



[Psalms 120-124](#)

Psalm 120-124
Tape #7210
By Chuck Smith

Psalm 120. According to the Jewish law, they were to have three major feasts in the year. These feasts lasted for seven days. They were feasts that were called Memorial feast for they were reminders to the people of God's work in the history of the nation. How that God was there at the founding of the nation. How that God was there to preserve that nation that He founded. And so in order to keep the consciousness of God's place in the national life, it was required by their law that every adult male gather from the areas where they lived three times a year to Jerusalem to stand there before the Lord at the holy place. Of course, during the reign of David the tabernacle that he had built in Jerusalem, and of course, later under Solomon the temple. And so it was a requirement that the adult males come. Now often, of course, when they would come they would bring their families with them. And they had these pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times a year.

As time went on and the Jews were dispersed into many parts of the world, they were not able to make it back to Jerusalem for these feasts the three times a year. It was always though in the heart of the Jew to go to Jerusalem for these feasts. Even today in the modern days, as in the Jewish homes they observed the feast of the Passover, they always declare at that feast of the Passover, "Next year, Jerusalem" expressing the heart and the desire of going back to Jerusalem for these feasts. The desire to keep that law of God that required them to be in Jerusalem to stand before God during these times in which they were reminded of the central place that God had in the creating and in the developing and molding of the nation.

I think that it is tragic in the United States that we do not have those kind of holy days that bring us into a national consciousness of the place of God in the founding of our nation. And I think that it is extremely tragic that those holidays that have been traditionally celebrated in our nation have gradually become paganized. So that what used to be Easter vacation when I went to school--and everybody knew that we were getting out for Easter in which was the time in which we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, His death on the cross on Good Friday, we all knew that--now it's spring break. Not even called Easter vacation anymore.

The Christmas vacation that we used to have and we all knew it was to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. And we would sing in school, "Silent Night, Holy Night." We would sing, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." But now it's the winter vacation or the winter break. And gradually there has been that endeavor to take away from our national consciousness the place of God in our nation, in the establishing and the developing of our nation.

The humanists of the day have sought to rewrite the history and to take away the consciousness of God from the national life, which is indeed a very tragic thing. So God incorporated in the law because God knew that man does have that tendency in time of need to seek after God; but in the time of prosperity to sort of forget God. We don't need You now. We're able to do it on our own.

So God incorporated into the very culture, into the very patterns of their culture those things that would bring them into that national consciousness of the place of God in the history of their nation. And thus they would go to Jerusalem and they would celebrate these holy days and these feast days as they would just remember the place of God in their national life.

Those that were living in the distant areas who maybe could only get to Jerusalem once every ten years, maybe once in a lifetime, it was always something that they were looking forward to. Something that they were anticipating and naturally something that they had to plan months in advance. They would be thinking about it months in advance. Even as if you are going to take a trip in the summertime. You're already thinking about it. You're already planning it. Say you've never been to Europe and you're planning to go to Europe this summer. You're already buying books and you're trying to get familiar with the places that

you're going to be visiting. And you're planning and you're thinking about it. It's a part of your whole, the anticipation and looking. And thus that anticipation and looking forward to being in Jerusalem. We're going to be there to worship God with all of God's people and that excitement that came through the anticipation.

These psalms, the fifteen psalms that begin with Psalm 120, these fifteen psalms are called the psalms of ascents. They are those psalms that were written to express the feelings of those who were preparing to journey to Jerusalem. They were the psalms of the pilgrims who were going to make this pilgrimage to Jerusalem at a time of the feast to worship God. And so they're starting to become conscious of God. They're starting to become conscious of Jerusalem, their journey to Jerusalem. They're standing within the walls of the city of Jerusalem and standing with the people of God to worship God. That's the background for these next fifteen psalms.

Psalm 120. The psalmist speaks of dwelling in the midst of these heathen people in Mesech and Kedar. The hostility of these foreigners towards him and his cry unto the Lord, verse one.

