

Promises for Pilgrims Psalm 121

Intro

A common thread among world religions is the practice of pilgrimage - traveling to sacred places, shrines, temples, and cities

For Muslims, one of the five pillars of Islam is called "hajj" - hajj being the pilgrimage to the Muslim holy city of Mecca that is required at least once in the lifetime of the adherent of Islam

In the OT we see that the people of Israel were commanded by God at various times of the year to travel to the temple in Jerusalem to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to participate in holy festivals

As Christians, we are not specifically commanded to make a pilgrimage to any earthly place, though the Holy Land is a hot destination for the Christian to walk where the Lord Jesus Christ walked and ministered, we are not commanded to make that pilgrimage, for the Christian something more fundamental - we ARE perpetually pilgrims - it is part of who we are - making our way to the New Jerusalem

1 Peter 2:11 we are described as sojourners, as exiles, as foreigners, as temporary residents

In world not of it

Salt and light in the midst of corruption

Peculiar people made for another world - a new heavens and new earth

Resting in Christ yet running the race set before us as we make our way to the eternity of God

Christianity is a pilgrim religion. As you well know the way can be very hard, there are many perils and dangers on our journey. God knows our frame, he knows that we are but dust and he makes great and precious promises to sustain us on our way. This Psalm provides for us just these sort of promises.

Our Psalm - superscript - "a song of Ascents" - would have been sung by pilgrims as they made their way through treacherous lands to Jerusalem as God called them to for the Passover and other holy festivals. A song assuring the pilgrim of God's personal care on their journey. Let's turn our attention to Psalm 121 and prepare our hearts and minds for this is the very Word of God

READ TEXT

This Psalm assures us God promises of his care and protection to pilgrims like and me - 4 points - 4 promises for pilgrims - 1. He Will Help You 2. He Will Establish You 3. He Will Protect You 4. He Will Keep You

I. He Will Help You (1-2)

A. v. 1 the Psalmist looks to the hills before him as he makes his pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

1. The hills / mountains being home to wild beasts, dangerous crags and sheer rock faces, bandits and robbers lying in wait for the vulnerable pilgrim
2. As he ponders the hills in front of him, a question rises to his mind. As I look at the challenges that these hills represent - from where does my help come from? Who will be my help in the face of these hills as I face a dangerous journey
 - a) KJV - help does not come from the hills - help is needed because of the hills

B. This help that is needed - no mere need for a bit of a helping hand as Allen Ross explains

This word “help” is a term that is used frequently for divine intervention in which the LORD provides what the people were lacking, or does for them what they cannot do for themselves. So it is more than simple assistance that is meant — without this help the psalmist would not be safe at all. (Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 3, pp. 614-615)

C. v. 2 The questions is quickly answered - where does my help come from - where does this help that I need or else I will not be safe at all - help for my need - help for my lack

1. My help comes from the LORD - from God himself
2. How capable is the LORD to be my help? How capable is he to provide the help the pilgrim needs without which the psalmist would not be safe at all? Well...this one...the LORD, he made heaven and earth
 - a) Where does my help come from? The almighty creator of all things
 - (1) Those dangerous hills, those challenges - those hills, those are the LORDs hills - those hills stand beneath his creational sovereignty
 - (a) He is more than ample to be the pilgrim's helper

[6] The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? [7] The LORD is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. (Psalm 118:6-7)

D. Application

1. Christian pilgrim - you got any hills in front of you? Challenges that reveal that you lack sufficient resources to move forward. We all have them at various times and various ways
 - a) Financial difficulty, rebellious kids abandoning the faith, family discord, temptations
 - b) Maybe you are in the kind of place that you can barely even lift your eyes to the hills as you wake in the morning with a sense of anguish, sadness, darkness - barely lift your head off the pillow
2. In the face of hills on our dangerous journey Where will my help come from? Immediate answer - God is our help - God is our divine helper. Cling to the promise
 - a) He meets us in the place of need, insufficiency, weakness - when we come to end of all our resources - he is there - our help - Sovereign - all things under his reign
 - (1) Needing help is not a failure in God's eyes - our awareness and confession of our need for his help is the humility that draws the care, power, and presence of God
 - (2) At times he will lift up hills in front of us to reveal just how insufficient we are - lift the deceitful veil of self-sufficiency - graciously revealing our need and his all-sufficient help in the face of need - see the hills - look above those hills and see God reigning - as our loving helper

[1] To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! [2] Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he has mercy upon us. (Psalm 123:1-2)

(a) He is our help - He will help you Christian pilgrim

II. He Will Establish You (3-4)

A. v. 3 What is the nature of his help? (next 3 points) "He will not let your foot be moved." - he will establish your footing as you make your pilgrim way through this world - he will secure your footing for the journey - he will establish your footing for the climb up those hills.

