

My Help Comes From the Lord

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Deliverance / Psalm 121:1–8

This sermon is about seeking God's help during the trials and tribulations of life.

Imagine living in Galilee, Samaria, or one of the many villages scattered throughout Judea. Three times each year, faithful Jewish families would leave the comfort and security of their homes and begin a journey to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. While the Torah commanded that Israelite men appear before God annually at Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles [1], this ideal was often difficult to achieve in practice. The costs of travel, accommodations, sacrifices, and time away from work could be substantial, and for Jews living as far away as Asia Minor, such a pilgrimage was often a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity [2]. For years you have dreamed of what it would be like to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, commemorating God's mighty deliverance from Egypt when families slaughtered an unblemished lamb, sprinkled its blood upon their doorposts to spare the firstborn, and ate unleavened bread in haste as they prepared to leave bondage behind. You have wondered what it would be like to celebrate Pentecost fifty days later, rejoicing before God at the completion of the wheat harvest. You have imagined attending the Feast of Tabernacles, remembering God's faithful provision during Israel's wilderness wanderings as worshipers lived temporarily in booths to recall the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Just the thought of joining perhaps hundreds of thousands, even over a million fellow Jews from across the known world—singing, rejoicing, feasting, and worshiping the Lord together—fills your heart with overwhelming joy. You can hardly wait for your pilgrimage to begin.

Yet while the thought of worship fills your soul with anticipation, it also leaves a pit in your stomach. Travel in the ancient world was exhausting and dangerous. There were no automobiles, no paved highways, no police patrols,

and no guarantees of safety. Depending on where you lived, the journey could take days, weeks, or even months. You would travel through unfamiliar territory on roads that wound through rocky terrain, narrow valleys, and mountain passes. Bandits knew the routes used by pilgrims and often hid among caves, ravines, and ditches waiting for opportunities to ambush, assault, and rob unsuspecting travelers. In addition, tensions between Jews and Samaritans made certain routes particularly hazardous, causing many pilgrims to avoid them altogether [3]. Rather than risk traveling alone, you join a large caravan of fellow worshipers and take the Jordan Valley route, a path considered safer because of the numbers traveling together [4].

But it is not merely the cost of the journey or the threat of robbers that troubles your heart. There are spiritual dangers as well. As your caravan draws nearer to Jerusalem, the climb becomes increasingly steep. Your legs begin to ache. Your breathing grows heavier. Jerusalem sits approximately 2,500 feet above sea level, and every step reminds you how much farther you still have to go. As you lift your eyes toward the surrounding hills, you see more than mountains. Throughout Israel's history, these high places had often become centers of pagan worship. Here many of your ancestors had turned away from the Lord, erecting altars to Baal and other false gods, worshiping the created things rather than the Creator Himself [5]. The hills stand as a sobering reminder that both physical and spiritual dangers surround God's people. The journey requires vigilance not only against enemies that threaten the body, but also against temptations that threaten the soul.

Then, as weary pilgrims lift their eyes toward those mountains, they begin to sing. It is not a song of fear. It is not a song of despair. It is a song of confidence, trust, and unwavering faith in God. It begins with a simple yet profound question:

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?" ([Psalm 121:1](#))

Is that not the question every believer eventually asks? Living in a fallen world filled with trials, disappointments, temptations, and uncertainties, do we not find ourselves facing our own mountains? Do we not encounter countless voices calling for our allegiance and promising help apart from God? When the road ahead appears difficult, when the burden feels heavy, and when you feel too weak for the journey, where do you look for help?

The Honest Question of the Heart

Lifting one's eyes to the mountains carried deep spiritual significance for the pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem. Throughout the Old Testament, the eyes often symbolized one's focus, direction, understanding, and dependence [6]. As the weary traveler gazed upon the hills ahead, he was reminded not only that the journey was far from over, but also that both physical and spiritual dangers lay before him. The mountains surrounding Jerusalem were more than geographical landmarks; they were silent witnesses to centuries of faithfulness, compromise, victory, and rebellion. The nations surrounding Israel often viewed mountains as sacred places where heaven and earth met and where humans could commune with their gods [7]. Tragically, many Israelites adopted these pagan practices. Though God had clearly commanded, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" ([Exodus 20:3](#)), the people repeatedly established high places, sacred stones, and Asherah poles upon the hills and beneath spreading trees ([1 Kings 14:23](#)). What God intended to remind His people of His greatness became, for many, a place of spiritual compromise.