In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me (120:1).

The Bible says that His ear, the Lord's ear is open to the righteous and He heareth their cry. "In my distress I cried unto the Lord, He heard me." This is his cry.

Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, and from the deceitful tongue (120:2).

He was distressed because people were lying about him. They were deceitful. And so he says,

What shall be given unto thee (120:3)?

Talking about those people who were lying about him.

what shall be done unto thee, you false tongue (120:3)?

And this is what he desires to be done.

That sharp arrows of the mighty (120:4),

That God would really bend His bow and smite them with sharp arrows.

and with coals of juniper (120:4).

The juniper tree there makes some of the best charcoal that is hottest and longest lasting. He's really wanting his enemies to experience the "arrows of the mighty and the coals of juniper."

Woe is me [he said], because I sojourn in Mesech (120:5),

The area to the north.

that I dwell in the tents of Kedar (120:5)!

Dwelling among the heathen.

For my soul hath long dwelt with him that hates peace (120:6).

He's living under difficult conditions because of the hostility that is there towards him as a Jew.

I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war (120:7).

So that longing of his heart to be gathered with God's people where there would be that commonality among them. He would be away from this hostility that he's experiencing in these foreign lands.

Psalm 121

To that,

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help (121:1).

As we mentioned, Jerusalem is situated in what they call the hills of Jerusalem. The Jews have this thing that they always say, Let's go up to Jerusalem. You never go down to Jerusalem. You may be living in the north part of the country but you wouldn't say, Let's go down to Jerusalem. You'd say, Let's go up to Jerusalem. We say, Let's go down to San Diego. But if they lived in the northern part on the top of mount Herman, ten thousand feet, they'd say, Let's go up to Jerusalem because the final leg of the journey to Jerusalem is uphill. No matter what direction you're coming from, your final last lap into Jerusalem is uphill. Whether you're coming from the coastal area, whether you're coming from Ephraim, whether you're coming from the south or, of course, from the area of the Jordan valley, it's always up to Jerusalem.

And there in the Jerusalem hills, when the pilgrims, many of them after long, long journeys by ship, by camel, by donkey, by walking, finally coming into view of the hills of Jerusalem, the hearts begin to beat faster. "Lifting up my eyes unto the hills." The excitement of soon being standing within the city of

Jerusalem. "From whence cometh my help" is, I believe, a question. He's not declaring surely that "my help comes from the hills." And I think to read it that way is to read it wrong. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help." The hills don't help me.

But my help comes from the LORD, which made [the hills] the heaven and the earth (121:2).

Again the vast importance in believing in a Creator. Seeing God in creation. It makes such a vast difference in the whole way that you look at life, that you look at circumstances in life. Whether or not life has meaning and purpose or life is just a mistake and a series of accidents. It all depends on whether or not you believe in a Creator and you believe in creation. I really feel sorry for those people who have been hoodwinked into believing that we have come into existence as the result of billions of years of "fortuitous occurrences of accidental circumstances" which is their phrase. They use a lot of big words just to snow you.

That you're the by-product of just millions of years of fortunate mutations of the cells and the codes within the cells being altered and varied as the need arose. Rather than I am here because God has created me in His image and after His likeness and He has created me for the purpose that I might know Him and fellowship with Him. He has a plan for my life. He has a purpose for my life. There's a reason for my existence. It's a divine reason. And it's that I might spend my eternity with God in the glories of His eternal kingdom. And thus I live with purpose and I live my life with meaning.

But if you don't believe in the Creator, then life is just here today, gone tomorrow and let's eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. And there's no meaning for life, there's no purpose for life, there's no purpose for your existence. Makes a big difference.

"My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth." Surely if God is great enough to make the heavens and the earth, He's great enough to take care of my little problems.

For He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber (121:3).

Coming up the path from Jericho was a pretty tough path. You have a very deep valley that you are coming up sort of on the upper side of that valley. A narrow path and it's rocky all the way. Not good footing, very easy to slip. But "my help comes from the Lord, and He will not allow my foot to slip: for He that keeps me will not slumber."

