

Psalm 120

Prayer for deliverance from lying lips
A Song of degrees

Verses 1-4: The psalmist was brought into great distress by a deceitful tongue. May every good man be delivered from lying lips. They forged false charges against him. In this distress, he sought God by fervent prayer. God can bridle their tongues. He obtained a gracious answer to this prayer. Surely sinners dare not act as they do, if they knew, and would be persuaded to think, what will be in the end thereof. The terrors of the Lord are his arrows; and his wrath is compared to burning coals of juniper, which have a fierce heat, and keep fire very long. This is the portion of the false tongue; for all that love and make a lie, shall have their portion in the lake that burns eternally.

Verses 1-7: Psalms 120-136 comprise "The Great Hallel"; compare "The Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118), and "The Final Hallel" (Psalms 145-150). Almost all these psalms (15 of 17), are "Songs of Ascent" (Psalms 120-134), which the Jewish pilgrims sang on their way up to Jerusalem (about 2,700 feet in elevation), on 3 prescribed annual occasions. These feasts included:

- (1) Unleavened Bread;
- (2) Weeks/Pentecost/Harvest; and
- (3) Ingathering/Tabernacles/Booths. Compare (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:22-23; Deut. 16:16).

David authored 4 of these songs (Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133), Solomon one (Psalm 127), while 10 remain anonymous. When these psalms were assembled in this way is unknown. It appears that these songs begin far away from Jerusalem (compare Meshech and Kedar in Psalm 120:5), and progressively move toward Jerusalem until the pilgrims have actually reached the temple and finished their worship (compare Psalm 134:1-2). With regard to Psalm 120, the author and circumstances are unknown, although it seems as if the worshiper lives at a distance among unbelieving people (compare Psalm 120:5).

- I. Petition (120:1-2);
- II. Indictment (120:3-4);
- III. Lament 120:5-7).

Psalm 120:1 "In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and he heard me."

Being at a distance from his own country, or, however, from the house of God. Persecuted by men, under the lash of their tongues. Reproached, abused, and belied by them. In this his case and circumstances, he betook himself by prayer to the Lord, and importuned help and deliverance of him. Knowing that none could help him as he (see Psalm 18:6).

"And he heard me": Answered him, and delivered him. The petition he put up follows, which shows his case, and his particular distress.

This is the first of the Songs of Ascent (120 – 134), a group of hymns that pilgrims sang on their way to Jerusalem for the holy feasts, Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

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The song of degrees is believed by many to be the song that was sung in front of the Ark of the Covenant, as it was brought back into the land. In all of these lessons, we have been looking more at the meaning of the Scriptures, rather than the history of the Scriptures. We are attempting to find practical applications of the Scriptures to our everyday life.

I find that most of mankind does not call on the Lord, until they have run out of ideas about how to get out of the problem they are in. It is a desperate cry then, that calls to the Lord. When you are in something, it means it surrounds you on every side. Truly the place to go in such a desperate situation is to the Lord. The most wonderful statement in the verse above is, He heard me.

Psalm 120:2 "Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, [and] from a deceitful tongue."

From the unjust censures and malicious slanders of mine enemies.

"From lying lips": False, deceitful, slanderous (compare notes at Psalm 31:18).

"And from a deceitful tongue": From a tongue whose statements cannot be relied on. Whose words are deceptive; whose promises are false. David was often called to experience troubles of this sort. And this is a kind of trial which may come upon anyone in a form which he can no more anticipate or prevent than he can the coming of a "mist from the ocean." No man can certainly guard against the influence of falsehood. No man can be sure that all that will be said to him is true. No man can be certain that all the promises made to him, save those made to him by God, will be performed.

"Lying lips ... deceitful tongue" (compare Psalms 52:2-4; 109:2; Rom. 3:9-18).

We find now just exactly what the distress is. To have your reputation slandered is probably the worst hurt you can have. It does not just break your bones; it breaks your heart. There is really no way to get away from this type of attack. If a person came at you with a physical sword, you could knock it out of their hand, but cutting you to pieces with their tongue is hard to fight against. Only God could deal with this type of attack. The tongue is the vilest part of the body. It can cut you to pieces.

Psalm 120:3 "What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?"

Or, "what shall it give unto thee?" That is, what shall the deceitful tongue give unto thee, O my soul? Or to thee, to anyone that hears and reads this psalm? It is capable of giving thee a great deal of trouble, of doing thee a deal of mischief. And of injuring thy character, and hurting thy peace and comfort, if permitted.

"Or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?" Or, "what shall the false tongue add unto thee?" It shall increase thy sorrows and distress. Or rather, what gain, profit, and advantage, shall the deceitful tongue get to itself by its lies and deceit? none at all; it may do harm to others, but gets no good to itself (see Isa. 28:15). Or, "what shall he (God) give unto thee?" Or, "what shall he add unto thee, thou false tongue?" so Jarchi. What punishment will not he inflict upon thee, who hates lying lips? What plagues will not he add unto thee, who knows all the deceit that is in thee, and spoken by thee? The answer is as follows:

If Jesus were answering this, He would say cut it out. Get rid of it. Of course, that is pretty drastic. You could not trade slander for slander, because that would make you as evil as the slanderer. The slanderer probably already has a bad reputation, and is trying to bring the person he is slandering down to his own level. There is really nothing man can do about this type of attack. The punishment must be left up to God.

Psalm 120:4 "Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."

