

## **Psalm 3**

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

**O LORD,**

**how many are my adversaries!**

**Many are rising up against me.**

**Many are saying of my soul,**

**"There is no deliverance for him in God."**

**But Thou, O LORD,**

**art a shield about me,**

**My glory,**

**and the One who lifts my head.**

**My voice-- to the LORD I cry,**

**and He answers me from His holy mountain.**

**I lay down, and I slept; I awoke,**

**because the LORD sustains me.**

**I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who**

**On every side they are drawn up against me.**

**Arise, O LORD;**

**save me, O my God!**

**for You struck all my enemies on the cheek;**

**the teeth of the wicked ones You broke.**

**From the LORD is deliverance;**

**On Your people is (or 'be') your blessing.**

## A psalm of David when he fled from the face of Absalom his son

“This psalm is set in 2 Samuel 15:13–17:24. The initial flight from Absalom covered two nights, the first of which could understandably have found David despondent (1, 2). [*New Bible Commentary*]

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(1) O LORD,  
    how many are my adversaries!  
(2) Many are rising up against me.  
    Many are saying of my soul,  
        "There is no deliverance for him in God."

“God is the ground of help; to have no more help in Him is equivalent to being rooted out of favour with God. Open enemies as well as disconcerted friends look upon him as one henceforth cast away. David had plunged himself into the deepest abyss of wretchedness by his adultery with Bathsheba, at the beginning of the very year in which, by the renewal of the Syro-Ammonitish war, he had reached the pinnacle of worldly power. The rebellion of Absalom belonged to the series of dire calamities which began to come upon him from that time. Plausible reasons were not wanting for such words as these which give up his cause as lost.” [Keil & Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament.*]

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(3) But Thou, O LORD,  
    art a shield about me,  
    My glory,  
    and the One who lifts my head.

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your *shield*, your very great reward.” (Ge 15:1).

“Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord,  
Who is the *shield* of your help, And the sword of your majesty!  
So your enemies shall cringe before you, And you shall tread upon their high places.”  
(Dt 33:29)

“As the psalmist moves his eyes from the multitude of enemies to God, the tone of the psalm changes abruptly. The principle that is involved in this change of tone is one which is well established in the biblical literature. **If one gazes too long upon the enemy and his might, the enemy grows in the mind’s eye to gigantic proportions and his citadels reach up to the skies** (Deut 1:28). The hypnotic power of the enemy is broken when one turns one’s gaze toward God, who is able to fight and grant victory (Deut 1:29–30). The psalmist, faced by foes, now recalls that God is a “shield round about,” that is, protecting him on all sides. His glory, as king, lies not in past accomplishments or present potential; God, the sovereign king, is his glory! The psalmist’s description of God as “the One who holds up my head” (3:4b) can be interpreted in a number of ways. If the psalm applies initially to David, the words imply contrast; David, whose head was covered in shame on the Mount of Olives (2 Sam 15:30: “*And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went.*”), will be helped by God to hold his head high again through this time of crisis. But if the psalm is of general royal significance, then the expression, “to hold/lift up the head” relates to a divine action, or sovereign action, which may include restoration to a former position (see Gen 40:20–21). In general terms, the lifting of the head signifies the movement from despair to hope (see Luke 21:28).” [Word Biblical Commentary]

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**(4) My voice-- to the LORD I cry,  
and He answers me from His holy mountain.**

*“Abiathar came up, and Zadok also, with all the Levites, carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, until the people had all passed out of the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, “Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and the place where it stays. 26 But if he says, ‘I take no pleasure in you,’ here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.””* (2 Sa 15:24-26).

“The God who had installed the king on the holy mountain would also come to his aid from that place which symbolized his earthly presence.” [WBC]

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- (5) I lay down, and I slept; I awoke,  
because the LORD sustains me.
- (6) I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who  
On every side they are drawn up against me.

