



**Title: Story and Song – Psalm 3**

**Text: Psalm 3**

**Date: June 26, 2022**

**Main Idea:** God sustains his people in the midst of trouble.

## **Personal Study Guide**

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**READ ENTIRE TEXT: PSALM 3**

## **Highlight – What stands out?**

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1. What images are mentioned in this text?

2. Who are the parties in this text? What do you notice about the tone of this psalm?
  
3. Did you read any words, phrases, or ideas that were familiar to you? Any that were unfamiliar to you?
  
3. Did these passages remind you of any other passages you have read or studied before? Write those down.
  
4. Are there any repeated phrases or contrasting ideas in this text? Write those down?
  
5. Is there a verse, phrase, or idea that stood out to you, convicted you, or spoke to your life experience? Write that down.
  
6. Name the attributes of God you find in verses 3 - 4.

# Explain – What does this mean?

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\*Note: These introductory notes to the psalms will help as you study these first 8 psalms this summer.

The psalms can generally be divided into 3 categories:

- Orientation: Telling you what life is supposed to be like
- Disorientation: Telling you what life is like
- Reorientation: Telling you what life will be like after deliverance (future or present)

There are also different genres of psalms:

- Lament – the life that is struggling
- Thanksgiving – the life that is delivered
- Praise/Hymn – the life that is content

1. Based on these explanations above, what kind of psalm is this one? How would you explain your answer?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Background: Read and summarize 2 Samuel 15 - 18. Review these questions to ensure your class understands the context of why David is writing this Psalm.
  - a. Who is Absalom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. What is the conflict?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. How was David delivered?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Looking back at the contrasting ideas in Psalm 3:1-4, what do you notice about the contrast and how that helps explain David's trust?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

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1. How should we respond to those who would say “there’s no salvation for him in God”?
2. Going back to the attributes of God (from the highlights section), how have you seen these attributes of God in your own life?
3. Psalm 1 promises joyous prosperity, Psalm 2 affirms that God’s rule is sovereign, Psalm 3 reveals that God’s children will endure overwhelming trouble. How should we respond to this? Can you think of a passage of scripture that shows how Jesus dealt with earthly ‘overwhelming’ trouble?
4. What are some other promises, made by God to us, we can lean on in times of distress that bring comfort in times of trouble?

## **Respond – What’s my next step?**

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1. Who do you know that is currently surrounded by many foes and needs to hear about Yahweh’s salvation?

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2. How can you practically remind yourself this week to take your troubles to God, prior to doing anything else?

# Commentary: Taken from “The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life” by Dale Ralph Davis

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## 3

### THICK TROUBLE

#### *PSALM 3*

*A psalm of David; when he fled from Absalom his son.*

- 1 Yahweh, how many are my foes!  
How many are rising up against me!
- 2 How many are saying about me,  
'There's no salvation for him in God.' [Selah.]
- 3 But **you**, Yahweh, are a shield around me,  
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.
- 4 With my voice I cry out to Yahweh,  
and he answered me from his holy hill. [Selah.]
- 5 **I** have lain down and gone off to sleep;  
I woke up again, for **Yahweh** sustains me.
- 6 I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people  
who have set themselves all around me.
- 7 Rise, Yahweh! Save me, my God!  
for you shall strike all my enemies on the jaw,  
you shall shatter the teeth of the wicked.
- 8 Salvation is Yahweh's doing;  
upon your people (be) your blessing. [Selah.]

There's an entry in Kenneth MacRae's diary in July of 1913 in which he alludes to 'that godly man Peter MacDonald,' who confessed to wondering if he had ever really prayed in his life. We may wonder the same when we meet with these prayers in the Psalms. What am I, spiritual pigmy that I am, doing wandering around among these mighty prayers?

Of course there are always debunkers. Arm-chair types who allege that prayer is simply believers' form of escapism, of failing to deal with life as it really is—whatever that means. We've no time for those who insinuate that prayer is

an anemic exercise engaged in by pale, pasty-looking creatures who have trouble coping with challenges. Bible Christians know better. It's as clear as the title to Psalm 3: 'when he fled from Absalom his son.' Prayer is the way we slug our way through troubles. To paraphrase Eugene Peterson (in *Answering God*), trouble triggers prayer.

