

David Calls on God for Help

Psalms 3 & 4

Psalm 3

Psalm 3 - *“Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God.” Selah*

But You, O Lord, are a shield for me; My glory and the One who lifts up my head.

I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah

I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah”

Background Notes for Psalm 3

In both Psalms 3 & 4, David was in distress, and he called on God for help. Knowing that God hears and cares, he gained courage and comfort - and he could sleep in peace. The title states that King David wrote Psalm 3 when his son Absalom usurped the throne, and David had to flee from Jerusalem. *“Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, “What city are you from?” And he would say, “Your servant is from such and such a tribe of Israel.” Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.” And Absalom would say, “Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice.”*

And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Now a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.” So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom” (2 Samuel 15:1-14). So David and his company fled from Jerusalem down through the Judean wilderness and across the Jordan River. Here they waited and prepared for Absalom’s army to attack.

The term *“Selah”* is used three times in Psalm 3 (at the end of verses 2, 4 and 8). *Selah* is a technical term that is used 71 times in the Psalms. We don’t know the exact meaning, but it probably means “pause and reflect on what’s been written.” Possibly *selah* indicates a musical interlude to be inserted when the psalm was sung or put to music.

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 3

Believers can sleep in peace because the Lord is their shield.

“But you, O Lord, are a shield for me” (v1), and “I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me” (v5). David was able to sleep in peace in spite of opposition and overwhelming odds, because he knew the Lord was his shield and protection.

Verse 1 indicates that there was a threat of increasing adversaries, as Absalom gathered all Israel against David. *“Lord how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they are they who rise up against me” (v1).* David was taunted as well as threatened: *“Many are they who say of me, ‘There is no help for him in God’” (v2).* They said that God was not on David’s side any longer because he was in trouble.

Does this sound familiar? How often do people say something like that about Christians when something unfortunate takes place in that Christian’s life? “God must be punishing them for sin!” What should you do when this happens to you? (And it will!) You must turn to the Lord as your shield of protection.

David facing threats and taunts, and literally thousands of armed men under Absalom were advancing to surround him. *“I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around” (v6).*

But David was able to sleep in peace, because he knew that the Lord was his shield. And the Lord did indeed protect him! God gave David the victory: *“The battle was in the woods of Ephraim. The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day, for the battle was scattered over the face of the whole countryside. And the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured” (2 Samuel 18:6-8).*

David looked to the Lord as his shield and his protection - and so should we! Believers can sleep in peace because the Lord is their shield.

Practical Application for Psalm 3

Let the Lord take revenge!

“Arise, O Lord; Save me, O my God! For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly” (v7). This is strong and bold language, but it emphasizes that David was confident that the Lord would deal with the enemy - completely! He could let the Lord take revenge while he slept in peace.

Salvation and deliverance belongs to Lord - not us! Romans 12:19 says that we should never take our own revenge, because vengeance belongs to the Lord. He will repay the opposition and bring blessing to us, as verse 8 says, *“Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah.”* Let the Lord take revenge!

Psalm 4

Psalm 4 - *“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress. Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer. How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood? Selah But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly. The Lord will hear when I call to Him.*

Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.

There are many who say, “Who will show us any good?”

Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that grain and wine increase.

I will lie down in peace and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Background Notes for Psalm 4

The title states that David was the author of Psalm 4. The title also says, *“For the director of music. With stringed instruments.”* When this psalm was put to music, stringed instruments were to be used - not loud trumpets and cymbals. Two *“Selahs”* were placed in this psalm, at the end of verses 2 and 4. *Selah* means “pause and reflect,” and it probably indicates a musical interlude that would be inserted when the stringed instruments were playing.

Like Psalm 3, Psalm 4 is an individual “lament” psalm. David was calling on the Lord for help from distress: “Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress. Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer.”

Bible students have recognized that Psalms 3 and 4 are closely related, in both content and structure. Many scholars believe that both of these psalms were written when David was fleeing from Absalom. Many in Israel had joined Absalom’s rebellion. If so, the verses that are addressed to the “opposition” make complete sense.

Notice that the “opposition” here is not a pagan nation that was attacking David and the kingdom of Israel. No. It seems that the opposition was from within the kingdom, and in the psalm David was exhorting them to change their ways and their minds, and realize that he, not Absalom, was God’s anointed king. *“How long, O you sons of men, will you turn my*

glory to shame? How long will you love worthlessness and seek falsehood? Selah. But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly. The Lord will hear when I call to Him” (v2-3).

David exhorted those who opposed him to stop sinning, and rather be angry for righteous causes: *“Be angry, and do not sin” (v4).* This verse is quoted in Ephesians 4:26. David encouraged the opposition to think through the situation as they lay quietly on their beds - and then to turn back to the Lord and offer sacrifices of righteousness: *“Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord” (v4-5).*

Doctrinal Point for Psalm 4

Believers can sleep in peace because the Lord is their security.

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (v8). David was able to sleep in the midst of rebellion and opposition - because the Lord was his security! Even those who were loyal to David were complaining, and saying discouraging things, such as “No one will help us.” Do you have any friends like that? They always picture the worst scenario! Why can't they take their eyes off themselves, and off fear of the opposition, and learn to look to the Lord alone for security? Then they would be able to sleep in peace!

Believers can sleep in peace, because the Lord is their security.

Practical Application for Psalm 4

Give me “God’s gladness rather than gain”!

In verse 7 David said, *“You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that grain and wine increase.”* Even in the midst of severe opposition, David could say that the gladness and joy he experienced from the Lord was greater and better than the gladness one experiences after a great harvest of grain and wine. Better than prosperity and money in your bank account!

If you had your choice, what would you take - God’s gladness in your heart, or the thrill of becoming wealthy? (And you can only choose one, not both - God’s gladness, or sudden wealth!) Like David, are you able to say - “Give me God’s gladness rather than gain”?