



**FLOURISH
BIBLE STUDY**

THE PSALMS *of* ASCENTS

JOURNEY TO JOY



LYDIA BROWNBACK

Endorsements for the Flourish Bible Study Series

“The brilliant and beautiful mix of sound teaching, helpful charts, lists, sidebars, and appealing graphics—as well as insightful questions that get the reader into the text of Scripture—make these studies that women will want to invest time in and will look back on as time well spent.”

Nancy Guthrie, Bible teacher; author, *Even Better than Eden*

“If you’re looking for rich, accessible, and deeply biblical Bible studies, this series is for you! Lydia Brownback leads her readers through different books of the Bible, providing background information, maps, timelines, and questions that probe the text in order to glean understanding and application. She settles us deeply in the context of a book as she highlights God’s unfolding plan of redemption and rescue. You will learn, you will delight in God’s word, and you will love our good King Jesus even more.”

Courtney Doctor, Coordinator of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition; author, *From Garden to Glory* and *Steadfast*

“My daughter and I love using Flourish Bible Studies for our morning devotions. Lydia Brownback’s faithful probing of biblical texts; insightful questions; invitations to engage in personal applications using additional biblical texts and historical contexts; and commitment to upholding the whole counsel of God as it bears on living life as a godly woman have drawn us closer to the Lord and to his word. Brownback never sidesteps hard questions or hard providences, but neither does she appeal to discourses of victimhood or therapy, which are painfully common in the genre of women’s Bible studies. I cannot recommend this series highly enough. My daughter and I look forward to working through this whole series together!”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“Lydia Brownback’s Flourish Bible Study series has been a huge gift to the women’s ministry in my local church. Many of our groups have gone through her studies in both the Old and New Testaments and have benefited greatly. The Flourish Bible Study series is now my go-to for a combination of rich Bible study, meaningful personal application, and practical group interaction. I recommend them whenever a partner in ministry asks me for quality women’s Bible study resources. I’m so thankful Brownback continues to write them and share them with us!”

Jen Oshman, author, *Enough about Me* and *Cultural Counterfeits*; Women’s Ministry Director, Redemption Parker, Colorado

“Lydia Brownback has a contagious love for the Bible. Not only is she fluent in the best of biblical scholarship in the last generation, but her writing is accessible to the simplest of readers. She has the rare ability of being clear without being reductionistic. I anticipate many women indeed will flourish through her trustworthy guidance in this series.”

David Mathis, Senior Teacher and Executive Editor, *desiringGod.org*; Pastor, Cities Church, Saint Paul, Minnesota; author, *Habits of Grace*

“As a women’s ministry leader, I am excited about the development of the Flourish Bible Study series, which will not only prayerfully equip women to increase in biblical literacy but also come alongside them to build a systematic and comprehensive framework to become lifelong students of the word of God. This series provides visually engaging studies with accessible content that will not only strengthen the believer but the church as well.”

Karen Hodge, Coordinator of Women’s Ministries, Presbyterian Church in America;
coauthor, *Transformed*

“Lydia Brownback is an experienced Bible teacher who has dedicated her life to ministry roles that help women (and men) grow in Christ. With a wealth of biblical, historical, and theological content, her Flourish Bible Studies are ideal for groups and individuals that are serious about the in-depth study of the word of God.”

Phil and Lisa Ryken, President, Wheaton College; and his wife, Lisa

“Lydia Brownback’s Bible study series provides a faithful guide to book after book. You’ll find rich insights into context and good questions to help you study and interpret the Bible. Page by page, the studies point you to respond to each passage and to love our great and gracious God. I will recommend the Flourish series for years to come for those looking for a wise, Christ-centered study that leads toward the goal of being transformed by the word.”

