

Psalm 121

(Using notes and ideas from the Serendipity Bible, NIV.)

2020-11-25 By Major Deborah Coles

This is a favourite psalm for many. It's short, it's reassuring and it's memorable. The Israelites sang this psalm as they travelled to Jerusalem from their towns and villages for various feasts and celebrations. The roads were rough or non-existent. The possibility of a fall, breaking a leg or twisting an ankle was very real. As small groups travelled, they were aware that there were wild animals and violent robbers in the desert places.

I picture a group, mostly extended family, walking together. Most are not wealthy enough to have a donkey to ride. Probably a responsible young man strides a bit ahead as a scout. And another brings up the rear, to be sure no one gets lost or injured. I imagine them getting into a rhythm of walking, looking out for each other, and singing. ("Unto the hills do I lift up my longing eyes...")

They know that it was not the hills ahead of them that brought help. They don't worship the local gods that 'own' each hilltop. Rather, they know that their help comes from the One who created the heavens and the earth – including the hills and the desert places.

Five times in this psalm they sing that the LORD (the God who is WITH them) is watching over them. He's not watching them to see if they sin, or break a law. He's watching over them. The Message translation uses the word 'guard' instead of watch. (Which do you prefer?)

READ the psalm aloud, 2x, perhaps once from a 'different than usual' translation.

A Pilgrim Song (The Message)

121 ¹⁻² 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.

³⁻⁴ 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.

⁵⁻⁶ GOD's your Guardian, right at your side to protect you—
Shielding you from sunstroke, sheltering you from moonstroke.

⁷⁻⁸ 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.

Consider:

1. How do the pilgrims feel as they wind their way through the hills toward Jerusalem?
2. What makes them vulnerable?
3. What are the differences between vulnerable during the day, and during the night?
4. What is the comfort that the pilgrims receive? (vv 3, 5, 8)

Reflection questions (Write your answers – you'll remember more!)

1. What are the dangers you face just now?
2. Does God protect you? How?
3. When do you feel most vulnerable?
4. How do you protect yourself?

Sing this, if you know the tune. (If you want to hear the music, look up Hymnal.net)

- 1 Unto the hills around do I lift up
My longing eyes;
O whence for me shall my salvation come,
From whence arise?
From God the Lord doth come my certain aid,
From God the Lord, who heav'n and earth hath made.
- 2 He will not suffer that thy foot be moved:
Safe shalt thou be.
No careless slumber shall His eyelids close,

Who keepeth thee.
Behold, He sleepeth not, He slumbereth ne'er,
Who keepeth Israel in His holy care.

3 Jehovah is Himself thy keeper true,
Thy changeless shade;
Jehovah thy defense on thy right hand
Himself hath made.
And thee no sun by day shall ever smite;
No moon shall harm thee in the silent night.

4 From every evil shall He keep thy soul,
From every sin;
Jehovah shall preserve thy going out,
Thy coming in.
Above thee, watching, He whom we adore
Shall keep thee henceforth, yea, for evermore.

Let me know if you have any questions or comments. I would love to hear from you.

Deborah.Coles@salvationarmy.ca