The background to the psalm then is Absalom's rebellion in 2 Samuel 15–18, when David's son tried to seize David's kingship by snuffing out David's life and loyalists. All this was part of Yahweh's judgment on David's Bathsheba-Uriah fiasco (see 2 Sam. 12:10–12). But there's another angle we dare not forget. In his lust for the crown Absalom was trying to unseat the king Yahweh had installed on his holy hill (Ps. 2:6). Absalom had joined the ranks of the international scoundrels of Psalm 2:1–3 in their plot to overthrow Yahweh's chosen king. And this thick trouble drives Yahweh's king to prayer.

One more 'intro' note. Isn't the placing of Psalm 3 interesting? You first go through the double doors of the Psalter—Psalm 1 tells you to settle your commitment and Psalm 2 to get a clear view of the kingdom. Then what? You walk into trouble (Psalm 3). In fact, there's so much trouble in these following psalms that—as Geoffrey Grogan points out in *Prayer, Praise & Prophecy*—not many readers are able to wade through the first 'book' of the Psalms without giving out.

So here is David's prayer in trouble. Maybe it's a prayer for you. Let's walk through it, remembering David is the special king but allowing you to nevertheless identify with him.

### The enemies you face

First, then, there are the enemies you face (vv. 1–2). 'How many ... how many ... how many ...'—nothing but enemies, lots of them. They are many, mean, and mouthy. And it's especially their *words* that grate. 'There's no salvation for him in God.' By that they don't mean that God cannot help David but that he will not help him (cf. Matt. 27:43). Such words can stir up an especially gut-wrenching temptation, for their words—whether said of David or me—are in one sense all too true: I don't deserve the least of God's mercies. The best defense is simply to admit the fact.

Patrick Kavanaugh tells how a friend of George Frideric Handel in all innocence told the composer about how dreary some of the music was that he had heard at the Vauxhall Gardens. Handel simply replied, 'You are right, sir, it is pretty poor stuff. I thought so myself when I wrote it.' That draws the sting; then one can get on to the real problem.

But verse 2 shows us how subtle our despair may be; it may come more from the enemies' words than from their weapons, more from their suggestion than from their attack as such. What then does one do? What did David do? Well, what is he doing in verses 1–2? He is telling Yahweh about it. The very God, who, his enemies say, wants nothing to do with him, is the One to whom he

cries. And what do you tell Yahweh in such a case? You tell him that many are saying that He wants no truck with you—you pour your anguish at the feet of a God who is not supposed to care.

## The God you confess

Now the focus falls upon the God you confess (vv. 3–4). Here is the turning-point: after the repeated ‘how-manys’ he does a grammatical ‘180’ and fills his vision with his God. ‘But you [emphatic], Yahweh ...’

What sort of God does he have? (1) A protecting God; you are ‘a shield around me.’ Precisely the sort of God David desperately needed in the Absalom peril of 2 Samuel 15–18. (2) A sufficient God; David calls Yahweh ‘my glory,’ a term that connotes the ideas of weightiness, substance, wealth. His kingdom is taken from him, but Yahweh is his glory (Franz Delitzsch). That is, he is losing his ‘glory’ (apparently to Absalom) and yet he has all the ‘glory’ he needs in Yahweh himself.

Let me digress momentarily to suggest that there could be a bit more packed into this use of ‘glory.’ You may remember those episodes of Israel’s ‘rebellion in the wilderness’ in the book of Numbers. Whether it’s a chunk of Israel or Korah & Co. who are ready to lay into Moses and Aaron—just when they are ready to do so ‘the glory of Yahweh’ appears (Num. 14:10; 16:19, 42). The glory-cloud of Yahweh’s blazing presence appears at precisely the needed time to defend his servants. In Numbers 14 and 16 the ‘glory’ of Yahweh speaks of his readiness to intervene in order to defend a leader who is under assault. I cannot be sure David had this context in mind when he speaks of Yahweh as ‘my glory’—but it would certainly fit his context and comfort his soul. If so, then ‘my glory’ suggests that Yahweh is both a sufficient and a defending God.

What kind of God is Yahweh?

- protecting
- sufficient
- restoring
- accessible

So Yahweh is a protecting, sufficient, and (3) a restoring God—David calls him ‘the one who lifts up my head.’ One finds the idea in Genesis 40:13, 20–21, when Pharaoh ‘lifts up the head’ of his cupbearer and restores him to his office (though there was a different head-lifting for the chief baker!). During Absalom’s revolt, David was in dire need of Yahweh’s restoring touch (2 Sam. 15:30). Then David implies that Yahweh is (4) an accessible God: ‘With my voice I cry out to Yahweh, and he answered me from his holy hill.’ Vocal, desperate prayer. What’s fascinating about this is that David is leaving Jerusalem, leaving the site of the tabernacle, putting geography between himself and the ‘holy hill.’ But his prayers get to Yahweh’s ‘holy hill’ even when David has no physical

access there. In a mere two verses and four lines of poetry David fills his vision with the character of his God.

