

=STORIES BEHIND THE PSALMS=

Lesson 3

Psalm 121

INTRODUCTION: This Psalm continues in the same theme as Psalm 127 and Psalm 136. It is a Psalm sung while traveling. It deals with God's care for His own as they travel to the Promised Land. Some think it was basically a Psalm sung by the Jews as they returned from Babylon. Whether this be true or not, one thing is true: It was sung on a journey to the Promised Land.

We are God's people. We, too, are bound for the Promised Land and are traveling toward Heaven. The same promises given to the Jews can be given to us as we continue our journey toward Heaven. Let us notice the story behind the Psalm and the Psalm itself for this week's lesson:

- I. PSALM 121 IS THE SECOND OF FIFTEEN "PSALMS OF ASCENSION." Notice in the Scofield Bible at the beginning of Psalm 120 the words, "A Song of degrees." These words precede every Psalm from Psalm 120 through Psalm 134. There were fifteen steps to the house of God. The Jews would sing Psalm 120 on the first step, Psalm 121 on the second step, Psalm 122 on the third step, etc. As they got higher and closer to God's presence, they continued singing the Psalms. Singing people continue to march on and go up. As we grow in grace, our joy becomes more, our song becomes sweeter. In other words, step by step the Christian life gets better. I have often said that the worst day a Christian will ever spend as a Christian is the first day. In other words, it gets better. The writer has said, "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before." So it was with the Psalms of degrees.

Stress here the importance of growing in grace. Stress the importance of continuing in the Lord's work. So many people just get saved and stay on the first step. Some get two or three steps up and stop. Others get halfway up and stop. We should never be satisfied until we have continued daily to grow in grace.

- II. THESE FIFTEEN PSALMS WERE ALSO CHANTED BY THE PEOPLE AS THEY WENT UP TO JERUSALEM TO THE FEAST. Notice especially Psalm 122:1, 2. This would be a good place to emphasize faithfulness to the house of God. How vital it is for a Christian to want to go to God's house! Of course, the Jews had four major feasts a year. These Psalms were sung by them as they journeyed from all over Palestine to Jerusalem for these feasts.

- III. THE JEWS REALIZED THAT THEIR HELP DID NOT COME FROM THE HILLS. Read Psalm 121:1. The Psalmist is saying that he will lift up his eyes unto the hills, but that is not where he gets his strength. Verse 2 answers where he gets his strength. His help cometh from the Lord. The Judæan hills are beautiful, and to look at the hills offers one a certain amount of security, but the simple truth is, the hills offer no protection. The help the Psalmist got was from the Lord. Oh, how we need, as we journey toward the Promised Land, the help and blessings of the Lord on our lives! We need to learn to trust Him, to lean on Him, to walk with Him, to talk with Him, to share our burdens with Him.

Notice the last line in Psalm 121:2, "which made heaven and earth." What the Psalmist is saying here is the hills are not his help—his help comes from the God Who made the hills. Now since this is true, the hills can be a great comfort and blessing to us since they remind us of the God Who made them; but it is not the hills, it is God Who offers us our help.

- IV. THE JEWS WERE REMINDED THAT GOD WAS AWAKE, EVEN WHEN THEY SLEPT AT NIGHT. See Psalm 121:3, 4. They would stop at night, pitch their tents and sleep. As they went off to sleep, they would sing a song of praise that God would not sleep but would be there to watch over them and guard them while they slept. This is a blessed thought. There is Someone Who made the hills and made us Who walks guard over us and cares for us. In Psalm 34:7a, something very similar is said: "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him." In the Bible when "the" angel of the Lord is mentioned, it oftentimes refers to Jesus Christ. The word "angel" means "messenger," and since Jesus is the Great Messenger of God, He encamps round about those that love Him. We sleep, but He does not. He continuously watches over us.

Day and night, week in and week out, our Saviour is at the right hand of God interceding for us and caring for His own. Then, too, the Bible says He discharges a guardian angel to each believer. When a child is born, an angel is assigned to him for his watchcare. When the child reaches the age of accountability, this angel leaves him until that person is saved. Then upon salvation, a guardian angel is given to each Christian. It is that angel's job to watch over us and care for us. The Jews realized this even while they slept.

V. THE JEWS THANKED GOD THAT HE WAS AT THEIR RIGHT HAND. Notice Psalm 121:5. This meant that they put Him first. On the right hand of a person was the place of honor. That is why Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Jews were guaranteed God's provision because they gave Him the honored place at their right hand. Does He have the honored place in your life? He keeps those who keep Him at the right place. Let us honor Him in our lives. Other Scriptures that deal with the Lord being on the right hand are Psalm 16:8 and Psalm 109:31.

VI. GOD TOOK CARE OF THEM IN THE DAYTIME AND IN THE NIGHTTIME. Read Psalm 121:6. As they traveled by day and as they slept by night, God took care of them. Think of the promises of God's care in the Bible. Read Matthew 6:25-34; Philippians 4:13 and 19 to the class. Remind them of God's promises to care. Read Psalm 103, the first few verses, and remind the pupils of God's care for His own. Oh, how prone we are to get outside the consciousness of His care! It is His job to provide for us day and night.

Lead the pupils to remember how God had provided for the Jews in the past. How did they get food in the wilderness? How did they get water in the wilderness? How did they cross the Red Sea? How did they get meat (quail)? How did they know where to go? (The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.) Would God, we could, as His people, learn to lean on Him and realize He cares for us by day and by night!

VII. THE LORD PRESERVED THE JEWS FROM ENEMIES. See Psalm 121:7. Robbers would lurk in the Judæan hills, but the Jews were conscious that the Lord would preserve them from all evil ones. God promised to keep them safe. Oh, the blessed fact that Romans 8:28 is true! God will take care of us and preserve us from our enemies if we give Him the right place in our lives.

VIII. THE JEWS FELT SECURITY IN THEIR GOD. Read Psalm 121:8. They said the Lord would take care of them all the way to the Promised Land and all the way back. God takes care of us the same way. Once we start the journey toward the Promised Land, it is His job to care for us until we arrive safely. How good God is to care for us as we journey on earth and to His Heaven! We should learn to trust our Father as little children trust their parents.

CONCLUSION: Psalm 121 is one of the sweetest of all the Psalms. It reminds us He cares for us and tells us how He does it. It is the second of the Psalms of ascension and was one of the happiest of all the Psalms. The Jew had no happier time in his life than when he went to Jerusalem for a feast. It was the highlight of his life. How happy he was to know he was going to the feast, knowing the God of Israel would care for him as he journeyed!