

Whence Cometh My Help?

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills."

These are the opening words of Psalm 121. Our attention has been directed to them upon many occasions as we have raised our voices in praise to God. But we have not sung the Psalm in just this manner. Our Hymn 21 has the words translated in the negative; the purpose of this change being to carry the thought out more clearly. The original words carry the sense of a question, as one seeking for guidance and help, as though we read, "Shall I lift up mine eyes to the hills?"

The practice of worshipping and adoring man-made images of wood and stone, upon every high hill and under every green tree, common to idolatrous nations, and copied by apostate Israel, would be vividly in the mind of the Psalmist. These were the things which had brought the wrath of God upon them repeatedly. The beginning of such a departure from God and trusting in high places is recorded of the people after the time of Noah. The people raised a tower to reach unto heaven in which they could make themselves a name. Their confidence was in that which they created and not in the Creator Who made them.

Wherever the spade of archaeology uncovers the history of man throughout the earth there appears the replica of this tower of Babel, indicative of man's trust in the thing created and not in the Creator. It speaks to us of the perversity of human nature, which, untouched by the power of God, refuses to recognize the provision of a loving Father. The fact that Israel came under this influence is recorded as an exhortation and as a warning to us. Each departure of Israel from the commandments of God brought the same helplessness and prostration before their enemies.

As Israel became a nation of prominence like unto all the other nations, so they made alliances or leagues with their surrounding worldly neighbors. This was begun by Solomon, who married the daughter of Egypt's king for the expressed purpose of defence.

Asa, king of Judah, made league with the king of Syria, stating:

"There is a league between me and thee; behold, I have sent thee silver and gold."

This was *after a wonderful deliverance God had wrought for Judah* against a great multitude from Ethiopia, when Asa had placed confidence in God. Thereafter God advised Asa—

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron. 16:3-9).

Jeremiah looked with sorrow upon the degenerate condition prevailing among his people as they turned to their idols for help and despised the loving care of God. He shows Israel that the shameful idols have devoured all their substance and even their children; and to what end?—

"Truly in vain is salvation hoped for **from the hills**, and from the multitude (of idols) **on the mountains**: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jer. 3:23).

The Psalmist therefore asks the question, "Whence cometh *my* help?"—Psalm 121:1. The number has always been small who have concluded that the arm of the flesh is unreliable as a source of strength. The idols of the riches and wealth which may be accumulated come in this same category. All these are undependable in the day of adversity.

Recall the parable of the barns, the man who had more than his barns could hold:

"I will tear down my barns and build greater."

To which the Lord replied,

"Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee."

James adds his voice to this same theme—

"Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries are come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten" (James 5:1-2).

The counsel of the Master is to the effect that we shall seek things above, on the right hand of God, not things on the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt. How easy it is to get drawn into the ways and confidences of the world, their schemes and plans of "permanent" security, of confidence for the future, always seeking to build towers of strength by their own efforts, and thereby sacrifice all their wealth, confidence and even their children to a false sense of security!

The godly man will not be long in supplying the answer to the question posed by the Psalmist, "My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth"—Psa. 121:2. He will see beyond the man-made schemes of betterment, observing in retrospect that each generation has had its impregnable bastions of security, only to have their ruin and impotence witness against them, and laugh them to scorn, a testimony for succeeding generations to view, for:

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa. 127:1).

But the warning generally is unheeded.

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"Which made heaven and earth"—Verse 2.

How short sighted are the people who fail to recognize that God's hand has made all things in the universe, who look to the *thing created* for assistance or aid! The natural hills have all been ordained by God, together with the trees and the verdure that clothes them. It is His Hand which has appointed the bounds of the great and small nations of the earth that they shall fulfil their destinies according to His purpose. It is He Who has arranged the smallest things of nature and sustains them all by His all-pervading Spirit. Yet man in his waywardness declares, "These be thy gods, O Israel."