In *Flags of Our Fathers*, James Bradley tells of the famous photograph of the Marines raising the American flag on Iwo Jima in 1945. It appeared in numerous papers, including a hometown Texas newspaper being perused by Ed Block, home on leave from the Air Force. His mother Belle walked by, glanced at the photograph, pointed to the marine thrusting the pole down in the ground and told Ed that was his brother Harlon. Ed refuted his mother: there was no side view, just the back of a marine; besides they didn't even know if Harlon was on Iwo Jima; there's no way she could know that that fellow was her Harlon. But Belle was sure; as she strode into the kitchen she simply said, 'I know my boy.' Actually, that figure was identified as Henry Hansen. But Belle Block was still unmoved. Sadly, the family soon received word that Harlon had been killed in action on Iwo Jima. But in 1947, after additional testimony, they received notification of a correction: Henry Hansen had not been in the picture; the lad aiming the pole into the ground was Harlon Block. Belle Block was hardly surprised: 'I know my boy.'

That is the sort of thing David is saying in verses 3–4. In the middle of his mess he is saying, 'I know my God.' In face of the threats and ruckus and theological opinions of his enemies David turns his eyes to his protecting, sufficient, restoring, accessible God. The God-centeredness of his gaze keeps him steady while his enemies try to decide what precise level of scum he is.

### The peace you enjoy

In view of this, you can think, thirdly, of the peace you enjoy (vv. 5–6).

'I have lain down and gone off to sleep.' What on earth is David doing, you might ask, going off to sleep when there's a coup afoot? The sequence of the text explains it: The emphatic 'I' of verse 5 comes after the emphatic 'But you' of verse 3. Because you, O Lord, are what you are, I can go take a snooze. Alec Motyer (in his *Treasures of the King*) nicely captures the stress of the text: 'The subject ("I") is emphatic—just imagine this being true of me! Placed as I am!—and the verbs are past tense, looking back on a delightful, if surprising, experience: "For my part, I went to bed, and how I slept! I woke up, for Yahweh himself keeps sustaining me." '

Note that this peace is both immediate (v. 5) and longterm (v. 6); it covers both the first night (v. 5) and the unforeseeable future (v. 6). David, however, takes nothing for granted; he explains why he awoke—'for Yahweh sustains me.' Is that not always the explanation of bed-sleepwaking? But David is not held in the grip of fear, for this peace is not a one-night flash but (as v. 6 shows) controls the way he looks at the future with all its uncertainty.

We dare not pontificate on all situations, but verse 5 implies that *your peace may be immediate*. The definitive relief had not yet come. David does not have

peace from turmoil but peace in it. What did David do that night as Absalom plotted his ruin? Went to sleep. No Tylenol PM. Sometimes God works that way.

Irene Howat (*Finding God Is in the Darkness*) tells of the heartwrenching trial of Pat and Andrew Cardy in 1981. They lived in Northern Ireland; their nine-year-old Jennifer had cycled off to a friend's house to play—and never came back. A week later she was found; murdered. What days and nights those were while they were waiting and searching and not knowing for sure. Probably about the fourth day, Pat's doctor dropped off some sleeping tablets for her, and that night she took herself to bed with her tablets, wondering if they were to be her constant crutch. Before bed she was meditating and soon the words of a verse came to mind: 'It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, for so he giveth his beloved sleep' (Ps. 127:2, KJV). As she thought on those words and on the love in which they were wrapped, she claimed them, and slept peacefully that night—and every night afterwards. It didn't bring Jennifer back; it didn't bring a magical end to her anguish. But sometimes Yahweh does that—he gives peace in trouble and tragedy, and may do so immediately.

David would understand. He goes off to sleep. Yahweh can look after his own kingdom. He didn't have any Sominex—only a God who shields and sustains. No circumstances have yet changed, and yet there is no alarm or anxiety.

### The help you expect

Finally, in verses 7–8 you come to the help you expect. Right away I will mention that you'll find the verbs in verse 7 handled differently in various translations. There are about five different ways one can construe these verbs and we can't suck up space to explain it all here. So let me simply explain how I am taking them ...

