

Psalm 120: A Cry for Peace in a Hostile World

The First of the Psalms of Ascent (120–134)

A Song of Ascents.

Background and Setting: The Journey to Worship

Psalm 120 begins a collection of fifteen psalms known as the “Songs of Ascents.” These were likely sung by Jewish pilgrims traveling up to Jerusalem, the city set on hills, to worship during the great feast days: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The word “ascents” (Hebrew: *ma’aloth*) implies an upward journey—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

As worshippers climbed the roads toward Mount Zion, their hearts climbed toward God. Each step away from the world they came from was a step closer to the presence of the Lord.

These songs formed a spiritual soundtrack—a way to remember where they had come from, where they were going, and why it mattered.

Verses 1–2 — Distress and Deliverance

*In my distress I cried to the Lord,
And He heard me.
Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips
And from a deceitful tongue.*

The psalmist begins not with joy but pain. He cries out to God—not with polished prayers but from deep distress. He’s surrounded by falsehood and deception, living in an environment where truth is distorted and words are weaponized.

But even in the pressure, God hears.

Personal Application:

Have you ever felt out of place—like your desire to live for truth and peace makes you stand out in a world that rewards manipulation and dishonesty? You’re not alone. Cry out to God. He hears, not because of your eloquence, but because of your sincerity.

Verses 3–4 — A Warning to the Lying Tongue

*What shall be given to you,
Or what shall be done to you,
You false tongue?
Sharp arrows of the warrior,
With coals of the broom tree!*

These verses shift from petition to prophetic warning. The psalmist recognizes that deceit and slander will not go unchecked. God will deal with lying lips. The imagery is intense: sharp arrows and burning coals symbolize God’s judgment against those who use their tongues to destroy.

Personal Application:

Don't be discouraged by the apparent success of the deceitful. God sees. He will judge justly. In a world full of rumors and character assassination, cling to integrity. Let God be your defender.

Verse 5 — Longing for a Better Home

*Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech,
That I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*

Meshech and Kedar were foreign, distant, and often hostile regions—symbolic of living far from the presence of God among those who don't know or respect Him.

The psalmist feels displaced. His surroundings don't reflect his values or his faith. He is a sojourner in a world that doesn't understand his love for God.

Personal Application:

Does your heart ache when you see the brokenness in the world around you? That's a holy longing. Like the psalmist, we too are pilgrims. This world is not our final home. Don't numb that discomfort—let it draw you into deeper fellowship with God.

Verses 6–7 — Surrounded by Conflict, Desiring Peace

*My soul has dwelt too long
With one who hates peace.
I am for peace;
But when I speak, they are for war.*

The psalmist is not only homesick for Jerusalem—he's heartsick from living in a world that thrives on conflict. He desires peace, but his efforts are met with hostility. He longs for unity, but he's surrounded by tension.

Personal Application:

If you feel like your desire for peace is met with resistance, keep your eyes fixed upward. You may be dwelling in "Meshech" now, but you're headed for Zion—the presence of the Lord. God honors those who pursue peace even when the world pushes back.

Summary: Psalm 120 for Today

Psalm 120 is not just an ancient song—it's a relevant cry for every believer who feels out of step with the world. It is the starting point of a spiritual ascent—away from deception and toward truth, away from war and toward peace, away from foreign tents and toward the house of the Lord.

Spiritual Truth:

The journey of faith doesn't begin with celebration—it begins with longing. It begins when we realize that this world is not our home and that our soul is yearning for something higher.

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come."—Hebrews 13:14

Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways do you feel like a sojourner in today's world?
2. How do you respond to the lies and hostility around you—by reacting, or by crying out to God?
3. What are you looking forward to in your “spiritual ascent”? What does it look like to walk toward God's presence daily?