

Summer Psalms
STICKS & STONES
Monday, July 28
Reading: Psalm 120

Psalm 120:6 *Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. 7 I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.*

Psalms 120 through 134 are a collection of short psalms called “the songs of ascent.” They were most likely sung by pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem for the annual feast days. Pilgrims would usually travel in groups for fellowship and safety on the roads. As they ascended toward Jerusalem in the mountains of Judea, they would sing these songs to prepare their hearts for worship at the Temple.

This first psalm expresses the thoughts of the Jewish pilgrim as he leaves home for this great journey. His journey is all the more poignant as he feels that he is surrounded by deceitful warlike people. He describes his situation as dwelling in Meshek and Kedar. Meshek was located far to the north of Israel in the mountains between the Caspian and Black Seas. The people of Kedar were descendants of Ishmael who lived in the Arabian Peninsula south of Israel. Both were known as barbarous and warring nations. The psalmist uses them as examples of the character of the people who surround him. He longs for God’s peace but is surrounded by “those who hate peace.”

This psalm reminds me of the old saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” Unfortunately, this is not true. Words can cut deep and cause serious damage. He compares them to being shot by an arrow and being burned with hot coals in his description of how God will turn the tables on his enemies and do to them what they have been doing to him.

Jerusalem means “city of peace.” It was considered the true home of all Jewish people no matter where they lived. Three times a year they would return home to Jerusalem to celebrate the fact that they were the people of God.

We live in a world that rejects God’s peace. The people of the world fight and war to get their own way and fulfill their own desires. Our message of peace through Christ often falls on deaf ears and is ridiculed and attacked by those with “lying lips and deceitful tongues.” Like the psalmist, we must continue to say, “I am for peace.” And as the psalms of ascent will remind us, this world is not our real home. We are on a journey to our forever home, the heavenly Jerusalem that God has prepared for us. Don’t let the sticks and stones or the wicked words of the world divert your eyes from the Lord.