

The Book of Psalms

Psalm 3

Opening Prayer

Read Psalm 3

Overview

This is the first psalm in the Book of Psalms that bears a title and an historical marker – “A psalm of David, when he fled from his son, Absalom”. This is also the first of 13 psalms that are linked to specific events in the life of David.¹ The specific event in the life of David that prompts this psalm is the attempted coup of his reign by his son, Absalom. These historical events can be found in **2 Samuel 15-19**. I would encourage you to read these chapters to give you a more complete understanding of the history behind this psalm. By way of summary, here are the important points of that historical event.

1. Absalom conspires to get the hearts of the Israelites to follow him rather than his father, David. (2 Samuel 15:1-12)
2. David flees Jerusalem when Absalom has raised up an army against him from Hebron. (2 Samuel 15:13ff)
3. David assembles his own army, but refuses to allow the Ark of the Covenant to come with him out of Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 15:25-37)
4. David has a spy within Absalom’s camp who relates to David what Absalom is going to do. (2 Samuel 17:21ff)
5. David’s army battles Absalom’s army, but David commands that Absalom not be harmed. (2 Samuel 18:1-9)
6. Absalom gets caught in a tree and is killed. David mourns. (2 Samuel 18:9-19:8)
7. David returns to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19:9ff)

In this brief historical outline, Psalm 3 probably fits best between numbers 2 and 3. It is an individual lament /complaint psalm and reflects David’s fear but also his trust in the Lord.

¹ The 13 psalms linked to specific events in the life of David are: 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.

Structure of the Psalm

The psalm follows a typical pattern for the individual lament/complaint psalms and can be structured like this:

1. David's lament – 3:1-2
2. David's confession of trust – 3:3-6
3. The petition – 3:7
4. Concluding blessing – 8

Side note about *Selah*

In this psalm and in many others you will see in the margin or as a footnote the word *Selah*.² While we are not certain of the meaning of the word, it probably serves one of two functions since it is not part of the formal text. First, it may serve as an understood liturgical response. So that whenever the word *selah* appears, the people would know to say a particular thing. We see a similar thing in ***I Chronicles 16:41***. So *selah* may trigger a particular response from the people or congregation.

*What are some understood responses that we have as a congregation?
How well are these known and what can we do to make them more widely understood?*

The second possibility of the function of *selah* at the side of the text is that it may be a musical notation for the musicians. As we remember that the psalms were meant to be sung, *selah* may indicate louder or softer for the musicians. In the end we simply don't know for sure.

David's lament (3:1-2)

- :1-2 - Note that each of the three divisions we are using in structuring the psalm contain the phrasing "O Lord" (3:1,3,7). This is important because it implies a relationship to the one we are addressing and it is to be contrasted with the way the enemies of David address God in verse 2.
- *Yahweh* is the word used for "O Lord" in the Hebrew text. It was considered God's personal name.
 - *Elohim* is the Hebrew word for "God" and it is the way the foes of David addressed his God in verse 2.

² This word also appears in the margins in ***Habbakuk 3***.

How does the way we address God affect the way we think about our relationship with Him?

What does this tell us about Jesus telling us to address God as “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer?

David’s Confession of Trust (3:3-6)

- :3 - “lift up my head” – This notion is meant to show restoration. ***See Genesis 40:13***
- :4 - David addresses his petition to where God is found by him at “his holy hill”. This is a reference to Zion and Jerusalem. This was the place where God dwelt for David and where his prayers should be directed.
- Where is God located for us now?*
- If there is no central place like the temple of Jerusalem, what is the value of having sanctuaries?*
- :5 - This verse gives the psalm the possibility of being both an evening psalm or a morning psalm. Either way the focus for David in this verse is that he may sleep well knowing that his times and events are in God’s hands.
- Very often we lose sleep to the worries and cares of our lives. Yet God has given us Scriptures to relieve us of those sleep-depriving worries.
- Read Matthew 11:28; Philippians 4:13; Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 41:13; Hebrews 13:6***
- :6 - “tens of thousands” - Here the historical reality of the psalm is easy to see for this is a reference to the army that Absalom has raise up against David. In the battle of those two armies it is estimated that some 20,000 were killed.

The Petition (3:7)

- :7 - “Arise, O Lord” – This may well have been a commonly understood battle cry for the people of Israel. ***Read Numbers 10:35.***
- The imagery of verse 7 probably proceeds from David’s own experiences in previous battles. There seems to be no indication that we should receive these words symbolically.

Concluding Blessing (3:8)

- :8 - David is reassured that the Lord would deliver him even as he awaits the confrontation with Absalom.
- Of special note is a change in David's prayer at the end. While the rest of the psalm has focused on David's need for deliverance, David concludes his prayer by thinking of others. "May your blessing be on *your* people".
How does praying for others in the midst of our own difficulties help us?
What are the elements of a good faith life that serve us?
 - a. Be in God's Word
 - b. Pray
 - c. Worship
 - d. Acts of service and mercy

Closing Prayer