**PRAY**

Who wrote the Psalms? David 73 / Solomon 2 / Moses 1

Family of Asaph 12 / Sons of Korah 11

 Heman 1 / Ethan the Ezrathite 1

No known author 50.

Except Solomon and Moses - priests or Levites - responsible for providing music for sanctuary worship during David’s reign.

Written over a period of 1,000 years - from Moses (90) reflecting on God’s eternal nature, to Psalm 137, written as a lament concerning the Hebrew nation was in Babylon captivity.

The Book of Psalms is longest in the Bible - 150 individual psalms – and also one of the most varied in terms of subject matter – covering amongst other subjects, God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice.

There is also the recurring theme of the promised Messiah – with several prophetic Psalms, which are worth a study by themselves.

There is so much variety in the Book of Psalms, but the God who inspired there writing is the same Lord in all that is written – He is unchanging.

We may respond to Him in different ways, depending on your personal feelings, mood or the changing circumstances of our lives, but the Psalms remain constant – declaring the awesome and wonderful God, our creator, whom we worship.

He is a God, who although is high and exalted beyond our human experience, is close enough to touch – One who walks beside us every step of life’s way.

They remain as relevant today for us and they were when written.

In **Ephesians 5:18-20**, Paul wrote, .**‘…be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’**

Today, we read the Biblical psalms, rather than sing them, but the original intention when they were written was for them to be sung.

The Songs of Ascent are believed to have been used by pilgrims as they travelled to Jerusalem – on a hill, so ascending - and the temple for the appointed feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles).

Worthy of study - Jesus Himself would have sung these psalms as He journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee.

**READ**

**Psalm 120**

**1I call on the Lord in my distress and he answers me.
2Save me, Lord, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.**

**3What will he do to you and what more besides, you deceitful tongue?
4He will punish you with a warrior’s sharp arrows, with burning coals of the broom bush.**

**5Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek, that I live among the tents of Kedar!
6Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.
7I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war.**

People, whether they trust in Jesus for salvation or not, often find themselves in distress. Life is not always as great as we would like it to be.

But here, we can have an assurance that there is an available refuge – God Himself.

Remember Peter of the Day of Pentecost saying, ‘call on the Name of the Lord and you will be saved’. Here the people are being told to do the same.

They are told to cry out to God with their problems and there is a guarantee that He will answer.

Needing to cry out to God is not something to be ashamed about – **Luke 22:44** says about Jesus, …being in anguish (agony), He prayed more earnestly (He cried out).

God has promised to answer – which mean He has heard too. Let us not forget in our problems that God has been faithful in the past and He does not change. Just because He has given before, does not mean He is unable to give again. He grace is unending.

**v2** tells us the reason for the Psalmist’s distress – it is lying (evil) words that have been targeted at him.

Whereas we, as well as the Psalmist, can take comfort from the fact that the words are lies and come from a deceitful tongue, that often doesn’t help the immediate situation.

But we should take comfort and gain strength from the fact that God hears and will answer.

How many lies do you hear every day? Probably more than you would care to imagine – especially as many of them just brush off us as we have heard them so many times.

We need deliverance form the lies said about us, but also the lies said to us.

Consider the information that comes before you on a daily basis. Consider the mass marketing that is effectively a continuous lie to persuade you that your life would be better if you just acquire a certain product.

Your life, identity, purpose and happiness are all parcelled up in that product. Certainly your very self can be changed – but is it truly beneficial, is it truly Godly.

Consider the lies that come to us – subtly suggesting that God is not in control, He doesn’t care, or He doesn’t even exist. The fact that God has been generally removed from the central place He held in society even forty years ago shows the lies under which we exist.

So the Psalmist cries out, **deliver my soul, O LORD**.

Circumstances were not different then – there were still Godless people in positions of power and others making good lives for themselves at the expense of others.

But God is in control – He is able to deliver your soul.

**v3** - but the Lord is one who will also judge in the end – the Psalmist warns those who are the liars and cheats that they also have a destiny - **what will He do to you..**.

