

## Psalm 3 Who is taking care of You?

### Introduction

What an extraordinary day it had been as David and those accompanied with him fled like a long line of refugees from the city of Jerusalem down the steep hillside heading towards the Jordan valley and its well-known river. The city is incredibly tense and quiet as people weight up their options to stay or to flee. Time is of the essence as Absalom and his supporters would soon arrive. How would they treat any remaining citizens? Who would be trusted to support the new regime or who would be suspected of deeper sympathies for the aged David? Was it time for the old man to step down and let his middle-aged son take the throne? David although weak in body as the ageing processes cannot be delayed for ever is still as 'sharp as a pin' in his mind. He knows that his only hope of survival or even of regaining his throne is to escape across the Jordan River. But the weather is hot and twenty miles of walking through mostly desert-like terrain with what people could carry means slower progress than was ideal, especially as children and the elderly are part of the departing group. Up to the Mount of Olives and then as the old city fades from view they start to go downhill on the road to exile. How long will they be away from home? It is good for a short break or even the pleasure of a week or more on holiday, but as an asylum seeker –which is what David and his companions surely were on this occasion – there had to be the nagging though that there was a chance they might never come home. It is easy to sense the deep emotions felt that day as sadly so many refugees from around the world have experienced in recent years. If Absalom sent a special-forces group to seize the river crossings then they were in deep trouble. But what would he do? Would he seek to consolidate control over the capital city and the surrounding area first or would he seek to capture and possibly execute his father so that there was no going back to the way things had been before? We don't need to try and imagine what was going on here as the fairly full account is recorded in II Samuel 15-19. The moment of drama is recorded in II Samuel 15:13-14: *A messenger came and told David, 'The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.'* <sup>14</sup> *Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, 'Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.'* David had a small retinue of guards who provided personal security for himself and others in the government, but it was not a standing army as such. The numbers whose entire living came from serving in the armed forces was probably in the relatively low thousands. In addition, many of these troops were foreign nationals who had no vested interest in taking over the country. This was a deliberate security policy followed by many Governments over the centuries. At that very time a Philistine detachment of troops employed by David, six hundred men strong, appear with their commander Ittai the Gittite. Would they and their families think it was an appropriate time to make their excuses and leave for home? Could anyone have blamed them had they made that choice? It is when we are under the most severe pressure that we learn so much about ourselves and about other people. There are those individuals whose courage and bravery in the deepest of trials inspires us to overcome our smaller challenges, but we also sadly have to admit that other people of whom we expected so much more crumble and fall in these kinds of contexts. The words of Ittai the commander in response to David's offer of being released from their terms of service are very special indeed. *But Ittai replied to the king, 'As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.'* (II Samuel 15:21). His oath includes the divine name of the God of Israel – had this heathen man seen something of a good witness for his faith in David? We will never know for definite what motivated Ittai to be so loyal, but his declaration of support may

humanly-speaking have been a decisive moment that day. We cannot say for certain when David wrote this Psalm but I suspect it was within days of the events described when his emotions were still extremely fresh and the memories of what he and others had gone through were painful indeed. How did David reflect on that situation and how might we in the particular life situations we face?

### 1. The pressure exerted by David's foes (Psalm 3:1-2)

(a) **Their increase** (Psalm 3:1a) <sup>1</sup>*Lord, how many are my foes!* II Samuel 15:13-14: *A messenger came and told David, 'The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.'* All of us have had times in our lives when we have felt overwhelmed. The emotions just come over us and we cannot but feel incapable of handling whatever circumstances are in front of us. It may be that in the worst case scenario they might indeed be that bad, but like me you will have had times where a good night's sleep has allowed our minds to be refreshed and our emotions calmed and then we are able to gain a sense of perspective. At that point we can start to see actions that can be taken to help us go forward with what lies before us. This is the hardest part of the situation seeking to get a clear picture of what is going on before seeking to process it so that we can organise a plan of action. It is so impressive that David despite his advanced years is able to keep his mind focussed on the task in hand. In life all of us will have our disappointments and setbacks with health issues, work and family challenges and bereavements, together with supporting other people through a varied mix of their life situations. In these situations it is a privilege and an assurance to know that we can rely on the Lord to sustain and uphold us through these times. *Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.* <sup>2</sup>*I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'* <sup>3</sup>*Surely He will save you...* (Psalm 91:1-3a). I hope each one of us have the Lord as our Rock on whom we can depend in the ups and downs of life.

