

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: November 20: Psalm 121: Some Notes

Psalm 121

The Message

**121** <sup>1-2</sup> I look up to the mountains;

does my strength come from mountains?

No, my strength comes from GOD,

who made heaven, and earth, and mountains.

<sup>3-4</sup> He won't let you stumble,

your Guardian God won't fall asleep.

Not on your life! Israel's

Guardian will never doze or sleep.

<sup>5-6</sup> GOD's your Guardian,

right at your side to protect you—

Shielding you from sunstroke,

sheltering you from moonstroke.

<sup>7-8</sup> GOD guards you from every evil,

he guards your very life.

He guards you when you leave and when you return,

he guards you now, he guards you always.

### Hymns based on Psalm 121 include<sup>12</sup>:

- Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
- Christ, Mighty Savior
- Abide with Me
- Children of the Heavenly Father
- God, That Madest Earth and Heaven

Rated in popularity alongside Psalm 23. One of the songs of Ascent, used by pilgrims going up to Jerusalem for worship. The pilgrimage was not without its risks. Another personal and collective psalm. One worth memorising. Note that in different translations you get different approaches to the relationship between hills and help. The correct version is probably the one that DOES NOT imply help coming from the hills. Walking in hilly country, including climbing hills, you will be looking up. However, as with water in the psalms, hills have two very different connotations: 1) Mount Zion and Jerusalem, and the Temple (and mountains where God revealed Himself to Moses and others); and 2) the rather threatening hills where robbers might lurk, and where worship points were established for alien gods. HELP comes from God, not from hills!

My Uncle Jim, by then nearly blind, had been a sailor. He lived outside Aberdeen, in sight of the hills – though he could no longer see them. He loved and quoted this psalm – though for him God was in some special sense in the hills. David Livingstone said this psalm with his family before leaving for Africa. The “maker of heaven and earth” in the Apostle's Creed comes from Psalm 118.

One theory is that this psalm dates from Nehemiah and the restoration of the Temple after the return from Exile.

God as Keeper/Guardian is a powerful image. God doesn't take time off or doze off. We have to.

As we have said before, God always there, always with us, is not a promise that life will always be comfortable. It is a promise that we will never be alone – even in “the dark night of the soul”, when we feel alone. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, with closest friends away or asleep, clearly felt very much alone as the hostile armed mob drew near.

The logic of the psalm is that tuning in on Sunday morning is fine, but Christianity really invites a much closer and more central relationship with God.