

Psalm 3: Shadows of the Resurrection

Expository Lessons from the Psalms

I. Introduction to Psalm 3

a. Read **Psalm 3**.

i. A few immediate observations and comments:

1. This **Psalm** gets very little attention today and is generally overlooked. It is much less well known than the first two **Psalms**, which precede it. However, there are some wonderful things hidden in **Psalm 3**; things that were better appreciated by early Christians.
2. This **Psalm** was written by David and addresses the time that he was fleeing Jerusalem from his son Absalom, who had seized the throne.
3. This **Psalm** is not nearly as well known by Christians today as the first two **Psalms**.
 - a. You might be surprised to see how many of the early Christian writers quoted this **Psalm** in connection with one particular verse that is commonly overlooked today.
 - i. I am not aware of anywhere in the New Testament where this verse is directly quoted. However, it may well be alluded to in a few places.
4. In the OSB translation from which I am reading, which is based on the LXX, there are two places where it says "Pause".
 - a. In the NKJV, it says "Selah". The meaning of that Hebrew word is debated.
 - b. In the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), it translates this term: "Interlude on Strings".

- b. Early Christians saw three levels to consider when reviewing a passage from the Old Testament. Not all Old Testament passages and stories have all three of these levels. Some passages only have meaning on one or two of the three levels. The three levels are:

- i. **Level 1:** The basic storyline: what was happening, to whom, why, etc. This covers the facts of the passage/story.
- ii. **Level 2:** Moral lessons we can learn from the story.
- iii. **Level 3:** Foreshadowing type prophecies about important things to come, especially regarding Jesus.

II. Level One: Understanding the Story Behind Psalm 3

- i. To appreciate what was going on in the background of **Psalm 3** and the motivation for writing this, we should *read the story behind it*.
 - 1. For example, the backdrop for **Psalm 51** (designated **Psalm 50** in the LXX), the famous prayer of repentance where David speaks about his own sinfulness and God's mercy, is the sins David had just committed involving Bathsheba.
 - 2. We can better appreciate what David is saying in **Psalm 51** if we read the story behind it, found in **2 Samuel 11-12**.
 - 3. In the same way, I believe we can better appreciate **Psalm 3** if we stop to consider the story behind it.
- ii. This tragic story is found in **2 Samuel 13-19** (designated **2 Kingdoms 13-19** in the LXX).
 - 1. David had multiple wives. His oldest son was Amnon, by Ahinoam. His third oldest son was Absalom, by Maacah. (**2 Samuel 3:2-3**)
 - 2. Tamar was the beautiful young virgin sister of Absalom by the same mother. She was, therefore, the half-sister of Amnon. (**2 Samuel 13:1-2**)
 - 3. Amnon was obsessed with desire for his half-sister Tamar, sets up a trap, and rapes her. After doing that, he hates her, rejects her and casts her from himself in disgrace and shame.
 - 4. Absalom takes in his violated sister and cares for her as she lives the rest of her life in mourning, like a widow.
 - 5. King David becomes aware of this, is angry, but does nothing to discipline his beloved first-born son, Amnon. However, Absalom hates his brother for the terrible thing he did and plots to kill him.

6. After having Amnon killed, Absalom flees and goes into exile. He returns, and then after two years is reconciled with his father David. (**2 Samuel 14**)
7. Absalom treacherously wins people over to himself, plots treason against David, seizing the throne. David flees Jerusalem with some of his supporters.
 - a. Read **2 Samuel 14:25-27** (designated **2 Kingdoms** in the LXX).
 - i. Absalom was good-looking and very popular.
 - ii. Later in Scripture, it says that Absalom's daughter marries Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. She then gives birth to Abijah, one of the kings of Judah, from whom Jesus is descended (**Matthew 1:7**).
 1. While it may seem peculiar to us, Absalom, the great usurper, was *one of the ancestors of Jesus*.
 2. This to me is one more reminder that God, in His sovereignty, can use even the most wicked to bring about His purposes in the end.
 - b. Read **2 Samuel 15:1-18**.
 - i. Absalom wins over the hearts of the people and has himself proclaimed king.
 - ii. David flees Jerusalem on foot with his closest supporters.
8. David departs Jerusalem by a route that touches on places that will take on great significance in the future (1,000 years later).
 - a. Read **2 Samuel 15:22-23**.
 - i. He crosses the *Brook Kidron*.
 - ii. **Question:** Is this particular brook mentioned anywhere in the New Testament?
 1. "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the *Brook Kidron*, where there was a garden,

