A Grace Gathering
1 November 2026

Psalms 121
A Song of Ascent

The Hebrew designation for the Book of the Psalms means “praise” (we derive the title from the Latin). It is Israel’s, ours as children of Abraham according to faith, praise book.

Henry Ainsworth, a refugee from England, published the Geneva Psalter 1562. Using several tunes, he wrote the musical score for the 150 Psalms. This is the Psalter the Pilgrim carried to Plymouth in the 1620’s. The first book published by the Puritans of Boston was the Bay Psalm Book or the Ainsworth Psalter (1640).

<u>The Setting/Uniqueness of the Psalm 120.</u>
This Psalm appears in series of fifteen psalms with the superscription, “Songs of Ascent” (120-134); they have also been called “Pilgrim Songs.” These were most likely songs that sojourners voiced on their way to the three great feasts (Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, First Fruits or Weeks, and Day of Atonement with the Feast of Tabernacles), as the pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem. Imagine ascending from below sea level at Jericho to Jerusalem, which is a climb of over four thousand feet and sixteen miles (a day’s walk), so delighted that they sang with excitement and expectation!

The authorship of these psalms is unknown as are the relative dates of composition.

While “not all Israel is Israel,” there is no doubt that many Jews took the worship of God, as they understood Him, seriously. The rituals, ceremonies, and feasts focused on the Lord and for many religious Jews it was the center of their lives. I think that righteous Jews of the Old Testament are a model of practical devotion for all who make the claim of being a Messiah seeker/follower.

Psalm 121

<u>The Theme of the Psalm</u>
The celebration of the faithfulness of God toward His people.

<u>The Key Words/Phrases of the Psalm</u>
1. The names of God

There is only one designation for God in the psalm: Jehovah (YHWH, acknowledged by the people with the substitute "The Name"), vv. 2, 5 (2x), 7, 8.

2. The actions of God
   "He will not allow your foot to slip," v. 3
   "He who keeps you will not slumber," v. 3
   "He keeps Israel," v. 5
3. The actions of the psalmist
   "I lift up my eyes," v. 1
4. The confidence of the psalmist
   "… my help comes from the LORD," v. 2
   "He is your shade," v. 5
   "The LORD will protect you," v. 7
   "He will keep your soul," v. 7
   "He will guard…" v. 8

<u>A Survey of the Psalm</u>

I. The Trust of the Child of God for the Journey, vv. 1-2
   A. The Question, v. 1
      This is a Pilgrim Psalm and, as such, it reflects the needs of a person on a journey (as stated to one of the great feasts in which every male was to appear before the Lord in the Temple). From whatever direction, the path would lead through mountains to Jerusalem's heights (you always go up to Jerusalem literally, and hopefully spiritually). On a long, and potentially dangerous journey of several days, the traveler asks a rhetorical question, "Where is my safety? The traveler would be filled with joyful anticipation, but also a potential awareness of harm from robbers, wild animals, and rough terrain.
   B. The Answer, v. 2
      1. Stated, v. 2a."
         The answer is clear, the "I AM."
      2. Assured, v. 2b
         "Maker of heaven and earth," the temporal and physical realms we experience, is the all-powerful, compassionate God who commanded the journey to worship.

II. The Assurance of the Child of God in the Journey, vv. 3-8
   The writer expresses the ground of his confidence that the Lord would extend His power and compassion as he makes the journey to and from the holy city and the Temple.
   A. Stated, vv. 3-4
      The sojourners manifested confidence that mishaps would not befall because of God's superintendence. God "watches" (7x) His people,

meaning He knows our steps and extends safety to us. We can be assured of this for a profound reason: He never ceases to care for us; He never dozes off losing momentary consciousness of our plight or for longer periods. “Slumber” or “sleeping” are metaphors for becoming unaware; God constantly is aware of our need for safety in our journey.

B. Enumerated, vv. 5-6
   1. The Fact, v. 5
      The watchful care of God is a fact, not a potential realization for every sojourner.
   2. Illustrated, v. 6
      “Shade” is a metaphor for comfort and protection; it is apt for walking in a dry, often hot, climate. “Right hand” suggests the availability of comfort, near and immediately accessible. Since He is never negligent (“no slumber,” “no sleep”), He is with us day and night.

C. Restated, vv. 7-8
   What a wonder statement, “The LORD will keep you,” not only today and tomorrow, but every day of our journey. “Coming out and going” means every step we take.

<u>Thoughts:</u>

We are all on a journey, not perhaps to Jerusalem, but we are traveling to the “city whose builder and maker is God,” the heavenly Jerusalem and the true presence of God, the heavenly Temple that will never be destroyed because of human folly. We are being preserved and protected, an inheritance “imperishable and undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (I Pet. 1:4). We are safe during this earthly migration to a better place in the protective mercies and love of the LORD.

1. I think we should call this the “Traveler’s Psalm,” memorize it, and offer it to the Lord before we take a journey. God’s promise of safety and protection is a need we all have, most poignantly, in these days.
2. God never grows lax; He never takes a break; He does not take naps! We may fall asleep at the wheel, but God does not. What a comfort to know that we are loved by one whose care for us is never interrupted.