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Psalm 120

Phase 1: ORAL



Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

Activity: Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?



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CREATIVE RESPONSES

Creative Activity: The emotions of anger and distress

How do you express very strong emotion of distress, but especially anger, in your language and culture? Is it appropriate to express extreme feelings?

Creative Activity: The issue of cursing

In most cultures exists some form of cursing. In some cultures, it is very specific and often fear-inducing, in others maybe less. Is there cursing in your culture? If so, how is it handled? Who can curse? Everybody? Describe amongst each other the issue of cursing.

ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

Facilitator: address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*

Activity: List all the participants in the context of the psalm (e.g. the actual psalmist, and the LORD) and then also list all the actors in the contents of Psalm 120.

Discuss:

- Who are the participants in this psalm in its context? Who is speaking (or writing)? And to whom is the psalmist speaking?
- Then, in terms of the contents of the psalm, who are the participants?
- Who is the “he” in v.3, who will punish you? Does it refer to YHWH? It does; he is asking for vengeance from the LORD on these treacherous people.
- What is this Psalm about? What does the psalmist want to say? What is the topic being discussed? What is the flow of thought?

The theme of the psalm

The theme of Psalm 120 is stated in verse 1: to the Lord I cried, and he answered me. The psalm is about a petitioner who had been pressed by deceitful adversaries, and he not only wants them to be violently eliminated by the LORD, he also wants to be removed from all



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warlike people. YHWH must help to change his circumstances. The righteous SHALOM of Jerusalem is where he wants to be, hence a Song of Ascent.

The flow of the psalm

The flow of Psalm 120 is FLOW 1) thanking, 2) pleading, 3) cursing, and 4) complaining.

The flow is from the psalmist and God to the deceivers without any reference to the psalmist, then back to the psalmist and the adversaries.

The thanksgiving of verse 1 is the foundation of the psalm, expressing an intense certainty of being heard. The psalm starts with the poet thanking the LORD for deliverance from earlier distress and trouble, but the trouble is not over. There are people trying to hurt him, even try to kill him. Then there is a clear break between verse 1 and verse 2, from testimony to plea. There is a petition because of a continuing situation of distress, followed by vv3-4 cursing (or perhaps warning) the adversary, the cause of the distress. The psalm ends with a woe by the petitioner, an anxiety, a sense of being lost, far away from the peace and safety and shalom of the sanctuary of Jerusalem.

The historical setting of the psalm

- Who are these deceitful tongues? What is the story behind this psalm? The deceitful tongues, repeated twice, are obviously adversaries in a distant land, but what could be the context? False accusations, or betrayal, or subtle undermining, or hatred?

The psalmist seems to be a believer who has been traveling in distant lands (Meshek and Kedar), possibly as a merchant or for some other reason. As merchants tend to do, he probably needed to stay there for some time to get all his merchandise ready for the return. While in these foreign lands, he finds a lot of duplicity among warlike people, who want to deceive him and even falsely accuse him of some crime or treason in some court, which can be very distressing and life-threatening. He was delivered by the LORD before; now he petitions his help again. He regrets being so far from home and longs to go back to the land of shalom, Israel.

Psalm 120 is the first of the Songs of Ascent, songs that were perhaps sung by Israelite pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the three annual festivals, but likely also when they ascended to bring their sacrifices in the sanctuary.

Emotions in Psalm 120

The psalmist expresses some strong emotions in this psalm!

Activity: Discuss all the emotions in this psalm

The psalmist wants to express his longing for home, where there is *shalom*. He is also wants to express his righteous anger at his hosts in a foreign country.



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Activity: What did the poet want to achieve? What was he hoping to achieve for himself or for his audience?

The genre and significance of the psalm

- What type of song or prayer is this psalm?

The genre and significance of Psalm 120 is an individual lament of being in a far away country. As is typical in laments, there is not only petitions and complaints, but also thanksgiving, as is the case here in verse 1. It is a lament psalm in which he looks for a change of circumstance: a violent end of his adversaries and removal from strife.

Psalm 120 belongs to the first group of five psalms that expresses the difficulties of going up to Jerusalem and to bring sacrifices.

UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

Discuss:

- The logic of the relationship between verse 1 and 2 is difficult to understand: in verse 1 the psalmist thanks the LORD, in verse 2 he cries for help.
- Directly addressing the deceitful tongues is poetic language. This is a poetic technique called metonymy (when the whole thing, in this case a person, is spoken of by one of its parts, in this case a tongue). How do you experience such language? Can you do the same in poems in your own language?
- What is the reference and meaning of Mechech and Kedar, places referred to in Gen 10:2 (Meshek) and Genesis 25:13 (Kedar)?

