**PRAY**

The second of the Psalm of Ascents, used as a foundation to worship as pilgrims made their way ‘up’ to Jerusalem for one of the appointed feats.

These people were no doubt filled with praise for God and in doing so, were being blessed by the Holy Spirit. In the same way, Paul used these Scriptures in a list showing how believers in Jesus as Saviour should worship and communicate together –

**Ephesians 5:18-20** **‘…be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’**

We have probably arrived here at a Psalm that is many people’s favourite.

It was a song sung by the pilgrims and for them it may have been particularly relevant for the trust placed in God through a potentially hazardous journey.

Did it originally form an extension of what we have as **Psalm 120**? **READ**

If it was, it starts with the pilgrim giving a response to whom he would look to, to protect him from the ungodly people amongst whom he lived, as he cried out to the LORD, the Creator of all.

**v1-2 - I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.**

He is looking to the hills – possibly to his final destination, Mount Zion and Jerusalem as he travelled toward the city to fulfil his pilgrimage.

Despite being far away from the end of his journey and the appointed place of worship, the pilgrim is saying that he is never far from his Lord – though far from the allocated place to worship, the pilgrim realises he is safe in the presence of the Lord.

That point is really wonderful and important. Here was a man who clearly understood that he didn’t need to be in any specific place to be under God’s protective care – the Lord would watch over them as much on the journey as he did after he arrived at the destination.

That is important for us to understand and hold on to as well.

You don’t need to be in any specific place to worship God. You don’t need to have someone appointed by God to allow you to speak on your behalf, or authorise your approach to Him.

The only One you and I need to allow us to approach God, is Jesus. He is our great High Priest – we need no other – He is our sole source of help and provision.

The Psalmist writes in **v3-4**, **He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber. …He …shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord provides by watching over us constantly – not like a security guard who needs sleep, but as One who is constantly alert to the dangers faced by His people.

He is aware that we need firm foundations in this world and He has provided them. **He will not allow your foot to be moved** – with God as your protector, you are on firm ground, where your feet need not move to constantly adjust your balance.

The foundation we have is God’s infinite power and goodness – which is rooted for us in Jesus.

In **Deuteronomy 6:4-**9 there is what is known in Hebrew as the ***shamar***, a word that means both keep and preserve.

It may be one of those passages that you know, but don’t know where it comes from - **4Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.**

The verse in Deuteronomy is used as a reminder of the need to keep God at the centre – and equally that He will keep watch over His people in return.

The Psalmist reminds us that it is God who **keeps you** and it is a recurring theme here – being used six times in this Psalm alone.

God is assuring His people (including you), that He will watch over His people as they travel on life’s journey, as a watchman watches over the city.

We can look to the LORD with absolute confidence that God does not sleep. Over and over in Scripture we are told that God both sees everything and that His watchful eye is always open.

The Lord is constantly looking to love and care for His people – if He seems distant it is because you need to get closer to Him. As the father of the prodigal son was always watching, so is our Heavenly Father.

But maybe you are concerned that He doesn’t know your needs, or that He will be unable to help in any given situation – that is where faith comes in.

The Psalmist had faith that the Lord would provide practical help as well as spiritual. In **v5-6** he says, **The LORD is your keeper;** *(again the word shamar)* **The LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.**

The sun in this country can be very hot, but even more so in the deserts of Israel as the travellers made their way to Jerusalem. But God makes a promise to care for His people and that promise has never gone away.

Time and time again, God has delivered on His promises to protect His people – consider:

* Abraham offering Isaac
* The original journey to and time in Egypt, when the small clan of Israelites were saved from starvation, before emerging as a great multitude of people.
* God’s grace as He continually gave His chosen people opportunities to repent and return when they had gone away from Him.
* God’s grace to you as He continually gives you opportunities to repent and return when they had gone away from Him.

The Lord has not, nor ever will change – He is continually extending His gracious eternal offer of an eternal Heavenly residence with Him, to us.

