

Psalm 121

1. *I lift my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?*
2. *My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.*
3. *He will not suffer your foot to stumble,
he who watches over you will not sleep.*
4. *Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep.*
5. *The Lord himself watches over you;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.*
6. *So that the sun shall not strike you by day,
neither the moon by night.*
7. *The Lord shall keep you from all evil;
it is he who shall keep your soul.*
8. *The Lord shall keep watch over your going out and your coming in,
from this time forth for evermore.*

My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 121 was probably used for the dismissal of pilgrims leaving the temple in Jerusalem on their homeward journey.

Looking east over the arid hills of the Judean wilderness, the pilgrim wonders what help he can rely on to complete the arduous journey, and he states that the God, who created the universe, is able to sustain him on his way. However, verses 1 and 2 may refer to the hills which surround Jerusalem, and show the confidence of the departing pilgrim as he thinks about the dwelling place of God. There is a similar thought in Psalm 125: 'As the hills stand about Jerusalem, so the Lord stands round about his people, from this time forth for evermore.'

The priests dismiss the pilgrim with a blessing. Guarded by God, who is constantly vigilant, the pilgrim will suffer no disaster on the road:

'He will not suffer your foot to stumble,
he who watches over you will not sleep.
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep.'

He will not be attacked by sickness, either from the heat of the sun or the baleful effects of the moon, which was thought to cause diseases such as leprosy and fever.

' The Lord himself watches over you;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
So that the sun shall not strike you by day,
neither the moon by night.'

The Lord will preserve his life and keep him out of danger from the time he leaves the temple until he arrives home, and then for evermore.

The psalm begins with anxiety, but ends with confidence and hope. We also face at times uncertainty and difficulty, and there are occasions when we may be faced with danger. Psalm 121, however, invites us to look beyond all this to God, who is ever-present, God whom we can trust in all situations. This is the God who watches over us in steadfast love.

Prayer

Lord, ever watchful and faithful,
we look to you to be our defence
and we lift our hearts to know your help,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

(Reflections on the Psalms)