Mechech (or Meshek) was in eastern Anatolia (modern Turkey), in the northern direction from which Israel was often threatened by very strong enemies. Kedar refers to the area where the Arab Bedouins lived in tents on the border of Syria and the Arabian desert.
- The petitioner is cursing his accusers, wishing on them a violent end by the hand of YHWH. He is helpless to bring vengeance himself. This passion can be observed in several cursing psalms, like Psalms 30 and 109. How can we reconcile that with loving your enemies in the New Testament?
- For what kinds of situations was this psalm intended to be prayed or sung?

According to scholars, Psalm 120 was sung during the Israelites' pilgrimage three times a year, when they went up to Jerusalem for the appointed holy festivals. It was also likely that the Songs of Ascent were sung as pilgrims walked up the stairs to the temple court, and perhaps even as they climbed the steps to the altar of the burned offering.
- How does this psalm fit in the wider Book of Psalms? What is going on around this psalm?

The place of Psalm 120 in the psalter is in Book IV, the book with psalms about the restoration of Davidic kingship. Psalm 120 is also the first of the Songs of Ascent, or



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Pilgrimage songs. Its position as the first song is very appropriate, as the psalm refers to distant lands, the furthest extreme away from Jerusalem and the Temple.

- How does this poem allude to other events or people in the OT and the NT? In many psalms, we can discern a higher meaning that goes beyond the primary meaning.

Ps 120 alludes to the unreasonable hostility that Jesus experienced, and where “deceiving tongues” falsely accused him and led to his crucifixion.

SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

A song of ascents.

1 I called to YHWH, and he answered me. (thanksgiving)

2 Oh YHWH, rescue me deceitful people! (petition)

3 What will God do to you, you deceitful tongue?

4 He will punish you (curse)

5 Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek and in Kedar,

6 Too long have I lived among those who hate peace.

7 I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war. (lament)

What does this psalm teach us about Christ?

Like the psalmist, Jesus was also distressed during his earthly life. As Jerusalem was distant and the psalmist longing for home, so Jesus as well, longing for the Home of his Father and his people.

The meaning of the vengeance because of deception and lying is that Jesus was also falsely accused by lying lips, and put in great danger. With Jesus it led to death on the cross. Sins of the tongue are some of the worst sins. Jesus is the Judge who will judge the lying and deceiving enemies of Israel and the Church.

The poet was still in enemy territory, among people who don't want peace: same with Jesus while on earth. This psalm was also prayed by Christ on earth: in enemy territory, longing for the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem far away.

FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:

- What is the main point or message of the psalm?
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?
- How can you or your church use this psalm?
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?





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Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

‘Get the poem inside yourself’ (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

Internalisation Activity: **Listen** to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God’s power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

Internalisation Activity: **Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group.** Use your own words; there’s no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

Internalisation Activity: **Then, as a group, make gestures** for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

Internalisation Activity: **Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method.** Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

Internalisation Activity (optional): **The storyboard method:** draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups

Internalisation Activity: **Skits**—act out what’s happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

Internalisation Activity: Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)

Other Options

Internalisation Activity 2: (e.g.) The key word method: give a key word or a macroword, or maybe a short phrase, for each verse line or each parallelism. Then try to recite all the key words



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in order. Do it as a group first, each one calling out what they remember. Then let one or two people recite the list, in order.



Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

For the facilitator: in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) Repetition of words, images, and sounds
- 2) Handling the Hebrew parallelisms
- 3) Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification
- 4) Rhythm, verse length, beat
- 5) Word order, clause order
- 6) Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

There are several poetic devices to investigate here in Psalm 120:

1. Repetition

Look at the Flower Garden for an overview of the repetitions. Do not hesitate to use repetition in your translation.



The Flower Garden

The repetitions and patterns below are placed upon the guide translation.

Psalm 120

A Song of Ascents.

1 I called to the LORD in my distress,
and he answered me.

2 O LORD, rescue my life,





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from *lying lips*,
from *deceitful tongues*.

3 **How you** will be repaid,
again and again,
you deceitful tongue!

4 With the sharp arrows of warriors,
with glowing coals of the hardwood tree!

5 **Woe to me**, that **I** stay long in **Meshech**,
that **I** dwell among the tents of **Kedar!**

6 **Too long I** have dwelled
among those who hate peace.

7 **I** am for peace, but when **I** speak,
they want war!

2. Parallelism

In verse 1, notice the sequence of events in the parallelism.

Notice the parallelism of similarity in verse 5. The verbs are basically the same, and Meshech and Kedar are both places where enemies of Israel lived.