1. And we can trust v. 3-4 that he will never waver in his protection and care - there is no lapse in his divine coverage - why? Because he does not slumber or sleep - the one who establishes our footing is always awake always working on our behalf to establish our steps

Illustration: I was reading a little bit this week on the effects of sleep-deprivation. If we don't sleep there are serious effects - within 24 hours of sleep deprivation - hormonal changes, stop metabolizing sugar correctly, body temperature drops, immune system begins to be compromised. Now there are no confirmed reports of someone dying from sleep deprivation but in the 1980s a University of Chicago researcher - Dr. Rechtschaffen did some research on the effects of sleep deprivation on rats - after 32 days of total sleep deprivation, all of the rats in the study keeled over dead. Not good...

2. At my age I get tired without doing much at all - stay up late - devastated for days
 - a) It has been well said that sleep is our daily reminder that we are not God - for God...he never sleeps...he never slumbers...he never taps out for a power nap - always keeping his children established - always at work to secure us on our pilgrim way

[25] Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, [26] for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught. (Proverbs 3:25-26)

B. Application

1. 2 x in v. 3-4 - impress upon the heart and mind - in our trials we may be tempted that he's asleep - he does not take notice
2. As you head to bed - anxiety rises - worries and concerns - we can sleep in peace because God...God is awake all night...establishing our way...securing our footing - he gives to his beloved sleep for he never sleeps or slumbers - hide this promise in your heart for those anxieties and worries

God is a tireless worker. He never wearies. Think of God as a worker in your life. Yes, it is amazing. We are prone to think of ourselves as workers in God's life. But the Bible wants us first to be amazed that God is a worker in our lives. (John Piper)

3. Though, as James says, we stumble in various ways - ultimately our footing will be established by God - we will be secured - we will walk together into the Celestial City for God himself will establish our way

[24] Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Let us remember that there is constant danger of our slipping and stumbling in our heavenly course. We are very weak in ourselves. It is strange that we are not entirely ruined. But when we remember

that God is the hope of his people, the mystery is explained. Almighty arms can hold up the feeblest. (William Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 1098)

- C. He will help you, he will establish you

III. He Will Protect You (5-6)

- A. v. 5 - the LORD is your keeper - your protector - the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night - moonstruck? he will protect both day and night - in the heat and darkness
1. The Jewish pilgrim would have been quite aware of the danger of middle-eastern sun - heatstroke - dehydration - The LORD is your shade
 2. A promise for pilgrims who hike through desert places
 - a) When the fierce heat of suffering beats upon our souls - he is our protector - he is our covering - our shade

Illustration: Just as God caused a plant to spring up over Jonah to protect from the heat of the sun - to cool and protect

- B. He himself is our protector - he is the protective shade for our souls in the heat of this life - he hides us in his grace - he is at our right hand - always there to protect us. In the dark, disorienting night of suffering he is our protector - our keeper
- C. He will protect from our enemy Satan, his schemes cannot destroy the chosen of God
- D. Application
1. As the fierce heat of suffering arrives - the sweltering, overwhelming fire of suffering and of trial - he will protect you - oh he'll not let your soul be lost.
 2. Pain, suffering removes illusions of safety and shade - revealing the places we look for protection - places we run to for a sense of safety
 - a) Escape - food, social media, porn, hobbies, movies - if my checking account is full enough I will be safe
 - (1) All pretense stripped away that we might cry - O Father, hide me in your grace
 - (a) In suffering, in trials, in every season He is there, at our right hand, he is committed, he is dedicated to our protection
 - i) He will help you, he will establish you, he will protect you