As the pilgrims climbed the rocky paths toward Zion, they would have been reminded of the painful lessons of their nation's history. They knew that many of Israel's kings had lifted their eyes toward false sources of help rather than toward the Lord. Solomon, despite his wisdom, allowed his foreign wives to turn his heart after Ashtoreth and Molek ([1 Kings 11:1-13](#)). Jeroboam fashioned golden calves and led Israel into idolatry ([1 Kings 12:25-33](#)). Ahab married

Jezebel and devoted himself to the worship of Baal ([1 Kings 16:29-33](#)). Manasseh went even further, rebuilding high places, practicing sorcery, consulting mediums, and even sacrificing his own son in the fire ([2 Kings 21:1-9](#)). Each of these kings sought security, prosperity, wisdom, or power apart from God, and each left behind a trail of devastation.

The hills therefore served as more than a reminder of past sins; they became a warning to every pilgrim. Israel's exile to Babylon had not occurred by accident. It was the bitter harvest of generations who looked to false gods for help instead of trusting in the Lord. As the traveler ascended toward Jerusalem, he was confronted with a question that every generation must answer for itself: Where will I look for help? Will I trust in the God who created heaven and earth, or will I place my confidence in something else? This is the honest question of the heart. Before faith makes its confession, it must first confront its temptation. Every believer faces moments when the road grows steep, the burdens become heavy, and the future appears uncertain. In those moments we reveal where our trust truly lies. The question is not whether we will seek help. The question is where we will seek it.

We too are on a pilgrimage. Our journey began the moment we placed our faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and were born again [8]. This world is not our home, for "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" ([Hebrews 13:14](#)). Our citizenship is not ultimately found in any earthly nation, but in the kingdom of God ([Philippians 3:20](#)). When I picture those weary pilgrims climbing the winding mountain paths toward Jerusalem, surrounded by uncertainty, threatened by bandits, and confronted by reminders of Israel's long history of idolatry, I do not merely see an ancient historical scene. I see a picture of the Christian life itself. Every believer is traveling a difficult road toward a heavenly destination. Every believer encounters challenges, trials, and temptations along the way. While the idols of our age are rarely carved from wood or stone, they remain just as deceptive and dangerous. They promise what only God can provide. They promise security but leave us anxious. They promise success but leave us empty. They promise acceptance but leave us enslaved to

the opinions of others. They offer escape through entertainment, distraction, pleasure, and self-indulgence, yet never satisfy the deepest longings of the soul. Beneath them all lies the same temptation that confronted Israel: to trust something other than God for help. As believers, we are engaged in a spiritual battle, for we wrestle not merely with visible struggles but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" ([Ephesians 6:12](#)).

The Confident Declaration of Faith

Like the pilgrims of Psalm 121, we must continually decide where we will place our trust. When the road is steep, when the burdens are heavy, and when temptation presses in from every side, we must remember that our help does not come from the hills, from our own strength, or from the false promises of this world. The gods of Canaan seduced Israel because they appeared to offer an easier path to the blessings people desperately desired. Worshipers were told that if they performed certain rituals and acts of devotion, the agricultural deities would ensure fertile fields, abundant harvests, and prosperous lives [9]. These false religions also appealed to the desires of the flesh, offering sensual indulgence and fertility as part of their worship. What God had designed to be sacred was twisted into something corrupt. In reality, Canaanite worship became little more than sexual immorality disguised as religion [10]. It was spiritually bankrupt, morally corrupt, physically degrading, and socially destructive. Yet despite its emptiness, it promised prosperity, security, pleasure, and fulfillment—the very things many Israelites longed for.

The tragedy was that these promises were nothing more than lies. The gods of wood, stone, and metal could neither hear, nor save. They could not send rain, protect a family, forgive a sin, or heal a broken heart. True help would never be found in idols fashioned by human hands but in Yahweh, the covenant God who had repeatedly demonstrated His power to save, provide, and deliver His

people [11]. The faithful pilgrim understood that life would not be found by turning to the right or to the left, but by walking the narrow path of obedience before the Lord. He had learned that what he needed was not the gods of nature, but nature's God [12]. The One who created the mountains was infinitely greater than anything found upon them. The Maker of heaven and earth alone possessed the authority to rule over creation, the power to sustain His people, and the wisdom to guide their steps. Therefore, as the pilgrims climbed the rocky paths toward Jerusalem, they did not ultimately fix their eyes upon the hills or fear the idols that stood upon them. Instead, they lifted their hearts toward the Lord and declared with confidence, “My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth” ([Psalm 121:2](#)).