which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples.” (**John 18:1-2**, NKJV)

b. Read **2 Samuel 15:30-32**.

- i. David ascends the *Mount of Olives* weeping and worships God at the top of the mountain.
- ii. **Question:** Does this incident remind you of anything in the New Testament?
 1. While **John’s gospel** mentions Jesus and His disciples crossing the Brook Kidron to pray the night before He was crucified, in **Matthew, Mark** and **Luke** it says he ascended the *Mount of Olives*, to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 2. “Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’ And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.’ Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.” (**Luke 22:39-45**, NKJV)
- iii. Note the parallels between David and Jesus. Is this just a coincidence, or is it a deliberate foreshadowing? What do you think?
 1. Both cross the Brook Kidron and ascend the Mount of Olives in a time of great distress.

2. Both are in great sorrow and pray on that mountain.
 3. Let us consider if there may be more potential parallels.
9. David is shamed publicly.
 - a. Read **2 Samuel 16:5-14**.
 - i. Shimei curses David and throws stones at him and his men.
 1. He resents the fact that David had assumed the throne and taken it from the line of Saul.
 - ii. David takes the abuse without retaliating.
 - b. Read **2 Samuel 16:15-17:4**.
 - i. Absalom dishonors his father by sleeping with David's concubines in the sight of all Israel.
 - ii. Absalom initially agrees to have his father David murdered.
 1. However, he is persuaded to delay that plan, so that he can gather up a larger army for the task.
10. In the end, Absalom dies and David mourns the death of his son.
- b. Read **Psalm 3** (again, now that we have been reminded of the story behind it).
 - i. **Question:** Is David asking God to protect him. Was David innocent here, or was he getting the punishment that was due him for something wrong (sinful) he did? Are his hands clean here?
 - ii. This certainly is a tragic story. Absalom was a very treacherous person, who was deceitful and wrongly plotted to murder his father, the rightful king.
 - iii. However, the full story of Absalom's treachery and rebellion actually begins in **2 Samuel 12-13**: with the story of David committing adultery with Bathsheba, covering it up, and then having her husband Uriah murdered.

1. Read **2 Samuel 12:1-14**.

- a. David was forgiven for the terrible sins he committed. This is marked by the famous prayer of David for God's mercy in **Psalm 51**.
- b. However, the sins he committed had long-lasting consequences that would come to pass over time.
 - i. David's sin: lust, leading to adultery, leading to deceit and murder.
 - ii. The sin of David's household (specifically his son Absalom): lust leading to sexual immorality, leading to murder. As David took another man's wife, so his own wives would be taken by another. The consequence of David's sin ends up causing massive damage to David's family and to his kingdom.

III. Level 2 – Moral Lesson for Us

- a. God is merciful and willing to forgive our sins when we turn back to Him and repent. However, sins we commit (or committed in the past) can have long-lasting consequences.
 - i. Perhaps David was aware at some level that he was being humbled by God, as Nathan said would happen, as a result of his own sin.
 - 1. That may be why he did not have Shimei struck down when he was cursing David.
 - ii. This should sober us when we are tempted to go after some short-term pleasure offered by sin. It will damage our character and cause problems for us later, even if we repent and can be forgiven by God.
- b. Second, David did not discipline his first-born son Amnon for the wickedness he did toward his sister.
 - i. Parents who refuse to discipline their children will cause all sorts of problems for their offspring. Don't be a permissive parent who, out of sentimental affection, refuses to discipline a child who sins. This is similar to the destruction caused by Eli neglecting to restrain his sons, in **1 Samuel 2-4** and in the story of David and Amnon here.
- c. Third, God did protect and restore David from the plot of his wicked son, Absalom. He did hear David's prayer and delivered him in the end.

