

Study and Discussion Guide for *Psalm 121*

A Song of Ascents: Walking, Trusting, and Praising

The Structure of *Psalm 121*

- 1-2 The Creator God: Confession of trust in the Lord.
- 3-4 The Living God: Assurance concerning the unsleeping guardian of Israel.
- 5-6 The God of gods: Assurance concerning unfailing protection.
- 7-8 The Sovereign Lord: Assurance concerning all of life.

Some Questions for Listening, Meditating, and Discussing

1. Notice that Psalm 121 is called "A Song of Ascents." The same title is found on all the psalms from 120 through 134. What does this say about how Psalm 121 was used? (See Ps 84:5-7; Ex 23:14; Deut 16:16; Micah 4:2) What temptation to false worship is being resisted by those making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem? (See John 4:20; 1 Kings 12:23-33)
2. In verse 1, how is the KJV translation different from most of the newer translations? What difference does it make if the second half of verse 1 is a question instead of a statement?
3. How would you paraphrase verse 1 for our culture today? What are today's *mountain gods*? Where do our contemporaries look for security and peace?
4. Notice the change of voice from verse 2 to verse 3 (first person to second person). Who is speaking in verses 1 and 2? Who is speaking in verses 3 through 8? What hint does that give you about how the psalm was used?
5. Do you ever ask God to pay attention? to wake up? (See Ps 44:23; 78:65; 1 Kings 18:27)
6. What threats do verses 5 and 6 promise God's protection from? (On the dangers of sun and moon and the life-saving benefits of shade and shadow, see: Ps 91:5-6; Jonah 4:8; Isaiah 4:5-6; 25:4-5; 49:2, 10; 51:16; Mt 4:23; James 1:10-11; Rev 7:16; 16:8; Lam 4:20; Ezek 31:6, 12, 17) Also, look up the etymology of *lunatic* in an English dictionary.
7. This Psalm was sung by pilgrims walking to the temple in Jerusalem for a religious festival. Think of a journey or pilgrimage you might be on today where this psalm would be a fitting prayer or song. What are some pitfalls to avoid on your journey? What are some threats you need to be protected from? How would you pray this psalm for yourself?
8. What does this Psalm say about the Psalmists *eyes*? What does this Psalm say about God's *eyes*? How many times is the verb phrase, *watch over*, repeated in this Psalm? Do you feel God's watching you as a comfort or as a threat? As protection or as suffocation?
9. Together with Psalms 135 and 136, these "Songs of Ascents" came to be known in Jewish liturgy as the "Great Hallel." If you have time to read all of them, see if you can find any theme or relationship controlling the selection or arrangement of them all? *Where* is the psalmist in Psalm 120? *Where* is the psalmist in Psalm 134?