Do we possess that kind of faith? Many Christians readily affirm that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, yet still live burdened by worry and anxiety [13]. The rising cost of living, mounting debt, retirement concerns, job uncertainty, and unexpected expenses cause many believers to ask, “Will I have enough?” In response, some spend their lives working longer hours and accumulating more possessions, hoping that material security will quiet the fears within. Yet no amount of wealth can provide the peace that comes from trusting God. Others find their joy stolen by sickness and suffering. A cancer diagnosis, heart disease, chronic pain, or the frailty that often accompanies aging can leave even faithful believers lying awake at night, fearful of what tomorrow may bring.

Perhaps the greatest thief of peace, however, is our fear of the unknown future. We long to know what lies ahead and to control the circumstances of our lives. In doing so, we are often tempted to place our confidence in our own intelligence, planning, resources, and abilities rather than in the Lord. The pilgrim of [Psalm 121](#) reminds us that our help comes not from the dust of the earth, but from the One who formed it. We were created in the image of God ([Genesis 1:27](#)), fearfully and wonderfully made ([Psalm 139:14](#)), and crowned with glory and honor, being made “a little lower than the angels” ([Psalm 8:4-5](#)). If the Creator cares so deeply for His children, why do we carry burdens He has invited us to place in His hands? The God who made the mountains is greater

than every mountain we face. Therefore, if we desire the peace that surpasses all understanding, we must heed the words of the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The God Who Never Sleeps

As the pilgrims journeyed toward Zion, they need not fear the bandits hiding among the rocks or the spiritual dangers represented by the high places, for the One protecting, guiding, and sustaining them was none other than the Creator and Sustainer of the universe [14]. In the religions of the ancient Near East, the gods were often portrayed as sleeping [14]. Sometimes they slept because of sheer exhaustion, while at other times their sleep symbolized indifference to the cries of those seeking help [15]. How different is the God of Israel! The psalmist joyfully declares that the Lord never sleeps. He is never distracted, never indifferent, and never unaware of the needs of His people. Far from being a passive observer, God is the Protector, Redeemer, King, and Shepherd of those making their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Because He is constantly watching over them, He is able to keep their feet from slipping and their path secure.

The same truth brings comfort to believers today. The dangers we face are real. Some are physical, others emotional, and still others spiritual. Many of them are hidden from our view. We face uncertainties about our health, our families, our finances, and our future. We also contend with a spiritual enemy who disguises himself as an angel of light and seeks to lead God's people astray. Yet while we may not always recognize the dangers around us, our heavenly Father sees them all. He never grows weary, never becomes distracted, and

never takes His eyes off His children. Parents watch over their children with great care, yet it takes only a moment for harm to occur. God's watchfulness is infinitely greater. Not a single hair falls from our heads apart from His knowledge. The One who knit us together in our mother's womb knows every detail of our lives. He knows every trial we will face, every temptation we will encounter, and every step we will take. Long before we recognize our need, our Keeper is already watching over us. What a comfort it is to know that when we sleep, God remains awake; when we are weak, God remains strong; and when we cannot see the way forward, the One who neither slumbers nor sleeps is faithfully guarding our path.

The God Who Stays Close

To further emphasize God's protection, the psalmist reminds the pilgrims that they need not fear either the sun by day or the moon by night. The journey to Jerusalem exposed travelers to many dangers. As they traversed the hot and dusty roads leading toward Zion, dehydration, exhaustion, and sunstroke were constant concerns. The blazing Middle Eastern sun could quickly drain a traveler's strength and turn a joyful pilgrimage into a dangerous ordeal. Night offered little relief, for darkness brought its own uncertainties. Bandits could more easily conceal themselves among the rocks and shadows, and the unfamiliar terrain increased the risk of injury and disorientation.

Beyond these physical dangers, many people in the ancient Near East viewed the sun and moon as powerful deities capable of influencing human affairs. The Babylonian moon god Sin, for example, was believed to afflict people with various illnesses and diseases [16]. Other pagan beliefs associated the moon with mental disturbances and mysterious afflictions, leading many to fear its influence [17]. While the faithful pilgrims of Israel likely placed little confidence in such superstitions, they nevertheless lived in a world saturated with these

beliefs and could not entirely escape the fears and uncertainties that surrounded them [18].

The psalmist addresses these concerns with a beautiful promise: "The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand" ([Psalm 121:5](#) NIV). Notice that God is not described as watching from a distance. He is at the pilgrim's right hand. In the ancient world, a soldier typically carried his shield in his left hand and wielded his sword with his right. This left his right side more exposed and vulnerable in battle [19]. The image is striking. God deliberately places Himself at the point of greatest vulnerability. He stands beside His people, shielding them from dangers they can see and dangers they cannot. The God of [Psalm 121](#) is not a distant deity observing events from heaven; He is the ever-present Keeper who walks alongside His children through every valley and over every mountain.

