

The Book of
*Psalm*s
The Heart of the Word

BOOK V, PART II: PSALMS 120–150

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 Generations

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PSALM 120

Category: *Ascent, Deliverance*

Occasion: *Ungodly Company*

Author: *Unknown*

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- ¹ In my distress I cried unto the Lord, and He heard me.
 - ² Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.
 - ³ What shall be given unto thee? or what shall be done unto thee, thou false tongue?
 - ⁴ Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.
 - ⁵ Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!
 - ⁶ My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace.
 - ⁷ I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.

The Point:

When exiled into an ungodly community that is consumed in ceaseless strife, the godly man longs for peace and for Zion.

How do we feel in the recitation of this Psalm?

We are distressed by the lack of peace in the world. We are sick of it. Spouses can't get along, family feuds are common, churches split, and nations go to war with each other. Deceit creates false

impressions all the time. Trust dissipates and relationships are tenuous. When a man loves peace, he cannot tolerate the wars, schisms, divisions, and strife around him. In this terrible world of unceasing conflicts, we long for peace. We cry out for it. We pray for God's peace in Christ.

What does this Psalm say?

Psalm 120 is the first in a series of 15 psalms that bear the inscription "Song of Ascent." Most translators believe that these are songs that God's people would sing as they ascended the hill into the city of Jerusalem for worship. Remember, the children of Israel would travel to Jerusalem three times every year to worship. Thus, these psalms are to be sung on the way to worship. They prepare us for worship.

Verses 1-4

What happens when you are deceived? Very terrible things can happen when somebody deceives a friend with a lie. If a friend told you the ice in a lake was deep enough to hold your weight, you might trust him and proceed to walk across the ice. Should he have misled you about the thickness of the ice, the consequences could be catastrophic. Truth matters, and this world is full of liars that cause much destruction to human souls. How can you know which teachers lie and which ones tell the truth? What if the liar to truth-teller ratio were a hundred to one? What would be the chances of the average person getting the truth? In our world, deceptions, cults, and false teachings are everywhere. For that reason, your ultimate hope of being saved out of this world of untruth is found in God. "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue!"

Wicked men are characterized by a lack of interest in the truth—the truth about God, the truth about other people, and the truth about themselves. They think of themselves as righteous, and they refuse to define right and wrong by the laws of God. They suppress whatever truth is available to them (Rom. 1:18). Then, they set out to deceive others through powerful mediums such as television, film, recorded music, and college classes. This is how billions of people are taken to hell in the present day. What shall be done to the false tongue? God

will judge. This is the message of the fourth verse.

Verses 5-7

Now the psalmist presents his current situation as very far removed from Jerusalem (the place of God's dwelling). Kedar and Mesech lie well outside beyond the land of Canaan, way over in the land of Arabia or Asia Minor. It is a land where there is no interest in peace. The wars of the nations are incessant. Either men are focused on micro-wars (divorces, church splits, etc.), or they are busy fighting other nations in bloody wars. This is the hobby that consumes natural man in his fallen estate. True Christians, however, are not all that interested in war. Occasionally they may have to defend their homes from marauders, but this is not their primary interest. They seek a local church body that opposes the world, and seeks peace within the walls of the church. If a local church community descends into bitter, malicious infightings, and worldly pursuits, the godly will leave and look elsewhere for a body of believers who seek peace with God and with each other.

When the believer is set among unbelievers, he finds himself in the tents of Kedar. He is a stranger among these folk, and he knows it and they know it. His one desire is always to return to the fellowship of the saints wherever it is to be found.

How do we apply this Psalm to our lives?

Peacemaking is a mark of a true church. If a church has no spirit of forgiveness, confession, and humility, it is not a church of Jesus Christ. However, the ministry of reconciliation is a gift that comes through Christ. Reconciliation is the business of the local church. First it is reconciliation with God, and then it is reconciliation with our brothers and sisters.

When a Christian brother works in the unbelieving world, he greatly desires the company of the saints and the worship of God. He feels like a fish out of water, or a bird far away from his nest. Even if he is pressed into the wars of the nations, his desire is still for peace. Even if he is a member of the national armed forces, every man in his battalion recognizes him as a true peacemaker (one who is al-

ways working to eliminate conflicts within his group, and to bring people to Christ).

How does this Psalm teach us to worship God?

The church is a place of peace. If there are ill-spirits between members of the congregation, we leave our gifts at the altar and repair relationships before entering into worship. We seek forgiveness and reconciliation, because we are in the fellowship of the forgiven. The Christian church offers the very best basis for unity available on earth. We are all great sinners, saved by the same great Savior! How can we worship the same Christ if we are at war with each other?

Questions:

1. What is the context of this psalm? Where are Mesech and Kedar?
2. What is the problem with deception?
3. What are the two things that mark the ungodly, as noted in this psalm?
4. How does the believer look at strife and war?
5. What is an Ascent Psalm? Which Psalms are categorized as Ascent Psalms?

Family Discussion Questions:

1. Should Christians fight in the military? Provide biblical justification.
2. Are we peacemakers or peace breakers? What does a peacemaker look like? What does a peace breaker look like?