

# (How to Understand the KJV Bible) 01 Psalm 121

by Keith Simons

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*Psalm 121 is a song of degrees that expresses the psalmist's trust in God's protection and care, and it is an important passage for understanding God's character and nature.*

**Duration:** 19:53

**Scripture:** Psalm 46:1, Psalm 121, Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20, Romans 8:31

**Topics:** "KJV Bible", "Trust in God", "God's Protection"

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## Description

Keith Simons teaches on Psalm 121, emphasizing the importance of understanding the King James Version of the Bible. He explains that the psalm is a 'Song of Degrees,' sung by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem, and highlights the significance of looking to God for help rather than to the hills or false gods. Simons clarifies the meaning of key phrases, illustrating that true protection and help come from the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth, who watches over His people day and night. He reassures listeners that God's protection extends to their souls and daily journeys, encouraging them to trust in His promises.

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## Transcript

Welcome to our talks on how to understand the King James Version of the Bible. My name is Keith Symons, I'm a Bible teacher from England. We look at the King James Version for various reasons, perhaps you use it in your church, perhaps you've been reading one of the old Bible writers and commentators and preachers for more than 300 years, the King James Version was the only Bible that was used in English.

Or perhaps you're wanting to understand better the modern computerized Bible resources, programs like MySword or eSword, which are based around the use of the King James Version. Well, in these talks, our method is to look at a Bible passage and to look at it word by word and verse by verse, look at the meanings of the words and to use those to understand how the King James Version works and how it's put together. So our Bible passage for today is Psalm 121, Psalm 121, and its heading, which you'll see at the top of the page in the old King James Version, is A Song of Degrees.

So degree, degree means going upwards and we could call them songs of ascent, that's what modern Bible translations tend to like, or songs of steps. These words have been given various interpretations, but one likely interpretation is that the pilgrims who were going to the Temple in Jerusalem would sing these

songs on their journey there. There were three pilgrim feasts each year and they would travel from across Israel to Jerusalem.

And as they did so because Jerusalem is in the hills, they would sing the songs of degrees, the songs of ascent, the songs of ascending towards Jerusalem and towards, therefore, the Temple of God. And that thought is very appropriate to the beginning of Psalm 121, where in verse one it says, I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. So let's look at the words.

Mine eyes simply means my eyes. I will lift up my eyes unto the hills. In other words, I'll look up towards the hills or at the hills.

From whence cometh my help? From whence, from where? From the hills comes my help. Or is it a question? From where does my help come? Well, in almost every modern Bible, this is a question. Where does my help come from? And that's because the translators of those Bibles understand this verse to mean, I look up at the hills.

Do I find safety and security in the hills? People worshipped false gods in the hills. Do I look at those false gods for help? Or do I look at the hills themselves? Do they provide my security? And the answer, of course, to those questions for the author of our psalm is very clearly, no, my help comes from the Lord. But in the King James Version, it's different because the King James Bible translators understood this not to be a question, but a statement.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. In other words, my help comes from the hills. Well, obviously, they didn't think that their help came from those mountain gods, those false gods.

Nor did they think that their help came from the hills themselves for all their greatness and majesty and how impressive they were. No, they said that their help came from the hills because they were looking towards a particular hill, the hill of Zion, where God's temple was, God's house in Jerusalem. And on this journey up to Jerusalem, they thought of someone looking towards the temple.

And so he looks at the hills in the distance. Among those hills is Jerusalem and Mount Zion. On one of those hills is the temple.

So there he is, the traveller looking through the distance of the hills and trying to pick out which one is the hill where the temple is, because that is where the house of God is. And it's from the house of God that God gives his blessing, his help, his protection, and especially, as we'll see, God's protection for that journey up to Jerusalem. Verse 2 then, my help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth.

The word Lord, you'll see, is not in normal print, it's in capitals. That's to show that it's the sacred name of God, the name which the Jewish people to this day do not pronounce, the name which has sometimes been translated into English as Jehovah. It's that sacred name and it's the name only of the true God.

So my help comes only from the true God. And then just to make sure we understand who this God is, it's the God which or who made heaven and earth, the Lord who made heaven and earth. There's only one God who made heaven and earth and everything in it and that God, of course, is our God.

And so the author of this psalm is not looking for his help to the hills. No, he's looking to the Lord God, the maker of the hills and heaven and the earth. And if a hill looks vast and if a mountain looks vast, then how great is the God who made the whole earth and heaven too.

Heaven, of course, means God's home beyond the skies. It means the skies. It means the place where the stars are.

And if you look at that great vastness in the night sky and think of just how distant those objects are yet, how great they are, then maybe it gives a thought of how great God who created them is. And so it's this God, the creator of all things, whom the author of this psalm trusts for his journey. He declares, he, the Lord, will not suffer thy foot to be moved.

Suffer. Well, this is an old English word. It means simply allow.

He will allow thy foot to be moved. God will not allow you to lose your footing, to fall on this pathway, to fall on this journey. He's protecting you.

You might say, how does suffer mean allow? Well, we see it again, of course, in the famous verse where Jesus says, suffer the little children to come unto me, which means, of course, allow the children to come unto me. I would guess that originally it meant that when you said suffer, it meant allow and then allow something to happen around you. And then they dropped the meaning of allow.