Taylor Turkington, Bible teacher; Director, BibleEquipping.org

THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS



Flourish Bible Study Series

By Lydia Brownback

Judges: The Path from Chaos to Kingship

Esther: The Hidden Hand of God

Job: Trusting God When Suffering Comes

The Psalms of Ascents: Journey to Joy

Ecclesiastes: Finding Meaning When Life Feels Meaningless

Jonah: God's Relentless Grace

Habakkuk: Learning to Live by Faith

Luke: Good News of Great Joy

Romans: The Glory of the Gospel

Ephesians: Growing in Christ

Philippians: Living for Christ

Colossians: Fullness of Life in Christ

James: Walking in Wisdom

1–2 Peter: Living Hope in a Hard World



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BIBLE STUDY**

THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

JOURNEY TO JOY

LYDIA BROWNBACK

■ ■ CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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With gratitude to God
for
Erin Sullivan

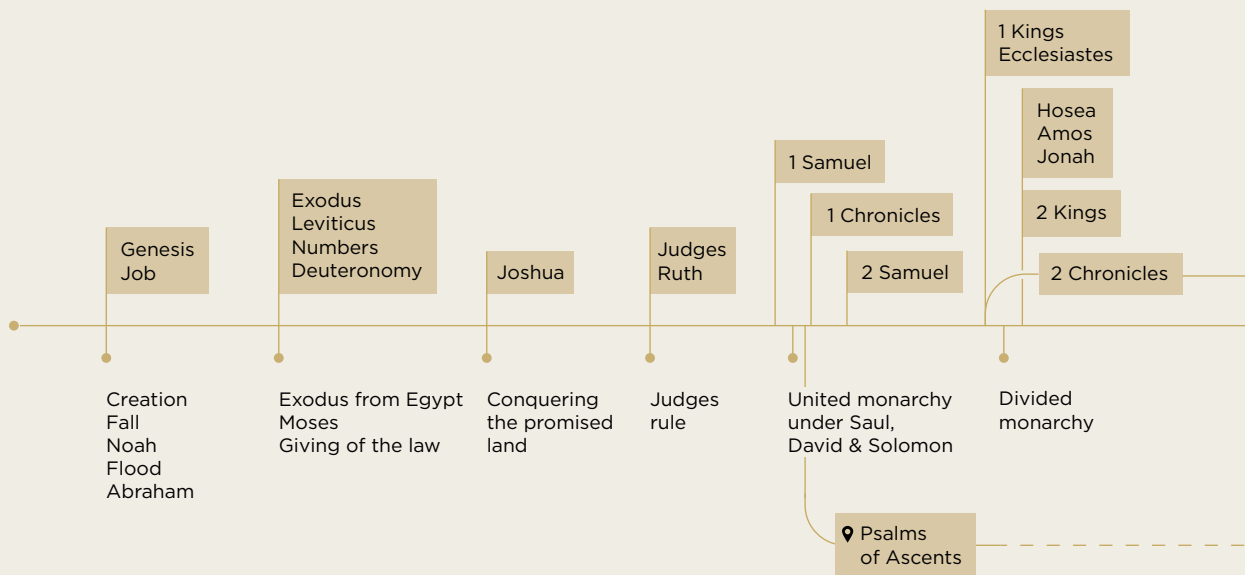
Friend of my youth, beloved sister for eternity,
where I hope we will worship together on summer-bright sandy beaches.