- i. God will also hear and deliver us if we return to Him, no matter what sin we have committed.

IV. Level Three – Possible Foreshadowings?

- a. **Question:** Do we find any potential parallels between the story of David (in **2 Samuel 12-13**) and the life of Jesus?
 - i. A king established by God is rejected by his own people.
 - ii. He is shamed and publicly humiliated. However, in his humility he did not resist.
 - 1. Think of Jesus: the robe, crown of thorns, and mocking shouts of, 'Hail, King of the Jews'.
 - iii. He crossed over the Brook Kidron and ascended the Mount of Olives to pray in anguish.
 - iv. A highly popular liar and usurper tried to dethrone and kill him, pretending to be the true friend of the people.
 - 1. In the case of Jesus, the liar and usurper was Satan.
 - v. Although things looked bleak for the rejected king, the powerful enemy would be defeated and destroyed in the end.
- b. Early Christians saw even more, specifically in **Psalm 3**, related to Jesus.
 - i. Note that in several of David's **Psalms**, where he is speaking in the first person ("*I/me*"), he is actually speaking *on behalf of the Christ*, the promised king over the eternal kingdom who would come from his own body.
 - 1. Examples of that include:
 - a. **Psalm 2:6-7.** "But I was established as King by Him"; The Lord said to Me, You are My Son..."
 - b. **Psalm 16:8-10.** "I saw the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul to Hades, nor allow Your Holy One to see corruption."
 - c. **Psalm 22.**

- i. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?” (**Psalm 22:1**, NKJV)
- ii. “All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying...” (**Psalm 22:7**, NKJV)
- iii. “For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.” (**Psalm 22:16–17**, NKJV)

d. **Psalm 69.**

- i. “Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.” (**Psalm 69:9**, NKJV)
 - ii. “Reproach has broken my heart, And I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (**Psalm 69:20–21**, NKJV)
2. Peter and Paul explain why David can speak in the first person on behalf of the Christ.
- a. In **Acts 2:25–32**, Peter explains that David, as a prophet, was speaking of the one that God promised would come “as the fruit of his own body”. Peter said that the statement by David from **Psalm 16:10** (designated **Psalm 15:10** in the LXX), “You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption...” could not possibly have applied to David himself. After all, by that time David had been dead and his body decomposing in the tomb for about 1,000 years!
 - i. Here Peter alludes to the promise made to David in **2 Samuel 7:12–16** and **1 Chronicles 17:11–14**; later confirmed in **Psalms 89** and **132** (designated **Psalms 88** and **131** in the LXX).
 - b. In **Acts 13:32–38**, Paul points back to **Isaiah 55:3** (and possibly to **Psalm 89:49–50**, designated **Psalm 88:49–**

50 in the LXX) regarding the promises made to David falling to the Christ.

3. Therefore, *whenever David is speaking in the first person ("I/me/my")* in one of his **Psalms**, we should ask the question: "Is David speaking on behalf of himself, or on behalf of the Christ (the one to come from David)?"
- c. There is one more concept for us to consider. Throughout Scripture, there is *wordplay*, where a word or phrase can be taken in more than one sense (for example, either literally or figuratively).
 - i. Some examples where Jesus was speaking figuratively, but his disciples thought he was speaking literally:
 1. "Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this *temple*, and in three days I will raise it up."" (**John 2:19**, NKJV)
 - a. Here His listeners take him *literally* (assuming He is referring to the temple building; however, He is speaking *figuratively* about His body.)
 2. "Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the *leaven* of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."" (**Matthew 16:6**, NKJV)
 - a. The disciples are confused and assume He is speaking *literally* about physical leaven or yeast, such as is found in bread. However, He is speaking *figuratively* about the sin of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.
 3. "These things He said, and after that He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.' Then His disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.' However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep." (**John 11:11-13**, NKJV)
 - a. Here Jesus uses the term "sleep" *figuratively*, to refer to death.
 - ii. Sleep is used as a metaphor for death (and waking up as a metaphor for being raised from the dead) throughout Scripture.
 1. "And many of those who *sleep in the dust of the earth* shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt." (**Daniel 12:2**, NKJV)
 2. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all *sleep*, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the

