

Psalm 120 **“Battle Scars”**

Introduction: As we go through life we fight the battles of the Christian faith, the battles of life, and the personal battles for purity and godly maturity. As I look at this psalm I cannot help but wonder what the battles were that the psalmist faced. I really believe that they were probably the same kind of battles we face. One painful battle is mentioned that we all endure... the hurt that comes from slanders and gossips.

Over the years as I have served in ministry, I guess slander, has a good chance of being the most difficult to endure. What has been the most painful is that most of the slander came from those I have tried to help the most. Betrayal is very difficult to take. At times, it seems that those we have tried to help the most, hurt us the deepest.

The psalmist is hurt and even cries out in distress. The psalmist cries out for salvation and deliverance from the Lord. I want to caution you and also encourage you to be careful about the scares of battle. Be careful what you bring from the battle. Protect your heart. When the slander is over and done, make sure your heart is still right with God. Let the Lord handle your reputation and know that He is your shield and protector. What men say about the least of these, they have said about Him.

This vile world is not a friend of God and will not be friendly to you either. Count yourself among the children of God when men speak evil of you. Be not surprised that they call you names and lie about you... they called our Lord a drunkard.

Matt 5:9-13

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

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

NIV

Be a peacemaker and know that persecution reflects on our Lord and you are blessed. My admonition is, "don't lose your salt."

Context:

*Psalm 120 is the first of a series of 15 psalms each with the title, **A Song of Ascents**. The reason for this collection and arrangement is not precisely stated. Many different explanations have been given for these "degrees" or "steps"*

James Montgomery Boice explained the first suggestion: "The Talmud says that the fifteen songs correspond to the fifteen steps between these courtyards (Middoth ii. 5; Succa 51b). Some have even supposed that the songs were sung by the Levites from these steps, though this is pure speculation."

Probably the best explanation is the last one listed, that these were songs for the people of God as they made the pilgrim journey to Jerusalem and the temple at the three appointed feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles).

*1 Chronicles 13:6 uses this phrase to describe the bringing of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem: to bring up from there the ark of God the LORD. According to **Spurgeon** (and many others), the word we translate **ascents** shares the same root with to bring up in 1 Chronicles 13:6*

1 Chron 13:6

6 David and all the Israelites with him went to Baalah of Judah (Kiriath Jearim) to **bring up** from there the ark of God the Lord, who is enthroned between the cherubim — the ark that is called by the Name.

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“We shall consider them as songs sung by those pilgrims who went up to Jerusalem to worship... These songs of desire, and hope, and approach are appropriate for the pilgrims’ use as they go up to worship.” (G. Campbell Morgan) This being likely so, then we know that Jesus sang these songs on His many journeys to Jerusalem from Galilee.

*Who wrote or collected these Psalms is not known. “The author of these fifteen Psalms is not known; and most probably they were not the work of one person. **They have been attributed to David, to Solomon, to Ezra, to Haggai, to Zechariah, and to Malachi, without any positive evidence.** They are, however, excellent in their kind, and written with much elegance; containing strong and nervous sentiments of the most exalted piety, expressed with great felicity of language in a few words.” (Adam Clarke)*

CHS: Treasury of David

Suddenly we have left the continent of the vast Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm for the islands and islets of the Songs of Degrees. It may be well to engage in protracted devotion upon a special occasion, but this must cast no slur upon the sacred brevities which sanctify the godly life day by day. He who inspired the longest psalm was equally the author of the short compositions which follow it.

TITLE. A SONG OF DEGREES. We have already devoted a sufficient space to the consideration of this title in its application to this psalm and the fourteen compositions which succeed it. These appear to us to be Pilgrim Psalms, but we are not sure that they were always sung in company; for many of them are in the first person singular. No doubt

there were solitary pilgrims as well as troops who went to the house of God in company, and for these lonely ones hymns were prepared.