Notice the intensification in the parallelism in verse 4: glowing coals of the hardwood tree intensifies just the sharp arrows of line A.

3. Figures of speech

Psalm 120 has picture language.

Activity: make a list of all the picture language in Psalm 120

Lying lips and *deceitful tongues* are metaphors for people who lie and deceive.

Mechech and *Kedar* are metonyms. They represent enemy cities far north and east of Jerusalem.

4. Word order and clause order

Notice the fronted “I” in verse 6. It is a topic shift, “but I, im for peace”. Can you do somthign similar in your language?

COMPOSING A SONG

For the facilitator: several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro’s and con’s to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5,*



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that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage

- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG! Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)

Activity: Make a recording of the composition(s).



Step 5: Draft

Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

Activity: Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often, it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom, and make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

Stanza 1: Verse 1: Call for help, with thanksgiving

A Song of Ascents.

A Song of Ascents.





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1 I called to YHWH in my distress
and He answered me.

1 I called to the LORD in my distress
and He answered me.

Discuss:

- Song of Ascents means songs for “going up”. The going up can refer to several things: going up the stairs of the temple, or of the altar, or going up to the high-lying Jerusalem for pilgrimage and the annual religious feasts ordained in Leviticus, which is the most likely interpretation.

Creative activity: make a list of the options you have in your language and poetry for expressing song of ascents, or pilgrimage songs.

- The first line of verse 1 in the Hebrew has a marked structure, with both the object and the circumstance preposed before the verb. This is called *fronting*, or a marked construction. Such frontings are often signals of theme, and with this psalm beginning with a double fronting, this verse is marked for prominence. The fronting marks YHWH as the most important referent in this psalm, and also marks “distress” or “trouble” as something that this poem is all about. Translating fronting with irregular or even unfamiliar word-order can be very poetic, as is it in the Hebrew, but a fronted construction may not necessarily be the best option. Discuss different options.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 2: Verse 2: petition for help against deceit

2 YHWH, rescue my soul,
from lying lips,
from deceitful tongues.

2 Rescue my life, o LORD,
from lying lips,
from deceitful tongues.

Discuss:

- Discuss the transition between verse 1 and verse 2. In verse 1 is thanksgiving and positive confession, in verse 2 a petition, to the very same YHWH mentioned gratefully in verse 1.
- Lying lips and deceitful tongues are two synonymous metaphors. There is a pattern of intensification from lying to a specific type of lying, namely deceiving. Discuss among each other how such metaphors can be expressed in the idiom and poetry of your language.

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 3: Verses 3-4: a curse

3 **With what** will He will repay you,
and **what** again,
o deceitful tongue?

4 With a warrior’s sharp arrows,
and with burning coals from broom trees.

3 How you will be repaid,
again and again,
you deceitful tongue!

4 Repaid with the sharp arrows of warriors,



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and with glowing coals of the
hardwood tree!

Discuss:

This verse is difficult to understand and to translate. Consider the issues below before you make an oral draft of these two verses:

- There is a strange phrase in v3 (consult the interlinear below) that goes “and what more besides, more on top of it”. It emphasizes the wish that the LORD avenges him and get to his enemies.
- The position of the vocative, the addressee, could be in different places. In the Hebrew, it is at the end of the verse. In Bantu languages, vocatives are often put in the beginning. Discuss what would be best in your language. Look at the poems you collected and see if there are examples of what you think would work best here.
- Verse 3 contains a strong wish of destruction, of punishment expressed by a rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions are strong devices much used in poetry. The first line of verse 3 has the Hebrew, "What will he give to you?" "What shall be given to you" (RSV/ESV); "What will he do to you?", REB "What does he have in store for you?"
- The verb “given” is passive in the Hebrew. In your translation, you can keep it passive or make it active, but making it active you have to specify the actor. Who is he? YHWH, the LORD. In the translation that does not need to be made explicit. A pronoun leaving YHWH implicit is sufficient, but if the language requires it, use one.

Creative activity: experiment with saying line 3a in an active or passive way. Which of the two do you prefer?

- Verse 4 the meaning of the burning coals of hardwood trees is difficult to understand and even harder to translate. The problem is to understand what sharpened arrows have to do with burning coals. These expressions both mean war and judgement by YHWH on the deceiver. It is very violent language. It is possible that charcoal from the broom bush, a hardwood that burns long, has been attached to an arrow (see notes on the interlinear below).

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

Stanza 4: Verses 5-7: A lament

5 Woe to me, that I stay in Meshech,
I dwell amongst the tents of Kedar!
6 Too long my soul has been there
with those who hate peace.
7 I, peace, but when I speak,
they are for war.

