

Psalms 120:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!

Analysis

The psalmist laments his situation: 'Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar!' This expresses profound spiritual alienation. 'Mesech' refers to a region in modern-day Turkey associated with barbarous people (Genesis 10:2; Ezekiel 27:13; 38:2), while 'Kedar' denotes Bedouin tribes of the Arabian desert descended from Ishmael (Genesis 25:13). These locations represent geographical extremes - north and south/east - symbolizing universal estrangement. The psalmist likely speaks figuratively rather than literally, using these names to represent dwelling among hostile, uncultured, godless people. The word 'sojourn' (Hebrew 'gur') emphasizes temporary residence - the righteous feel like foreigners even in their own land when surrounded by wickedness. This verse captures the exile experience, whether literal (Babylonian captivity) or spiritual (living as God's people in a fallen world).

Historical Context

Mesech and Kedar represent peoples on the periphery of Israelite civilization, known for hostility toward God's people. References to these regions would evoke images of lawlessness, violence, and spiritual darkness. For post-exilic Jews or those living in diaspora, this imagery captured their experience of cultural and religious isolation among pagan neighbors.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'sojourn' rather than permanently 'dwell' somewhere, and how does this shape the believer's identity?
2. How does geographic alienation serve as metaphor for spiritual alienation?
3. In what ways do Christians today experience the tension of living in 'Mesech' and 'Kedar' - dwelling as strangers in a hostile world?
4. How does this verse anticipate the New Testament teaching about believers as 'sojourners and pilgrims' (1 Peter 2:11)?
5. What spiritual practices help maintain faithfulness when surrounded by ungodliness?

Interlinear Text

אֲבָל־עַם שָׁכַנְתִּי מִשְׁעָר גַּרְתִּי כִּי לֹא אָמֵה
Woe H0 H3588 is me that I sojourn H1481 in Mesech H4902 that I dwell H7931 in the tents H5973 H168

קְדָרָה:

of Kedar

H6938

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 10:2 (Parallel theme): The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

Genesis 25:13 (Parallel theme): And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam,

Ezekiel 27:13 (Parallel theme): Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were thy merchants: they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass in thy market.

Song of Solomon 1:5: I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

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