(b) **Their insurrection** (Psalm 3:1b-2) *How many rise up against me!* <sup>2</sup>*Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him.'* It is in the hard times of life that we find out who our best friends are. We may also learn a lot about ourselves at well at such times. David had made some major mistakes in his life not least over the adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of his husband Uriah to cover up his actions. What is significant is that it was in a time of ease that David made his mistakes (II Samuel 11:1). How many people who are magnificent in times of hardship let their standards and values slip when all is going well? David was outstanding at crisis management as he was to prove here. He had an unwavering faith in God's love and mercy and that relationship with the Lord was one that rightly is admired down the centuries and from which we have the majority of the Book of Psalms. It was that deep relationship in which his security was based on his Lord and Saviour that enabled him to keep going time and again when the odds were stacked against him. David quickly sized up the situation and knew he had to flee. To stay in the city presented Absalom and his supporters with an easy target. Years on the run from Saul had proved to David how to react in times of great danger. It was therefore, no surprise that he gave the order to evacuate the city.<sup>14</sup> *Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, 'Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.'* (II Samuel 15:14). Yet not everyone was asked to leave. Zadok and the priests on duty were asked to remain at their posts but provide some younger men to serve as intelligence officers to report to David what Absalom and his men were doing. The biggest challenge was how to nullify the influence of David's chief adviser Ahithophel who had gone over to Absalom. The reason for it was that he was Bathsheba's grandfather and had felt betrayed with what David had done to his family

—and in fairness with good reason. The one option open to David was to ask his best friend Hushai who was also a gifted military strategist to return to the city and contradict whatever advice Ahithophel gave to Absalom. It was the masterstroke that even at this early stage ensured that David would survive and regain his throne. David himself would not know that for a few weeks possibly, but looking back with hindsight we can see how God worked to protect His servant David. Often in times of serious difficulty we cry out to the Lord and expect our deliverance to come in particular ways, yet how often it turns out to be a different person that aids us or a different means of assistance is provided.

(c) **Their inference** On the way out of the city boundary heading out into the Judean countryside a relative of King Saul called Shimei appeared to pass comment on the sight before him. His words are recorded in II Samuel 16:5-8. <sup>5</sup> *As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out.* <sup>6</sup> *He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left.* <sup>7</sup> *As he cursed, Shimei said, 'Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel!'* <sup>8</sup> *The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!* The specific charges were false David had never sought to kill Saul or any members of his immediate family. In fact he was scrupulously fair and honourable in all his dealings with them. Otherwise Mephiboshesh, the lame son of Jonathan and his steward Ziba (II Samuel 16:1-4; II Samuel 19:24-30) would not have sought the favour of David at that time, even if Ziba had another agenda as his primary motivation. David declined to allow any of his soldiers to kill Shimei because he knew that the words spoken were true- but not the specific example given by his accuser. David knew that God had been displeased by his sin over Uriah and Bathsheba and although the matter was forgiven there were inevitable consequences that followed within his own household. There are people that will say to you and me –I did [x] ...and God didn't punish me or strike me down for it... so how can there be a God? In such situations forgetting the grace and mercy of God to undeserving sinners; what was particularly important was that David had grasped the gospel of grace that God's love is shown to undeserving sinners, not to those who are good enough to merit it! We too need to grasp that with both humility and gratitude.

## 2. **The protection provided by David's God** (Psalm 3:3-4)

(a) **God is my shield** (Psalm 3:3a) *But You, Lord, are a shield around me, God you are my protector. You care for me when other people may think –doesn't he deserve it? I won't give a hand! In Psalm 27:7-10 David makes this point at a time when he was in another crisis situation. Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me.* <sup>8</sup> *My heart says of You, 'Seek His face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek.* <sup>9</sup> *Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Saviour.* <sup>10</sup> *Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.* David's parents never forsook him as far as I can tell. These words were a hypothetical example – even if this happened – God will never abandon me. In Psalm 34:6-7 during an earlier crisis when he was on the run from Saul, David while in Philistine territory was delivered by God. His autobiographical statement is most encouraging to us: *This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles.* <sup>7</sup> *The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them.* What a wonderful assurance! I hope you and I can share it as well in our lives.

(b) **God is my glory** (Psalm 3:3b) *...my glory*, at that moment in time David was humiliated for all the world to see. Around the world just now in how many places are Christians treated

as an underclass in countries like Pakistan? In how many countries just now are Islamist or Communist inspired regimes or terrorist groups behaving abominably towards them? It feels like a growing number of them. Yet David can see beyond his present trials to future glory whether it be in this life or beyond it. David would leave Jerusalem weeping and barefooted (II Samuel 15:30), but later would come times of joy. Remember Paul's words in the last surviving letter to Timothy before he was martyred for his faith. *Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, **with eternal glory.** <sup>11</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with Him* (II Timothy 2:8-12a). Many people will receive all kinds of honours in this life for things they have done –and may richly deserve them too! However, as Christians what matters is being on God's honours list of those who are welcomed into His eternal kingdom for faithful service rendered here on earth.

(c) **God is my uplifter** (Psalm 3:3c) ... *the One who lifts my head high.* The evil one will take pleasure in pointing out our inadequacies and failures. He need not say anything untrue because the list of all the thoughts that are inappropriate, words that were unwise or unsaid, and deeds that ought to have been so different for me would be long; when you know your own heart each one of us is acutely aware of our shortcomings. However, we are not saved because we are good enough but because Jesus was good enough to die in our place on the cross as our sin-bearer and substitute. God knows exactly what I am like in my inner being –but through Jesus He has chosen to welcome me into His family for ever! Hallelujah what a Saviour. David, although living before the time of Jesus, yet had grasped the truth of the graciousness of God towards undeserving sinners. Therefore, his words of testimony, for example in Psalm 40:1-3 are so encouraging and powerful to us as we read them. *I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup> He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. <sup>3</sup> He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in Him.*

(d) **God is my sanctuary** (Psalm 3:4) *I call out to the Lord, and He answers me from His holy mountain.* David's capital city was a fortress, a sanctuary that was exceedingly difficult to capture. He was in human terms incredibly vulnerable crossing the desert as a member of a fleeing and frightened group of people. However, his security was not in the things he possessed but in the Lord He loved and served. Where is your security and mine? Could you and I give the same answer as David here?