Isaiah illustrates the Divine estimation of all such—

"They that make a graven image are all of them vanity. None considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say . . . shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?"

The prophet in words of exhortation endeavors to bring his people to see the *reasonableness* of following the commandments of God. He shows them that because of idol worship they shall be punished, but there is a time coming when their warfare shall be over. Then he calls to their attention, and to all who will hear, the position of authority and supremacy of God over all.

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing" (Isa. 40:15).

With such an One as this, Who is higher than the highest, certainly we should place our utmost confidence and trust in God. We should not dishonor Him by trusting in things on the earth. Perhaps we do not *knowingly* do this. Yet it is wise for us to examine *why* we do certain things, to analyse all our actions in the light of Israel's failures in the past.

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved."

If we believe and have confidence in God this next thought will be the natural result. It is the result of honoring God by faith in Him. It is the loving covenant, the bond of affection and kinship enjoined by God.

The picture we are shown is of a man standing against a torrent of opposition, forces which would seek to pull him away from a sure foundation. In each individual these forces are working against the will of God. Even the beloved Paul declared,

"When I would do good, evil is present with me. I find then a law in my members warring against the law of my mind."

There are forces beside this which would "sift us as wheat," but the assurance has been given that Christ will never leave us or forsake us if we trust in God. It is a reciprocating force of attraction. *It is only operative while we maintain our part.* If we remain unreceptive to the Spirit's influences, then we cannot store its energy nor reflect its power.

We have noticed in the ritual of the Law of Moses the anointing of Aaron and his sons with blood at three places on their bodies—the tip of their right ears, on their right thumbs, and upon their great toes of their right feet. This is a type of the impressing of the *hearing*, the *doing* and the *walking* of those who are called to God's service by association with the way of God in Christ Jesus. It tells us the feet have to be placed in a certain course. A straight path has to be set before the feet, and the called-out one may run the Gospel race. The feet have to be shod with the preparation of the Gospel—Eph. 6:15.

Being thus prepared we stand upon holy ground, and God has agreed to perform *His* part—

"He will not suffer our feet to be moved."

The righteous are shown as having their feet upon a rock. Waters and storms may beat against the rock. It may at times seem to sweep over the head and seek to put down. But when the storm is past the rock remains, and those who have trusted in God are delivered, while others may be swept aside.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psa. 40:1-2).

God has not guaranteed to keep the waters calm at all times. He controls the elements and the nations. The chastening is His means of proving our faith. An untried faith is worthless. He brings the storms today as much as in any generation. He is as close to each one today as in any generation. He expects the same degree of faith now. He will protect and keep the feet of any in this generation who have confidence in Him as did the faithful of old. We read in Psalm 121—

"The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy life. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore" (vs. 7-8).

This is a very comprehensive statement, "Preserve from *all* evil." We look back over the lives of the faithful as recorded in the Scriptures and at first glance we may be inclined to question this point. *Has not evil dogged the steps of all the faithful in whatever age?* Look at the remarks of Jacob, addressed to Pharaoh—

"Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been."

Preserving from evil does not mean that the righteous shall not be acquainted with evil, nor surrounded by evil. The world is full of evil, therefore we must needs go out of the world to evade its proximity. The word "*preserve*" carries the idea of "being hedged about," "guarded," "protected." Jacob certainly was acquainted with evil all the days of his life. Its closeness to him brought a reliance upon God rather than a confidence in his *own* ability to supplant another. Wherever he turned the angel was at hand to ward off the thrusts of the enemy. Just when the blackness of darkness seemed to be closing in, there was the hand held out, "This is the way, walk ye in it." God truly was with him "in his going out and his coming in." The words of God were fulfilled in every respect—

"I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

God went out with him, was with him during his sojourn and brought him back again. True it was, evil crowded in upon him. but out of it all the Lord delivered him. We read in Psa. 126:6—

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves."

Thus in deeper retrospect we see that *there must be this going out*, bearing the seed of the Word in sorrow, struggling against the evil with good. Yet from these very circumstances God will deliver the righteous and hedge them about with glorious immortality, to go out and come in at His bidding for evermore.

