

SLIDE 1

Psalm 121 -a psalm of trust. Where do we put our trust?

Aminya 11/20; Chinese Castle Hill 1/21

We are at the beginning of another year. As last year taught us, we have no idea of what the year may hold, both good and bad. We tend to rely on our finances, our superannuation, or our employment, a good education, our health, family members or church friends to bring us security and there is a certain security which does come, when we have those things around us, but we can lose all of them in a very short space of time. We probably all know people who have very unexpectedly lost one of their important securities. Marriages fail. Employment ceases. Global Financial crises hit. We get a terminal health diagnosis. Friends desert us. We fail exams. None of these is totally secure.

But Psalm 121 gives us something strong & firm to hold on to. It reminds us how powerful & trustworthy is the God we follow and worship. And of every security he is the only one we can totally depend on.

Psalm 121 is one of 15 Songs of Ascent, which the Jews would sing, as they travelled together from all parts of the land, to Jerusalem, to celebrate the three great festivals of their faith – Passover, Pentecost/Feast of weeks & Tabernacles/ Booths. It was both a going-on-holidays and a going-to-worship song of praise.

SLIDE 2. Most of the people walked to Jerusalem. For some, like Mary & Joseph, Jesus' family, it was a journey of 150 kms from Nazareth to Jerusalem and took easily a week each way. Women & young children were not obliged to go, but men were expected to do the trip 3 times a year. Everyone loved travelling with family & friends in convoy and meeting up with others along the way and in the city of Jerusalem.

SLIDE 3. Jerusalem was built on a mountain range, not quite as high as our Blue Mountains. The road from the north ended with a climb from Jericho 270 metres below sea level to Jerusalem 750 m above sea level.

SLIDE 4. Then as they reached the Mount of Olives the city came into view and

SLIDE 5 the Temple with its shining sandstone walls was visible to the pilgrim travellers. Jews were justifiably proud of its beauty and believed that it symbolised God's dwelling place on earth, even though he was far greater than a god confined to one place. There they worshipped their God, the Lord.

SLIDE 6. Their non-Jewish neighbours believed that the gods lived up on mountains and so they climbed up mountains to pray because they felt closer to their gods there.

SLIDE 7. I remember climbing to the top of a mountain at Petra in Jordan and there were the ruins of an ancient temple and altar to a Nabatean god whose name means "God of the Mountain".

SLIDE 8 Elijah & 450 prophets of Baal plus 400 prophets of Asherah assembled on Mt Carmel, to see whose god would answer by fire. No doubt the mountain was chosen by the Baal worshippers so they were closer to the gods and thus it would be easier to get Baal's attention.

SLIDE 9. Mountains are places which speak to us of strength & stability.

V.1,2. So when the psalmist looks up, he looks beyond his neighbours' mountain gods, to the Lord whose strength made the mountains and the whole universe. Strength and stability is found in him alone. Our help comes from the **MAKER** of heaven & earth. He is greater than the mountains, greater than the Temple. He created everything in the universe and he is our **HELPER**. The Hebrew word for *helper* contains that idea of strength, but also includes the idea of a saviour or rescuer. He is a person, who comes alongside of us in our life and in our problems, and is with us to save, rescue & strengthen us.

Some people think a helper is on a lower level than the person being helped, and they interpret Genesis 2 where God gave Eve to Adam as his helper, that she was not as important as the man. But this passage turns that on its head. Here the Lord is our helper and he is certainly not on a lower level to us.

SLIDE 10. V.3-5. Second Our God is our **PROTECTOR**. Six times in this Psalm we are told God is our protector/ our keeper/ our body guard/ He watches over us. ***He will not let your foot slip/be moved.*** This was important for travellers walking many kilometres. God protects from accidents. With him we are on solid ground.

SLIDE 11 I remember a few years ago I took my 90+ year old mum & her sister on a little holiday up to the Blue Mountains. Both were unsteady on their feet. When we arrived home again they both thanked me, and I replied, "I am just so grateful that I got you both home again without falling over." In a small way I was their protector. I anticipated where the problems would be, and ensured that they would be supported so they didn't fall. God does that for us, all the time. His strong arm is there for us to hold.

SLIDE 12. ***He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*** I looked up the difference in Hebrew between slumber or sleep. Slumber means to be drowsy. Sleep means truly asleep. Whatever – God is always alert. He watches over us 24/7. There is no time day or night when he is not alert to us.

It's interesting that the prophets of Baal in Elijah's day thought Baal went to sleep and Elijah taunted them asking them to shout louder in case he needed waking up! (1 K 18.27). The Canaanites believed that during the months when vegetation dried off, their fertility gods went off duty & slept for a few months. Obviously Hindus believe that their gods go to sleep and they will often ring a bell to get their gods' attention. Our God is never distracted. He never dozes off. We can pray to him at any time. So we don't have to lie awake at night worrying. God is there watching over us always. He doesn't sleep.

SLIDE 13. V.5 The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade** protection from burning sun ***at your right hand. He is in the position of honour. He is not subservient to us. He watches over us as Almighty God. ***The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*** He protects us from all the dangers we meet day or night. In days before electricity there were many dangers people feared at night. Another Psalm, 91.6 encourages us not to fear the pestilence/ plague/ pandemic that stalks in the darkness or that destroys at midday. Covid19 is not the first pandemic that our world has faced, nor will it be the last. We are not to live in fear. Nothing happens to us outside of God's permissive will. He is watching over us. That doesn't mean that we don't take every precaution against catching the virus, but if we do we still know that he is there with us in the sickness.

***SLIDE 14 V.7,8. So he is our HELPER, our PROTECTOR and third The Lord will watch over us all our life FOREVER. The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life;** Our body and soul are in his care, covered by him. God doesn't promise no problems. He is *with us in them*. He does not cushion us against life. He strengthens us to face it. Romans 8 tells us that whatever happens to us, he will work together for our good and the good of his kingdom. He is *for* us, not against us. Evil will not win. Nothing can thwart God's purposes in our lives.

SLIDE 15. the Lord will watch over your coming and going He knows every time you go out your front door and every time you return. Orthodox Jews have a little box, called a *Mezuzah*, on the doorframe of their front door. In it are vs 5 & 8 and they touch it before they leave home & when they return. It reminds them that God is with them. This too reminds us that - wherever we go, in every aspect of daily life; - whatever changes in life we go through, he watches over us **both now and for evermore**. Jesus parting words to his disciples were, "*Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*" He is committed to us forever.

On road to Port Macquarie/ As a widow with no children I often wish

God watches over us. He is our helper, protector for ever.. We must deliberately take our eyes off our problems and focus on God. We can depend on him to be with us and provide all the resources we need to meet life's difficulties head on. Nothing happens outside his will and providential care. He is not a good luck charm to prevent anything bad happening to us, but his strength and saving grace is with us within the difficulties of life.

SLIDE 16

So we will trust in his unfailing love & care in 2021 and beyond, and we will never be afraid.

Let's read the psalm together slowly, affirming God's strength and saving grace for ourselves, and encouraging one another (as Jews in ancient times did) to put our trust in

A song of ascents.

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills/mountains –
where does my help come from?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved
he who watches over you will not slumber;
- ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The Lord watches over you
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
- ⁶ the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The Lord will keep you from all harm –
he will watch over your life;
- ⁸ the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and for evermore.

Pray