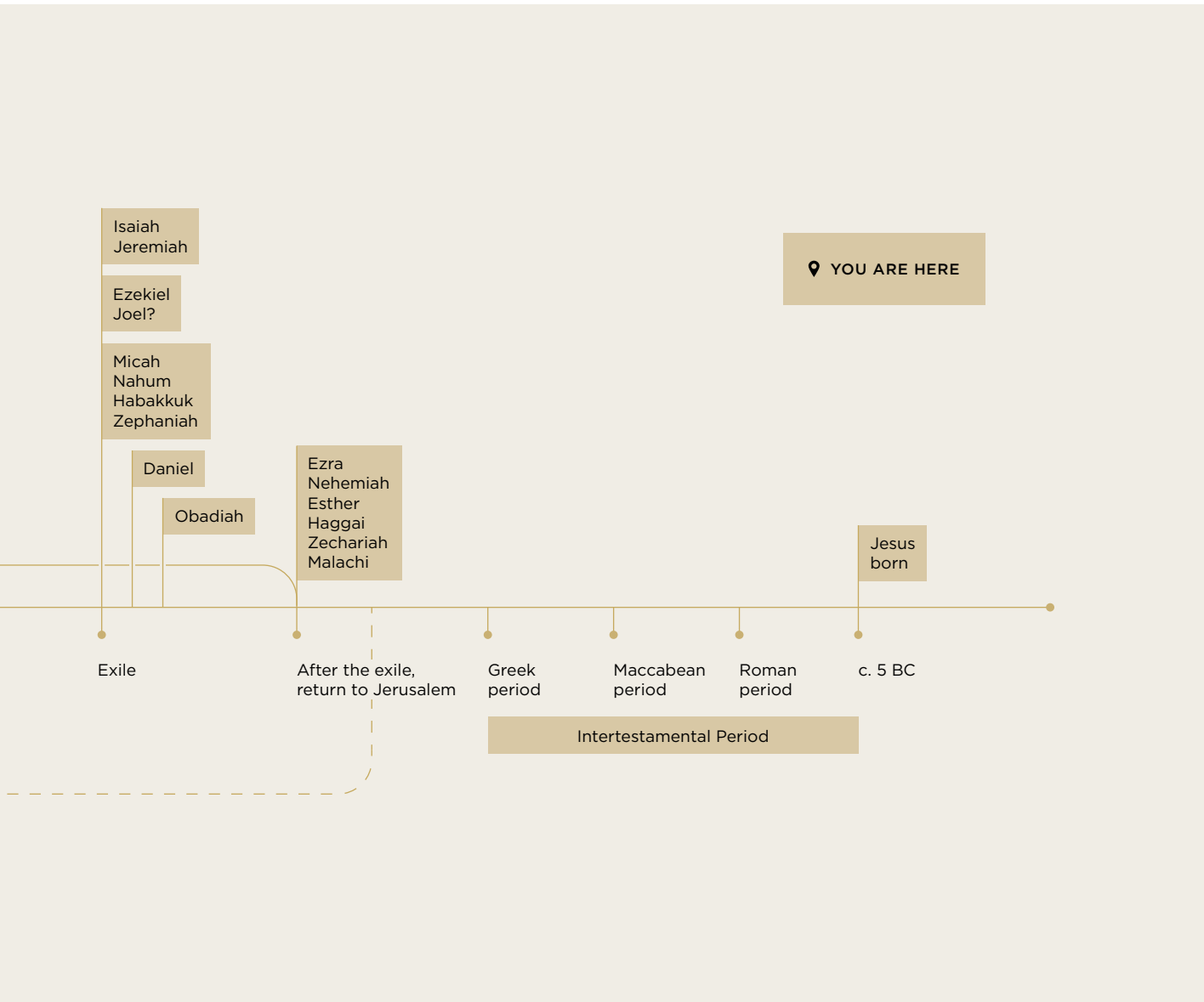
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THE PLACE OF THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS IN BIBLICAL HISTORY





Isaiah
Jeremiah

Ezekiel
Joel?

Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah

Daniel

Obadiah

Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

📍 YOU ARE HERE

Jesus
born

Exile

After the exile,
return to Jerusalem

Greek
period

Maccabean
period

Roman
period

c. 5 BC

Intertestamental Period

INTRODUCTION

GETTING INTO THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

A family roadtrip requires a good bit of advance planning. Loading up a cooler with snacks minimizes the number of stops for meals, and downloading entertaining videos keeps the kids from arguing. If your vehicle lacks high-tech amenities, tossing in some creative car games will help pass the long hours on the road. Getting ready to go is a significant undertaking. Imagine, then, the difficulty of traveling with a family hundreds of miles on foot. That's what families in ancient Israel did—and they did it three times a year! Old Testament law required God's people to journey from their homes to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate three annual festivals. They had no podcasts or videos to pass the hours, but they sang songs. Most Bible scholars believe that the songs they sang were the Psalms of Ascents, the focus of our study. Through these fifteen psalms, or songs, we enter into their experience—the weariness, the sin struggles, the hopes, and most of all the joy. Three times each year, they journeyed to joy. And the songs they sang along the way provide us with a blueprint for our own journey as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.