last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (**1 Corinthians 15:51–52**, NKJV)

3. “Therefore He says: ‘Awake, *you who sleep*, Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” (**Ephesians 5:14**, NKJV)
- iii. Therefore, whenever there is a reference to “sleeping/waking” we need to ask ourselves: “Does this refer to *natural* sleep and then waking up, or does it refer to death and resurrection from the dead?”
 1. Examples where early Christian writers saw Old Testament references to “sleep/waking” as referring to death and resurrection include:
 - a. The prophecy that Jacob, on his deathbed, gives to his son Judah, in **Genesis 49**. Read **Genesis 49:8-12**.
 - i. “Judah is a lion’s cub; From being a shoot, my son, you have grown up. He bows down, and *slept* as a lion and a cub; And *who shall rouse him?*” (**Genesis 49:9**, LXX, OSB)
 - ii. This is the famous prophecy about Jesus, “the lion of the tribe of Judah”, the great ruler who was to come.
 - b. The similar prophecy, regarding Israel, from Balaam’s third oracle in **Numbers 24**. Read **Numbers 24:5-9**.
 - i. “He lies down and rests like a lion, And like a lion’s cub, *who shall rouse Him?* Those who bless You are blessed, and those who curse You are cursed.” (**Numbers 24:9**, LXX, OSB)
 - iv. So, let’s put the above two concepts together and ask ourselves two questions:
 1. **Question:** In **Psalm 3**, was David referring to himself or to the Christ when he wrote “I lay down and slept, I awoke for the Lord will help me”?
 2. **Question:** When David uses the words “slept” and “awoke”, is he referring to lying down for natural sleep and then waking up (as from a nap); or is he referring to death, and resurrection from the dead?
 - d. Several early Christian writers answered these questions!

- i. “*I lay down and slept; I awoke* for the Lord will help me...” (**Psalm 3:6**, LXX, OSB)
- ii. Early Christian writers who saw this statement about “slept...awoke” in **Psalm 3:6** as referring to the death and resurrection of the Christ (who came from the body of David) include:
 1. Irenaeus (ANF vol. 1, p. 510),
 2. Justin Martyr (ANF vol. 1, pp. 175, 247)
 3. Lactantius (ANF vol. 7, p. 122),
 4. Hippolytus (ANF vol. 5, p. 206),
 5. Clement of Alexandria (ANF vol. 2, p. 469), and
 6. Cyprian (ANF vol. 5, p. 525).
- iii. Some quotes from early Christians that illustrate how they understood this statement in **Psalm 3**:
 1. From Justin Martyr, a philosopher from Samaria who converted to the Christian faith, writing c. 160 AD:
 - a. “For it was not without design that the prophet Moses, when Hur and Aaron upheld his hands, remained in this form until evening (**Exodus 17:8-15**). For indeed the Lord remained upon the tree almost until evening, and they buried Him at eventide; then on the third day He rose again. *This was declared by David thus: ‘With my voice I cried to the Lord, and He heard me out of His holy hill. I laid me down, and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me.’* (**Psalm 3:5-6**) And Isaiah likewise mentions concerning Him the manner in which He would die, thus: ‘I have spread out My hands unto a people disobedient, and gainsaying, that walk in a way which is not good.’ (**Isaiah 65:2**) And that He would rise again, Isaiah himself said: ‘His burial has been taken away from the midst, and I will give the rich for His death.’ (**Isaiah 53:9**)
 - b. “And again, in other words, David in the twenty-first Psalm thus refers to the suffering and to the cross in a parable of mystery: ‘They pierced my hands and my feet; they counted all my bones. They considered and gazed on me; they parted my garments among themselves, and cast lots upon my vesture.’ (**Psalm**

