

Psalm 121

Psalm 121 is the second of the Psalms of Ascent, sung by God's people as they travelled to Jerusalem for the annual feasts, to the temple – the place that signified God's presence with his people. These songs served as reminders as they bolstered the confidence of the weary travelers in the truth of the power and sovereignty of their God.

What do the hills represent?

There are three main interpretations.

1. They are the hills surrounding Jerusalem which can be protective of the city, symbolizing God's protection of his people, of his surrounding Jerusalem.
2. The mountains, with their high places, were where the Canaanites had centers of worship for their gods. The mountains were associated with idolatry.
3. The hills refer to the hills that the travelers would have to go through on their journey to Jerusalem. These hills would have all sorts of dangers associated with them – like steep cliffs, loose rocks, wild animals as well as dangers from robbers and others who would wish them harm.

The question that comes next is, "From where does my help come?"

1. This is a natural question to ask when facing danger or trials of various kinds.
2. This echoes a theme throughout the Psalms
 - a. 46:1 – God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
 - b. 124:8 – Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Application: For God's people, this is part of our growth in the Lord. To rehearse his truths so that in the moments of trial we can ask the questions and be fed with truth. When you lift your eyes to the hills, when you face difficulties, do you know where your help comes from?

For those in Christ, our answer is this...

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

1. Help
 - a. The help that the psalmist asks about is not a simple boost in confidence, it's not just the lending of a hand, but it is a comprehensive act of protection and provision.
 - b. This goes along with the full picture we get in scripture – we are not good people who need a little help to be better. We are without hope, sinful, broken, people in danger, in the midst of a great battle being waged for our souls.
 - c. The help we need is a complete rescue and subsequent protection of our lives.
 - d. Who can do this?
2. LORD – Yahweh. The Covenant name of God. The name that God revealed to his people as he promised them that he would be their God and they would be his people.
3. The psalmist qualifies the Lord as the one who made heaven and earth. He appeals to creation as proof of God's trustworthiness and power.
 - a. "Who made Heaven and Earth" This is a merism – the combination of two contrasting words to refer to an entire entity.
 - b. Creator of heaven and earth and everything in between.
 - c. Who can help him? The one who created everything.

- i. “The point is that if the Lord created everything then he created the hills through which the pilgrim must walk; and whatever the Lord has created he can control. The doctrine of creation, therefore, is relevant for the life of faith in every detail. If pilgrims were faithfully obeying the sovereign Lord of creation by going up to Jerusalem to worship him, then they could be confident that he was able to overcome any difficulty on the way.”
(Allen Ross)

God protects and keeps his people.

1. He is fully present and fully in control. (vv. 3-4)
 - a. He watches over every step of the way (He will not let your foot be moved).
 - b. He is fully present, vigilant at all times (He will not slumber).
2. He watches over His people in all circumstances. (vv. 5-6)
 - a. He is our keeper (protector).
 - i. Like a shepherd who keep his sheep from harm
 - ii. “I am the good shepherd...I lay down my life for the sheep.” John 10
 - b. Shade on your right hand – his protection would be over all that you put your hand to (complete protection)
 - c. The sun and the moon – another merism (nothing by day or night shall harm you)
3. He protects His people from evil for eternity. (vv. 7-8)
 - a. Going out and coming in; this time and forever more
 - b. Both of these again are merisms –everywhere you go; always
4. How does this line up with our experiences?
 - a. First, this psalm is sung by those who were walking in obedience to God as they went to the temple to worship.
 - b. Second, we need to be careful that we don’t think that if we follow God everything is going to be easy and we will be free from trials, dangers, and calamity. In fact, this psalm, many other psalms, and the context of scripture tells us otherwise. We are to expect trials and difficulties.
 - c. Third, this psalm is only fully realized in the greater context of God’s redemptive work.
 - i. This psalm was sung as the people went up toward the temple.
 - ii. We no longer go to the temple but to Christ.
 - iii. These songs were sung as the people looked to God’s promises while still acknowledging the already and not yet aspects of them.
 - iv. We recognize that we will stumble. We will get sick. Harm may come to us. But we look to Christ to meet us in those moments. And more importantly we look to him knowing that there is a greater fulfillment of these promises than just temporary protection.
 - v. We are promised that the Lord will protect us from all evil. The end point of all evil is separation from God, life lived apart from him and in rebellion from him.
 - vi. We know that if we look to the Lord for help, and ultimately our salvation, we will be kept and protected from the ultimate end of evil – eternal punishment.
 - vii. It is because Jesus Christ has endured the cross, the very epicenter of evil in history, that we his people can be promised that we will be kept from it.