WHO'S WHO IN THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

The traveling Israelites are in the background of each psalm we'll be studying. Four of these psalms are attributed to Israel's King David and one to his son Solomon. The author or authors of the remainder isn't known. The *what* is just as significant as the *who* when we study these psalms. The ark of the covenant, the most sacred fixture in Israel's worship, is a significant feature. The temple in Jerusalem, or Zion, plays a dominant role, not only as a destination to be reached but for what it symbolized to God's people.



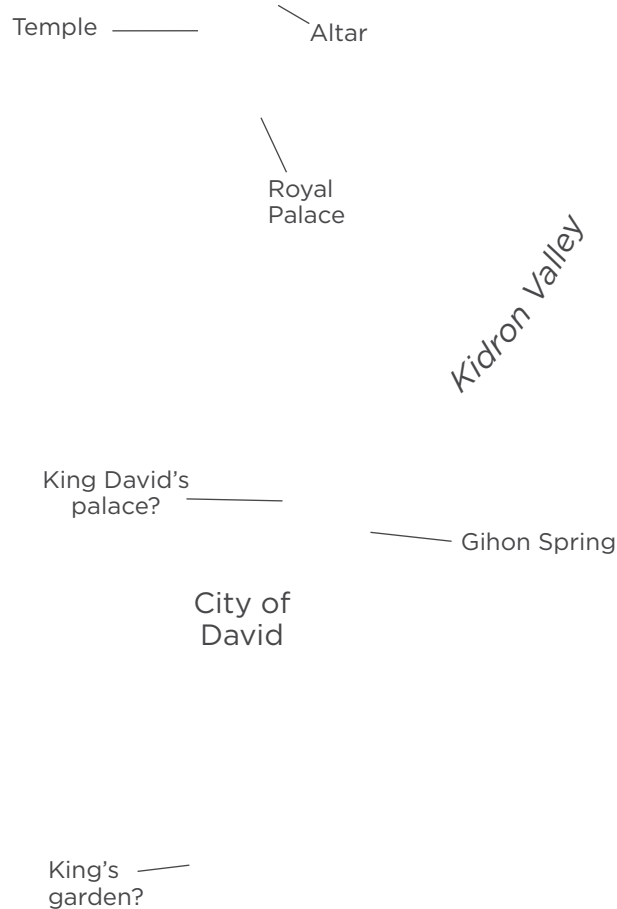
SETTING

These fifteen psalms, Psalms 120–134, were composed at various times in Israel's history and were pulled together at some point into this collection, the Psalms of Ascents. As we've noted, it is assumed that as God's people traveled to Jerusalem for the annual worship festivals, they used the journey to reflect on God's faithfulness, offer praise and thanksgiving,

and renew their commitment of faith and obedience. Three times a year they made the trek, according to God's instructions:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. (Deuteronomy 16:16)

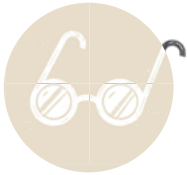
Jerusalem in Its Heyday under King Solomon¹





THEMES

Worship is the overarching theme of these psalms, worship offered in praise and thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness to his people. Another major theme is trust. Learning to trust God through the varied pains and perplexities of life is part of every believer’s life journey. Finally, what permeates this entire collection of psalms is joy. We learn from those traveling pilgrims that joy is possible in every difficulty and challenge we face when our destination is the presence of God.



STUDYING THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

The fifteen Psalms of Ascents are a collection, but each psalm is its own entity. Before you begin each week’s lesson, read the entire psalm all the way through (most of them are quite short!)

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“The soul travels its affections. If you are in love with the earth, your journey is taking you far from God. If you are in love with God, you are climbing toward him.”²

.....



GROUP STUDY

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you’ll want to finish each week’s lesson before the group meeting. You can work your way through the study questions all in one sitting or by doing a little bit each day. And don’t be discouraged if you don’t have sufficient time to answer every question. Just do as much as you can, knowing that the more you do, the more you’ll learn. No matter how much of the study you are able to complete each week, the group will benefit simply from your presence, so don’t skip the gathering because you can’t finish! That being said, group time will be most rewarding for every participant if you have done the lesson in advance.

If you are leading the group, scan the QR code below or visit crossway.org/AscentsLeadersGuide/ to download a free leader's guide with study tips and answers to discussion questions.



