

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Psalms: God's Nurture Of The Inner Man In The Life Of Faith

CXX: Handling Toxic Verbal Abuse

(Psalm 120:1-7)

I. Introduction

- A. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV predicts that in the latter days of Church History, there would be "terrible" times when people would be, among other things, fierce, deceptive and verbally abusive.
- B. Psalm 120:1-7 thus has significant application to our era as it addresses the believer's handling of deceitful, combative and verbally abusive people. We thus view this psalm for insight and edifying application:

II. Handling Toxic Verbal Abuse, Psalm 120:1-7.

- A. The introductory remarks are part of the first verse, so the numbering system in the Hebrew text matches that of the English Bible (Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 1086), so we stay with the English Bible's numbering system.
- B. We thus translate Psalm 120:1-7 (as follows):
 1. "A song of ascents. I call upon Jahweh in my [crisis of] narrow straits and He answers me," Psalm 120:1.
 2. "O Jahweh, snatch me away (*nasal*, B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 664; Hiphil stem = causative) from lying lips and from deceitful tongues," Psalm 120:2.
 3. "What will He give you and what more besides, O deceitful tongue?" (Psalm 120:3)
 4. "A warrior's sharp arrows, with burning [long burning; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 882] coals of the broom tree!" (Psalm 120:4)
 5. "Woe to me that I sojourn in Meshech [land of barbaric peoples living in the far north; *Ibid.*], that I dwell among the tents of Kedar [Ishmaelite enemy foes in Northern Arabia; *Ibid.*]," Psalm 120:5.
 6. "My life principle has lived too long among those who hate peace," Psalm 120:6.
 7. "I myself (emph. pron.) am a man of peace, but when I speak, they (emph. pron.) are for war!" (v. 7)
- C. We consider significant observations regarding this psalm (as follows):
 1. Beyond simple verbal abuse, the psalmist described a state of war in relationships he had with such verbally abusive foes in that such foes were *deceptive* (v. 2-3), *brutal* (like the barbarians of Meshech or the Ishmaelites of Kedar, v. 5) and *combative* (v. 6-7) over the *long-term* (v. 6).
 2. This potent combination of factors made life actually dangerous for the psalmist, for not only were his emotions in danger of being constantly hurt, but the element of deception coupled with combativeness in his foes affected the psalmist's **mental** welfare, leading him to ask God for deliverance from such foes that he found too difficult to handle! (Psalm 120:2)
 3. The divine punishment for such foes is severe, matching their abuse: a warrior's sharp arrows kill (v. 4a) and the broom tree was known to be especially long-burning, the use of both objects indicating God's punishment would be both lethal and tortuous for the psalmist's formidable foes, v. 4b.
 4. The element of the **long-term** nature of this conflict, since it affected the emotions and mind, would lead to physical problems for the psalmist due to the prolonged effects of the stress he faced, v. 6.
 5. Accordingly, when facing foes who over the long-term were combative, brutal and deceptive, the psalmist realized that trying to continue to relate even peacefully with such people was an exercise in utter futility (v. 7), so he called on the Lord to snatch him away from these foes, v. 2. This practice matches the Apostle Paul's directive of responding to abusive people in 2 Timothy 3:1-5: in verse 5, Paul urged Timothy to pull back from such people, using the middle voice (*apotrepou*, The Analyt. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 48) to indicate that Timothy was to do this for his own benefit as there was no other edifying action he could take. (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 735; J. G. Machan, N. T. Grk. For Beginners, 1951, p. 57)

Lesson: *The psalmist came to realize that due to the long-term, irreconcilable, deceptive, brutal, combative nature of his verbally abusive enemies that it was futile for him to try to co-operate with them, so he prayed for God to snatch him away from them and their influence, realizing that great divine judgment was due to those foes.*

Application: *(1) In accord with 2 Timothy 3:1-5, in facing long-term, irreconcilable, deceptive, brutal, combative, verbally abusive foes, we must see the futility of trying to relate peaceably with them so that we shrink back from them, asking God to deliver us from them. (2) Though we Christians are to love all men, including abusive foes (cf. Matthew 5:44), God does NOT expect us to EXPOSE ourselves to their ABUSE, but to shrink back from them in a defensive posture, 2 Timothy 3:1-5. We need GOD'S INTERVENTION with such foes!*