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep (121:4).

God is always there when I need Him. Anytime I call Him, He's available. He never slumbers. He never sleeps.

I think of how when Elijah was having that contest with the prophets of Baal. They were to build their altars and they were to pray to their God and whichever God answered by fire, let Him be acknowledged as the true God. And how that the prophets of Baal built their altar. They put their sacrifice on and then they started to pray to Baal to send the fire to consume their sacrifice. And how they got into the frenzy, they began to cut themselves and throw themselves on the altar. Going through all kinds of these kind of actions trying to provoke their god to activity in their behalf. And finally Elijah just sort of having a little fun with them said, Fellows, I'll bet your god's asleep. You need to cry a little louder. Just sort of egging them on to put on a real show.

But "He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." When they were through with their show and there was no fire, Elijah without a lot of fanfare and a lot of emotion or anything else said, Lord, I know You can do it but not for my sake but for their sake that they might know that You're God, go ahead and, and of course, before that he had had them pour water all over the thing until it was soggy. And then the fire of God came and consumed the sacrifice, the wood and even the stones that they had used to make the altar with. "The one who keeps us neither slumbers nor sleeps."

For the LORD is thy keeper: He is your shade upon your right hand (121:5).

That is a very arid area and the dangers of traveling where the sun by day, sunstroke, or dehydration. And if you that know anything about the desert know the dangers of dehydration. And so "the Lord is your keeper: He is your shade on your right hand." The interesting thing, the right side was the side that you were most vulnerable on because you always held your shield with your left hand. And thus your left side was pretty well protected by the shield but the right side of the fighter was exposed. And so He will be your shield on your right side. He'll be the protection on the right side, that side that is most vulnerable.

The sun will not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night (121:6).

There was a feeling that sleeping in the moonlight had dangers. I don't know from a scientific standpoint if that has proven to be factual or not. I know that up until a few years ago there were still many who felt that sleeping under the full moon could affect a person. In fact, the word "lunatic" comes from the Latin word "luna" which is moon. And so lunacy or lunatic comes from the idea that sleeping under a full moon can affect a person mentally. During full moon, those who have mental problems have manifestations of those problems more under a full moon.

For years we had a listed phone number because we wanted to always be available to the people. We were finally forced to get an unlisted number because at full moon we would get these crazy calls all night long. We got to the place where we would take the phone off the hook during the full moon at night so we could sleep because whenever it was full moon, we'd get these people that would call, certain ones that would call all the time during full moon. And then one fellow started calling all over the world charging it to our number and we came home from vacation and found about a thousand dollars worth of long distance calls on the bill. He would call from wherever he was and just give our home phone number, said "Charge it to my home." So we finally had to go to an unlisted number. But it was interesting how that Kay would say, It's full moon, honey, take the phone off the hook. So there is a relationship between mental disorders and the full moon. People get more agitated or whatever who do have mental problems during that time and that's why probably they related mental disorders to the moon. Sleeping under the moon.

The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil (121:7):

That's a great promise, "The Lord will preserve you from all evil:"

he shall preserve your soul (121:7).

Your mind. And of course, talking about the lunacy and your shield by night. "The moon will not smite thee by night. The Lord will preserve your mind."

The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, even for evermore (121:8).

So traveling to Jerusalem for these feasts. You're going to be traveling through the desert areas. You're going to be exposed to the elements; the sun, the heat of the sun, the moon and the slippery pathways but God will preserve you. God will keep you. He will watch over you. He won't slumber. He won't sleep on the job.

Psalm 122

I was glad [the next psalm declares] when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD (122:1).

When the suggestion came, Let's go to the house of the Lord. The joy. I was glad at the prospect of going to worship God.

For our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem (122:2).

The anticipation of coming, standing within the city itself, within the walls of Jerusalem.

For Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together: Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD (122:3,4),

That idea of compact together is where national groups can come together in a unity. Where the tribes go as one. Though they are the twelve tribes, yet as they gather together that unity that they experience as they feel unified together. A place where we are unified together. "Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD,"

unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD (122:4).

I was glad when it was suggested, Let's go to the house of the Lord that we might "give thanks unto God, to the Name of the Lord."

For there [in Jerusalem] are the set thrones of judgment (122:5),

There is the national headquarters, the national capital where the Supreme Court,

the thrones of the house of David (122:5).

The places where the judgment issued forth.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: for they shall prosper that love thee (122:6).

And then David's own prayer. And for the peace. He exhorts you and others to pray for the peace but this is his prayer.

Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good (122:7-9).

So moving now towards Jerusalem. Seeing the hills. The anticipation. The joy, the excitement, the thrill. Glad when they said to me, Let's go to the house of the Lord. O, the blessed city of Jerusalem. The place that it holds in the heart of every Jew.

It's interesting, there's almost a Jerusalem cult. Those Jews who live in Jerusalem feel that they are blessed above all Jews in the world and they feel that those who live in Tel Aviv are pagans. To live in the land of Israel and not to live in Jerusalem; man, you're just a real pagan. And that love for Jerusalem. Those that live there. They just really have an intense love for Jerusalem and it's great to hear them talk about Jerusalem and their love for this city because it is the city of God and has a special place in their hearts.

Psalm 123

So now the beginning of the worship.

Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us (123:1,2).

In those days in which they had servants, the man of the house would have the male servants that attended to his every desire. The wife, the women would have their maidens who attended to them. And the masters would develop hand signals that were imperceptible to other people. And they would direct the movements of their servants with just a slight movement of the hand. They would have certain signals that would indicate to bring me a glass of water or time to bring the food or whatever and they would just have these slight little hand signals that would direct the servant's activities. And thus, whenever the master was there, guests were around, the servants would always watch his hands because he would give that signal with his hand and he would expect then the servant to respond. They would never give them verbal commands. Always used a signal with the hand that the servant understood and will respond to those hand signals. And thus the servant would just always stand there attentively watching the hand. Waiting for the directions that were to come to him through these little signals that would be given by the hand of their master.

So as the servant, the eyes of the servant, look to the hand of their masters, the eyes of the maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes we stand looking to God, waiting for those signs of God's mercy. Waiting for those indications of God's mercy upon us. Our eyes look upon the Lord, our God, until we have that mercy upon us. And then the prayer,

Have mercy upon us, O LORD, have mercy upon us: for we are exceedingly filled with contempt (123:3).

That is, the contempt of those around us who hate us. God, have mercy.

Our soul is exceedingly filled with scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud (123:4).

Being ill-treated by the world around me, I look to God for solace. For mercy. For comfort.

Psalm 124

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul (124:1-4):

Many of these psalms are ascribed to the period of captivity and to the period of Nehemiah, Ezra when the temple was rebuilt and the people were again coming--many of them from Babylon who lived in these hostile environments. As you remember, there was at one time even in the Persian Empire an edict to exterminate all the Jews. And so if it had not been for God's preservation, "if it had not been the Lord who was on our side." Of course, this psalm was ascribed to David so it is before that time of the great

persecution by Babylon and later by Persia.

But David had, of course, experienced his own trials by Saul who sought to destroy him. Absalom who sought to drive him from the kingdom. And of course, they were surrounded by their perennial enemies. The Philistines, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites.

So “if it had not been for the Lord who was on our side”--the face of the Lord is against those that do evil but the Lord is on the side of those that do good. “When men rose up against us: they would have swallowed us up quickly, when their wrath was kindled against.” God has preserved us. It’s recognizing that it was God who gave us the victory. Then the deep waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul:”

Talking now about the emotional experiences of life. Those deep waters that we often go through. When we have a death of a loved one. When we have financial reverses. When we have a break-up of a marriage. Problems in personal relationships that just are deep water and they seem like they’re going to swallow us up.