INDIVIDUAL STUDY

The study is designed to run for ten weeks, but you can set your own pace if you're studying solo. And you can download the free leader's guide if you'd like some guidance along the way.



Marinating in the Scripture text is the most important part of any Bible study.



Reading Plan

	Primary Text	Supplemental Reading
Week 1	Psalms 120	Genesis 12:1-4; Habakkuk 2:4
Week 2	Psalms 121	
Week 3	Psalms 122	Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 32
Week 4	Psalms 123-124	Genesis 3:1-19
Week 5	Psalms 125-126	
Week 6	Psalms 127-128	Galatians 5:16-26
Week 7	Psalms 129	
Week 8	Psalms 130-131	
Week 9	Psalms 132	
Week 10	Psalms 133-134	Genesis 3:14-15





WEEK 1

LONGING FOR HOME

PSALM 120

Homesickness is a longing for home, for all that's familiar. But it's more than just longing. To be *sick* for *home* is to feel cut off from the easy comforts and let-your-guard-down acceptance of the people we love most. Home is a place, but even more, it's the people—family and friends—who anchor our identity. For disciples of Christ, God intends that the fullest expression of everything we associate with home is to be found in the church, in the fellowship of his people. If you've known this rich blessing, then you know the ache of extended time away from your faith community. Even short separations can trigger the ache, those days when your only company is unbelievers whose plans and purposes revolve around selfish pursuits and worldly pleasures. Psalm 120 was penned by someone in just such a circumstance—stranded in a godless place. As the first in the Psalms of Ascents collection, perhaps it was sung when God's people were in the beginning stages of their journey to Jerusalem.

THE BIG PICTURE (PSALM 120)

A Song of Ascents.

- ¹ In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.
- ² Deliver me, O LORD,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue.

- ³ What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?
- ⁴ A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree!
- ⁵ Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
- ⁶ Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.
- ⁷ I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war! (Psalm 120)

1. What key words are used more than once in the psalm? Note any initial impressions these repeated words provide you.

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LONGING FOR DELIVERANCE (vv. 1-2)

The weary psalmist remembers God's faithfulness in times past, which gives him confidence to cry out for deliverance in the present:

- ¹ In my distress I called to the LORD,
and he answered me.
- ² Deliver me, O LORD,
from lying lips,
from a deceitful tongue. (vv. 1-2)

The psalmist uses God's covenant name, Yahweh, which is indicated in the Bible whenever "LORD" appears like this, in small capital letters. This isn't a minor detail! Wrapped up in the name Yahweh is everything God promised (covenanted) to be and do for Israel, his people—provide for all their needs and protect them from every enemy. They, in turn, were to give him their love and loyalty by obeying his ways, which were set

out for them in the law of Moses. God’s people failed to keep the covenant, but God remained faithful. By drawing on God’s covenant name in his present predicament, the psalmist is reminded of God’s faithfulness, and it gives him confidence that God will not forsake him now or ever.

The psalmist asks to be delivered from “lying lips” and a “deceitful tongue.” We aren’t told the specific situation, but it’s clear that someone was stirring up trouble with untruthful words.

2. Think about an occasion when someone lied to you. How did it impact you and perhaps your relationship with the one who lied?

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3. Many of us tend at times to downplay the destructive nature of dishonesty. We water down its awful impact when we call it “exaggeration” or “embellishment” or “white lie,” but Scripture paints a vivid picture of its effects. Fill in the following Lies and Liars chart and then write a summary statement of how the Bible portrays dishonesty.

Lies and Liars	
	What Do You Learn?
Psalms 5:6; 7:14	
Proverbs 6:16-19	

Lies and Liars	
	What Do You Learn?
Proverbs 19:5	
Proverbs 26:28	
John 8:44	
Colossians 3:9	
Revelation 21:8	



- Summary statement:

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4. What is indicated in verses 1–2 about the psalmist’s state of mind as he begins his prayer?