There is a certain tension in verse 7. When David cries, 'Rise, Yahweh! Save me, my God!' (7a), we can see that deliverance has *not yet* actually come. He has peace (vv. 5–6), but Absalom & Co. are still on the loose, wanting to spill his blood and pilfer his kingdom. And yet he is sure of deliverance. I've translated the verbs of verse 7b as futures. However, these Hebrew verbs are really what Anglos would call 'past' tenses. I think this is what David is doing: he is so certain of rescue that he describes it as already having taken place (past), even though, strictly speaking, it is yet future (hence my translation).

But this leads to a problem. There are some who always get upset when we get into parts of a psalm like this. Notice the violent imagery of verse 7b: 'for you shall strike all my enemies on the jaw, you shall shatter the teeth of the wicked.' Some get bent out of shape because the enemies are going to need an orthodontist. These people are nervous because this prayer asks God to get violent. Remember the hymn some churches sing: 'For not with swords loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums; with deeds of love and mercy the heavenly

kingdom comes.' Shall we pass the hand cream? And some are disturbed because David seems so vengeful—another woeful example of those crude Old Testament saints, they say. But he's not vengeful—clearly, in this prayer, he is committing vengeance to God and asking him for deliverance. But you must understand something here: if David is going to be 'saved' in this situation, then God will have to bring down those who oppose his chosen king. There can be no safety for David unless his enemies are eliminated.

Some months ago I ran across a clip in *WORLD* magazine about Bessy. Bessy is/was a Burmese python that accidentally was set loose in an Idaho apartment complex. A posse of plumbers was called in to find the 8-foot reptile among the walls and pipes of the 57,000-square-foot complex. They found Bessy loitering in the ceiling in the apartment below her proper 'home.' For two weeks residents had been nervously checking beneath beds and under sheets for the huge snake. After hearing the news of Bessy's discovery one resident confessed, 'We'll definitely sleep better.' No mystery there. Until the threat is removed, it's hard to feel secure.

That is the way it is with David's situation. Only his enemies are worse than a pet python. For David to have 'salvation' his enemies must be destroyed. He can have no lasting security unless that is so. You find the same kind of thing in the New Testament. Look at that prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9–10—it is not a nice prayer but recognizes that if God's servants are to ever be vindicated those who crush them must be liquidated and judged. All this to say that, biblically, *'salvation' can be a nasty piece of work.*

But let's note what David is wanting here when he asks for God to 'save' him (v. 7a) and confesses that 'salvation' is Yahweh's forte (v. 8). The salvation David speaks of here is a broad sort of thing—it includes deliverance from the clutches of Absalom. So salvation in this text is not limited to what we sometimes mean by it when we use it as almost synonymous with justification or entering the kingdom of God. Here it clearly included physical deliverance, the way God repeatedly acts for us in the crises and nasty times of life. We should not make too much of this, but neither should we make too little of it.

I remember my week at Bible camp when I was ten or twelve years old. The counselor for our cabin was 'Uncle Amos,' a minister who was spending his week at camp caring for his bunch of 'boys.' After lights were out one night and we were all in our bunks, we were talking there in the dark. Uncle Amos was inquiring of us whether we had been 'saved.' One of the lads answered that Jesus had saved him, because one time he and a friend were walking down the side of the road and a driver careened off the road into the ditch but didn't hit the two boys. Jesus had surely 'saved' him. Now I wasn't very brilliant but I do remember thinking to myself, 'That's not what Uncle Amos wants to hear! He means something much different by "saved"!' I'm sure I was right about Uncle Amos, but that kid may have known more about salvation than I! There is a sense in which Yahweh saves you again and again in your troubles and dangers. Some of you can point to having been 'saved' in that sense even this

last week. We shouldn't forget this sense of 'salvation.' Maybe some of us are in arrears in the gratitude department if we haven't been remembering this.

'Upon your people (be) your blessing.' The psalm ends with a benediction. It's as if David said, 'Lord, it's not just my emergency, my fear, my enemies—but these situations are the lot of your people; let your blessing, your saving help also flow to them in their troubles.' And isn't David 'spot on'? Aren't there any number of you who come dragging your anxieties and your troubles into these pews and up to the Lord's table because you want to talk with Jesus about them?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, [\*Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life: Psalms 1–12\*](#) (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 39–48.