SUBJECT. A certain author supposes that this hymn was sung by an Israelite upon leaving his house to go up to Jerusalem. He thinks that the good man had suffered from the slander of his neighbors, and was glad to get away from their gossip, and spend his time in the happier engagements of the holy feasts. It may be so, but we hope that pious people were not so foolish as to sing about their bad neighbors when they were leaving them, for a few days. If they wished to leave their houses in safety, and to come home to kind surroundings, it would have been the height of folly to provoke those whom they were leaving behind by singing aloud a psalm of complaint against them. *We do not know why this ode is placed first among the Psalms of Degrees, and we had rather hazard no conjecture of our own. We prefer the old summary of the translators—"David prayeth against Doeg"—to any farfetched supposition: and if this be the scope of the psalm, we see at once why it suggested itself to David at the station where the ark abode, and from which he had come to remove it. He came to fetch away the ark, and at the place where he found it he thought of Doeg, and poured out his complaint concerning him. The author had been grievously calumniated, and had been tortured into bitterness by the false charges of his persecutors, and here is his appeal to the great Arbiter of right and wrong before whose judgment seal no man shall suffer from slanderous tongues.*

THE SONG OF DEGREES OR THE GRADUAL PSALMS.

This little psalter within the psalter consists of fifteen brief songs. Why they are grouped together and what is meant by their generic name it would be hard to tell. The conjectures are very many, but they are mere suppositions. Out of them all the conjecture of Dr. Jebb best commends itself to my own mind, though it would be quite consistent with this suggestion to believe that the series of songs arranged by David became the Pilgrim Psalms of after ages, and were chanted by the Lord's people as they went up to the temple. They are "Songs of the Goings Up;" so some read the word. Those who delight to spiritualize everything find here Ascents of the Soul, or language fitted to describe the rising of the heal

t from the deepest grief to the highest delight. I have thought it well to indicate the methods by which learned men have tried to explain the term "Songs of Degrees," but the reader must select his own interpretation. -- **C.H.S.**

In the thirteenth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, it is related, that David brought up the Ark from Kirjath-jearim to the house of Obed-edom. The word (hjlç) used in the seventh verse, for "bringing up" the Ark, is of the same etymology with, and cognate to that which is translated "degrees." And upon this occasion the great event was celebrated by the accompaniment of sacred music. "And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." Again, in the verse **fifteenth chapter of the same book, in the fourteenth**, the same term is employed for bringing up the Ark to Jerusalem; and the choral services of the Levites are mentioned in immediate connection. And in the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles (fifth verse), we are told that Solomon assembled the people at the dedication of the Temple, to bring up the Ark from Sion to the Temple of the Lord. --**John Jebb.**

We gather from this that the songs of ascents were used in the festivals and the bringing up of the Ark. The commemoration of past events was important to the Jews. David has set the precedence and the people followed in years to come. Here, the psalmist, and I believe David, speaks of these events. These psalms are used in the worship at the temple during the three main feasts times. The people and the Ark went up to the house of God to worship.

Exposition:

The psalmist (David is my belief) starts us very low and then brings us out of the pit to glory. Note how CHS puts this and recounts the slander and betrayal of Doeg the dog.

“If these psalms were sung at the ascent of the ark to Mount Zion, and then afterwards by the pilgrims to Jerusalem at the annual festivals and at the return from Babylon, we shall find in the life of David a reason for this being made the first of them. Did not this servant of God meet with **Doeg the Edomite** when he enquired

of the oracle by Abiathar, and did not that wretched creature believe him and betray him to Saul? This made a very painful and permanent impression upon David's memory, and therefore in commencing the Ark's journey he poured out his lament before the Lord, concerning the great and monstrous wrong of "that dog of a Doeg", as Trapp wittily calls him. The poet, like the preacher, may find it to his advantage to "begin low, "for then he has the more room to rise: the next Psalm is a full octave above the present mournful hymn. Whenever we are abused it may console us to see that we are not alone in our misery we are traversing a road upon which David left his footprints.

Here is the passage that may recount what is in the mind of David.

1 Sam 21:1-7

David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"

2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."

4 But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here — provided the men have kept themselves from women."

5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6 So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

7 Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the Lord; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.

