

Psalm 120

Psalms 120-134 are Psalms each entitled 'A Song of Ascents' the significance of this phrase is uncertain, but the best suggestion is that these Psalms were used by worshippers going up to Zion for the three great festivals of the Jewish year, even though only one, [Psalm 122] is obviously in keeping with the spirit of such pilgrimages, others, for example Psalm 121 can easily be applied to a pilgrimage situation.

This group of Psalms can be divided into five groups, each consisting of three Psalms.

The first two groups deal with external pressures of the godly person, the expectant trust in the intervention of God and the realisation of the tremendous stability, power and righteousness in Him, and the choice of Zion as the central point of all the Creator God's dealings with humans.

The third group has more in common with the wisdom literature, the viewpoint is much more general. There is no mention of divine mercy, redemption or forgiveness, nor of prayer, the services in the sanctuary, nor the house of King David. The emphasis on home and family life is peculiar to this group.

The fourth group is intensely personal and devotional, the theme is the discipline of patience.

The last group is dominated by the concepts of divine choice, the covenant, the community, and the sanctuary. There is a very real sense of the inheritance of historical past.

Psalms 120:1-2 [New King James] *"In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me. Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue."*

This prayer for relief was prompted by the pervasive atmosphere of lies and deceit, it is the cry of a person who is spiritually exiled, and summarises the patience, suffering and cruel dilemma of the Church in a hostile world.

The strength of the Psalmist's opposition to the misuse of the tongue is remarkable.

Psalms 120:3 [New King James] *"What shall be given to you, or what shall be done to you, you false tongue?"*

The Psalmist looks for retributive action from the Creator God. The words *"what shall"* refers to the oath formula, [1 Samuel 3:17].

It is possible the Psalmist had been involved in legal proceedings in which lies had been spoken under oath by his opponents.

Psalms 120:4 [New King James] *"Sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree!"*

The *"warrior"* is the Creator God. In return for the arrows of evil words come the arrows of divine judgement.

The broom tree is a hard wood that gives out fierce heat, fire being characteristically the wrath of the Creator God, against sin, [Psalms 18:12-14; Psalms 140:10].

Psalms 120:5 [New King James] *"Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!"*

"Meshech and Kedar" is the area of Arabian nomads, and used here as a metaphor for uncongenial surroundings and not a factual statement of the Psalmist's home.

Psalms 120:6-7 [New King James] *“My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.”*

The people of God living in an alien and violent society are marked by a strong desire for peace and a form of speech contrasting with their neighbours.

This Psalm can easily be used by a Christian today as the basis of their ardent prayer to the Creator God, for the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, to return to the earth soon, [**Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27**].