

PUSHING BACK OUR HORIZONS

TEXT: "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."
Psalm 121: 1,2.

This particular psalm, the 121st, has long been one of my favorites. It's one of the better known psalms and familiar to most of us. I recall that a very devoted and dedicated Sunday School teacher in the St. Luke's Methodist Church in Albany first introduced me to this psalm. Many years later in the seminary experience, I learned a little of the background behind the psalm.

The psalm is known as one of the Songs of Ascent. The Songs of Ascent were a collection of psalms used in connection with the pilgrimages to Jerusalem made by the pious Jews. Let's just review the historical situation. We find that the pilgrims have come from afar. They have travelled over robber-infested lands, they have been lost on the trackless wastes, they have been buffeted by storms, hunger and thirst. Some have died on the way.

Now this psalm was sung as the weary pilgrims came in sight of the mountains surrounding the ancient city of Jerusalem. Off in the distance they could see the walls of the city, and towering above the walls they could see the dome of their beloved Temple. It was a glorious sight. Their hearts throbbed with excitement and their voices broke forth into song. On the following day they would arrive at the city gates, and with thanksgiving in their hearts they would sing Psalm 122.

It was a little over a year ago that I had an experience very similar to the one which I have described here. I was travelling throughout sections of the middle east. I shall never forget the first glimpse of the walls surrounding the city of Jerusalem. It really was a thrilling experience, for here it was...the very place where the Incarnation took place, where God revealed himself to man.

As I stood there in the road leading up to Jerusalem, I reflected upon the words of this psalm. (Read over text.....slowly) These lines reflect the trustful confidence that the people had in God. God is their keeper. He sleeps not. He shall preserve them from all evil. The hills symbolize confidence and security in the way of Jehovah. The pilgrim has his eye fastened upon the hills of Zion - upon the horizon.

HORIZONS Allow me some poetic license. I would like to substitute the word horizon for the word hills. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the horizon". I believe that this word "horizon" is not in the Bible. But certainly that which the horizon symbolizes is found within the Biblical narrative. As Weddwell upon this word "horizon", perhaps we're reminded of the phrase "lure of the horizon". The imagination is stirred as we start to think of the Biblical heroes who were lured by the adventures that lay beyond the horizon. We can think of men filled with divine discontent who sought to break away from the dull and misty flats of life. Of Moses....that powerful figure of Old Testament days who led his people from the flats of slavery to the far off horizon of a new and promised land. Of Paul....lifting his eye to the far off horizons of Athens and Rome in order to spread the gospel of love.

WHAT IS THE HORIZON? Before going any further in our development of the concept of the horizon, let's define our terms. What is the horizon? It may well be described as the circular line where the sky and earth appear to meet. The circular line has been there since the beginning of time. Beyond this line is the void where the sun rises and sets. This is rather a loose definition, but it serves our purposes. The important thing that I would like to bring out here is that the horizon is a moveable affair. The horizon of an individual is not permanent or fixed. It depends upon two factors. First - it depends upon the power of one's vision. Secondly - it depends upon