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1 Sam 22:9-19

9 But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. 10 Ahimelech inquired of the Lord for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. 12 Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

13 Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

14 Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? 15 Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

16 But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

17 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me."

But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the Lord.

18 The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. 19 He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

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This may help us understand more why David starts the songs of ascents from the bottom and then lifts us to glory. We shall see within these 15 songs much about the nation and its pride. The protection of God for His people, the Ark, the promise of God's Messiah, the throne of David, peace, enemies, prayer, the covenants, God's blessings for obedience, the house of God, worship, and so many other spiritual influences. Read the 15 all at

once to get the full blessings of their use in worship and for festival praise. The psalmist takes us “up” to the house of God.

In psalm 120 the King is hurt by the slander and betrayal. This psalm is more apropos today than any other. As I study this passage, the Palestinians are firing rockets into Israel. The battle wages and the attempts to harm the Jews are ongoing. Pray for the peace of Israel. This is really a prayer for Messiah to come.

Verse 1: What is the Jewish man or woman to do? Cry and call upon Yahweh. Just like Doeg, the Palestinians are killing God’s people. Just like Saul killed innocent women and children, so do God’s enemies. Cry unto God for His people. God will hear and you have no greater responsibility than to pray for the Chosen people of God.

Spurgeon-

To whom should children cry but to their father? Does not some good come even out of that vile thing, falsehood, when it drives us to our knees and to our God? "And he heard me". Yes, Jehovah hears. He is the living God, and hence prayer to him is reasonable and profitable.

Verse 2: This is what stirred my heart to call this psalm “**Battle Scars.**” I am going to say that we not only need to be protected by God from the slander and deceitful lips of others but from our own. May my lips never learn the art of slander and gossip in my own battles. What I bring from the fight should be sacred, not secular. Learn not the things of the wicked. Check your heart for hatred and revenge. Be careful not to allow scars to build up on the heart and soul of the redeemed.

Verse 3: It is my belief that David is not only speaking of the enemy’s tongue but his own as well. The scriptures speak about the evils of the tongue. In 119:131 the psalmist asks God to open his mouth. Make sure God is the one opening your mouth and it

will go well with you. May God hear in my voice love. How often has my voice betrayed me. Oh, the things we have said.

Ps 119:149

149 Hear my voice in accordance with your love;
preserve my life, O Lord, according to your laws.

NIV

If a man will cool his tongue now, he may not have to beg for it to be cooled in hell.

Luke 16:23-24

23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

NIV

Rom 14:11

11 It is written:

"'As surely as I live,' says the Lord,
'every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will confess to God.'"

NIV

James 1:26

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

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James 3:5-12

5 Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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1 Peter 3:10

For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

NIV

May I say that it is not my enemy's tongue that scares me; it is my own.

What will the Lord do to the lying tongue?

Rev 21:8

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

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Verse 4: The proverbs speak of a wicked tongue. We have much to learn from the proverbs. A lying tongue will be punished.

Prov 10:31

31 The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,
but a perverse tongue will be cut out.

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Prov 11:12

12 A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor,
but a man of understanding holds his tongue.

NIV

Prov 12:19

19 Truthful lips endure forever,
but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

NIV

Prov 15:2

2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

NIV

Prov 15:4

4 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life,
but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

NIV

Prov 17:4

4 A wicked man listens to evil lips;
a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue.

NIV

Prov 17:20

20 A man of perverse heart does not prosper;
he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.

NIV

Prov 17:28

28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent,
and discerning if he holds his tongue.

NIV

Prov 18:21

21 The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

NIV

Prov 21:6

6 A fortune made by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.

NIV

Prov 21:23

23 He who guards his mouth and his tongue
keeps himself from calamity.

NIV

Prov 25:15

15 Through patience a ruler can be persuaded,
and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

NIV

Prov 25:23

23 As a north wind brings rain,
so a sly tongue brings angry looks.

NIV

Prov 26:28

28 A lying tongue hates those it hurts,
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

NIV

Prov 28:23

23 He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor
than he who has a flattering tongue.

NIV

Sharp arrows from the mighty and coals from the juniper will be the deceitful tongues reward.

