

Tea Time: Isaac Watts

post written by Wende

Isaac Watts, the eldest of nine children, was born in Southampton, England, on July 17, 1674. His father would not conform to the Anglican Church and was twice thrown in jail for not following it. Isaac followed his father's strong biblical faith. Isaac was a very intelligent child who loved books and learned to read at a young age. He began learning Latin at age four and went on to King Edward VI School where he learned Greek, Hebrew, and French as well. From an early age Isaac had a propensity to rhyming, and often even his conversation was in rhyme. Once, during prayers, he spurted out:

A little mouse for want of stairs

ran up a rope to say its prayers.

And to get out of his spanking, he replied:

O father, father, pity take

And I will no more verses make.

Isaac could not attend any Anglican colleges, so he entered a Nonconformist Academy at Stoke Newington in 1690, under the care of Thomas Rowe, pastor of the Independent congregation at Girdlers' Hall. It was this congregation that Isaac joined in 1693, preached at, and was eventually ordained as pastor.

Isaac's health began to fail, so he was appointed an assistant in the ministry. While it was natural to build up resentment and anger, the Lord used Watts' sufferings to produce a gentle, modest, and charitable spirit. Out of his compassion, one-third of his small allowance was given to the poor.

The next six years of his life were spent working as a private tutor to the son of eminent Puritan John Hartopp. During those years he began to devote himself even more diligently to the study of the Scriptures. The intense study of these years is reflected in the theological and philosophical material he subsequently published.

In 1712 Sir Thomas Abney received Watts into his home, and Sir Thomas' family continued to provide a home and serve as Watts' patrons for the next 36 years!

Watts' early love for poetry ended up producing over 600 hymns. He translated Bible verses into poetic, metered form and gave them a Christian perspective. His introduction of this new kind of poetry opened up a new era of Protestant hymns as other poets followed his path. His most famous hymnal works include *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, published in 1707, *Divine Songs for Children*, where his tenderness to children can be seen reflected, published in 1715, and his poetic paraphrases of the psalms, the *Psalms of David*, published in 1719. Hymns children are most familiar with include:

Joy to the World (based on Psalm 98)

We're Marching to Zion

O God, Our Help in Ages Past (based on Psalm 90)

He also published 52 other works, including a book of logic used in the universities, books on grammar, pedagogy, ethics, psychology, astronomy, geography, three volumes of sermons, and 29 treatises on theology.

Isaac Watts died in Stoke Newington in November 25, 1748.

Thanks to Benjamin Franklin publishing and bringing to America the hymns of Isaac Watts in 1729, these hymns were a source of comfort and encouragement to Americans of the Revolutionary period. May they also be a source of comfort and encouragement to us today.



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

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

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

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

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

Activities:

Read:

Divine and Moral Songs for Children [Free PDF Download](#)

Listen to:

Look for Isaac Watts hymns to listen to.

Extend Your Learning

Recite or memorize the poem: "O God"

Record what you learn about Isaac Watts on the notebooking page.

Analyze "O God" using the study notes and side by side comparison.

For a tea time treat:

Why not have a traditional [English Tea Party](#) featuring [Scones](#) served with [Devonshire Cream](#) or [Lemon Curd](#).

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***O God, Our Help in Ages Past* by Isaac Watts**

Study Notes

Define:

Watch: _____

Interpret:

Explain, in your own words, what each stanza means:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Examine:

Look at the individual elements of the poem. Give examples of the following:

Meter - a definite rhythm pattern in a poem. To feel the meter, clap each beat.

Repetition – when the same word(s) are used more than once in a line or poem

Similes – comparisons using the words “like” or “as”

Evaluate:

This poem is based on Psalm 90. Do you think the poem evokes the same feeling as the Psalm? Why or why not?

***O God, Our Help in Ages Past* by Isaac Watts**

Study Notes

Define:

Watch: a military expression concerning a guard protecting his post

Interpret:

Explain, in your own words, what each stanza means:

Answers will vary.

1. Our Father has always been our dwelling place as He is our Creator
2. Even before this earth age, before the creation of the mountains or earth, He was God.
3. With the Lord, a thousand years are as a day. So while the “watch” may seem like a long time when it is happening, when it is over, it seems like just a moment in time. Such is life.
4. Our time in this earthly flesh swiftly moves on like a river, because it is just a vapor in time. “They fly forgotten” refers to Psalm 90:10, telling of our numbered days and how in time, in a blink of the eye, all of flesh mankind will die and our souls will return to the Father.
5. God always has been and always will be our only hope. This last stanza is a request, asking God to guard us through the troubles ahead, and to be our shelter and dwelling place forever.