"Sharp arrows ... coals": Lies and false accusations are likened to:

- (1) The pain/injury inflicted in battle by arrows; and
- (2) The pain of being burned with charcoal made from the wood of a broom tree (desert bush that grows 10-15 feet high).

There are two ways to look at this little verse. The mighty could have been speaking of the mighty of this earth. Their lies and slander against David would have been like sharp arrows shot into David's heart. Another way one might look at this is if this is the punishment from God Almighty for the terrible slander brought upon David. Those who live by the sword, must die by the sword. The coals of juniper speak of a hot fire, that burns a long time. It would fit either. My own personal opinion, is that these were still arrows from the evil tongue.

Verses 5-7: It is very grievous to a good man, to be cast into, and kept in the company of the wicked. From whom he hopes to be for ever separated. See here the character of a good man; he is for living peaceably with all men. And let us follow David as he prefigured Christ. In our distress let us cry unto the Lord, and he will hear us. Let us follow after peace and holiness, striving to overcome evil with good.

Verses 5-7: The psalmist actually lives among pagans who do not embrace his desire for peace.

Psalm 120:5 "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, [that] I dwell in the tents of Kedar!"

"Mesech" and "Kedar" were pagan peoples who created a hostile environment for the psalmist. He looked forward to arriving in Jerusalem, where he would hear welcome words of peace and truth. These were in Asia Minor (compare Gen. 10:2), and Kedar (Isa. 21:16), respectively.

The psalmist here, is feeling a very saddened plight for himself. Mesech and Kedar were similar to Gypsies. They wandered constantly and were at war with everyone they came into contact with. They even fought with each other from time to time. There really was nothing good that could be said of either of them. David is comparing his living among these liars as being in such an awful place. The word, sojourn, means that you are passing through. Dwell, however indicates a somewhat more permanent situation. At any rate, the psalmist feels that he is caught in the middle of a group of very sinful people.

Psalm 120:6 "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."

The God of peace, against whom their carnal minds are enmity itself. Christ, the Prince of peace, the Man, the Peace, who has made peace by the blood of his cross, whom the world hates. The sons of peace, the quiet in the land, against whom the wicked devise evil things. The Gospel of peace, which the natural man abhors as foolishness. The way of peace, pardon, and salvation by Christ, which carnal men know not, and do not approve of. And the ordinances of the Gospel, which are paths of peace. In short, some are of such restless, quarrelsome, and contentious spirits, that they hate peace with any. They are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest; and cannot sleep, unless they do mischief to their fellow creatures. It is very uncomfortable living, especially living long with such. The Targum is, "my soul hath long dwelt with Edom, hating peace;" that is, with the Romans or Christians, who are intended. For the Jews understand this psalm of their present captivity.

It seemed that the psalmist here, (who is probably David), had lived among these evil people for a very long time. It reminds me of the believers in Christ, who are living in a very evil world. We do not understand the ways of these people, because we are not one of them. Christians are like an island to themselves. They are sojourners in an evil land. Thank goodness, we do not fit in with the liars and thieves around us. These people in the previous verse was said by historians to have been armed heavily, just looking for a fight to get into. This would be a terrible place for the peaceful little shepherd boy to live.

Psalm 120:7 "I [am for] peace: but when I speak, they [are] for war."

Am wholly peace. A man of peace, as Aben Ezra. Of a peaceable disposition, devoted to peace. Love it, seek and pursue it, as every good man does, who is called to it, and in whose heart it rules. Such follow peace with all men, and the things which make for it. And, as much as in them lies, endeavor to live peaceably with all.

"But when I speak, they are for war": Make a motion for peace, and propose the terms of it, they declare against it, and are for war. Or when he spoke of the things of God, and of his experience of them, of the word of God, and of the truths of it, and of what he believed (Psalm 116:10). And especially when he gave good counsel and advice to them, and reprov'd them for their sins, they could not bear it. But hated him for it, and proclaimed war against him. And could not behave peaceably to him in any degree, but became his avowed, sworn, and implacable enemies. The Targum is, "when I prayed;" either prayed to God, that they did not like. Or prayed for peace with them, that they would not grant; but became more embittered against him.

David was always for peace, but when he was forced into war, the Lord was with him in battle. It seemed there was no way to have peace with these people, who thought of nothing but war. Even while he was speaking to them, trying to find peaceful solutions to the problems, they had their weapons drawn ready for war.

Psalm 120 Questions

1. In my distress I _____ and He heard me.
2. What do many believe the song of degrees to be?
3. We are looking at the _____ rather than at the history of the Scriptures.
4. When Does most of mankind call on God?
5. What is the most wonderful statement made in verse 1?
6. What is the distress the psalmist was in?
7. Slander does not break your bones, but your _____.
8. What is the evil weapon used against the psalmist, in verse 2?

9. What would Jesus say, to do with such an evil tongue?
10. What are the two ways to look at the sharp arrows of verse 4?
11. What do the coals of Juniper speak of?
12. Where did the psalmist sojourn?
13. He dwelled in the tents of _____.
14. These two were similar to _____.
15. What kind of people were these people, that the psalmist lived around?
16. Verse 6 says, they hated _____.
17. Who is the psalmist in chapter 120, probably?
18. Christians are _____ in this evil land.
19. The psalmist says, he is for _____ in verse 7.
20. Even when he was speaking to them about peace, they had their _____ drawn for _____.