

Day 1

Psalm 120

Psalms 120-134 comprise the Psalms of Ascent, so-called because, according to tradition, they were recited by pilgrims as they journeyed up to Jerusalem to celebrate the major festivals: Passover, Pentecost and Rosh Hashanah (New Year.) Isa 30.29 alludes to such glad occasions.



Yet the joy and expectation of a pilgrimage up to Jerusalem would also have occasioned some anxiety. Leaving the security of home and community and travelling dangerous routes, particularly through the Judean hill country, would have caused the pilgrim to look to the Lord for protection and safe passage. No one would have travelled alone, but in a group for security. But that, too, would have presented challenges - getting along with one another!

As you read and reflect on these Psalms it will be helpful to do three things:

1. Try to put yourself in the shoes of those ancient Hebrew pilgrims
2. Remember that Jesus himself would have recited these Psalms going up to Jerusalem for the festivals. Reflect on what they may have meant to him, particularly as he travelled to Jerusalem for the last time, to the cross.
3. Reflect on your own pilgrimage, following Jesus today.

It is entirely appropriate that the Psalms of Ascent begin with a declaration of the Lord's past faithfulness (Ps 120.1): when called out to in the past, God has not failed to answer. What a wonderful assurance to anyone setting out on a journey: God is with them!

But no journey is ever without challenges and dangers. The Christian one is no exception. How telling it is, though, that the initial fear of this pilgrim is not the physical hardships or dangers, but the tongue. Lying lips and deceitful tongues are his first concern. Is he worried about what those at home will say behind his back while he is away? Is he afraid of being mocked for his faith by pagans along the way? Or is he worried about loose or cutting tongues amongst his fellow pilgrims? Perhaps all three.

He likens the misuse of the tongue to acts of warfare (vv.5-7). Those who speak evil of others are like pagan peoples, enemies who hate peace, stirring up strife. The pilgrim doesn't retaliate in kind but trusts the Lord to turn back the words of the speaker on himself (vv. 2-4).

To ponder

How do you respond to verbal abuse from others? Do you have control of your tongue?

To pray

Heavenly Father, you are my sure guide and deliverer. Guard me, I pray, from those who would speak untruths about me; and may my speech always be for the building up of others and your body. In Jesus' perfect name I pray. Amen.