Examine:

Look at the individual elements of the poem. Give examples of the following:

Meter - a definite rhythm pattern in a poem. To feel the meter, clap each syllable.

In each stanza, the first and third verses have eight beats, while the second and fourth each has six beats.

Repetition – when the same word(s) are used more than once in a line or poem

the first and last stanzas

Similes – comparisons using the words “like” or “as”

A thousand ages are like an evening gone

A thousand ages are as short as the watch

Time, like an ever-rolling stream

They fly forgotten, as a dream

Evaluate:

This poem is based on Psalm 90. Do you think the poem evokes the same feeling as the Psalm? Why or why not?

Answers will vary

O God, Our Help in Ages Past by Isaac Watts; Based on Psalm 90

O God, our help in ages past,	Psalms 90:1 "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place In all generations.
Our hope for years to come,	Psalms 90:2 "Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art GOD."
Our shelter from the stormy blast,	Psalms 90:3 "Thou turnest man to destruction; And sayest, "Return, ye children of me."
And our eternal home:	Psalms 90:4 "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, And as a watch in the night."
Before the hills in order stood,	Psalms 90:5 "Thou carrest them away as with a flood; They are as a sleep: In the morning they are like grass which groweth up."
Or earth received her frame,	Psalms 90:6 "In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; In the evening it is cut down, and withereth."
From everlasting Thou art God,	Psalms 90:7 For we are consumed by Thine anger, And by Thy wrath are we troubled."
To endless years the same.	Psalms 90:8 "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, Our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance."
A thousand ages in Thy sight	Psalms 90:9 "For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath: We spend our years as a tale that is told."
Are like an evening gone;	Psalms 90:10 "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."
Short as the watch that ends the night	Psalms 90:11 "Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear, so is Thy wrath."
Before the rising sun.	Psalms 90:12 "So teach us to number our days, That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."
Time, like an ever-rolling stream,	Psalms 90:13 "Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants."
Bears all its sons away;	Psalms 90:14 "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; That we may rejoice and be glad all our days."
They fly forgotten, as a dream	Psalms 90:15 "Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, And the years wherein we have seen evil."
Dies at the opening day.	Psalms 90:16 "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, And Thy glory unto their children."
O God, our help in ages past,	Psalms 90:17 "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: And establish Thou the work of our hands upon us: Yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."
Our hope for years to come,	
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,	
And our eternal home.	

O God, Our Help in Ages Past
by Isaac Watts

Stanza One

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home:

Stanza Two

Before the hills in order stood,

Or earth received her frame,

From everlasting Thou art God,

To endless years the same.

O God, Our Help in Ages Past
by Isaac Watts

Stanza Three

A thousand ages in Thy sight

Are like an evening gone;

Short as the watch that ends the night

Before the rising sun.

Stanza Four

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,

Bears all its sons away;

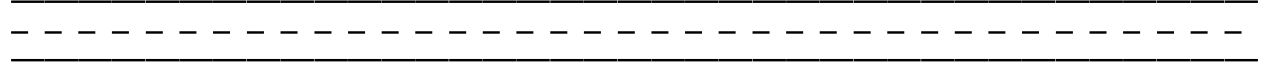
They fly forgotten, as a dream

Dies at the opening day.

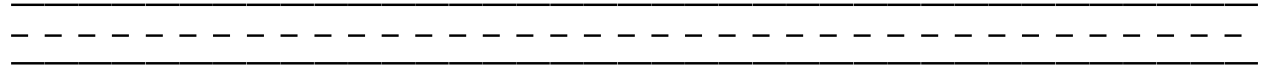
O God, Our Help in Ages Past
by Isaac Watts