When the proud waters had gone over our soul (124:5).

We would have been destroyed. We wouldn’t have survived if the Lord had not been with us.

Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as a prey to their teeth (124:6).

Now that goes back to the enemies who surrounded us who would have swallowed us up when they were angry with us if it had not been for the Lord. God didn’t give us as a prey to them.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare (124:7)

Talking now about the mind, the emotions, to which you’re so caught in this. I see no wait out. I feel like I’m trapped and I feel like there’s just no way out of this dilemma. It’s sort of like, I can’t see any way out. I’m trapped. And so many times a person feels trapped in the conditions that they are. It’s a horrible feeling to think, Man, this is the rest of my life? And I’m trapped, I can’t see any way out. But the psalmist declares, “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare,”

of the fowlers (124:7):

The snare of the fowlers, of course, is an old English term. Goes back to when they used to trap birds, the fowls. The snare, being a trap of the fowlers, the men who trap birds. So I feel like a bird that was caught in the trap but yet I was able to escape out of the trap for the snare of the fowlers.

the snare is broken, and we are escaped. For our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth (124:7,8).

Because God is my help. And again, the idea of creation and the Creator. He made the heaven and the earth. And it’s such an important concept to hold whenever you’re in trouble. Whenever you’re desperate and you go to God in prayer. It’s important to remember God’s power. To realize that I’m calling upon the One Who is so great as to have created this universe.

This past week back in Virginia, there has been an interesting conference of the National Academy of the Astronomers. Many of the astronomers have been presenting their papers to this convention back there. And thus, our news media in the past week has been filled with a lot of reviews of the papers that are being presented in this convention for astronomers that was held in Virginia. The interesting thing that I have noted as I have been reading the summary of their papers is the amazement that the astronomers have with the universe in which we live. The discovery of how much more vast is this universe than we ever dreamed before. We had no idea of how vast the universe actually is. And of course, this great wall that they have discovered out there which just stretches from horizon to horizon. Some five hundred million light-years wide that we know of. How much further it stretches we don’t know but it’s out there just as a great wall. There seems to be new galaxies that are being birthed in the universe.

All of these interesting things that they are discovering as they are able to improve the various telescopes and means of exploring the universe. They are finding out that it’s far more vast than they had ever comprehended before.

It always excites me because it means that God is just that much bigger than we ever thought He was before. Because He stretched out the heavens like a curtain. Now it’s interesting; they say wall but the Lord says curtain. He just stretched out like a curtain that vast what they call wall out there of light five hundred

million light-years long.

The greatness of the God who created the heavens and the earth. He is the God that listens to you when you pray. He is the God who is interested in your little problems. He is the God who wants to help you and reveal Himself to you because He loves you. Now that just is mind-boggling to think that God loves me. That God is interested in me. The One who created the universe is interested in me, in my needs. And those things that overwhelm me are nothing to Him. He is God.

He said to Jeremiah, “Behold, I am God. Is there anything too hard for Me” (32:27)? And thus believing in creation, a God who created this universe. I have great comfort. I have great assurance. Because He is going to see me through every difficulty, every trial. He’s going to protect me. He will be my defense. I don’t even have to defend myself. He is my defense.

This marvelous psalm of David, 124. We’re going to quit with that one tonight. We had the extra program. Time is getting away from us and so we’ll pick up at 125 for next week. These are all short, little psalms but they’re just filled with goodness. So read them, meditate in them, study them. And we’ll continue our pilgrimage through the Word next Sunday night.

And now at the beginning of another week, we pray that the hand of the Lord will be upon your life to guide you in His path. That you will live in the consciousness and awareness of God and of His love for you. That you’ll experience His help in your time of need. That the strength of the Lord will be your portion. May it be a good week. A week of spiritual development and growth as we watch; as a servant watches the hand of his master. As we watch for the work of God and the hand of God.