



## Psalm 3 - Trust in God under Adversity

A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom.

### Introduction

This is the first psalm with a title. The title also names David as the author and ties the psalm to the occasion of Absalom's rebellion as recorded in 2 Samuel Chapters 15-16, although this need not mean that David actually composed it then.

As explained in the Authorship, Occasion, and Date in the Introduction to the Psalms on the website, David as author is the representative of God's people. Readers must discern whether the emphasis is on his role as the ruler of God's people, in which case the congregation joins in offering his prayer, or else on David as the ideal member of the people of God, with the song being well-adapted for the use of Israelites in their various kinds of distress. The second option seems more likely, and thus the psalm can be considered an individual lament. The purpose, then, of the information in the title is to add concreteness: here is how David models genuine faith in his dire straits, and readers can learn to do the same in theirs.

### Psalm 3:1-2 - What He Sees.

The opening of the psalm lays out the desperate situation, with its repetition of many. The description here ties in well with 2 Samuel 15:12-13 (many) and 16:8 (no help for you).

- 1 O Lord, how many are my foes!  
Many are rising against me;
- 2 many are saying to me,  
'There is no help for you in God.' Selah

### Psalm 3:1-2

How many are my foes! At the writing of this Psalm David was in a great deal of trouble. His own son led what seemed to be a successful rebellion against him. Many of his previous friends and associates forsook him and joined the ranks of those who troubled him.

There is no help for you in God. Help or salvation here, as generally in the OT, refers to both physical and spiritual deliverance from danger. The fact that they are saying this of his soul indicates that the enemies are taunting him: his sins are so bad, they imply, that even God cannot save him. Shimei, who cursed David (2 Samuel 16:5), was an example of someone who said that God was against David and he was just getting what he deserved: <<*Shimei shouted while he cursed, 'Out! Out! Murderer! Scoundrel! The Lord has avenged on all of you the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, disaster has overtaken you; for you are a man of blood'*>> (2 Samuel 16:7-8). This thought was most painful of all for David - the thought that God might be against him and that there is no help for him in God: <<*Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the Lord by saying, The Lord will surely deliver us*>> (Isaiah 36:15a).

Selah, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect.

### Psalm 3:3-6 - What He Believes.

The singer calls to mind the variety of ways in which God has cared for him in the past, and how he was able in faith to sleep peacefully in the face of danger. These past experiences build his confidence for the present, enabling him to walk by faith and not by sight.

<sup>3</sup> But you, O Lord, are a shield around me,  
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.

### Psalm 3:3

But you, O Lord, are a shield around me. Although many said there was no help for him in God, David knew that God was his shield. Others, even many others, could not shake David's confidence in a God of love and help. Under attack from a cunning and ruthless enemy, David needed a shield. He knew that God was his shield. This was not a prayer asking God to fulfil this; this is a strong declaration of fact: You, O Lord, are a shield around me: <<*Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great*>> (Genesis 15:1b).

My glory, and the one who lifts up my head. God was more than David's protection. He also was the one who put David on higher ground, lifting his head and showing him glory. There was nothing glorious or head-lifting in David's circumstances, but there was in his God: <<***Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord***>> (Psalm 27:6).

<sup>4</sup> I cry aloud to the Lord,  
and he answers me from his holy hill. Selah

#### Psalm 3:4

I cry aloud to the Lord. It is good to call out to the Lord, even if he does not appear to hear: <<***I cry to you and you do not answer me; I stand, and you merely look at me***>> (Job 30:20). Spurgeon comments: 'Surely, silent prayers are heard. Yes, but good men often find that, even in secret, they pray better aloud than they do when they utter no vocal sound.'

He answers me from his holy hill. Others said that God wanted nothing to do with David but he could gloriously say he answers me. Although Absalom took over Jerusalem and forced David out of the capital, David knew that it was not Absalom enthroned on God's holy hill. The Lord Himself still held that ground and would hear and help David from his holy hill.

<sup>5</sup> I lie down and sleep;  
I wake again, for the Lord sustains me.

#### Psalm 3:5

I lie down and sleep; I wake again. David used both of these as evidence of God's blessing. Sleep was a blessing, because David was under such intense pressure from the circumstances of Absalom's rebellion that sleep might be impossible, but he slept. Waking was another blessing because many wondered if David would live to see a new day. Such are the blessings of God: <<***And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land***>> (Leviticus 26:6).

<sup>6</sup> I am not afraid of tens of thousands of people  
who have set themselves against me all around.

### Psalm 3:6

I am not afraid of tens of thousands of people. With God sustaining him, David could stand against any foe. Before it was written God knew the truth of Romans 8:31b: <<*If God is for us, who is against us?*>>

### Psalm 3:7-8 - What He Prays For.

The singer calls on the Lord to save him now as he has in the past. Deliver (v.7) and deliverance (v.8) look back to the taunt in v.2: this rescue is the Lord's to give or withhold as he sees fit, and not under the control of the enemies. The prayer does not replace work; instead it is what makes the work effective.

7 Rise up, O Lord!  
Deliver me, O my God!  
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;  
you break the teeth of the wicked.

### Psalm 3:7

Rise up, O Lord. This recalled the words: <<'Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you'>> (Numbers 10:35b), where Moses used this phrase as the children of Israel broke camp in the wilderness. It was a military phrase, calling on God to go forth to both defend Israel and lead them to victory.

For you strike, you break. The singer is emboldened to ask God for help because God has regularly protected him from enemies, by shaming them and rendering them powerless.

David's mind was both on what he trusted God to do (Deliver me, O my God), and on what God had done (you strike all my enemies, you break the teeth of the wicked). Knowing what God had done gives David confidence in what the Lord would do. This vivid metaphor is also used in: <<*O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord!*>> (Psalm 58:6). It speaks of the total domination and defeat of the enemy. David looked for protection in this psalm, but more than protection - he looked for victory. It was not enough for David to survive the threat to the kingdom. He had to be victorious over the threat, and he would with the blessing of God.

8 Deliverance belongs to the Lord;  
may your blessing be on your people! Selah

### Psalm 3:8

Deliverance belongs to the Lord. By looking back to v.2, the singer remembers that it is the decision of the Lord, and not of the enemies, that makes the difference. The same exclamation is made elsewhere: <<*But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the Lord!*>> (Jonah 2:9), <<*They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'*>> (Revelation 7:10), and: <<*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God'*>> (Revelation 19:1).

Your blessing be on your people. A merciful word indeed, wishing well even for the people who oppose him; but the blessing will require their defeat.