

Pillar Passages – Psalm 121

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July 1, 2021

Welcome. Today we're looking at Psalm 121. It may very well be one of your favorite Psalms. It certainly is one of my favorites. It is another of the Psalms of Ascent. Ascent, means these were psalms that pilgrims would sing or recite to one another as they went up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem sat on a number of hills. So, these are songs pilgrims would sing along the way. These are songs to be sung by people who were heading home. By people who are not home yet—not where home is—but on their way and longing for home.

We are immediately faced with a question. What are the hills that the psalmist is looking at in verse 1? There are two options. One is, as I said, the hill upon which Jerusalem sat. The other option would be that the hill that he sees are where the threat is found from which he needs help. Which leaves out the third option which would be hills of the earth in general have some kind of mystical power where God's help is contained. That's not true, though that is often how we interrupt or use this verse.

I think that the most likely case, is that the pilgrim is experiencing threats in his life. And when he lifts up his eyes to the hills where Jerusalem is found, he is reminded (verse 2) that his help from the Lord. Not the city itself but the city where the Lord is found, Jerusalem. Thus, his help comes from the Lord. When he looks at the city, he is reminded that this is not some tribal local deity. This is the God who created heaven and earth (verse 2). This is the Creator of all things. The Creator of heavens, earth, and of every thing and every person that threatens this pilgrim and those that he loves. This is a God who is sovereign over all of it. This is a God would bounds it and contains it and is utterly in control of all of it. He *is* God. He is God.

Which reminds me of another famous passage. Hebrews 11 verse 4 reminds us, authentic faith is two things. It believes that God exists. Secondly, He rewards those who seek Him. So often in this life as we are pilgrims who deal with threats all the time and are moving from what is not our home to what is our home, the most fundamental work that we must be about—that we so often forget—is simply to remember that this God exists. The God who is here. The God who is our Creator. The God who is sovereignly in control—so much so that He 'will not let our feet be moved' (verse 3). He is not like an old man who sits in his recliner taking an afternoon nap when you are faced with threats. No, not at all! He is a God who keeps Israel—keeps His people—and He will neither, never ever, slumber nor sleep. This is a God who is in control. A God who keeps His people. He is like a shade from the heat of life on our right hand.

This reminds me of another passage from John chapter 6. John chapter 6 verse 39 where Jesus says, "This is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me but raise it up on the last day." And on that last day when He raises us up, where will He take us? He will join us to Himself and He will take us to the hills to His city. Heaven and earth will be one and we will dwell in His city, in the shade of His love for ever and ever.

Thus, the threats that lurk by night. The threats that we cannot see in this life. They shall not strike us. Nor the sun by day—the heat of life. Yes, we will feel the heat of life. That will happen. But in all of it, the Lord will keep us from all evil. Do you know that this even includes your sin—let alone others' sin. He will keep *your life*, Christian.

This reminds me of another passage. First Corinthians 10 verse 12 and 13 where Paul says, 'no temptation or trial,' the word there can be translated either temptation or trial. 'No temptation or trial has overtaken you, such as is common to man, but God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted or trialed beyond your ability. But with the temptation or trial, He will provide a way of escape that you may be able to endure it. Thus, my beloved, flee from idolatry,' he says in verse 14. The point there being, God contains and restrains all evil so it is not beyond our ability, but with it He provide the way of escape. Thus, He keeps us. He keeps us in our going out, and in our coming in. From this time forward—from this moment—from the very moment that you are reading this—He is doing this. From this time forth and **forever** more the Lord is your keeper, Christian.

Thus, I find it a happy coincidence that today in my Bible reading, in the McShane Bible reading plan, the other Old Testament read passage that comes up is Joshua 1, where Joshua is commanded, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." In your coming out and in your coming in.

Now, this is all very inspiring, and it is so reassuring. And yet, ought to ask ourselves, how is it we can read this passage? How is it, we modern, mostly Gentile, (if you're reading this, you're probably a Gentile Californian) how can we read this and take assurance in a Psalm speaking of God keeping *Israel*? How does that work? If we think about this, we are given even more assurance because we keep reading our Bibles from Psalm 121 and we realize that all Israel was boiled down into one Israel—*Jesus*. This Jesus died and was raised for the dead so that all who trust in Him now can be *in* Israel and be part of God's people. All who are united to Him by faith alone. In Him alone. If you have faith in Christ, you are now part of God's people—God's Israel—and you can read this Psalm as your own. This is God's promise to you, Christian. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Just as He did not, on that third day, sleep but instead raised His own Son from His sleep that we may live forever in His all-encompassing love. To Him be the glory.