

## **SUNDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2022.**

### **Psalm 121 HELP FROM THE LORD.**

If we want to want to understand the Word of God we need to read our Bibles daily. I have found that the best way is to use a lectionary which gives daily readings in small doses that are easily studied and considered. This is not chapters at a time. To read and ponder the daily doses makes for greater understanding.

In these lectionary doses the Psalms feature at least twice a year. As you probably know there are 150 psalms. A few years ago, one church where I worshipped for many years commemorated 150 years of service to the community where it is located. For 150 days before the anniversary of the first service the parishioners were encouraged to read one psalm each day.

The Psalms are a poetic expression of praise, worship and confession to God. Some are a shock at times when we read the psalm writer bringing down expressions of anger and demands for retribution yet all such psalms end in praise and supplication to God.

It is sometimes hard to understand the Psalms. Such was the case for me with Psalm 121. This psalm starts with a question:

*<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?*

I wondered about this opening for a long time. Why did the psalmist lift up his eyes to the hills? Why did he not lift up his eyes to the heavens?

The answer to that lies in the seesaw of the history of ancient Israel.

Over 4,000 years ago, God chose Abraham for a special role. He saw in Abraham the man who He chose to be the beginning of the long road to

providing redemption for humankind who had, in Adam and Eve, submitted to the temptation of Satan and, as a result, been expelled from the Garden of Eden.

God spoke to Abraham, who was then called Abram, and the man set out from what is now Iraq to the Promised Land, that we now know as Israel. In time, Abraham fathered Isaac who, in turn, fathered Esau and Jacob, twin sons. Jacob was the important one in God's plan for he would father 12 sons.

Now, this was only a family. For God's plan to work there had to be more than about 70 people who made up Jacob's family.

Among the sons of Jacob was Joseph who angered ten of his older brothers by his immature boasting of his dreams that they would submit themselves to him. As a result, the brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Joseph's experiences in Egypt matured him and he rose to become the ruler of Egypt, subordinate only to Pharaoh. When famine came to the region, Joseph's brothers did come to submit to him. Jacob and all his family moved to Egypt.

But the high status of Jacob's descendants would not remain for they were a fertile bunch of people. Their numbers grew alarmingly to the Egyptians and so they were reduced to slaves.

The sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt lasted over 400 years by which time their numbers had grown into enough to form a nation.

God chose Moses to be their leader. He was supposed to have been killed at birth, being a male child born to the Hebrew slaves. Instead, he was adopted by the sister of Pharaoh when he was found floating on the Nile River in a basket.

Here is not the place to go into detail of Moses story. It came to pass that, about 400 years after the Hebrews went to Egypt, Moses led them out of that land into the Sinai Desert and to Mt Sinai.

At that place God began to mould the Hebrews into a nation. He gave them the Ten Commandments and the laws by which He wanted them to live. But that generation rebelled and never entered the Promised Land. Nor did Moses, denied entry by God because in a fit of anger brought on by his frustration at the attitudes of those he was leading, he committed an act that angered God.

It would be a man whose name was Joshua who would lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land.

From the beginning of the conquest, though, there would be disobedience to God.

The first of the Ten Commandments is

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” Exodus 20:2-3*

To prevent this God told the Hebrews that they must remain separate from the peoples in the lands they were sent to possess. That did not happen and idol worship remained. Many among the Hebrews, from the leaders down being seduced.

It would take almost 400 years for the Hebrews to take control of the Promised Land. That was under King David who would reign for 40 years but, because of his adultery with Bathsheba, and his arranging the murder of Uriah the Hittite to cover up the adultery, God decreed that,

following the reign of David's son, Solomon, the kingdom of Israel would be beset by trouble – and so it was.

On his accession to the throne of Israel, Solomon did not ask God for power but for wisdom however he was not fully wise. Solomon had 700 wives and concubines. Each had to be housed and fed and most were of foreign birth which meant that they were pagan and worshipped idols. That meant, in practice, the continuation of idol worship in Israel – and that was against God's commandment.

From Solomon onwards there were kings who worshipped idols, and some who worshipped God. Those that did displeased God. There were others who did not. They remained faithful to God, who they called Yahweh.

For hundreds of years there were two standards of worship in Israel, as I have described. The temple of God was located in Jerusalem. This was the dwelling place of God in the world, although He was not of the world for He had created it. The temple at Jerusalem was the earthly focal point of the worship of the one God who created heaven and earth.

It was on the hills that those who worshipped the Baals, the pagan idols, gathered to worship. We read in Hosea 4, in two places, Hosea 4:13 –

*They sacrifice on the mountaintops  
and burn offerings on the hills,  
under oak, poplar and terebinth,  
where the shade is pleasant.*

And in part of Hosea 4: 14 –

*your men are doing the same thing,  
sinning with whores and shrine prostitutes.*

That was the format of Baal worship. It involved sexual immorality.

Often those kings of Israel and Judah – for by this time there were two kingdoms in the Promised Land – may have been faithful to God however they did not succeed in ridding the land of the pagan worship centres.

Now, it has taken a while to return to Psalm 121. It is said that the writer is anonymous however it is also suggested that Zedekiah who was king in Judah in 562BC may have written it. His father followed pagan idols however he did not, yet he was not perfect in his faith in God.

Let us return to the opening of Psalm 121 –

*<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the mountains—  
where does my help come from?*

It is a rhetorical question. It took note that help did not come from those idols whose worship places were on the hills and mountains. On the contrary,

*.<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth*

For the phrase my help, read our help.

By his apparently negative question, the psalm writer emphasised that God is the Creator of all. We exist only because God wanted us to exist. We have life because of God.

Have you ever wondered why we have life?

It is because God loves us and, in His love, He has extended His grace to us. He loves us despite our sinning which is why He sent His Son, our

Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the Cross, to then be resurrected so that all who turn to Jesus may have eternal life.

We see that in the first part of verse 3 –

<sup>3</sup> *He will not let your foot slip*

Think about what that means.

If we go to Psalm 91 we get an answer, in verse 11:

*For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways;*

That is the love our God has for us. God does not sleep; he does not slumber. He watches us all, day and night.

I want you to consider that a moment.

God watches us all, those who believe and those who do not. For those who do not He watches for the moment that their hearts and minds are ready to welcome Him into their lives. It is not a static waiting; it is active for God will arrange for that moment.

He did for me, now 27 years ago. I have witnessed before that I left the Church in my teens and it was in my mid 40s that I returned. I had developed ambition that I was not capable of achieving nor was it God's plan for me. I had to be brought to a place and time where I came to understand how much I needed God and Jesus in my life.

When I look back over the years since I returned to Church, I know that for the person I was back then, what has developed would have been unbelievable and I suspect I would have scoffed.

I spoke earlier of how God watches us all.

Us is a huge concept.

It has been estimated that this year there are 7.96 billion people in the world. God watches us all, from you and me to all those billions of people.

To God who created day and night, there is no day or night. He is awake at all times. His eyes see all, as I have said.

He is omniscient. He is all-knowing. He is all-seeing. He is all-forgiving – if we sincerely repent and seek His forgiveness.

Our God is higher than the mountains.

Our help comes from the heavens.

That is where our help comes from.

I will end in prayer.

*Mighty God and ruler of all creation,  
give new strength to our faith,  
that we may recognise your presence  
even when all hope seems lost.  
Help us to face all trials with serenity  
as we walk through the stormy seas of life  
and come at last to your eternal peace.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.*