

Psalm 3

Office of Readings Sunday Week 1

This is a psalm of trust in YHWH who can be relied on to come to the aid of those who cry to him. The title reads: ‘A Psalm* of David, when he fled from his son Absalom’. As explained in the article ‘Psalm’ in the Introduction, calling this prayer a ‘psalm’ indicates that it is to be accompanied by musical instruments. Those responsible for compiling the psalms are suggesting that as we sing we reflect on the story of David and Absalom as found in 2Samuel 14:25 - 19:4.

**¹O YHWH*, how
many are my foes!
How many are ris-
ing up against me.**

**²How many are
saying to me* :**

**‘No saving help*
will come for you
from God’.**

[Selah*]

**³But you, YHWH,
are a shield around
me, my glory*. You
lift up my head.**

Hemmed in by enemies, there is no way out and seemingly no hope. The abuse flung at the psalmist reminds us of the Book of Wisdom:

If the righteous man is God’s child, God will help him,
and will deliver him from the hands of his adversaries.

Let us test him ... and find out how gentle he is ...

Let us condemn him to a painful death,

for, according to what he says, he will be protected.

– Wisdom 2:18-20

We recall the abuse cast at Jesus on Calvary:

He trusts in God; let God save him now, if he wants to; for he
said, I am God’s Son.

– Matthew 27:43

His enemies are ‘rising up’ against him. Later, he pleads for God to ‘rise up’(verse seven). ‘Me’ in verse two translate the Hebrew *nepeš*. The special nuances of *nepeš* are explained in the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction. They are attacking him at the very core of his longing for life. ‘Saving help’ (see the article in the Introduction) translates the Hebrew *yešû‘â* [יִשׁוּעָה, יִשׁוּעַ]. The focus is not on God protecting us from having to contend with evil, but on God being there with us, bringing us through it safely. The idea is repeated in verses seven and eight.

‘Selah’ seems to indicate a musical interlude. See the article in the Introduction.

The ‘you’ here is emphatic. The psalmist knows in whom he places his trust. It is YHWH, who is always present bringing his powerful love to bear in every situation. God is our protector. God is the one who gives meaning to our life, the one in whom we boast. It is God who makes it possible for us to stand erect, confident in victory. He speaks of YHWH as his ‘glory’, for the splendour of God’s loving power is manifest in the history of Israel and in the psalmist’s own life. See the article ‘Glory’ in the Introduction.

YHWH always hears those who cry out to him in their need, and the psalmist is confident that the cry is never in vain. YHWH will respond. We are reminded of the words of Jesus:

Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

– Luke 11:9-10

The holy mountain is Jerusalem where God dwells in the temple.

What a symbol of trust! With aggressive enemies on every side, he can still rest peacefully and wake up confident in YHWH's protection. The 'I' is emphatic, balancing the 'you' of verse three. 'It is because *you* protect me that *I* can rest peacefully'. We recall Jesus' words about not worrying when we are under attack (Matthew 10:19). We recall, too, Jesus' faith that he would be raised to life 'on the third day' (Luke 9:22), and the confidence with which he handed his spirit over to his Father from the cross (Luke 23:46).

The psalmist is not afraid. Compare the following:

My enemies are pursuing me
With no respite they attack me and trample me down ...
When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.
Thanks be to God. I praise God and his promise.
I trust in God and am not afraid; what can flesh do to me?

– Psalm 56:2-4

Many enemies are rising up against the psalmist (verse one). He cries out to God the Saviour to rise up on his side! They are claiming that there is no god to help him (verse two). They are wrong! We met the noun 'saving help' in verse two. Here we have the verb [Hebrew *hōšîa*, הוֹשִׁיעַ]. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures there is a prevailing assumption that the enemies of Israel are necessarily the enemies of Israel's God. It took Jesus to change this conception, and to tell us to be like God, our Father, in loving our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

On the 'irreligious' (Hebrew *rāša*) see Psalm 1.

**⁴When I cry out to you,
YHWH, you answer me
from your holy moun-
tain.**

[Selah*]

**⁵I lie down to rest, and I
sleep; I wake up again,
for YHWH sustains me.**

**⁶I am not afraid of the
vast army that is ranged
against me on every
side.**

**⁷Rise up, YHWH! Save*
me, O my God!
For you strike all my
enemies. You break the
teeth of the irreligious.**

⁸Saving help* is from you, YHWH.

For the third time in this brief psalm we hear of God's saving help. The central conviction behind this psalm is that we can trust God to come to our aid when we cry to him. YHWH can be relied on to be present with faithful and all-powerful love and to save all who cry to him in their distress. Compare the following:

Only in God can my soul find rest;
in Him is my hope.
He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress;
I shall not be shaken.
In God is my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock. My refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.

– Psalm 62:5-8

‘Truly in YHWH our God is the salvation of Israel.

– Jeremiah 3:23

Your blessing* is for your people!

[Selah*]

It is fitting that a psalm which celebrates God's loving presence and activity in favour of those who appeal to him should end with a cry of assurance in YHWH's blessing of his chosen people.

Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge that they are
a people whom YHWH has blessed.

– Isaiah 61:9

God's 'blessing' is seen in the outpouring of God's favour. See the article 'Bless' in the Introduction.