Psalm 120 • A prayer when surrounded by ungodly people

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Psalm chapter 120 is really a cry to the Lord about living in the midst of an ungodly and violent people. And particularly violent in their words. And this is... You got to wonder if this Psalm might have been inspired by the pilgrims who had left those places. And who are now gathered with their fellow Jews and making their way toward Jerusalem.

And they're thinking about living where they live. And the violent language that is used by the people there and so forth. And how they're beginning to say, Lord, just deliver me from that and that's what this Psalm essentially says.

Look in verse 1. The psalmist begins with a cry, saying,

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

2 Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue." (ESV)

He's talking about the people that he lives around. And you might be able to relate to this. If you work outside the home. And you're in a workplace that is vulgar and quite often filled with obscenities. You know what it's like to go to work and all day long be exposed to language that you don't really want to hear. And yet you don't have any control over what people say. And you can't tell people, hey, don't do that and they talk the way they talk.

And this is what the psalmist is complaining about to a degree. And then he begins to speak a word of judgment in verses 3 and 4.

He says,

"What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue?"

And then he tells him what? He says,

"A warrior's sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree!"

And he basically speaks a word of judgment over those who give their tongues to evil and deceitful speech, which he has to listen to. Because he's not living among his fellow Jews. This is a pilgrim who's making his way to Jerusalem but he's living among the ungodly. He's living among unbelievers. He's living among the violent, if you will.

And by the way, as he talks about the judgment of the Lord, *"A warrior's sharp arrows,"* would speak of the piercing arrow of judgment. But the *"glowing coals of the broom tree!...,"* are an interesting statement. Because the roots of a broom tree, the wood of the broom tree, was considered to be one of the hardest woods in all of Israel. And therefore it burned very slowly and very hot. And it was used for coals. And it took on this idea of the burning judgment of the Lord.

He says in verse 5,

"Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!"

And Meshech, by the way, was a son of Japheth, who was one of the sons of Noah. And then Kedar was the son of Ishmael. Actually, the second son of Ishmael, you'll remember, the son of Abraham and his descendants are also known to be cruel and ruthless.

And the psalmist is bemoaning the people that he lives with. He's basically saying, I live among unbelievers. I work among unbelievers all day long. And I have to listen to their words.

And he says in verse 6,

"Too long have I If I had my dwelling among those who hate peace."

He says,

"7 I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!"

In other words, their hearts are filled with violence. And so perhaps you can understand and relate to the situation that the psalmist speaks of here.