

Our God, Our Help in Ages Past

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Verse 1

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Verse 2

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

Verse 3

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

Verse 4

Thy Word commands our flesh to dust,
"Return, ye sons of men:"
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again.

Verse 5

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Verse 6

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their lives and cares,
Are carried downwards by the flood,
And lost in following years.

Verse 7

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Verse 8

Like flowery fields the nations stand
Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.

Verse 9

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Vocabulary In one or two words define the following terms from the poem.

Verse 1: shelter, eternal

Verse 2: dwelt, secure, sufficient

Verse 3: everlasting

Verse 4: Word, ye

Verse 5: Thy, watch

Verse 6: tribes

Verse 7: bears

Verse 8: mower, withering, ere 'tis

Verse 9: guard

Word Pictures Word pictures is another way of saying *imagery*. *Imagery* or *figurative language* helps us form a picture of what the author is trying to present. Discuss what these word pictures mean and, perhaps, draw your idea of the *imagery* or *figurative language* the author uses!

Verse 1: shelter from the stormy blast

Verse 2: under the shadow of Thy throne; sufficient is Thine arm alone

Verse 3: before the hills in order stood

Verse 4: Return ye sons of men

Verse 5: short as the watch that ends the night

Verse 6: busy tribes of flesh and blood

Verse 7: time like an ever rolling stream

Verse 8: like flowery fields the nations stand

Verse 9: Be Thou our guard

Mechanics are the nuts and bolts of a poem. Verbally discuss.

Who is the speaker? (Does the speaker have a specific personality or has the author remained in the background so the message of the poem will be more clear?)

What does the poem reveal about the speaker's character? (Sometimes, poems reveal nothing about the speaker's personal thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. Yet, the poem may demonstrate those character traits that are important to the author like courage, loyalty, perseverance, etc.)

Is the speaker addressing someone in particular or is it to anyone? (Sometimes poems are not directed to anyone in particular, but to anyone that may read it.)

Does the poem have a setting? (Does the author tell where the poem occurs? Is the poem about a specific event?)

Is the poem about a particular event? (Is the event past or present? If it is about a past event, does the remembrance of the event have a particular meaning to the speaker?)

Is the theme of the poem stated directly or indirectly? (Some poems are straightforward and are meant to be taken literally. In songs, the theme may be presented in the refrain or in the last few lines. Sometimes the theme is a little bit more difficult to discern as it is made with figurative language or symbols.)

What point of view or perspective is the speaker? (What meaning do you think the poem has for the author?)

How did you respond to the poem when you read it the first time? (Did your thoughts and feelings change after you took time to study it?)

Comprehension Questions Verbally discuss

Verse 1: Why are the words “Help”, “Hope”, “Shelter”, and “Home” capitalized? How has God helped Christians in the past? (*Hint: The more history you know from a Christian worldview will aid you in answering this question*) Who or what is our “Hope” for years to come? Why? Who or What is our “Shelter”? Describe a stormy blast with respect to the weather. Does a stormy blast in this verse symbolize or represent something else? If so, what? Who or what is the Christian’s eternal home? What Scripture(s) support the claims of this verse?

Verse 2: Explain: “Beneath the shadow of Thy throne.” The first sentence speaks of God’s sovereignty. Over what does He rule? What does “dwelt secure” mean? Discuss: “Thy saints have dwelt secure.” Discuss: “Sufficient is Thine arm alone.” Does God depend on the strength of His people? or do His people receive strength from Him? Why would a Christian’s defense be secure? What Scripture(s) support the claims of this verse?

Verse 3: Discuss: “Before the hills in order stood, Or Earth received her frame.” What does this mean? What Scripture supports this claim? What does “From everlasting Thou art God” mean? Give Scriptural proofs. “To endless years the same” refers to what? Give Scriptural proofs.

Verse 4: To Whom or what does “Thy Word commands” refer to? What does “Thy Word commands our flesh to dust” mean? Explain: “Return, ye sons of men!” What Scripture supports the claim of the author? Explain: “All nations rose from earth at first, And turn to earth again.” Discuss this in light of ancient civilizations (e.g., Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc.) Can you think of any other civilizations that have fallen in Post Modern Times? (*Hint: A brief discussion of WWII may prove helpful and/or a review of Russian history.*) Re-read this entire verse again. Who is in sovereign control --- man or God? What Scripture(s) support the claims of this verse?

Verse 5: Explain: “A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone.” Give Scriptural proofs. What does “Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun” mean? Does verse 5 refer to God’s sovereign power? Why or why not? What Scripture(s) support the claims of this verse?

Verse 6: Discuss the meaning of “The busy tribes of flesh and blood.” Who(m) is/are “The busy tribes of flesh and blood”? Are they families? ethnic races? nations? what? Explain: “Are carried downward by the flood.” Compare and relate verse 6 and verse 4. What do you think of when you read the word “flood” in “Are carried downward by the flood”? Relate the Biblical story. Who(m) judges the humanistic “busy tribes of flesh and blood”? Discuss in light of 1 Peter 4:17 ...

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God:
and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not
the gospel of God?

What message is the author of this verse attempting to get across?

