

Psalm 121:3-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-121/psalm-1213-4/>

The psalmist describes how God does not rest or fail to sustain us as we walk through life. He will guide our steps.

Beginning in verse 3 and throughout the remainder of the psalm, the voice of the psalmist changes from the perspective of the first person singular (I, me, my) to the second (you, your) and third person (He, His) singular points of view. Why the shift? Bible students have suggested a number of reasons, including:

1. The psalm is a “call and response” hymn in which the first two single-voice verses elicit the larger choral responses of the latter verses. Thus, as the congregation ascends to Jerusalem, the crowd respond to the prompts of the leader.
2. The psalm is liturgically designed for the ascent up the steps of the Temple. Prior to entering the Temple courtyards, the pilgrim offers credentials of worthy faith that in turn are given corroboration by Levitical officiants.
3. The psalm captures the exultant worshiper initially testifying of unabashed confidence in the Lord. Then, given the Lord’s characteristically unrelenting care and faithfulness, the psalmist enthusiastically invites listeners to embrace a like faith. “He does for me; He will do for you.”

The “call and response” notion seems to be the simplest, most practical, and (therefore) most likely explanation. In any case, it is to be noted that the emphasis in Psalm 121 is not necessarily given to the merits of the psalmist’s admirable faith. Rather, the emphasis is given to the One Who is the subject of such exuberantly declared faith: the Lord, Yahweh.

He will not allow your foot to slip. Ever the skilled wordsmith, the anonymous psalmist evokes an image well suited to mountains and their ascent. In ancient days, ordinary pilgrims might journey up to 500 arduous miles “upward” toward Jerusalem. They were mostly making the trek on foot, with perhaps only a wealthy few able to secure a ride on a donkey, much less a horse or in a drawn cart. When climbing any inclination of terrain, an unfortunate *slip* of the foot might quickly lead to a tumble or fall with dire consequences. God’s watch over His people is active and personal. He will not *allow* any impediment to their progress toward Him. God is sovereign over even the unfortunate circumstances encountered in life.

No force or happenstance can prevent the faithful seeker from finding rest in God, as well as finding the good that God intends for each person (Romans 8:28). The ultimate destiny of the believer is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). No circumstance, no setback, no disappointment or difficulty can prevent us from walking in faith, trusting God. It is solely within our control to choose to lift up our eyes, and depend upon God. When we do, we can be assured that we will never be disappointed; our *foot* will not *slip*. It is notable that the circumstance of this ascent to Jerusalem is in obedience to God’s command to make an annual pilgrimage. The image conveyed is that when we trust God and walk in His ways, we can be

assured that His work will be completed in us, and we will become all He intends for us to be (2 Timothy 3:17; Hebrews 13:20-21; James 1:4).

He who keeps you will not slumber. It was not uncommon among ancient peoples to explain times of misfortune as periods when their deities might be distracted or unaware of the common affairs of life, even dozing; and so, be unavailable. (See 1 Kings 18:25-29, esp. v. 27 for a contextual reference to lesser deities and sleep.) When favorable resolutions to negative circumstances are not apparent, it is then that faith like the psalmist's is most beneficial. It is a faith based on a relationship of love, confidence and trust in God, not on demands for or perceptions of performance from a deity that can be manipulated to accomplish our desires.

Psalm 121 assures us that the Lord *keeps* (Hebrew "shamar") the believer. Yahweh is the ultimate keeper, guard, protector; ever watchful, ever present among His people; knowing and meeting their every need, down to the secure fall of a foot along even the most treacherous paths. God is working to complete every good work within us at all times (2 Timothy 3:17; Hebrews 13:20-21; James 1:4,21).

Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The poetic repetition of the concept drives home its critically important point. Yahweh, the maker of heaven and earth, is Himself the keeper of Israel—the people established as the first witnesses to the faithfulness of God. There will never be one moment when the Lord is not at work to keep and care for His charge. Slumber—light sleep—might come upon the weary. The Lord, however, “does not become weary or tired” (Isaiah 40:28). Sleep—full submersion into an unconscious state of recuperative quietude—does not impose itself upon the Lord.

The Creator of all that has been created rested on the last day of creation (Genesis 2:2-3). That rest was to enjoy the fruit of His labors; to enter into, to bless, and to make holy all that He had done. The Lord's rest was not to recover from the work of bringing into being all that is. Even at rest God, Who *will neither slumber nor sleep*, remains attentive to His creation and to humankind whom He especially loves.

Biblical Text

**³ He will not allow your foot to slip;
He who keeps you will not slumber.**

**⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep.**