What comfort this truth brings to believers today. We often feel exposed and vulnerable as we face trials, temptations, illnesses, disappointments, and uncertainties about the future. There are moments when we feel alone in the struggle, wondering whether God sees our pain or understands our fears. Yet the promise of [Psalm 121](#) reminds us that our Lord is closer than we imagine. He stands beside us in the hospital room, beside us at the graveside, beside us in seasons of financial hardship, and beside us in every spiritual battle. He faithfully limits every temptation and provides a way to endure it ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). He will never leave us nor forsake us ([Hebrews 13:5](#)). The same God who guided the pilgrims safely to Jerusalem walks beside His people today, guarding them by day and by night. Because He is near, we need not fear what lies ahead.

The God Who Holds Your Life

The pilgrim who began his journey by asking, "*Where does my help come from?*" now arrives at the answer's fullest expression. The God who made heaven and earth is not merely watching over the journey—He is watching over

the traveler. He is the God who never sleeps, the God who stays close, and the God who holds the lives of His people securely in His hands. This does not mean believers will never face trials, sickness, disappointment, or even death. The promise is not a life free from valleys, but a life preserved through them. Like the shepherd of [Psalm 23](#), God walks with His people through the darkest valleys and safely leads them home. Nothing can happen to us apart from His knowledge, His presence, and His sovereign care. The phrase "*your coming and going*" refers to the whole of life. God watched over the pilgrim as he left home, traveled to Jerusalem, worshiped, and returned again. Likewise, God watches over every step of our journey. He is with us in our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures, our beginnings and endings. His protection is not confined to a place; it follows His people wherever they go. And perhaps the greatest comfort of all is found in the final words: "both now and forevermore." God's care does not end when our earthly pilgrimage is complete. The God who watches over us today will continue to watch over us for all eternity. He holds our hand in this life and will one day receive us into glory.

The pilgrims journeyed upward toward Jerusalem seeking the presence of God. Yet centuries later, Jesus Himself set His face toward Jerusalem, not merely to attend a feast, but to become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He willingly walked the road to Calvary, bore the burden of our sin, endured the judgment we deserved, and rose again in victory over death. The One who now keeps us is the very One who laid down His life for us. Our help comes from the Lord because the Lord Himself came to help us. Through His death and resurrection, He secured not only our salvation but also the promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Therefore, when the road is steep, when the burdens are heavy, and when the future feels uncertain, lift up your eyes. Your help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. The God who called you will keep you, guide you, and carry you safely home.

Footnotes

- [1] Daniel Overdorf, *What the Bible Says about the Church: Rediscovering Community* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2012), 110–111.
- [2] Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 89–91
- [3] Yohanan Aharoni et al., eds., *The Carta Bible Atlas* (Jerusalem, Israel: Carta Jerusalem, 2011), 180.
- [4] A.D. Riddle, “The Passover Pilgrimage from Jericho to Jerusalem,” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels*, ed. Barry J. Beitzel and Kristopher A. Lyle, *Lexham Geographic Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 397.
- [5] Susan Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on [Psalms 73–151](#)*, ed. John Sawyer et al., *Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries* (Hoboken, NJ; West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2022), 3:262.
- [6] Tremper Longman III, Peter Enns, and Mark Strauss, eds., *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 552.
- [7] Timothy B. Cargal, *So That’s Why! Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001).
- [8] Alan Carr, “Hang On, Help Is Coming! ([Psa. 121:1–8](#)),” in *The Sermon Notebook: Old Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 1639.
- [9] Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 144–145.
- [10] Ibid.

- [11] W. Dennis Tucker Jr., “[Psalms 107–150](#),” in *Psalms*, ed. Terry Muck, vol. 2, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 731.
- [12] James Montgomery Boice, *[Psalms 107–150: An Expositional Commentary](#)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1077.
- [13] Daniel L. Akin, Johnny M. Hunt, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in [Psalms 101–150](#)*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 191.
- [14] W. Dennis Tucker Jr., “[Psalms 107–150](#),” in *Psalms*, ed. Terry Muck, vol. 2, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 732.
- [15] Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), [Ps 121:3–4](#)
- [16] W. Dennis Tucker Jr., “[Psalms 107–150](#),” in *Psalms*, ed. Terry Muck, vol. 2, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 733.
- [17] Alan Carr, “Hang On, Help Is Coming! ([Psa. 121:1–8](#)),” in *The Sermon Notebook: Old Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 1640–1641.
- [18] John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): The Minor Prophets, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 424–425.
- [19] Alan Carr, “Hang On, Help Is Coming! (Psa. 121:1–8),” in *The Sermon Notebook: Old Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 1639.