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"He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep"—Psa. 121:3-4.

This speaks to us of the unlimited power of God and should serve to impress with a confidence in the provision and protection God has freely offered for all who seek Him. It is in sharp contrast to the idols of the land espoused by Israel, and unto which they sought rather than God. Our minds turn to the incident of Elijah and the prophets of Baal upon the heights of Mt. Carmel. The preserving hand of God had for three years and a half been withdrawn from the land. The land was scorched by the sun; it had not enjoyed the early and latter rain, nor had the dew refreshed their fields. The prophets of Baal called all day unto their god, without response. Elijah, aware of the pitiful pantomime, tried to impress them with the folly of their useless antics—

"Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked" (1 Kings 18:27).

How *equally impotent* are all enterprises unassociated with a trust in God! The hollow echo of the voice will return to mock all those who trust in anything except the living God. The apostles foretold that the earth would be filled with violence in the days just prior to the coming of the Master. This is one of the signs proving to us the nearness of that glorious event. Are we crying aloud unto Baal, all the day, and trusting in the same idols as the world? Do the words of Isaiah fail to impress us?—

"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isa. 40:28).

These are now *our* words. They have come unto us to impress us. Do we trust in God, or in the world? There is absolutely nothing stable or sure about the world; but God "fainteth not, neither is weary." The Proverbs carry the same theme of protection from an untiring Father—

"Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken" (Prov. 3:23-26).

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"The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand"—Psa. 121:3.

Perhaps in our temperate climate we do not appreciate the force of this statement. In Palestine its application, together with that of the following verse, may be more striking—

"The sun shall not smite thee by day" (v. 6).

Even in our land the lack of rain at certain seasons is a source of much discomfort and grief. Consider then the merciful kindness of God for His people as He willingly provides a shelter against the burning heat of the day, bringing a cloud to intercept the rays of the sun. Has He not said that upon the nation that will not serve Him in the Kingdom, upon them shall be no rain?

But on a higher plane the nations are likened to the sun. In the Apocalypse the symbol is used frequently, and Christ makes use of the figure in his discourse upon the days just prior to his return:

"There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon" (Luke 21:25).

The powers of the earth in the day of their supremacy are likened to the sun in the heavens. Likewise the moon is associated with things of religion or ecclesiastically. Therefore to be protected against these forces in the earth is to be guarded by a power higher than they. These powers are necessary in the working out of His purpose, and they are controlled for the sake of God's elect. The extension of world power often creates a heat uncomfortable to the people of God, but the Divine permission to this extent is only allowed to draw the chosen more closely to the shadow of the Great Rock, as they sojourn through a weary land. Isaiah tells us that this Rock is the man Christ Jesus—

"A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isa. 32:2).

This immediately follows upon his stirring declaration that—

"A king shall reign in righteousness, princes shall rule in judgment."

Israel and other nations had trusted in strong empires, had banded themselves together by the force of numbers. Babylon is shown as a great tree, under whose branches many nations gathered—

"Under his shadow dwelt all great nations" (Eze. 31:6).

The Creator lopped down the branches and caused Babylon to cease as a shadow for other nations. The influence she has exerted upon the nations of the world continues to exist however. We are therefore in danger of being drawn unconsciously toward its deadly shade if we permit the world and its influences to enter into our lives. The time remains for its death-dealing pale, which blights all spiritual growth, to be removed, and for the sun of righteousness to shine forth with healing rays. For the age of probation, we are exhorted to—

"Dwell in the secret place of the most High."

And thus we shall—

"Abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91:1).

In such a manner we are hedged about in the fold, the great Shepherd being the keeper of the sheep. And as he leads us forth, going out and coming in, we shall be protected on the right hand, on the right side, from that which man can do unto us.

Shall we not then sing in our hearts—

“MY help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

—F.H. May 1955 Berean