5 Woe to me, that I stay long in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!
6 Too long I have dwelled
among those who hate peace.
7 I want peace, but when I speak,
they want war!



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Discuss:

- Expressing a complaint or lament with “woe to me” is very strong. What are the poetic expressions in your language to bring out this “woe to me”? The second line of verse 5 does not have the “woe to me” repeated, but maybe in translation it is necessary to repeat it. Consider different options.
- The “too long” of “too long have I lived...” lends itself well for poetic expression. One can use an exclamation like an interjective, or even an ideophone to intensify the misery.
- The Hebrew says literally: “I, peace”. It can have two meanings: either I am peacefull, or I am for peace. Both are acceptable.
- The double mention of SHALOM so close to each other at the end of verse 6 and beginning of verse 7 is important to handle well in translation. The adversaries hate peace, but the psalmist-petitioner loves peace. There is contrast here. It is the point of this song of pilgrimage: the psalmist wants peace where he lives and in the words he hears. Contrasting lends itself well to poetry. Explore different ways to bring out the concept of SHALOM and how to express the contrast between the petitioner and his foes

Creative activity: Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Activities:

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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Phase 2: TEXT



Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

Activity: Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



Step 7: Contents Check

Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

Activity: Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.



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EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- There are not many key terms in this psalm, but do check YHWH, NEPHESH, and SHALOM.
- The rhetorical question in v3 is a strong poetic device. Try to keep it in the translation, but check if it corresponds with the way rhetorical questions are handled in your language.
- Translating the metonyms of lying lips and deceitful tongues in v2 need special care.
- Check again the cursing verses in verses 3-4. Do they express cursing in the right way?
- Refer to the Flower Garden in Appendix C and check if all the synonyms, repetitions, and contrasting concepts are correct.
- In v7, the poetic “I – peace”. How was that handled? Look again at the notes in the Exegetical layout and in Step 5.



Step 8: Poetry Check

Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

Activity: Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- The vocatives* (YHWH and the owner of the deceitful tongue) may need to be line-initial in some language areas.
- Exclamations* and/or ideophones* could be used for the line “too long I have lived among”
- A marked word-order* could work in verse 1, to start the poem, putting the nouns before the verb.
- Picture language: the Hebrew contains military and juridical court metaphors. Try to use the same from your language.
- Material and metaphorical references not juxtapositioned but intertwined with each other. Wordplay of deceitful tongue as a sharp arrow turned around on adversary.
- Word repetitions: often in pairs of two occurrences: <what> x2; <to you> x2; <YHWH> x2 in vv1-2; <ki> x2; <shalom> x2, <nepesh> x2 a prominent word: in petition of v2 and assertion of v6: need for a new space to live in.
- The close positioning to each other of SHALOM in vv6-7 is a poetic device.





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Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

Activity: Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

Activity: Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

Activity: In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

Activity: If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.

Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

Psalm-specific ideas:

- ...

Activity: Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.



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Activity: Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.



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Appendix A: Guide Translations

| Hebrew-mirror | Guide Translation |
|---|---|
| <p>Song of Ascents</p> <p>1 In my distress, to YHWH I called and he answered me.</p> <p>2 O YHWH, rescue my life from lying lips, from deceitful tongues.</p> <p>3 With what will He will repay you, and what again, deceitful tongue?</p> <p>4 With a warrior's sharp arrows, and with burning coals from broom trees.</p> <p>5 Woe to me, that I stay in Meshech, I dwell amongst the tents of Kedar!</p> <p>6 Too long my soul has been there with those who hate peace.</p> <p>7 I, peace, but when I speak, they are for war.</p> | <p>A Song of Pilgrimage.</p> <p>1 I called to the LORD in my distress and he answered me.</p> <p>2 LORD, rescue my life, from lying lips, from deceitful tongues.</p> <p>3 How you will be repaid, again and again, you deceitful tongue!</p> <p>4 With the sharp arrows of warriors, and with glowing coals of the hardwood tree!</p> <p>5 Woe to me, that I stay long in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!</p> <p>6 Too long I have dwelled among those who hate peace.</p> <p>7 I want peace, but when I speak, they want war!</p> |





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Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

The genre of Psalm 120 is an individual lament with elements of thanksgiving.

