

STUDIES IN PSALMS

13. There is an intriguing biographical inference to the author in the psalm. What is it?
14. What theological question could be raised here? How answered? (It is important—do not ignore it!)
15. The historical problem of growing spirituality in the nation of Israel is here mentioned. What is said about it?

PSALM 120

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Peace versus War.

ANALYSIS

(See Inserted Headlines.)

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

(A GRATEFUL KING'S MEMORIAL.)

- 1 Unto Jehovah in the distress that befell me
I called and he answered me:—
- 2 "Jehovah! oh rescue my soul—
from the lip of falsehood
from the tongue of deceit."

(A BELLIGERENT COUNSELLOR'S WARLIKE SPEECH.)

- 3 "What shall one give to thee and what shall one add to thee,
thou tongue of deceit?
- 4 Arrows of a warrior—
sharpened with glowing coals of broom!"¹

(THE PEACEFUL KING'S LAMENT.)

- 5 "Ah! woe is me! that I sojourn with Meshech—²
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!³
- 6 Full long hath my soul had her dwelling
with haters⁴ of peace!

1. "The broom shrub makes the best charcoal, and therefore the best coal to burn and glow"—Br.

2. "The Moschi . . . in Assyr. times they dwelt in W. (or N.W.) Armenia"—O.G.

3. "Tribes of nomads in Arabian desert"—O.G.

4. So (pl.) some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "a hater" (sing.)

PSALM 120

7: I am peace! but when I speak
they [are] for war!"

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 120

In my troubles I pled with God to help me and He did!

2 Deliver me, O Lord, from liars.

3 O lying tongue, what shall be your fate?

4 You shall be pierced with sharp arrows and burned with glowing coals.¹

5, 6 My troubles pile high among these haters of the Lord, these men of Meshech and Kedar. I am tired of being here among these men who hate peace.

7 I am for peace, but they are for war, and my voice goes unheeded in their councils.

EXPOSITION

If we assume the correctness of Dr. Thirtle's solution of the title of the following fifteen psalms, as on broader grounds we deem ourselves entitled to do, we ought to find the contents of the psalms themselves continually verifying that conclusion. We shall accordingly call attention, in the quietest way possible, to the passing indications afforded, that the so-called "Songs of Degrees," or "Songs of Ascents," more exactly *Songs of the Steps*, are commemorative of the two-fold deliverance—of Israel from the Assyrians, and of Israel's King from the premature death with which he was threatened by Jehovah. We need not suppose them all composed in celebration of the particular crisis when the sign of the Dial-steps was vouchsafed, so long as, in a general way, they are all such as Hezekiah might have either written or adapted to the various events of his reign, and employed especially to commemorate its crowning deliverance. Should two or three of these psalms approve themselves as written to celebrate Hezekiah's great Passover-feast to which he invited the Northern Tribes with a chequered and yet encouraging response, so much the better; since no one can doubt that the king would naturally desire to memorialise his efforts after the reunion of the Tribes; and then, besides, the larger the area from which our circumstantial evidence as to authorship is de-

1. Literally, "with coals of the broom tree."

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rived, the more convincing ought to be the result when the converging rays of light are brought to a focus.

It is easy to recognise the probability that, for some time after he began to reign, Hezekiah had about him counsellors who, without being actually disloyal to him, were quite unable to take his exalted views of the reality of Jehovah's protection of Israel; and, consequently, how naturally it came about that when, in the earlier days of the Assyrian Invasion, the King's whole soul was set for *peace*, by reason of his confident trust in Jehovah, his courtiers were some of them utterly unable to follow his counsels; and, indeed, were only moved by his pacific assurances to fiercer denunciations of the foe. This apprehension of the state of the atmosphere at Hezekiah's Court, forms an apt preparation for the first psalm in the series. Kirkpatrick's explanation of the strikingly figurative language employed in the course of this psalm may usefully guard us from stumbling at the outset.

"*Meshech*, mentioned in Gen. 10:2 as a son of Japheth, was a barbarous people living between the Black Sea and the Caspian, probably the Moschi of Herodotus (iii. 94) and Mushki of the Assyrian inscriptions: *Kedar*, mentioned in Gen. 25:13 as the second son of Ishmael, was one of the wild tribes which roamed through the Arabian desert, 'whose hand was against every man' (Gen. 16:12). Obviously the psalmist cannot mean to describe himself as actually living among peoples so remote from one another, but applies these typical names of barbarian tribes to his own compatriots, as we might speak of Turks and Tartars."

These "Turks and Tartars" were in Hezekiah's Court, and the king was getting weary of them. It is submitted that the very terms of the psalm exactly suit such a situation, and not at all the state of affairs during the Exile, or after it in the neighborhood of Jerusalem.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The following fifteen psalms are commemorative of a two-fold deliverance. What is it?
2. In what place in this psalm are the counsellors of Hezekiah found?
3. Who is the "Meshech" of verse 5?
4. How did Hezekiah feel God would deliver Israel? How was Israel delivered?