So it was something that happened around you. And so we've got when we suffer, things are happening around us that we can't control. I should think it progressed something like that.

But the word suffer in the King James Version means allow. We've got the word thy, your, and the later in the verse, you. And sometimes, of course, the King James Version does use the word you.

In at the time of the King James, there were two different words for you. If you were speaking to one person, it was thou and thee and thy. And if you were speaking to more than one person, it was you and ye.

And so where we see thy or thee, it's talking very specifically to one person because we don't need a protector who protects everyone. When we're on a journey, we need a protector who protects us, ourselves, who protects me. So the promise is us to one person.

You see that in the Ten Commandments too, where it says thou shalt not murder you, you yourself. It's not a case of the whole community shouldn't murder. It's a case of you personally.

As one person, you have a responsibility not to murder, not to commit adultery, whatever. In the same way here, God does not allow thy foot to be moved, you personally. He that keepeth thee, he that defends thee, he that defends you personally, will not slumber.

So that second part of the verse then, he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Slumber means get sleepy, lose your attention, get distracted by things. God isn't like that.

God's nature is not to get drowsy and be unaware of what's going on. God, your defender, your guard is alert. And having told you the personal promise, the author of the psalm now tells you in verse 4 the promise for the whole nation.

Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. God who defends Israel doesn't just not get drowsy, he doesn't sleep. He's alert and he's awake by day and by night to defend his chosen people.

There is a teaching in the Christian church called Replacement Theology where people try to replace Israel with the church. That's wrong. That changes the promises that God's given and we have no right to change God's word or the promises that he has given.

And so you might say, well, this promise was to Israel. Can a Christian consider this promise to be to him? And my answer to that is, well, the God who protects Israel is the same God who protects all his people. God hasn't changed his character.

He chose in ancient times Israel's people to be his special people, but he's called people now from every nation to be his people. And so he will deal with them as he dealt with Israel in the past, as he protected Israel and as he now protects Israel, so he will protect the people from every nation who put their trust in him. The psalm continues with more of these promises.

Verse 5, the Lord is thy keeper, he's thy guard, he's your guard, your personal guard. The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. Thy right hand.

But the picture is not of a shade which just covers your hand, which wouldn't really be much help to you in the burning heat of the sun at midday. The picture is of someone looking towards the east where the sun rises and they've got a shade on their right hand. And if you're in the northern hemisphere, you'll be aware that the south is at your right hand when you're facing east, and it's from the south that the sun is at its hottest at midday.

It's then that there's the greatest danger of sunstroke. And so to have a shade on thy right hand side is to have a shade that is protecting you at the worst and the most dangerous times of day. But God's protection is not only when the dangers are most fear.

Verse 6, the sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. Smite means to hit, it can even mean to kill. And of course a person can die from sunstroke or heat exhaustion.

And the promise is that the sun shall not smite thee by day. You don't have to be afraid of the sun by day and its very real dangers, nor the moon by night, when the moon doesn't have such great dangers. But if it's imaginary dangers or fears that are controlling you, you may be sure of God's promise to protect you from them as well.

Verse 7, the Lord shall preserve thee, protect thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul. The soul means the whole person, but especially the inner person.

Because although God can and does protect his people often from the affect their bodies, the much more severe dangers are the dangers that affect their inner person, their soul, their soul that needs to have a relationship with God, their soul which continues living after their body is dead. And you know we sometimes see God's protection in our daily lives and when we are protected from danger, if we are God's people, then we should be sure that God has done that because of his promises. But sometimes we don't see that protection.

Sometimes we find ourselves in danger and in trouble and we ask ourselves, is God defending us now? And the answer is God defends the real person. Even if he's allowing your body for some reason to go through troubles, then if your relationship is right, he is guarding your soul, your inner person. You can put your trust in him.

You can declare that God is protecting you, even though every circumstance seems to say that he's not, that you're in danger, that you're in trouble. Nevertheless, hold firm to the promise, keep on trusting God. If your body is not protected, then your soul is, because your relationship with him is right.

Verse 8, the Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in. The Lord will protect what? When you go out from your home and when you come back from your home. When you go out on that long journey to Jerusalem, as we've seen, the Lord is protecting you on that journey and he's protecting your coming in when you come back home, from this time forth and even forevermore.

So the promise is for now and it's forever. It's not a promise that lasts for a short time. It's not like God will protect you for part of your journey and the rest of your journey.

You've just got to take your chances. No, it's God preserves your going out and your coming in. You can trust him every step of the way.

You don't have to depend on yourself, depend on your own power to protect yourself from all the dangers that are around you. You can trust in him. Let me give you my email address so that you can write to me.

I'd love to hear from you. This is the first broadcast of what may be many, but when you do a broadcast like this, you don't know whether people will be able to find it and whether they'll hear it. So if you could write to me and tell me that you heard the talk on Psalm 121, that would be excellent to know.

My email address, I've set up a special email address, which is easy for you to type in. It's 333kjb at gmail.com. In a moment or two, I'm going to read through the entire Psalm again so that you can see what you've learned from this talk. But let me just give you that email address again if you've been searching for a pen first.

It's 333kjb at gmail.com. So let's read the Psalm. Psalm 121, a song of degrees. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved, he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil, he shall preserve thy soul.

The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

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