



*Notes for Adult discussion groups
On-Line@9 Worship Service
17 February 2008*

Life's Journey: Psalm 121

Context

Originally, Psalm 121 was probably associated with pilgrims attending a festival in the Temple. They said it as they prepared to leave to return home, facing the journey through the Palestinian countryside. The psalm affirms their faith in terms of the possible dangers of such a journey. It starts with a question and answer; it may have been a teaching psalm.

Verses 1 and 2 contrast the gods of other nations, who were worshipped at hilltop shrines, with the true God of Israel, who has created the hills.

Verses 3 and 4: Because Israel's God is the creator, God is also worshipped as protector. The emphasis is on the supremacy of the God of Israel over all possible threats. Above all, God is unfailing in protection. Again, there is an implied contrast between Israel's God, who does not sleep, and the gods of other nations who were believed to sleep and therefore required awakening.

Verses 5 to 7: God's protection applies to both natural dangers and other, unspecified hazards. The sun's heat on a journey would have been very trying and at times dangerous to a traveller's health, and so the shading by God is very practical protection. The moon was dangerous in itself (the association with lunacy already existed in people's understanding) and because it signalled night, a dangerous time.

Verse 8: The psalm is not limited to the journey home from the Temple, but is linked to all journeys: your coming and going forever. This insistence that God is in all of life was an important affirmation when attending, and even more when leaving, a festival. God was not simply to be met with or invoked in the holy places and at the holy times, but always and everywhere.

Life's Journey

1. (Verses 1 and 2) Where do you go for help?
2. (Verses 3 and 4) How do we stumble or go off the path?
3. (Verses 5 and 6) What could harm us and how could God protect us?
4. (Verses 7 and 8) Where do we find encouragement and God's protection as we "come and go"?

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