



ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH THE PSALMS

STUDY 3: PSALM 121 – GOD IS A REFUGE AND HELP

Start the study by reading the psalm aloud and asking the group for their immediate response to the psalm. What caught their attention? What was their overall impression?

This psalm is one of the Songs of Ascent or pilgrimage psalms (Psalm 120-134) that were sung by pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem to worship in the temple at one of the three great Jewish festivals. It is also part of a group of psalms known as psalms of trust that includes some of the best loved psalms such as Psalm 23 and 91. These psalms, slightly removed but written still in the presence of a threatening situation, express a deep trust and confidence in God's faithfulness and ability to deliver. For example, God is described as a refuge, rock, and shepherd.

As we go through this psalm we will consider what it teaches us about being on pilgrimage and trusting God and our relationship with Him.

DISCUSS

'I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.' (Psalm 121:1,2 NIV)

Safety was a big issue for a pilgrim who was travelling through lonely country and the hills surrounding Jerusalem could be dangerous with the threat of robbers. However the psalmist is confident that God is with him. Another of the pilgrimage psalms picks up on the same theme. *'As the mountains surround Jerusalem so the LORD surrounds his people'* (Psalm 125:2 NIV)

Read 2 Kings 6:15-17. Elisha prayed for his servant to see beyond the natural to the spiritual.

Share an occasion when you became aware of God, especially his protection, presence, covering in your life? i.e. protection when you were travelling

DISCUSS

The journey to the sanctuary was considered part of the worship and these pilgrimage songs would have been sung on the way as well as when they arrived.

Is there a specific part of your week that comes to mind when you think of worship?

Do we wait to worship God until we arrive at church on Sunday morning or even until we have warmed up with a couple of songs?

What could you incorporate into your Sunday morning or even during the week that would mean that you are already worshipping by the time you arrive at church?

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Psalm 84:5-7. The Israelites were physically pilgrims as they made the trip to Jerusalem for the great festivals but there is also a spiritual attitude of pilgrimage. This



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does not just apply to Israel but to us as well. The language of being a foreigner in this world connects to that of being a pilgrim travelling through a country but not really belonging there.

What do you think it means to set your heart on pilgrimage? What are the promises in this passage for those who do?

There is a sense that this world with all its brokenness is not ultimately our home. We are looking for a greater fulfillment and our eyes are on a city where God is king. Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 1 Peter 2:11,12. With what we have read in mind, how should we live in the world in the meantime?

DISCUSS

What declarations of trust does the psalmist make in verse 3-8?
Read Romans 8:35-39. What is our hope as Christians?

DIGGING DEEPER

'The LORD will keep you from all harm' (Psalm 121:7 NIV) To be kept 'from all harm' does not imply a life without challenges but that God will be there and ready to protect. For example in Psalm 23:4 David speaks of walking through the darkest valley but he has confidence because God is with him.

Where are you placing your confidence? If in something else, how could you shift your confidence to be in God?

ACTIVITY

Before the pilgrims returned home they would receive a blessing from the priests to assure them of God's protection and provision even after they had left. Today we do not need to wait for a priest to bless us because we are all part of a holy priesthood through Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

As we finish today it would be good to take some time to bless one another. This is not a prayer to God to bless but rather a proclamation of God's blessing often starting with the words 'May the Lord...' If you find it difficult to come up with the words here are a number of examples of blessings in the Old and New Testaments that you could read over the person you are blessing.

Psalm 121:5-8; Psalm 115:14-15; Psalm 134:3; Numbers 6:24-26; Hebrews 13:20,21; Romans 15:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14

PRAY TOGETHER