As our Creator he can rightfully demand that we worship Him, but He allows us to make our own choice whether we do that or not.

That is the freewill we have – which extends to accepting salvation through Jesus and gaining a Heavenly reward, or rejecting the same offer, to spend an eternity in hell.

It is a stark choice and there is no option to sit on the fence. It is also a choice that needs to be made before we die, but the rewards are great.

The Psalmist recognised that too. He recognises that God will protect them from the sun in the same way He protected the Israelites as they wandered in the desert – God was in the cloud that led them.

The phrase **The Lord is your shade**, contains the same thought and promise as other Bible verses - **Isaiah 4:6, 25:4**.

Probably the best know verse that covers the thought of God being our shade and protection is **Psalm 91:1**, when the word shade is the same as the word for shadow.

### **Psalm 91:1-2 - 1Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’**

In the same way that the shade or shadow of a tree or cloud on a hot day has the ability to refresh and protect, God’s love for you has the power to do the same in spiritual ways.

The important point is that often we need to get out of the sun and into the shade – we need to remove ourselves from things that are not of a Godly nature. Things that neither honour or glorify Him.

The writer concludes this Psalm with a wonderful promise.

**The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in. From this time forth and even forevermore.**

Clearly the Psalmist had a great confidence in God’s protecting power. It is also clear in life that people who are not Godly in nature, often have influence over us and the ability to make your life difficult – possibly to the point where you are persecuted for your faith.

However, believers in Jesus as Messiah have the assurance that whatever happens, the Lord will **preserve your soul**.

That is great news and a reminder that no matter what people or circumstances do to us on earth, our Heavenly Father is both in control and has his protecting hands around our souls.

As one commentator wrote, ‘In the light of other scriptures, to be kept from all evil does not imply a cushioned life, but a well-armed one.’ (Kidner)

It is a life that keeps to the principles of **Ephesians 6:10-18** – putting on the full armour of God on a daily basis – for both protection and defence, but also to gain ground for the Heavenly Kingdom.

Spurgeon wrote of that verse, ‘Our soul is kept from the dominion of sin, the infection of error, the crush of despondency, the puffing up of pride; kept from the world, the flesh and the devil; kept for holier and greater things; kept in the love of God; kept unto the eternal kingdom and glory.’

As we conduct our lives, we go through what the writer calls **your going out and your coming in** and he assures those who travel with him that the **LORD shall preserve** you in these things too.

That is just one thing that is so great about God’s promise – it is comprehensive and it is timeless.

We can trust that we have His protection in everything that we do – our **going out** and **coming in** - and at all times - **from this time forth and even forevermore**.

Spurgeon said, ‘when we go out in youth to begin life and come in at the end to die, we shall experience the same keeping. Our exits and our entrances are under one protection.’

We have the assured knowledge, as did those pilgrim travellers, as did those people in Jesus’ time, as well as everyone since who has put their trust in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, that we will never be abandoned by our Heavenly Father.

What a stable foundation from which to build and live the remainder of your life – for God’s glory.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READING**

**Psalm 120**

**1I call on the Lord in my distress,
    and he answers me.
2Save me, Lord,
    from lying lips
    and from deceitful tongues.**

**3What will he do to you,
    and what more besides,
    you deceitful tongue?
4He will punish you with a warrior’s sharp arrows,
    with burning coals of the broom bush.**

**5Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek,
    that I live among the tents of Kedar!
6Too long have I lived
    among those who hate peace.
7I am for peace;
    but when I speak, they are for war.**

**Psalm 121**

**1 I will 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 allow your foot to be moved;**

**He who keeps you will not slumber.**

**4 Behold, He who keeps Israel**

**Shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

**5 The LORD is your keeper;**

**The LORD is your shade at your right hand.
6 The sun shall not strike you by day,**

**Nor the moon by night.**

**7 The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;**

**He shall preserve your soul.
8 The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in**

**From this time forth, and even forevermore.**