from both the sun and the moon?

“Day and night make up all time: thus, the ever-present protection never ceases. All evil may be ranked as under the sun or the moon, and if neither of these can smite us, we are indeed secure.”
Charles Spurgeon, *Commentary on Psalm 121*

Note to study leader: Verse 7 is not promising no harm will ever happen to our physical bodies. The literal translation of the end of the verse is, “He will keep your soul” (*Blue Letter Bible*).

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ PHIL. 1:3-6, 1 THESS. 5:23-24, AND JUDE 1:24-25

In Psalm 121:3, we read that God will not let our foot slip. Considering the verses we just read, what spiritual lesson are we to learn from this analogy?

Jesus is the true vine, and we are the branches (John 15). Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Jesus will preserve those who are His. Our job as a branch is to abide in the vine. He will cause our growth.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ JOHN 15:4-5 AND GALATIANS 3:2-3

What lessons do we need to learn from these verses as we realize it is God who keeps us from slipping?

We can't use our fleshly efforts to overcome our sinful flesh. Our job as a branch is to abide in Christ and allow Him to cause us to grow by His grace.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ JOHN 14:27, ROMANS 15:13, PHIL. 4:6-7, AND 2 THESS. 3:16

How do these verses expand on the idea in Psalm 121 about God being our source of help; and how do they show us how the fact that God is our helper should affect how we live our lives?

God is our only source of peace. If we seek it anywhere else, it will fail us.

APPLICATION

The psalmist is committed to looking to the Lord for his help. What can we learn about prayer from the psalmist's example?

In what situations or circumstances is it most difficult for you to put your trust in God? What is one step you could take this week to trust God in those situations?

PRAYER

Praise God that He is the creator of heaven and earth. Thank Him that He will not let our foot slip, and that He will neither sleep nor slumber. Thank Him for the spiritual shade He provides for our lives. Thank Him for watching over our coming and going both now and forevermore. Pray that God would help us to always remember to keep our eyes on Him.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 121

121:1-2. The hills are difficult to interpret accurately. There are no punctuation marks in the Hebrew text so the second part of verse two can be translated as a statement or as a question. And there is uncertainty about whether the opening phrase in verse one implies the psalmist is initially looking in places other than God for his help; or whether this is a positive statement, with the psalmist referring to looking up toward Jerusalem, where he is pilgrimaging to God's temple. Either way, the author is referring to the importance of looking beyond physical hills to the Maker of the hills. God is where we find our help.

121:3-4. The rest of the psalm expands the promise that God supplies our help. The word for "not" in verse 3 is the one used normally for requests and commands. This shows us verse three is a prayer, which will be answered by the confidence of verse 4 and of all that comes after.

121:5-6. What is true for all of God's people is, of course, true for the individual, as these verses emphasize. The Lord is closer than the hills, and His protection as refreshing as it is thorough. God's guarding and protecting triumphs over and against both the known and the unknown; the dangers of both the day and night.

121:7-8. The promise moves on from the pilgrim's immediate preoccupations on his journey to cover all of existence. To be kept from all evil does not imply an easy life, but a well-protected one. The psalm ends with a powerful pledge: our going out and our coming in is not only a way of saying "everything in our life," but also draws attention to our specific efforts and experiences.