There is a reminder here that, no matter how much you have been provoked, or how tempting it to deal out your own justice, it is for God and Him only.

**James 4:12 - There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?**

The Psalmist liens God’s judgement to a warrior’s sharp arrows and to burning coals of the broom bush.

The broom bush doesn’t actually burn, but it has bright red and yellow flowers that look like red hot burning coals. Some translations may have coals of juniper – which when kindled burn fiercely and retain their heat for a long time.

Whichever, the imagery is clear – God’s judgement of fire will be for everyone who does not acknowledge and worship Him, first and only.

The Psalmist also deals with a feeling of discontentment.

**5Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek, that I live among the tents of Kedar! 6Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.**

Living amongst people who do not hold your values and love for God, can be a risk if you live in an area that persecutes believers.

But, even living in a supposed tolerant society where everything is acceptable, can become a strain and burden – especially if you look around and see how much God’s people (because we are all created by God), fall short of His standards and continue to push Him further away.

The Psalmist mentions two places – **Meshek** and **Kedar**.

These are both places inhabited by nomadic people, who were definitely not worshippers of the God of Israel.

These two places an 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 this Psalm had no true home.

The Psalmist is saying there is a burden for a believer living in an ungodly area, but our God has already answered that.

The Bible uses the term sojourner - refers to a person who is just passing through, but may also use the terms foreigner, exile, and alien, to describe the same thing.

During the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites were sojourners in the wilderness **Psalm 105:12-13, 1 Chronicles 16:19** and even though they stayed in the wilderness for forty years, it was not their home **Numbers 14:33-34**.

They were sojourners – waiting for the Promised Land, the land that God would give them as a permanent home.

In the same way, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus were also sojourners in Egypt when Herod sought to kill Jesus **Matthew 2:13-15**.

Also Paul was a sojourner as he travelled, establishing churches and preaching the gospel **Acts 13:1-3, 13-14, 51**. All were living for a short time in foreign places.

For those who have put their faith in Jesus as saviour, this world is not our home either.

We are told by Paul in **Romans 12:1-2 not to conform to the pattern of the world** – we are not to copy its ways, rather we should remember that **our citizenship is in heaven Philippians 3:20**.

The knowledge that we are just passing through should focus our minds on heavenly rewards, rather than the temporary riches that this world has to offer.

Sojourners don’t put down deep roots in the places where they reside because they know they will soon move on - Christians don’t pour their hearts and passions into things that won’t last.

It has been said that, ‘the wise Christian is one who lives every day with bags packed, ready to move on when God directs and eager to vacate this world when our Father calls us home.’

The Psalmist finishes this Psalm with **v7** by contrasting himself with the community in which he lived - **I am for peace; But when I speak, they are for war.**

He declares that he loved and longed for God’s **peace**, His shalom.

But in contrast, those around him respond **for war**: The Psalmist sought to represent peace and goodness, as we should in our communities, but in response the response was hostile.

Yet, that attitude would change as he found new companions, those who worshipped the Lord, in the group that accompanied him up to Jerusalem.

**CONCLUSION**

Psalm 120 should be a reminder to each of us that living surrounded by unbelievers for family, neighbours and work colleagues can be cause weariness.

That is why we are told by the writer to the Hebrews to not give **up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching Hebrews 10:25**.

There can be weariness that will damage our lives, unless we stay close to the supportive community of God’s people that is your church family.

For the Psalmist, he needed this constant return to Jerusalem at the feast times to be with the larger community of the people of God.

We can only trust that he allowed God to speak to him in those times.

This Psalm may have been written nearly 3,000 years ago, but God’s Word never loses its relevance or ability to speak to us.

Let this and the other Psalms of Ascent guide you back to true worship – where nothing gets in the way of having God the Father and Jesus the Son at the centre of your life – for ever.

**PRAYER / OFFER**

**READING**

**Psalm 120**

**A song of ascents.**

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    and he answers me.
2Save me, Lord,
    from lying lips
    and from deceitful tongues.**

**3What will he do to you,
    and what more besides,
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