

Psalms 120-134

Songs of Pilgrimage

These fifteen psalms share the same title: 'A song of Ascents'. Some add 'of David'. They form a sub-group of Book Five, and a likely explanation of the title is that they were sung in the caravans by pilgrims who were making their way up to the mountainous regions of Judah, to Jerusalem and the temple.

Psalm 120

Prayer during the Day Monday Week 4

The psalmist is either living in a foreign land, or the behaviour of his neighbours makes it feel that way. He is complaining how hard it is to live as an alien among people who have no regard for truth or peace. In his distress he is crying out to YHWH.

**¹In my distress I cry to
YHWH*, and he answers
me:**

**²YHWH, take away from
me* the lying lip, the de-
ceitful tongue.'**

The destructive power of speech is a common theme in the psalms, not only because of the general harm that lies cause, but also because of false witness given in court.

The blow of a whip raises a welt, but a blow of the tongue crushes the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword, but not as many as because of the tongue.

– Sirach 28:17-18 (see 28:13-23)

'Me' in verse 2 translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction.

**³What shall be given to
you? And what more shall
be done to you, you deceit-
ful tongue?**

What appears here as a question is, in fact, a form of oath taking. It is the equivalent of saying: 'Let double be done to me if you are not punished!' The desired punishment follows.

**⁴A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the
broom tree!**

The tongue that is attacking him is like a sharpened arrow. The caustic remarks are like a glowing coal. The psalmist prays that his attacker will get some of his own back.

He is preparing for them his deadly weapons,
arrows barbed with fire. Look at them!
They conceive evil, are pregnant with malice,
and give birth to lies.

– Psalm 7:13-14

Scoundrels concoct evil, and their speech is like a
scorching fire.

– Proverbs 16:27

People in Israel had dealings with traders from Meshech in southern Assyria (see Genesis 10:2; 1Chronicles 1:5,17; Ezekiel 27:13; 32:26; 38:2-3 and 39:1), and with bedouins from Kedar, the desert of northern Arabia to the east of Israel, who traded in sheep and goats.

We might reflect on the following passages from the New Testament that speak of 'peace'.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

– Matthew 5:9

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!

– Luke 2:14

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

– John 14:27

He is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

– Ephesians 2:14

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

– Romans 12:18

It is to peace that God has called you.

– 1Corinthians 7:15

Live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

– 2Corinthians 13:11

Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

– Hebrews 12:14

⁵Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech, that I must live among the tents of Kedar.

⁶Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace*.

⁷I am for peace*; but when I speak, they are for war.