

The Origin of a Pilgrimage

“Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace.” (Psalm 120:1-7)

Before us is a series of 15 short psalms named “Songs of Degrees (or Ascents)” which chronicle the elect pilgrim’s exodus from the bondage of sin, deceit, strife, and grief to righteousness, light, peace and joy in the Lord Jesus.

The journey always has its origin, its beginnings, in the darkened, smoke-blackened tents of Kedar. It is a cheerless, gloomy, depressing environment. Sin has obscured our vision. Outside, the sun is shining brightly and things are clearly known, but inside these tents men grope in darkness as if they had no eyes, they mourn and cry for light, truth and justice, but cannot find it (Isaiah 59:9-15). Lies, not truth, is the rule of Meshech. The whole culture of life is based upon the premise of dishonesty, trickery, thievery, and plunder. The truth is not expected unless sworn to, and then held in suspicion and distrust. With men intent upon living according to deceitful lusts, each man’s hand is against his neighbor, for one either wishes to greedily and mercilessly take what the other has or is selfishly clutching his own beggarly treasure to his bosom lest it be torn from his grasp.

The pilgrim’s stance, at the point of this song, is of one who “is for peace”, in the midst of a people who are for war. But his history has not always been so noble. No, he was once every bit the greedy, lying merciless citizen of this world as any one else. When he cries, *“deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and a deceitful tongue”* he is speaking more of his own lying lips and deceitful tongue than that of his neighbor. We all “come forth from the womb, speaking lies.” We who are born of fallen sinful flesh are of our father the devil, who was a liar from the beginning and who, when speaking, speaks lies. The tongue of the natural man easily and naturally perverts and misrepresents. It must be forced, compelled to tell the truth. Even when we are intent on being truthful, to our utter amazement, we hear ourselves “stretching the truth”, leaving out some facts in order to leave the untrue impression we wish, in fact, lying!

In the pilgrim, however, there has been a change of heart, and he longs for a change in walk and habitat. We can hear the cry of the Apostle in his own sojourn from Meshech, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” We are now more than ready for this sinful flesh to be given over to the mortifying work of sharp arrows and burning coals. Our mighty and triumphant Christ shall not disappoint us.

This is a work, a deliverance, a liberation beyond the reach of mere flesh and blood. Flesh cannot mortify flesh. This is a task for which the nothing less than the Spirit is sufficient. Spiritual deliverance is wrought only by the power of the Almighty. That power shall not be forthcoming until we have utterly had our fill of sin, and would be rid of it at all costs. It is in this distress that the weary pilgrim makes his cry to the Lord. And he is heard. His deliverance is imminent! -C. M.