### 3. **The peacefulness experienced during David's sleep** (Psalm 3:5-6)

(a) **His confidence** (Psalm 3:5a) *I lie down and sleep;* It was because his security was in God that he could have the confidence to lay down and sleep that first night. It was not simply sheer exhaustion that brought about his sleep – though undoubtedly he was exhausted with the exertions of the day. The gift of sleep is so precious to us. But we do take it for granted. We only truly appreciate it when on those rare nights we struggle to sleep, we long for it, and if it doesn't arrive we can feel very weary. There is here a real practical issue in our prayer life of being able to bring things to the Lord and leave them with Him. Paul's words in Philippians 4:6-7 are so applicable here: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.<sup>7</sup> And **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** May that continue to be our experience as followers of Jesus.*

(b) **His trust** (Psalm 3:5b) *I wake again, because the Lord sustains me.* God promises each one of us only the strength we need for one day at a time. It is a battle that we may have to fight daily. Jesus addressed this issue in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?... But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own* (Matthew 6:25-27, 33-34). May God the Holy Spirit enable us to live this way in His resources.

(c) **His fearlessness** (Psalm 3:6) *I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.* This is not a reckless arrogance advocated here or the thought processes of a person under the influence of alcohol or drugs! What is being stated here is that in life there are innumerable what ifs'... Most of them will never cross my path – praise God for that! However, I can lose my enjoyment of life and my sense of perspective if I do not consciously release the pressures of life onto the Lord. In II Kings 18-19 there is the account where the Assyrian emissary is attempting to undermine Jewish King Hezekiah's confidence in God. In fact he wanted to destroy the nation's confidence in their God. The Assyrian field commander said these words: *'Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, "The Lord will deliver us." <sup>33</sup> Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? <sup>34</sup> Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? <sup>35</sup> Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'* (II Kings 18:32b-35). Hezekiah and the people remained silent. Why? Not because there were no appropriate words to use in the context, but because a line had been crossed here by this arrogant official. Their confidence in God enabled them despite their concerns to have an over-riding confidence in God. God would take care of the tens of thousands of Assyrian soldiers (II Kings 19:35-36) –and He did! God will be at work in the circumstances in which we find ourselves this week, this month, this year and into the future. We rightly revere Him so that we are not overcome with fear of other people and what they might think of us or do to us.

#### 4. **The petition that came from David's heart** (Psalm 3:7-8)

(a) **His appeal for himself** (Psalm 3:7) *Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.* The wording here makes us as Christians feel uncomfortable. It doesn't seem very Christ-like to pray for someone to get a good beating! What is David actually praying for here? After all when it comes to the inevitable military battle with Absalom and his forces the aged king ordered his senior military commanders to spare Absalom's life (II Samuel 18:12b). It was in the context a foolish request because while Absalom was still alive the civil war would continue and a lot more people might potentially die. Yet David's heart was not looking for bloodshed he wanted a reconciliation with his erring son. What he was appealing for was a disarming of the enemy so that they had no weapons to cause harm using the picture of a wild animal. A lion or bear with no teeth would be struggling to capture and kill its prey. It is a wartime situation and there would be the inevitable innocent people suffering in the conflict. Yet David wants it over with as quick as possible. His request is actually a legitimate one in this conflict. Lord please resolve this conflict situation which I am facing by doing what is necessary to bring it about. His requests and ours in such situations are appropriate when we bring them to the

Lord. Remember Paul's words in Romans 12:17-21: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* <sup>18</sup> *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* <sup>19</sup> *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.* <sup>20</sup> *On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'* <sup>21</sup> ***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*** May God give us the strength to do that.

(b) **His application to other believers** (Psalm 3:8) *From the Lord comes deliverance. May Your blessing be on Your people.* The civil war was just beginning and David and his companions were camped out on the other side of the Jordan River. Yet this promise would be true. Different people came to assist them with the things they needed from food to bedding and there would be a rebuilding of their confidence in how things would work out for them to go back to their homes and get on with their lives again as before. For us as Christians our deliverance is sometimes our home-call to glory. We will not see death as a failure but an opportunity for the follower of Jesus to enter into the greater future which Jesus has prepared for us. John 14:1-4 states: *'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me.* <sup>2</sup> *My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there **to prepare a place for you?*** <sup>3</sup> *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.* <sup>4</sup> *You know the way to the place where I am going.'* This is the future prepared for you –if you have put your trust in Jesus? If you haven't done it yet then please do so without delay! Yet in God's goodness the deliverance or blessings might also be in this life, but whichever way God sends His deliverance may we trust Him with confidence for the future He has prepared for us, Amen