Verse 7: What do you think of comparing to time and a rolling stream? Does this make sense? Why or why not? Explain: “Bears all its sons away.” Who(m) “fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day”? What do you think of the compare/contrast the author utilized in this verse? Does it help to make the point? What message is the author attempting to get across with this verse? Why? What Scripture(s) support the claims of this verse?

Verse 8: Explain “Like flowery fields the nations stand, pleased with the morning light” in light of the following Scriptures.

As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower
of the field, so he flourisheth. Psalm 103:15

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man
as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and
the flower thereof falleth away. 1 Peter 1:24

Discuss “The flowers beneath the mower’s hand lie withering ere ’tis night” in light of the following Scriptures.

For they shall soon be cut down like grass,
and wither as the green herb. Psalm 37:2

Thou carriest them away as with a flood;
they are as a sleep: in the morning they
are like grass which groweth up. Psalm 90:5

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry?
All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is
as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the
flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand
for ever. Isaiah 40:6,7

What does “night” meant in “withering ere ’tis night”? What message, do you think, the author is attempting to get across with this verse?

Verse 9: With the last verse, the author again eludes to the first stanza of this poem. Why do you think this is so? Why do you think the author beseeches or pleads with God to guard the lives of Christians while they last? What is meant by “our eternal Home”? What Scripture(s) support this verse?

After reading this poem, what character traits did you think of? What does the Bible have to say about these character traits?

What is the theme to the lyrics of this song?

What Does the Bible Say?

Find Scripture proofs for each of the assertions or statements made for each of the nine verses and the refrain.

What does the Bible have to say about “duty,” “perseverance,” “cheerfulness,” and “honor”? Give examples of Biblical characters that demonstrated these character traits. What heroes in history demonstrated these character traits?

The Author/Poet

Based on what you have studied about this poem so far, would you guess that the author was a Christian or a humanist? How did you arrive at your decision?

The name of the author for this poem or lyric is Isaac Watts (1674-1748). He was born 17 July 1674, in Southampton, England, and died 25 November 1748, in Stoke Newington, England. He is buried at Bunhill Fields Cemetery, London, England. Watt’s had an interesting father who was imprisoned two times for his religious views. Mr. Watts studied Greek and Latin but declined an offer for a standard university education preferring to attend the Nonconformist Academy at Stoke Newington in 1690. When Mr. Watts was 20-22 he stayed at home and wrote the majority of the hymns for *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* that were published in 1707-1709. For six years he was the tutor Mr. John Hartopp’s son. Mr. Watts was ordained in 1702.

"Give 'em Watts, boys, give 'em Watts!"

Interestingly, Isaac Watts is intimately connected with the American War of Independence. In an attack upon Springfield when the patriots' wadding gave out, Rev. James Caldwell (of Huguenot descent) ran into a Presbyterian church returning with his arms and pockets crammed full with *Watts' Psalms and Hymns* saying, "Now, boys, give them Watts!" The British offered large rewards for the capture of Rev. Caldwell, but to no avail. Therefore, the British burned his church, shot his wife while she was in the midst of their nine children, dragged her body into the street, and burned his home and out buildings.

Geography

Locate Southampton, England, and Lond on a globe, map and atlas.

Challenge Locate Stoke Newington (England) on a map or in an atlas.

Compare/contrast England’s weather with your own for one week.

Make an English meal for your family.

Activities

1) Make your own book! Without making an image of Christ, draw pictures representing each verse. (Note: that will be nine different illustrations). With construction paper and other items readily available at home, make a title page with the name of the song and the author’s name which will be your book’s cover. You may want to illustrate your cover and include this poem in your book.

2) Make your own play! Re-enact with your siblings or friends the message discussed in this poem. Keep it lively, simple, and short. You may want to end your play with singing a rousing chorus of this poem or reading Scripture verses. Videotape your creation.

3) Radio Drama! With a handheld tape recorder, create your own radio show dramatizing the historical event or message of this poem.

4) Be a Reporter! Either with your family camcorder or with a handheld tape recorder, “interview” various individuals connected with this poem (e.g., David, Joseph, Charlemagne, Alfred the Great, Martha Washington, repentant sinner, etc.). In order to have the fast paced style of a reporter, watch and/or listen to the news with your parents’ permission. Keep the interviews lively, quick, and to the point.

Remain objective! Being objective means just reporting the facts and not giving your opinion of the situation.

5) What is one of the things you most enjoy? Is it literature? math? science? sports? cooking? Take that area of interest and relate that to this poem. If you enjoy dance, for example, develop a dance routine that physically expresses the sentiments of this poem. If you enjoy shop, create something out of wood that helps to clarify this poem. Do you enjoy creating stories? Write a story based on any time period you desire that expresses the sentiments of this poem. Do you enjoy creating things in the kitchen? Make an ancient meal from this time or develop your own meal that symbolizes the many different points this poem makes.

6) Poster. Create a poster illustrating the the author’s view of the impact of *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*.

7) Scavenger Hunt. Go to the library to learn what you can about Isaac Watts and share it with your family. If possible, discover the story behind this poem.