Stanza Five

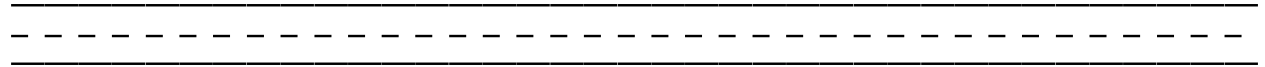
O God, our help in ages past,



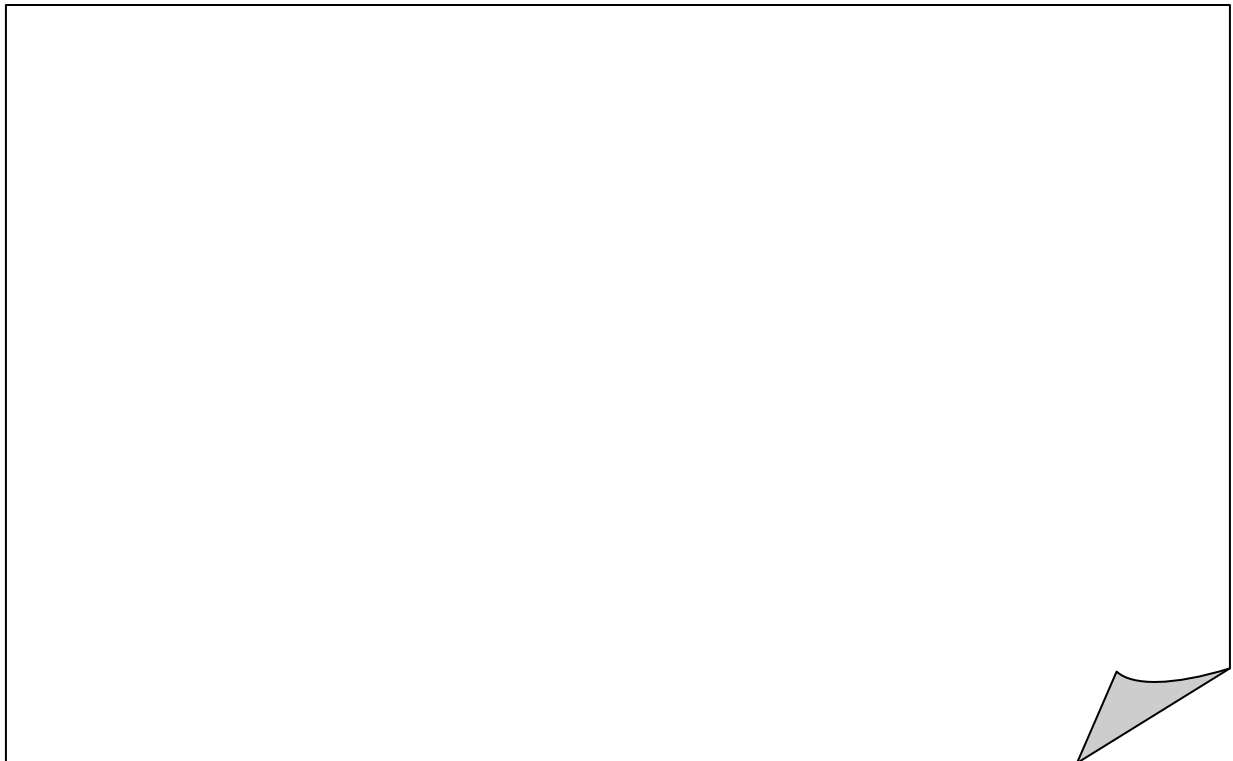
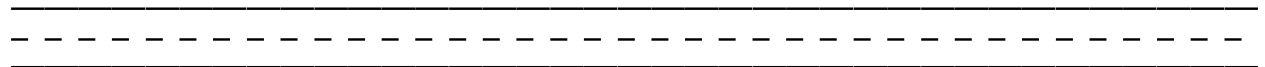
Our hope for years to come,



Be Thou our guard while troubles last,



And our eternal home.



O God, Our Help in Ages Past
by Isaac Watts

First Stanza

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home:

Second Stanza

Before the hills in order stood,

Or earth received her frame,

From everlasting Thou art God,

To endless years the same.

O God, Our Help in Ages Past
by Isaac Watts

Third Stanza

A thousand ages in Thy sight

Are like an evening gone;

Short as the watch that ends the night

Before the rising sun.

Fourth Stanza

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,

Bears all its sons away;

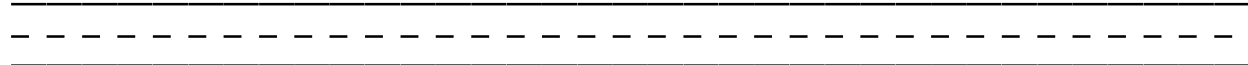
They fly forgotten, as a dream

Dies at the opening day.

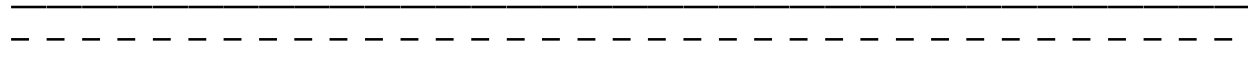
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Fifth Stanza

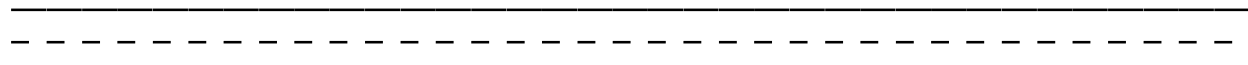
O God, our help in ages past,



Our hope for years to come,



Be Thou our guard while troubles last,



And our eternal home.