SUGGESTED HEADING

"A prayer for help". Or "Enemies of peace", or "Prayer in the face of deceit and war"

Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatal perfective = blue • Yiqtol imperfective = red | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infinitive construct = purple • Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink • Jussive/cohortative = light brown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperative = brown • Participle = green • Weqatal = navy |
|--|---|--|

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת | A song.of the.ascents ¹ |
| אֶל־יְהוָה בַּצָּרָתָה לִי | 1 To the.LORD² in.the.distress of.me |
| קָרָאתִי וַיַּעֲנֵנִי: | I.called and.he.answered.me. |
| יְהוָה הַצִּילָה נַפְשִׁי | 2 LORD, rescue my.NEPHESH ³ |
| מִשֵּׁפֶת־שִׁקָּר | from.lips.of a.lie, |
| מִלְשׁוֹן רַמְיָה: | from.a.tongue ⁴ (of) deceit. |

¹ "Song of Ascents" has several meanings: 1) returning from Exile, 2) going up to Jerusalem for the annual festivals (the most likely meaning), 3) going up Mt Zion where the temple is, 4) going up the stairs of the temple or of the altar, or 5) some literary feature. Ps 120 was included in the Songs of Ascent because of v5, living in exile, longing for home. The songs of ascent may have been used when the pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem and like also when they bring their annual sacrifices.

² The double fronting marks topicalisation. The line is a theme statement that frames the whole psalm

³ NEPHESH means "whole being". In English versions it is often translated as "soul" or "life". Physically, NEPHESH refers to the throat, which is key for living as it is used for breathing, speaking, eating, and drinking. But in most cases it signifies the whole being, the inner ('soul,' 'mind' etc.) as well as outer ('body') parts of the person.

⁴ Tongue: metaphor for speech and utterance.





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| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| מֵה־יִתֵּן לְךָ | 3 What-he.will.give ⁵ to.you |
| וּמֵה־יִסְיֶיף לְךָ | and.what-will.be.again ⁶ to.you, |
| לְשׁוֹן רְמִיָּה: | tongue ⁷ (of) deceit? |
| חֲצֵי גִבּוֹר שְׂנוּנִים | 4 Arrows.of a.warrior sharp |
| עִם גַּחְלֵי רְתָמִים: | with burning.coals.of ⁸ broom.trees ⁹ . |
| אֲוִיָּה־לִי כִּי־גִרְתִּי מִשְׁךְ | 5 Woe-to.me that-I.stay ¹⁰ (in) Meshech ¹¹ , |
| שְׁכַנְתִּי עִם־אֹהֲלֵי קֶדָר: | I.dwell with-the.tents.of Kedar ¹² . |
| רַבַּת שְׁכָנָה־לָּהּ נַפְשִׁי | 6 Many (days) it.dwelled-in.there my.NEPHESH |
| עִם שׂוֹנְאֵי שְׁלוֹם: | with hater(s).of ¹³ peace. |
| אֲנִי־שְׁלוֹם וְכִי אֲדַבֵּר | 7 I-(am for)-peace ¹⁴ but.when I.speak, |
| יְהִי לָמְלַחְמָה: | they (are) for.the.war ¹⁵ . |

⁵ God is going to give punishment to these deceiving, lying, falsely accusing foes.

⁶ In English, the verb יסף is normally translated as an adverb “again”. יסף is normally accompanied by an infinitive that takes the role of main verb in English (“he will repeat to do” -> “he will do again”). Here the infinitive is implied from the previous line, “to give” so this line implies repetition – God will repay again and again.

⁷ Tongue is being used here as a metonym for the entire deceitful person.

⁸ The burning coals could refer to coals, or to the arrows sharpened by the coals, or even as sharpened flame-arrows. All of this are images of judgement (cf. Psalm 130)

⁹ Broom trees are trees with hardwood used to make coals for home fires.

¹⁰ The word used implies an extended period, but not a permanent period of residency. It is living as an alien resident, perhaps a dependent.

¹¹ *Meshech* is a far-away region between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, in Gen 10 identified with the great northern nations like Magog, threatening Israel. It could also have been slightly to the west in the traditional land of Armenia towards Cappadocia in modern Turkey. The people of Meshech were known for being fierce warriors using flaming arrows, hence the allusion here.

¹² *Kedar* refers to the area where Ishmaelite Bedouins lived east of Israel and east of Gilead, south of Damascus, on the border of the deserts of Arabia. It is closer than Meshech but identified with war-like desert tribes opposed to Israel. Deserts are believed to be places of evil for the Israelites, given their Exodus experience.

¹³ Many Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions read plural construct form here.

¹⁴ “I - *SHALOM*”, meaning “I am for peace”, is very prominent in the Hebrew, contrasted with the warlike “they”. The repetition of peace is very close to each other in Hebrew, making it very prominent, something of a hinge.

¹⁵ Notice the compact language.