

The hurt of lies spoken against us can easily be remembered. But how do we best respond in a God-pleasing manner? Psalm 120, the first of the fifteen *Songs of Ascents* or the *Pilgrim Psalms*, gives us the right perspective. The psalmist responded by praying and offers us three reasons why this is a good response.

I. *You respond well to wicked words by praying, because deliverance by the LORD is sure (120:1–2).*

1. *The psalmist's confidence: The LORD answers prayer.*

By past experience the Psalmist was certain that the LORD (Jehovah God) answers prayer because of His very nature as a faithful God who keeps His promises.

No matter what the distress in the life of the child of God, God's great gift in His own Son gives us an even greater confidence that He will "graciously give us all things" (Romans 8:32).

2. *The psalmist's response: Pray to the LORD when wicked lips speak.*

The particular current distress of the Psalmist arises from lying lips and a deceitful tongue. James describes the destructiveness of the evil tongue, likening it to a fire and a deadly poison (James 3:5, 6, 8). Poisonous, lying lips are part of mankind's natural, fallen nature (Romans 3:13–14). Lies wound deeply, and so the Psalmist's response was to pray for deliverance.

II. *You respond well to wicked words by praying, because vengeance belongs to the LORD (120:3–4).*

Contrary to the natural, fallen response to seek revenge or become bitter, the Psalmist leaves vengeance to the LORD.

1. *The psalmist's address: a prayer of retribution*

Though addressing the "deceitful tongue," the psalmist is really reminding himself and praying to God, that the LORD would deal with this person or persons as appropriate. We do not avenge ourselves, but leave vengeance to the Lord (Romans 12:19; cf. Deuteronomy 32:35).

2. *The psalmist's expectation: a divine response in kind*

Just as tongues speaking lies are pictured as bows shooting arrows (Jeremiah 9:3, 8), so also God would respond with His mightier arrows and with a fire kindled in His anger (Deut 32:22–23). It is not necessary to avenge, with God as an Avenger.

It is certainly important that we are not among those with lying lips. People will give account for every careless word (Matthew 12:36–37), knowing that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt 12:34). Instead follow the pattern set by Jesus who did not return insult with insult, but entrusted Himself to His heavenly Father (1 Peter 2.23–24).

III. *You respond well to wicked words by praying, because perseverance in the LORD is needed (120:5–7).*

Deliverance by the LORD is not necessarily the removal of those who speak evil, but includes deliverance from our own sinful responses. The child of God entrusts him or herself to the LORD and seeks to persevere in the LORD.

1. *The psalmist's lament: Hostility continues.*

The Psalmist's near neighbors were like the hostile tribes to the far north and far east of Israel. They hated peace, and the psalmist was weary from their verbal warring.

2. *The psalmist's commitment: He is for peace.*

Peace, that which characterized the Psalmist, is a mark of the Spirit in a person (Galatians 5:22) and of the change which occurs when a person has come seeking mercy from God (cf. Matthew 5:3, 9). The follower of Jesus will be persecuted for His name's sake and have to endure insults and lies (Matthew 5:10–11). Therefore, we pray, relying upon His strength to persevere.

The *Pilgrim Psalms* appear to offer to us a perspective for our heavenward journey. This first psalm acknowledges that we live in an evil world, which shoots its poisonous arrows. But the LORD is our deliverer from wicked lips. So pray to Him who will deliver us home victoriously.

Questions for further reflection:

- What do your words reveal about your own heart?
- What would help you to control your speech? What will you do today to improve?
- If you remember evil words spoken against you, what should you do now?
- What will you determine to do the next time evil words are spoken about you? How can you practice now having a right response?