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 **LONGING FOR JUSTICE (vv. 3-4)**

Now the psalmist expresses his reflection directly to the liar:

- ³ What shall be given to you,
and what more shall be done to you,
you deceitful tongue?
- ⁴ A warrior's sharp arrows,
with glowing coals of the broom tree! (vv. 3-4)

5. The psalmist is most likely expressing righteous anger in these verses. At the same time, the verses could serve as a warning to the liar, revealing what he can expect for unrepentant sin. What do the images in these verses convey about what awaits unrepentant sinners?

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6. Read Psalm 11:5-7, another passage where burning coals are used as a word picture. What does the image of burning coals in these psalms show us about God?

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7. It's right to be angry at sin, although it's very hard to be sinlessly angry. Until we are perfected in glory, the time when we will finally be free from all the effects of sin, it's doubtful that we can experience purely righteous anger. How can adopting the psalmist's perspective help us?

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8. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. How does Revelation 12:9 reveal the fate of this father of lies—the way in which this psalm will ultimately be fulfilled?

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LONGING FOR PEACE (vv. 5–7)

As the psalm draws to a close, we get a bit more insight into the source of the psalmist’s distress:

- ⁵ Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
- ⁶ Too long have I had my dwelling
among those who hate peace.
- ⁷ I am for peace,
but when I speak, they are for war! (vv. 5–7)

Meshech and Kedar refer to two people groups. Meshech was north of Israel and Kedar to the southeast. Since the psalmist obviously couldn’t dwell in both places at once, it’s best to take verse 5 as a general reference to his living among unbelieving Gentiles.

9. How is the psalmist’s living situation affecting him?

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Broom Tree

The broom tree is a bush with many branches and twigs, small leaves, and clusters of flowers.³



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Given the psalmist’s lament in verses 5–7, some Bible scholars think that Psalm 120 was written during what’s called “the exile,” the time when God’s people were forcibly taken from their homeland and carried away captive to Babylon. During the exile, God’s people were compelled to live among idol-worshiping pagans and to conform to the Babylonian way of life. Although God brought this judgment on his people for their unfaithfulness, he intended to use the exile for good, both for his people and for the pagans who captured them. Other Bible scholars think that Psalm 120 was written after the exile, when God’s people were allowed to return to their homeland. After they returned, there was still a lot of intermingling between God’s people and other nations, and the challenges of that time are certainly reflected in this psalm. Whatever the origins of the psalm, it comforted wandering Israel when they were far from Jerusalem, the symbolic center of God’s presence in those days.

10. Pictured in Psalm 120 are two completely polarized worldviews. The psalmist seeks to promote peace, but the unbelieving Gentiles (non-Israelites) have a thirst for conflict. What do you think is the only lasting remedy for this conflict?

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11. How would you summarize what the psalmist is longing for?

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12. Until Jesus returns, there will always be spiritual conflict between God’s people and those who reject him. How do the following passages help us apply Psalm 120 to our lives today?

- 2 Corinthians 6:14–18

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- 1 Peter 2:11–12

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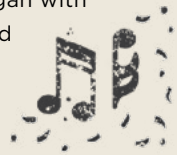
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Festival Fact

“The Israelites kept three pilgrim feasts—Unleavened Bread, Harvest, and Ingathering. Each annual festival testified to the grace of God. Unleavened Bread reminded God’s people of the night they left Egypt, and thus it spoke of their salvation. Harvest and Ingathering both celebrated the bounty of God’s provision: The God who saves is a God who provides . . . The worship year began with unleavened bread and ended with lavish feasting.”⁴



13. The psalmist found solace in journeying to Jerusalem to worship with God’s people. How do we apply this in our own day?

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LET'S TALK

1. Describe a time when you were homesick. What were the circumstances that led to it, and why did you want to go home? Discuss what earthly homesickness reveals about our spiritual, eternal homesickness and what present provision God has made for us.

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2. We live in the midst of unbelievers at work, in school, and in our neighborhoods. As we intermingle, we can blend in by adopting their worldly ways, or we can stand out from them by upholding God's ways. Discuss the ramifications of both.

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3. Revelation 12:9 calls Satan “the deceiver of the whole world.” He lies and loves to promote lying, especially lies about God. We see the havoc he causes in the way lies destroy relationships and harm trust in God. Think about a time when you lied to someone or when someone lied to you. How was this spiritual truth about lies and liars exposed in the process?
