

## Help Is On The Way!

Contributed by Kerry Haynes on Mar 5, 2020

**Scripture:** Psalms 121, Romans 8:31, John 16:7

**Denomination:** Baptist

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**Summary:** Like the early Israelites, we can sing with confidence, because God watches over us, God protects us, and God is with us. We have nothing to fear.

Psalm 121

Help is on the Way!

We live in a time of great uncertainty, of fear of what the future may hold. If you asked me a couple of months ago, I never would have predicted that the world would be caught up in a deadly new strand of coronavirus. We have had great scares before: the Spanish flu, the H1N1 virus, Ebola. And all of these were contained, after some scare and some death. And here we are again. It's an uncertain time. How many will be infected? How many will die? Even though every year the regular flu takes tens of thousands of lives in America and more worldwide, somehow this COVID-19 is scarier, because of the unknown element, because we don't fully understand it and we don't yet have a vaccine against it.

When you feel unsettled, unsafe, you need help. Psalm 121 is a great reminder of our only and ultimate security. Three times a year, faithful Israelite families would march from the small towns of their nation to the proud city of Jerusalem, home of Solomon's Temple. The capital sat on a hilltop, so no matter what direction you came from, you could truthfully say you were "going UP to Jerusalem." And as these pilgrims walked, they would often sing together, to pass the time. (This was before cell phones, you see.) Psalm 121 is one of a number of "Ascent psalms," sung on the way up to Jerusalem. Look at the opening two verses:

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?

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

Lots of things promise help today: the latest pharmaceutical on TV will take away your pain, or help you forget you ever had it. It will cure your depression, and give you zest for life once again. Alcohol will numb your fears. Drugs claim to bring life more vividly.

Hobbies keep your mind busy. Close friends bring fulfillment. But ultimately, our help comes only from the Lord, the one true God, Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 121 reminds us of three great ways God helps us. Consider them with me on your outline.

How does God help?

### 1. God watches over you always (vv. 3-4)

Verses 3 and 4 give the image of one who stands guard over us 24/7:

3 He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber;

4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

A big no-no in the military is falling asleep while on guard duty. When it comes to the military's mortal sins, falling asleep on guard duty is right up there with losing your weapon. It's a huge deal; it could be the difference between life and death! And here we see that God never slumbers; he never sleeps. Why? Because he is on guard duty. He's watching over you 24/7. The Hebrew word for "watch over" or "keep" appears six times in this short poem, the same amount of times as the word "Yahweh," or "Jehovah," interpreted here as "The LORD."

Our God, Yahweh, has our back. He watches over our lives, day in and day out. Sometimes you pray and you see nothing happen, and you wonder if God is asleep at the wheel. No, he's not. Just because he hasn't answered your prayer the way YOU thought was best doesn't mean he hasn't answered your prayer. God is always at work in and around you. He always has your best interests at heart. He is infinitely in love with you, and will stand for nothing less than your very best.

Know that you are guarded, 24/7. God has angels watching over you. And God himself is on guard duty. And secondly, know that...

### 2. God protects you always (vv. 5-7a)

When we moved here from Washington state ten years ago, we noticed a new use for umbrellas. In Washington, they're used to protect against the rain. In Texas, yes occasionally for rain, but more often for protection from the sun. Shade is a big deal here, and likewise in the Middle East. Listen to the psalmist, in verses 5-7a:

5 The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all harm...

Remember, this was one of the songs sung by pilgrims walking up to Jerusalem. Can you imagine the hot dry sun beating down on you in the desert? A rare shade tree became a refreshing oasis. On the other hand, the moon reminds us of the dangers of the night: robbers and wild animals. Day or night, God will "keep you from all harm." He gives round-the-clock protection.

Can you say with the Apostle Paul, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)? God is your protector, always. He will "watch over your life." Your ultimate security—from COVID-19, from the regular flu virus, from every sickness and illness known to mankind—your only real security is found in God. Charles Stanley writes, "Why worry? The omnipotent Lord of the universe has declared His unending love for you and will never fail in protecting you."

Yet, we all know that bad things happen to good people. And we know that death comes for us all, unless Jesus comes first. So how can God keep us from ALL harm? Hold that thought; we'll come back to it in a minute. And consider lastly, that you are not alone because...

3. God is with you always (vv. 7b-8)

Let's pick up on the second half of verse 7 and then verse 8:

7b He will watch over your life; 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

God is always watching over you. Not in a negative sense, waiting for you to trip up: "I caught you now! I knew you were going to go for that extra dessert!" No, God is the most loving, non-manipulative parent, not one to impose guilt every chance he gets. God watches over you with the promise of his presence. The phrase, "coming and going," refers to the everyday ebb and flow of life. Certainly, God was with you in those big moments: when you got married, when you had a child, when you got promoted, when you lost a spouse, when you moved here. God was with you in those moments. But God is with you in the little moments, too: when you wake up in the morning, when you eat breakfast, when you take a walk, when you watch a movie, or write an e-mail, or meet someone for lunch, when you go to bed at night. God is there. If you're a believer, everywhere you go, the Holy Spirit goes with you.

This was the big promise Jesus made to his disciples, in John 16:7: "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

VA has a little saying for its staff: it's the acronym I-C-A-R-E ("I care.") Each of the letters stands for something. The "A" stands for Advocate, that we as staff advocate on behalf of the Veteran. What's an advocate do? He or she speaks out for the betterment of the person. They fight for the person to get what that person needs. The Holy Spirit is your advocate. He fights for you. He stands up for you. He speaks out for you. He is always with you. He is the very Spirit of Jesus Christ; the Trinity: three yet one. That's why Jesus could truthfully say, right before he ascended back to heaven: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

And so that care extends from this life to the next; you see it in the little phrase, "both now and forevermore." That's why, for the believer, death has lost its sting. When Jesus walked free of the grave, he broke the power of sin and death for all time. In him, we have life, eternal life, forever life. So we don't have to be afraid. What's the worst that could happen? We die and go to heaven. Not too shabby, right? I like how the NIV Jesus Bible puts it: "Followers of Christ will not be kept from difficulty, but they WILL be kept." Remember, six times in this poem, it says God will "keep you" or "watch over you."

God watches over you, always. God protects you, always. God is with you, always. You belong to the One who controls the whole universe. So have no fear, and know that you are in good hands. Let's pray:

Thank you, Yahweh God, for your protective hand over each one of us. Thank you that we can sing, like the original Israelites, of your great love and protection. We need you, because you are our very life. Help someone here today turn their life over to you for the very first time. Help us all to turn our fears into faith, as we bring each one to Jesus, the Lover of our souls. And to know that you are in control and will never leave us or forsake us. We pray this in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen.

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For welcome time:

I saw a person at Walmart who had March Madness teeth. She was down to the final four.

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Psalm 121

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where does my help come from?

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5 The Lord watches over you—

the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

6 the sun will not harm you by day,

nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all harm—

he will watch over your life;

8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going

both now and forevermore.