IV. He Will Keep You (7-8)

- A. v. 7-8 - the Lord will keep you - used 6x in this Psalm
1. V. 3 "he who keeps you"
 2. v. 4 "he who keeps Israel" - he who keeps his chosen people
 3. v. 5 "The Lord is your keeper"
 4. v. 7 the LORD will keep you from all evil
 - a) The evil that assails our souls - Satan, sin, and death defeated at Calvary - he keeps us on our way - no weapon formed against us shall prosper against our souls
 5. V. 7 "the LORD will keep your life"
 - a) Sustaining us now - bringing us into the consummation of eternal life in Christ
 6. v. 8 "the Lord will keep your going out and coming in" - covers the whole of life
 - a) Not only in this momentary life - but "forevermore" - FOREVER! His promise to keep us is FOREVER - He'll not let us go

Illustration: We are charismatic - when the healing doesn't come to you or the one you love - through the tears - He is keeping me - he will keep me - he will keep them now - healing now is wonderful and to be desired - he will keep you - you will know relief and joy forevermore because God keeps you.

B. Application

1. Oh my friend with tender conscience - nagging doubts because of failure and weakness "will I be lost?" - those he calls he keeps - he will keep you Christ will lose none whom the Father has given him. He has secured his elect pilgrims in his substitutionary death and resurrection from the dead

[38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] 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. (Romans 8:38-39)

2. Keep you in his love
3. In the face of opposition from the world, suffering, trials, he will keep us forevermore - keep this firmly in your mind

[10] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. [11] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)

4. 4 promises as we make our way through this life clinging to Christ - If we grab hold of these promises - what a game changer! The Lord himself is committed to us to help us, establish us, protect us, and keep us on our pilgrim journey - for those of us aware of our failures and weakness - WHAT GRACE.
5. In our suffering, challenges, trials - in every season we remember and rest in his promises

The Christian life is not a quiet escape to a garden where we can walk and talk uninterruptedly with the Lord; nor a fantasy trip to a heavenly city where we can compare blue ribbons and gold medal with others who have made it to the winners circle...The Christian life is going to God. In going to God Christians travel the same ground that everyone else walks on, breath the same air, drink the same water, shop in the same stores, read the same newspapers, are citizens under the same governments, pay the same prices for groceries and gasoline, fear the same dangers, are subject to the same pressures, get the same distresses, are buried in the same ground.

The difference is that each step we walk, each breath we breathe, we know we are preserved by God, we know we are accompanied by God, we know we are ruled by God; and therefore no matter what doubts we endure or what accidents we experience, the Lord will preserve us from evil, he will keep our life. (Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, p. 38)

6. DO YOU KNOW (ABOVE)? GOD WANTS YOU TO KNOW - HE WANTS TO ASSURE YOUR IN AND THROUGH PSALM 121
7. What can an increasingly hostile world do to these kind of people - who stand cheerfully under the care and protection of God when they are opposed?
8. In light of God's great and precious promises as we make our way through this world - don't settle for a nice, safe, controlled, version of the American with a little Jesus mixed in - TAKE GREAT RISKS AND ENDEAVOR TO DO ALL THAT WE CAN FOR THE CAUSE OF CHRIST - Whitfield - we are immortal till until our work on earth is done

Illustration: David Livingstone, Scottish missionary in the 19th century, upon seeing the great need of an Africa unreached by the gospel, set out for Africa to proclaim Christ declaring that "death alone will put a stop to my efforts!" Upon receiving his medical degree he set out for Africa. The morning of his

departure he gathered his family, family he would not see again, and opened up the Bible and read to them - Psalm 121. Went to Africa eventually succumbed to Malaria in Africa. It was worth it. God kept his going in and out forevermore

9. Oh that we would apprehend the sheer immensity of God's provision and care for us and give ourselves to his cause - if you're 13 or 93
 - a) Oh my young adult friend still in the home - grab hold of these promises - attempt great things for the Lord Christ - even to go where Christ has never been named - give your life - and die with peace in your soul as you make your way to your reward

Close

Promises for pilgrims only. Those who have set themselves to trust and follow Jesus Christ. Get in on these promises. Turn from your sin and cast yourself on the mercy of Christ and receive God's everlasting care and provision

Beloved There is more than enough help in God for needy, dependent, exhausted pilgrims

Don't need now? Hide away for tomorrow is coming...Consider memorizing this Psalm this week - 8 verses

In this day, tomorrow morning, Thursday evening as hills rise before you "from where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord."

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