

Psalm 121 (New International Version)

A song of ascents.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Reflections on Psalm 121 by Alan Branford

Psalm 121 is an example of a song of ascents. Such songs were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they negotiated the mountainous terrain on their journey to Jerusalem and eventually to the Temple itself, hence the name. The songs gave the pilgrims inspiration and strength in the face of the ordeals that lay ahead on the journey to Jerusalem and reminded them of the unwavering support from the Lord in their pilgrimage.

The first four-line stanza of this psalm is written in the first person. “I”, the author of the song, looks at the obstacles ahead and initially doubts his capability, but then he is reassured that there will be help from the Lord. Note, though, that very subtly as the song enters the second stanza the words are in the second person: “you” will be watched over and assisted by the Lord. You are no longer the passive listener to the experiences of the pilgrim, but it is you, yourself, who is on that pilgrimage.

But then the psalm again makes a subtle shift. From talking about the Lord watching over you in your ascent to Jerusalem, the song gives you an undertaking that the Lord will look out for you in all your undertakings. By the end of the psalm, the writer of the song is positively *exhorting* “you” to trust in the Lord that he will “watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore”. It is truly a psalm of FORTITUDE and PERSEVERANCE against life’s travails in the knowledge of the Lord’s protection.