

Psalm 121:
The God Who Keeps

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An Art of Taleh Mini-Study



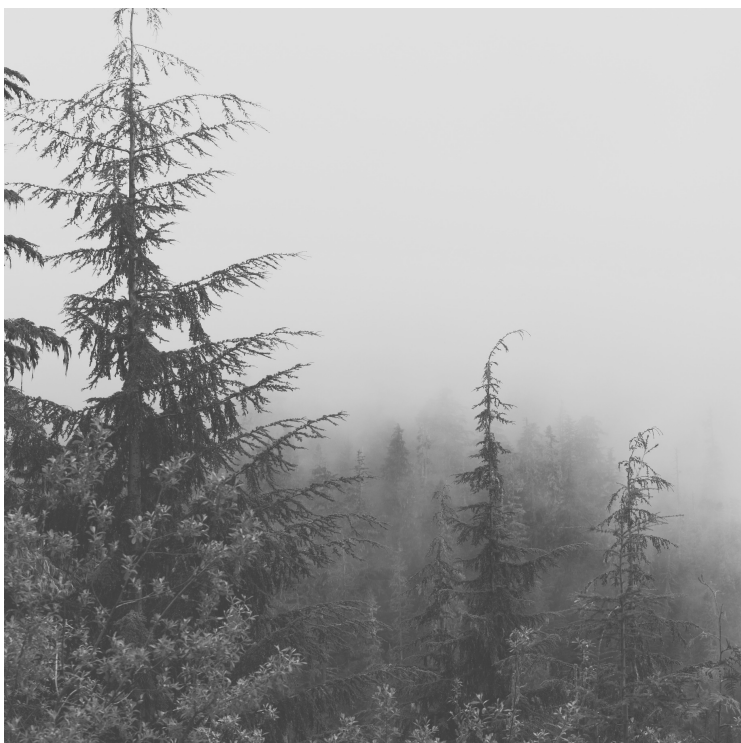
written by guest writer

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Psalm 121: The God Who Keeps



Overview



Passage
Outline
Questions
Devotion
Reflection

The Passage

1

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?

2

My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

3

He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

4

Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.

6

The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

7

The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

8

The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

The Outline

In the Art of Taleh, our first approach to a Bible passage is to study it sentence by sentence.

To do this, we want you to work through Psalm 121 and, as you go, summarize each verse in no more than 5 words.

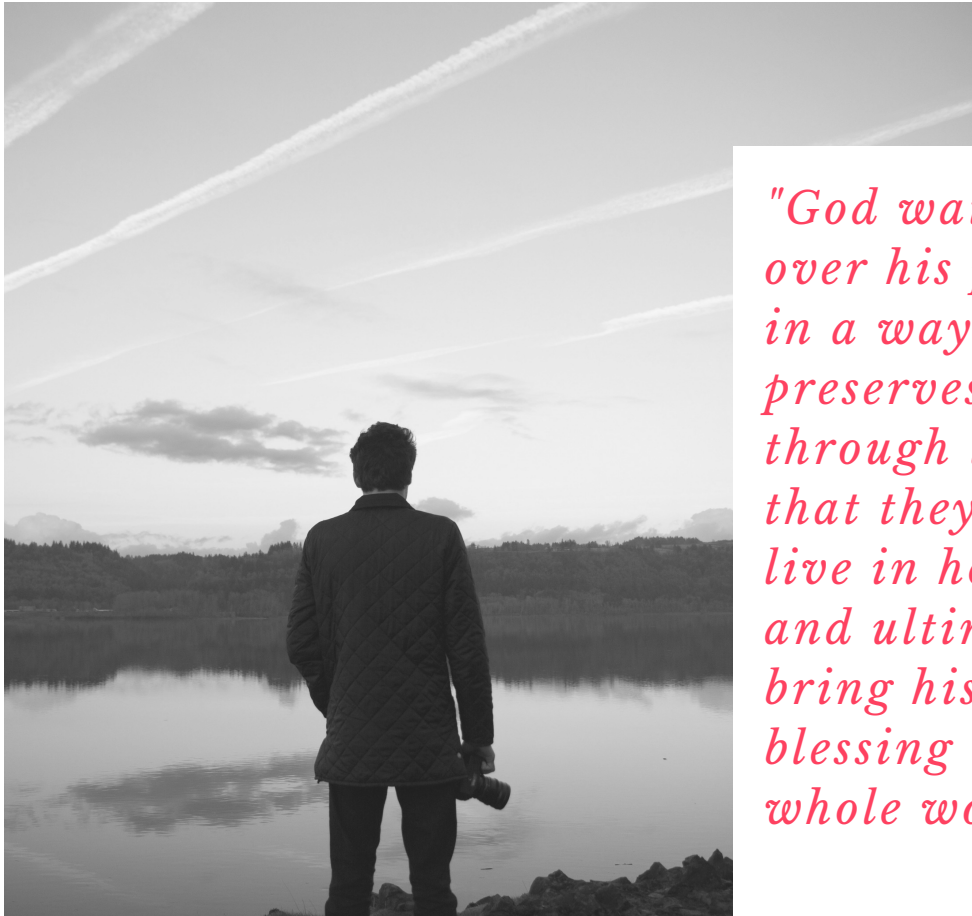
- 1: _____
- 2: _____
- 3: _____
- 4: _____
- 5: _____
- 6: _____
- 7: _____
- 8: _____



