

## Is the LORD your Helper?

For: Voice of the Church

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We are all on a journey through life. That journey is often filled with various challenges, whether that be health issues, financial difficulties, or family concerns. Sometimes we look up, wondering where help will come from. In Psalm 121, the Psalmist looked up too. He put it like this: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:1,2 ESV). That was the Psalmist’s confession of faith. Do you confess that the LORD is your Helper?

Psalm 121 is a song of ascents sung as the Israelites travelled up to the temple mount in Jerusalem from all corners of Israel for the annual feast days. That trip was filled with danger from wild animals, bandits, rough terrain, and intense heat. Those travelers would have wondered whether they would make it safely to Jerusalem.

As the Psalmist approached Jerusalem, he saw the hills of Jerusalem rising up before him. Those hills made him think of the sanctuary of the LORD. Those hills reminded the Psalmist of the service of the LORD at the temple where the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law were performed. All of that pointed to the beautiful relationship of grace between God and his people.

Five times in Psalm 121 the Psalmist speaks about “the LORD” – or “Yahweh” in Hebrew. This is the Name of God which points to God’s faithfulness toward those who serve him. It literally means “I am who I am.”

And that’s why Psalm 121 speaks about the LORD as a present help. He is with his people always! Psalm 121 puts it like this: “He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps 121:3,4). The LORD never falls asleep. At no time is the LORD’s care absent from those who believe in him!

The Psalmist is not only talking about himself but about all of God’s people. He speaks about the individual believer and the people of Israel as a whole (Ps 121:3,4). God does not only have his eye on individuals but on his entire people, all those who believe in him.

What a wonderful privilege and comfort! How is this possible? The message of the gospel is that this is possible because of Jesus Christ, whom Scripture calls “the Immanuel,” which means “God with us” (Is 7:14; Mt 1:22,23)! God is with us because of the gospel of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for sinners to reconcile God and sinners. The Old Testament looked forward to this, as did the Psalmist in Psalm 121 when he referred to the hills of Jerusalem where the sacrifices took place which pointed forward to the coming Saviour. And just before Jesus Christ left this earth and ascended into heaven after having died on the cross and risen from the grave, Christ said to the church in Matthew 28:20: “...I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

But the Psalmist doesn’t only speak about the LORD as a present help, he also speaks about the LORD as a preserving help. Six times the Psalmist uses a word which can mean “watch over,” “keep,” or “preserve.” The frequent use drives the point home!

Psalm 121 illustrates the point by speaking about the LORD as the shade of his people. We read: “The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night” (Ps 121:5,6). Shade and shadow are biblical imagery for protection and safety. This is stated very directly and powerfully in Psalm 121 because it does not say that the LORD *provides* shade for his people, but that the LORD himself *is* shade for his people. The LORD himself is the shade of his people! The LORD is the provider, sustainer, and protector of those who believe in him.

The Psalm even emphasizes the point by saying that “...the LORD is your shade *on your right hand*” (Ps 121:5). The LORD is at our right hand! In the Bible, the right hand is the place of importance and the place that counts. This means that the LORD is at the side of his people and close by to them. It means that we can count on the LORD! The Psalmist goes on to say: “The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore” (Ps 121:7,8).

Sometimes Christians are confused by this Psalm when they consider the particular challenges and struggles they have in life. What does it mean when the Psalm says, “The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life” (Ps 121:7)? We must be clear on the fact that all of this does not mean that Christians are guaranteed no harm. The Bible tells us in other places that God has his purpose for the trials and difficulties in the lives of believers. Just because people are Christians doesn’t mean that they are guaranteed clear sailing! Just think of the Old Testament believer Job who served God devoutly but who lost almost everything – his possessions, his children, and his health.

The point of Psalm 121 is that believers may be comforted that nothing happens to them by accident or chance. If you are a believer, you may have the comfort that your foot does not slip by accident because the LORD is sleeping; the LORD watches over his people (Ps 121:3). No one and nothing can take your life without the LORD’s will (Ps 121:7). All things are in God’s hands, God accompanies believers on the journey through life, and God helps them deal with the challenges and difficulties. That’s what those believers travelling to Jerusalem for the annual feast days could be encouraged by, and that’s what all believers may be encouraged by as they travel the road of life. Even in difficulties, the LORD has his eye on his people. To say it with the words of the Psalm, “...the LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore” (Ps 121:8).

In trying to understand this Psalm, let’s also remember that the Christian is on a journey to the new earth where God’s people will dwell with God in perfection. Ultimately, Psalm 121 is about that journey. God preserves his people for that destination. On that journey, believers are guaranteed safe passage. The LORD will keep his people from all harm that would prevent them from reaching that destination. It’s about far more than that we are still alive and breathing!

That destination is described beautifully in Revelation 7. There we read about the great multitude which came out of the tribulation – yes, they came out of a time of hardship because they are Christians. We read the following in Revelation 7 as the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 121: “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; *the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat*” (Rev 7:15,16). That last phrase – “the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat” - is the echo of Psalm 121: “...the sun shall not strike you by day...”

And the LORD is able to do this because he is powerful. Not only does Psalm 121 speak about the LORD as a present help and a preserving help, Psalm 121 also speaks about the LORD as a powerful help. As the Psalmist says, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Ps 121:2). Often when God wants to remind people of his power, he points to his work of creation. The God who is powerful enough to create all things is powerful enough to lead his people to their eternal destination. The Apostle Paul puts it like this in Rom 8:38,39: “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What a comforting Psalm! Do you have this comfort on the journey of life? Are you a believer?

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