22:16-18; designated **Psalm 21:17-19** in the LXX) For when they crucified Him, driving in the nails, they pierced His hands and feet; and those who crucified Him parted His garments among themselves, each casting lots for what he chose to have, and receiving according to the decision of the lot. And this very Psalm you maintain does not refer to Christ; for you are in all respects blind, and do not understand that no one in your nation who has been called King or Christ has ever had his hands or feet pierced while alive, or has died in this mysterious fashion—to wit, by the cross—save this Jesus alone.”

- i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 97; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 247–248)
- c. “And when the Spirit of prophecy speaks from the person of Christ, the utterances are of this sort: ‘I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to those who walk in a way that is not good.’ (**Isaiah 65:2**) And again: ‘I gave My back to the scourges, and My cheeks to the buffetings; I turned not away My face from the shame of spittings; and the Lord was My helper: therefore was I not confounded: but I set My face as a firm rock; and I knew that I should not be ashamed, for He is near who justifies Me.’ (**Isaiah 50:6-8**) And again, when He says, ‘They cast lots upon My vesture, and pierced My hands and My feet.’ (**Psalm 22:18**) And ‘I lay down and slept, and rose again, because the Lord sustained Me.’ (**Psalm 3:5-6**)”
 - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 38; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 175)
- 2. From Hippolytus, an elder of the church in Rome, writing c. 200 AD:
 - a. “Now the blessed Jacob speaks to the following effect in his benedictions, testifying prophetically of our Lord and Savior: ‘Judah, let your brethren praise you: your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the shoot, my son, you have gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lion’s whelp; who shall rouse him up? A ruler shall not depart

from Judah, nor a leader from his thighs, until he come for whom it is reserved; and he shall be the expectation of the nations. Binding his ass to a vine, and his ass's colt to the vine tendril; he shall wash his garment in wine, and his clothes in the blood of the grapes. His eyes shall be gladsome as with wine, and his teeth shall be whiter than milk.' (**Genesis 49:8-12**)

- b. "Knowing, then, as I do, how to explain these things in detail, I deem it right at present to quote the words themselves. But since the expressions themselves urge us to speak of them, I shall not omit to do so. For these are truly divine and glorious things, and things well calculated to benefit the soul. The prophet, in using the expression, a lion's whelp, means him who sprang from Judah and David according to the flesh, who was not made indeed of the seed of David, but was conceived by the (power of the) Holy Ghost, and came forth from the holy shoot of earth.
- c. "For Isaiah says, 'There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall grow up out of it.' (**Isaiah 11:1**) That which is called by Isaiah a flower, Jacob calls a shoot. For first he shot forth, and then he flourished in the world. And the expression, 'he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lion's whelp,' (**Genesis 49:9**, LXX) refers to the three days' sleep (death, couching) of Christ..
- d. "And David says to the same effect, 'I laid me down (couched) and slept; I awaked: for the Lord will sustain me;' (**Psalm 3:5-6**) in which words he points to the fact of his sleep and rising again. And Jacob says, 'Who shall rouse him up?' (**Genesis 49:9**) And that is just what David and Paul both refer to, as when Paul says, 'and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.' (**Galatians 1:1**)"
 - i. (Source: Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, sections 7-8; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 206)
 - ii. Note that Hippolytus sees the question of **Genesis 49:9**, "Who will raise Him up?" as being answered definitively by Paul, centuries later, in **Galatians 1:1**. God the Father would raise Him from the dead!