“The psalmist trusts fully in God (3:6–7). It is the psalmist’s conviction that God heard and answered prayer, **which makes possible the transition to this quiet statement of trust**. Surrounded by enemies who want to kill him, the psalmist finds himself in a situation naturally inviting insomnia. But it is his conviction that “the Lord sustains” (3:6b) that makes sleep possible in an impossible situation.” [WBC]

“The Hebrew text begins with the personal pronoun "I" as an emphatic way of expressing the inner quietness of the psalmist. In fact, it may be translated "as far as I am concerned." **Lying down to sleep expresses David's confidence in God's response to his plea**. He is the Great King who will come to the aid of his son. Instead of being vexed in his soul or making plans to relieve the pressure, he has learned to console himself with God (e.g., the well-known example of Peter in Acts 12:5-6). **Too often plans come before prayers**. How many blessings we may miss by conceiving our own schemes only to see God frustrate them later and work out his own plan!” [EBCOT]

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- (7) Arise, O LORD;  
save me, O my God!  
for You struck all my enemies on the cheek;  
the teeth of the wicked ones You broke.

*Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say,  
“Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, (Nu 10:35)*

Slapping as insult:

*Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, “Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?”  
25 Micaiah replied, “You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber.”  
(1 Ki 22:24-25)*

*They have gaped at me with their mouths;  
they have struck me insolently on the cheek;  
they mass themselves together against me. (Job 16:10).*

*The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.  
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.  
It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth,  
to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it,  
to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),  
to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.* (La 3:25-30).

“The psalmist prays that God would smite his enemies “on the cheek” (3:8c). The words are symbolic; to smite someone on the cheek was to **administer a gross insult** (cf. 1 Kgs 22:24; Job 16:10; Lam 3:30). **As the psalmist had been insulted by the words of his enemies** (3:3b), so now he prays for an insult to be administered to them. The parallel line (3:8d) takes the thought further. He prays that God would “smash the teeth of wicked men”; although the words have been interpreted as the imagery of savage beasts rendered harmless through fractured teeth, it is **possible that their primary significance is with respect to speechlessness**. The enemies had spoken wicked words (3:3d), but mouths cluttered with shattered teeth could no longer voice their enmity. [WBC]

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## **(8) From the LORD is deliverance; On Your people is (or ‘be’) your blessing.**

“Yahweh’s blessing not only saves them from evil, but bestows upon them every good that is needful. [ICC]

“...signifies breadth as applied to perfect freedom of motion, removal of all straitness and oppression, prosperity without exposure to danger and unclouded” [K&D]

“**Instead of cursing his faithless people he implores a blessing upon those who have been piteously led astray and deceived**. This “upon Thy people be Thy blessing!” has its counterpart in the “Father forgive them” of the other David, whom His people crucified.”

[K&D]

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## Summary

- A. Pointing out the Problem to God (vv. 1-2)
- B. Evidence-based Confident Prayer to the Lord (vv. 3-4)
- C. Trust in the Lord—in the Midst of the Danger (vv. 5-6)
- D. Request for Loyal Deliverance (v. 7)
- E. Request for Healing of the Nation (v. 8)

“But the antidote to despondency (1-2) is, first, to assert divine truth (3), and secondly to seek divine aid (4). The consequence is the blessing of a night’s sleep (5) and fresh confidence for the new day (6). Just as one day ended in prayer (4) so the new day begins in calling on God to deliver (7), for he has ever been the foe of David’s foes: thus, confident prayer draws on past experiences of grace and begets assurance for the future (8)”. [*New Bible Commentary*]

“As a morning prayer, the psalm conveys a particular wisdom. For a person afflicted with troubles or “enemies,” the opening moments of consciousness which mark a new day may be filled with an awareness of problems on every side. The psalm required of the worshiper a conscious movement of attention from those troubles to God, who is a source of protection and who answers prayer. After any sleep, there is cause for gratitude and trust; the moments of unconsciousness have ended and life resumes, only because God is the perpetual Sustainer. That same Sustainer of all life can grant victory for the coming day. Thus the psalm reflects a spiritual progress which is necessary for every day of human existence. The worshiper must consciously move from the natural state of anxiety, through trust and thanksgiving, to a prayer for God’s victory (or salvation) and blessing in the coming day. Such a psalm is not only present in the Psalter for instruction, but it is there to be used in the daily spiritual life. [WBC]

## A Couple of Observations...

1. You reap what you sow... Do unto others as you want them to do unto you...
2. Even when our problems are our own fault, God has a heart for us
3. However big our problems are, God is bigger.
4. When we cannot see a way out, God can see dozens (or make one)!
5. Always seek the good of those who hurt us—even if that good involves correction.
6. When it hurts the most, God can bring us peace.