A Few Questions

Before diving into Psalm 121, let's first gain a better picture of how this Psalm relates to big ideas in the rest of Scripture. Consider the 3 following questions and carefully base your answers on passages in the Bible.

- **How does the Bible contrast Israel's God with other gods?**
- **How has God preserved and "kept" Israel throughout their history?**
- **Note how the same word "keep" is also translated in Psalm 127 as "watch." How does this word also describe God?**



*"God watches
over his people
in a way that
preserves them
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that they may
live in holiness
and ultimately
bring his
blessing to the
whole world."*

Psalm 121: The God Who Keeps

The Psalms of Ascent are worshipful poetry full of human experience interacting with God's character. Psalm 121 is a prime example. The author starts with a question. "I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from?" Help comes from God. The rest of the psalm describes God and how he "keeps" us.

The repeated use of the LORD (i.e. Yahweh) shows this is not just god as a concept. No, he is the covenant lover of Israel who redeemed his people out of slavery. He is the maker of heaven and earth who stands over and against the gods of this world.

Verses 3-4 make this point again describing God who never sleeps nor slumbers. This may seem like merely nice rhetoric at first, but it becomes more powerful when you consider Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Moriah. 1 Kings 18:27 recounts one of the seminal moments in Israel's history: "Elijah mocked them, saying, 'perhaps [Baal] is asleep and must be awakened.'" Other religious texts from the ancient Near East describe deities sleeping. Israel's God, however, is not like the other gods of this world who are made in the image of man. Because of this, he is able to watch over his people like none other.

Verses 5-8 describe God “keeping” us in a holistic way. In our comings and goings, day and night, past, present, and future, God is able to protect and provide for his people. Israel knows this from early on in their history. God faithfully preserved his people through various trials even before redeeming them out of slavery into the Promised Land.

Note the repeated use of the word “keep.” In Hebrew, שָׁמַר can mean to keep, watch over, protect, guard, and preserve. It is important to highlight this as an important theme for journeying worshippers since the Psalms of Ascent use this word several times. God watches over his people in a way that preserves them through trial that they may live in holiness and ultimately bring his blessing to the whole world.

But isn't this Psalm just pie in the sky musings because God's people experience evil all the time?

First, the Psalmist is not naïve or writing in a bubble. Indeed, the Israelites using these psalms just finished singing about being among war-mongering people in chapter 120. We should find a proclamation of God's preserving presence even more powerful from those who have known intense suffering. Second, this Psalm points forward to future salvation and justice. The Hebrews in exile spoke these words in faith trusting in God's promise not only to bring them back into their land but to renew the covenant and their hearts along with it (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:26).

Christ fulfilled God's promise! The cross is the means by which God protects and keeps his people and place. On the cross, the evil of this world exhausted itself on him, and he defeated it. In his resurrection, he provides new life to those who are united to him by faith. Peter describes this promise as an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:4 NIV). The Spirit resting in his church continues to “keep” his people.

Whether you're a worshipping pilgrim in ancient Israel or just trying to faithfully live today, we should derive great joy and comfort knowing the creator God who keeps us is omnipotent and capable, and he has done so through Christ and his Spirit.

Reflection

- How does God ultimately keep us through the work of Christ on the cross and in his resurrection?
- Do you seek after God's presence as the source of protection and peace? What else might we be tempted to find that in instead of God's presence?
- Do you wrestle with the idea of God keeping and preserving you through evil? What might cause you to doubt this?
- While Christ is victorious over evil, how should we live when we still experience evil?

About the Author

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This mini-study was written by Colson Hauser, a guest writer for the Art of Taleh. Colson is a lay-leader at Redeemer Fellowship Church in St. Charles, IL. He and his wife, Sarah, live in nearby Batavia with their twin toddlers and one on the way.