Verse 5: CHS- He had some hope from the fact that he was only a sojourner in Mesech; but as years rolled on the time dragged heavily, and he feared that he might call himself a dweller in Kedar. The wandering tribes to whom he refers were constantly at war with one another; it was their habit to travel armed to the teeth; they were a kind of plundering gypsies, with their hand against every man and every man's hand against them; and to these he compared the false hearted ones who had assailed his character.

Estes says that “*Meshech was a tribe in Anatolia or Armenia and that Kedar was a tribe in the Arabian Peninsula.*”

Verse 5. *Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!* Mesech was a son of Japheth; and the name here signifies his descendants, the Mosques, who occupied that wild mountain region which lies between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. Kedar, again, was a son of Ishmael; and the name here signifies his descendants, the wandering tribes, whose "hand is against every man, and every man's hand against them." There is no geographical connection between those two nations: the former being upon the north of Palestine, and the latter upon the south. The connection is a moral one. They are mentioned together, because they were fierce and warlike barbarians. David had never lived on the shores of the Caspian Sea, or in the Arabian wilderness; and he means no more than this, that the persons with whom he now dwelt were as savage and quarrelsome as Mesech and Kedar. After a similar fashion, we call rude and troublesome persons Turks, Tartars, and Hottentots. David exclaims, I am just as miserable among these haters of peace, as if I had taken up my abode with those savage and treacherous tribes.—*N. McMichael.*

Verse 5. *Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, etc.* David exclaims, Alas for me because, dwelling amongst false brethren and a bastard race of Abraham, he was wrongfully molested and tormented by them, although he had behaved himself towards them in good conscience. Since then, at the present day, in the church of Rome, religion is dishonoured by all manner of disgraceful imputations, faith torn in pieces, light turned into darkness, and the majesty of God exposed to the grossest mockeries, it will certainly be impossible for those who have any feeling of true piety within them to lie in the midst of such pollutions without great anguish of spirit.—*John Calvin.*

However the psalmist uses these locations, for instance are they real geographical locations or references to the barbaric world in which the psalmist lived, it is important to know that this is the way the world is to the righteous. We feel like we are in the land of the barbaric tribes constantly. It is my belief that the places are real and these people are real. They represent the enemies of God. The Ishmaelites.

Enduring Word Website:

a. **Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech:** **Meshech** was a distant place, far from the land of Israel (Ezekiel 27:13, 32:26, 39:1). **Kedar** was a place associated with the nomadic tribes in the lands surrounding Israel (1 Chronicles 1:29, Isaiah 21:16-17, Jeremiah 49:28).

i. "Meshech was the name of barbarous tribes who, in the times of Sargon and Sennacherib inhabited the highlands to the east of Cilicia, and in later days retreated northwards to the neighborhood of the Black Sea... Kedar was one of the Bedawin tribes of the Arabian desert." (Maclaren)

ii. "These two peoples were located so far apart geographically that they can only be taken here as 'a general term for the heathen.' No one person could have lived among both. They are examples of warlike tribes, among whom the singers of Psalm 120 had no true home." (Boice)

The point that is being made is that the Christian does not feel comfortable among the heathen of the world. We don't belong among the people of the world, e.g. Lot.

Verse 6: Again, as I write this the Ishmaelites are firing rockets into Israel. The Palestinians hate peace. The Arabs hate peace. The Arabs have millions of acres of land but they want the land of Israel. They hate peace.

Gen 16:9-12

9 Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

11 The angel of the Lord also said to her:

"You are now with child
and you will have a son.

You shall name him Ishmael,

for the Lord has heard of your misery.
12 He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
toward all his brothers."

NIV

The Ishmaelites are wild donkeys.

Verse 7: One day God will bless Israel with peace. The very name Jerusalem comes from the word peace. It has been anything but peace. It is the center of all human life. Everything that happens in this world revolves around this place and this people.

The songs of ascent will be sung in the New Jerusalem for millions of years to come.

For more information

Go to Arab Israeli conflict primer. MERIP



Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict
Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar