

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 14,

A Petition Psalm – Psalm 3

20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everyone, welcome back. Ready for another deep dive? Always ready. Awesome.

So today we're tackling Psalm 3. Okay. But we're going beyond just reading it, you know. We're going to really dig deep into the historical context around it.

Yes, context is crucial for understanding any text, especially ancient ones like the Psalms. Think of it like this: you wouldn't jump into the middle of a movie and expect to get the whole picture right. Exactly.

So to really grasp the depth of Psalm 3, we need to understand the story behind it. Absolutely. And that story, well, let's just say it's a doozy.

We're talking family drama, betrayal, political intrigue. It's got it all. It's like a biblical soap opera, but with much higher stakes.

Okay. So first things first, the superscription of Psalm 3 tells us it was written by King David when he was fleeing from his son, Absalom. What's the deal with these superscriptions? Are they reliable or what? Good question.

A lot of modern scholars tend to dismiss these superscriptions, but they're actually like little treasure maps. They give us a peek into the historical backdrop of the Psalm. So basically, we shouldn't ignore them.

Definitely not. In this case, the superscription gives us the key to unlocking the raw emotion and depth of Psalm 3. Okay. So for those of us who need a little refresher, what exactly went down between David and Absalom? Well, imagine this.

A father, a king, forced to flee for his life from his own son who's trying to steal his throne. Oof. Talk about family drama.

And it wasn't just some petty squabble. This rebellion was rooted in a whole web of moral and spiritual failings. Adultery, murder, betrayal, even the misuse of God's name- it was a full-blown crisis.

Okay. Wow. So let's back up a bit.

Who are the key players in the story, the ones we really need to know? All right. Well, it all starts with Amnon, David's eldest son. Okay.

Now, Amnon commits a horrific act. He rapes his half-sister, Tamar. That's just awful.

I can only imagine the pain and devastation that caused. It was a terrible crime that set off a chain reaction of violence. Tamar's full brother, Absalom, decides to take matters into his own hands.

Oh no. Driven by a desire for justice, he murders Amnon to avenge his sister. So Absalom becomes both a victim and a perpetrator in this whole messed-up situation.

Exactly. He was driven by this urge for justice, but he chose this path of revenge, and ultimately it led to his own downfall. Man, this is already intense, and we haven't even gotten to the actual rebellion yet.

Right. So Absalom is exiled for murdering Amnon, but eventually he returns. And here's the thing: he's cunning, he's deceptive, he uses this vow to sacrifice at Hebron, makes it seem all innocent, but really it's a cover to rally support for his rebellion against David.

So like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Totally. He was a master manipulator, and to make things even worse, he got this guy, Ahithophel, to advise him.

Ahithophel. Ahithophel. He was brilliant, but ruthless.

Yeah. People even compared him to Machiavelli in terms of his cunning and strategic thinking. Machiavelli.

Remind me, who was that again? I'm not a history buff or anything. Sure. So Machiavelli was a 16th-century Italian philosopher.

He wrote this book called *The Prince*, and it basically argued that rulers should prioritize power above everything else, even morality. Okay. So basically, Ahithophel was the brains behind Absalom's rebellion, teaching him how to grab power no matter the cost.

Precisely. But David wasn't completely alone in all this. He had his own loyal advisor, Hushai.

Okay. Hushai infiltrated Absalom's court and cleverly messed up Ahithophel's plans. It was like a strategic countermove.

Wow. So you have all this betrayal, ambition, and then despair swirling around. I can't imagine what David was going through emotionally as he fled from his own son.

It must've been incredibly difficult. And that brings us to Psalm 3. When we look at it with this historical context in mind, it's like David's raw emotions and spiritual struggles just jump off the page. Okay.

So let's dive into the Psalm itself. It starts with this cry of anguish. Lord, how many are my foes? Many are rising against me.

Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. I mean, you can almost feel the weight of despair and isolation in those words. Right.

It's not just poetic imagery. It's David's actual lived experience pouring out. He's surrounded.

He feels completely abandoned. And to top it all off, his enemies are mocking his faith, saying God won't save him. It directly reflects the events of Absalom's rebellion, where David was betrayed and forced to run.

And yet, even in all this chaos, David finds this confidence in God. He declares, "But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory and the lifter of my head." It's pretty remarkable.

Psalms 3 is raw. It's honest. It shows David's fear and doubt, but then it also shows this incredible, unwavering faith.

This image of God as a shield is really powerful, especially considering David is literally running for his life, vulnerable and exposed. It says a lot about his trust in God's protection. It really does.

Even when things are at their worst, David still believes that God is his ultimate protector, the one who will restore his honor and lift him from this pit of despair. And then there's this detail that always gets me. David says, I lay down and slept.

I awoke for the Lord sustained me. I mean, seriously, he's in the middle of this life-or-death situation. His own son is after him, and he manages to sleep peacefully.

That's the power of faith, right? It doesn't magically erase the storms of life, but it gives us this incredible strength to weather them. David being able to sleep in such chaos just shows this deep, profound trust in God's protection. It's a lesson for all of us.

It reminds us that even when our world feels like it's falling apart, we can still find peace. We can find rest knowing that God is ultimately in control. It's a timeless message of hope and resilience, something that still speaks to people even centuries later.

So we see David pour out his anguish, then he expresses this incredible confidence, and then he shifts gears, going into this petition, this plea to God for deliverance. He cries out, arise, O Lord; deliver me, my God; strike all my enemies on the cheek; break the teeth of the wicked. These lines, though, they're pretty intense.

It's what people call the imprecatory side of the songs, where the writer asks God to punish their enemies. Yeah, it's raw, it's visceral. David wants justice.

And that can be tough to reconcile with the New Testament teachings about loving our enemies and turning the other cheek. Right. It feels like these two totally different theologies are clashing.

How are we supposed to make sense of this? Well, I think it helps to remember that David wasn't just a man of faith. He was also a king, God's anointed representative. So his enemies weren't just personal rivals.

They were a threat to the established order, to God's chosen king, and basically to God's plan for Israel. So there's a bigger picture here than just David's personal feelings. Exactly.

It's about upholding justice and righteousness, principles that were at the heart of the Old Testament covenant. And, you know, it's worth noting that even in his anger, David never actually prays for his enemies to die. Oh, that's interesting.

He asks God to strike them, to humiliate them, to make them powerless, and to break their teeth, taking away their ability to harm, but not to kill them. Huh. I never noticed that before.

So maybe even in all this conflict, there's a hint of restraint, maybe even a sliver of hope for reconciliation. It's definitely a complex prayer, showing the turmoil of the situation and that tension between justice and mercy. We'll explore these imprecatory prayers and their significance in light of the New Testament a bit later.

But for now, let's keep going with the psalm itself. Okay. So after this passionate plea, how does David wrap up Psalm 3? He ends with this powerful declaration of praise, a heartfelt wish.

Deliverance belongs to the Lord. Your blessing be upon your people. I love how he acknowledges that God is the one with the ultimate power, and then he extends a blessing to all of God's people.

Even in his own personal struggles, he's still concerned for the well-being of the entire community. Absolutely. It shows his spiritual maturity and a deep understanding of God's sovereignty and love.

Man, this is already so insightful. Seeing Psalm 3 through the lens of this whole Absalom rebellion adds so much more depth and meaning to the text. It really does.

But there's another piece of the puzzle we need to look at. Remember Hushai, David's loyal advisor who outmaneuvered Ahithophel? Yeah. Well, his actions bring up some fascinating questions about how faith and action work together.

Okay. I'm intrigued. Let's unpack that in part two of this deep dive.

Okay. So we're back, and I'm really ready to dig into this whole faith and action thing. You mentioned Hushai earlier, and I'm super curious to hear more about how he fits into all of this.

Yeah. Hushai's story is really fascinating. It gives us this counterpoint to David's cries for deliverance in Psalm 3. We see things from both sides.

Right. Right. So remind me again, what exactly did Hushai do? Well, when David found out that Ahithophel, his former advisor, had joined forces with Absalom, he was like, oh no, this is bad.

Ahithophel was brilliant, a master strategist, and David knew how dangerous he could be. So he recognized the threat, but he didn't just stop at prayer, right? Exactly. And that's what's so cool about this story.

David, this man of deep faith, also took action- strategic action. He sent Hushai back to Jerusalem with a mission: infiltrate Absalom's inner circle and counter Ahithophel's influence. So it wasn't like pray or act; it was pray and act.

Exactly. David understood that they often go hand in hand. He trusted God, but he also used his wisdom and the resources he had to navigate this whole crisis.

That's a really powerful example. It challenges this idea that faith is passive, just sitting around waiting for God to do everything. Totally.

David's example shows us that we can totally trust in God, completely rely on him, while also playing an active role in what he's doing. And what's interesting is that David doesn't even mention Hushai in Psalm 3. It's all about God, God being the one who delivers. Yeah, that makes sense though, right? The Psalms are personal prayers, expressions of devotion directed straight to God.

But knowing the whole story, the behind-the-scenes stuff with Hushai, it adds this whole other layer of meaning to the Psalm. It's like having these two puzzle pieces that suddenly fit together to make a clearer picture. We see God working not just through David's prayers, but through this strategic action of his loyal advisor.

And Hushai's actions weren't just symbolic, right? I mean, they had a real impact on how the rebellion played out. Absolutely. His advice swayed Absalom.

And that led to this crucial delay, buying David time to regroup and ultimately defeat his son's forces. So you could even say that Hushai's actions, in a way, were a form of answered prayer. God was working through him to protect David and restore order.

That's a good point. It really highlights how God often works through, well, through us. He uses people, you know.

Our skills, our choices to accomplish his purposes in the world. This brings up a question, and I bet a lot of our listeners are thinking the same thing. How do we know what God wants us to do? How do we figure out when to act and how to act in a way that aligns with his will? It's a question people have been wrestling with forever.

No easy answers there, but I think David's story gives us some clues. Okay, I'm all ears. So first off, it's about having that relationship with God, praying, studying the Bible, and getting advice from wise people who are close to God.

So staying connected to the source, being in tune with what God's saying, and getting guidance from others who are walking with him. Yeah, exactly. And then it's about being willing to take that step of faith, even when we're not sure what's going to happen.

That can be scary, but it's kind of exciting too, right? Knowing that God's with us, even when we don't know what's ahead. Totally. And sometimes that step of faith might look like going to the doctor when you're sick, or learning new skills, or helping people who need it.

It's not about ignoring God to power. It's about knowing. He often uses what's right in front of us, the ordinary things.

Right. It's not either. We can be people who pray, A-N-D, people who take action.

God can use both to do what he wants in the world. I like that. Yeah.

As we look at this story- David, Absalom, Hushai- it reminds us that each of us, in our own way, can be like instruments for God, bringing peace, justice, and love to the world around us. Man, that's powerful stuff. I'm seeing Psalm 3 in a whole new light now.

It's not just a poem; it's this real-life story full of faith, action, and God being faithful, even when things are super messed up. For sure. But we're not done yet.

Remember those verses where David asks God to strike his enemies and break their teeth? Yeah. They raise some serious questions about how we can understand those imprecatory parts, especially compared to the New Testament, where it's all about love and forgiveness. I'm glad we're going to talk about that, because that's something I've always struggled with.

It's tough to wrap my head around it all. It is. It's definitely a topic worth exploring.

Okay, let's dive right into this. I mean, those lines in Psalm 3 where David's asking God to, like, strike his enemies and break their teeth? It's intense, especially when we think about, you know, Jesus talking about loving our enemies and turning the other cheek. Yeah, it's something that, you know, a lot of people struggle with when they're reading the Psalms.

Like, how do you reconcile these two ideas? They seem so opposite. Exactly. It's like two completely different ways of thinking about things.

On one hand, you have David, this guy who's supposed to be close to God, asking for some serious payback. And on the other, you have Jesus saying we should forgive and love those who hurt us. Well, one way to think about it is to see the imprecatory Psalms, you know, the ones like this, as reflecting a certain stage in how God revealed himself and his plan.

The Bible wasn't written all at once, right? It's a bunch of different texts from over centuries. So each one kind of shows the historical and cultural context it came from. So you're saying we need to look at those verses, the ones that are tough to swallow now, in light of the whole story of how God has revealed himself over time.

Exactly. The Old Testament shows us God's justice, his anger at sin, his desire to protect his people. But then in the New Testament, we see a fuller picture, right? God's love and mercy coming through Jesus.

And Jesus took that divine justice on himself on the cross. So those intense verses, they kind of point us towards Jesus in a way. Yeah, I think so.

They point us towards that ultimate solution. Through Christ, we're called to something higher, something beyond just getting even. It's about forgiveness and trying to reconcile, even with those who've hurt us.

So it's not like the Old Testament is wrong or anything, or that God changed his mind. It's more like we're getting a deeper understanding of who God is and his plan for us. I think that's a really good way to put it.

Old Testament: God's holiness and justice. New Testament: his love and grace in Christ. That makes sense.

But I still have this question, like, how do we actually live this out? I mean, when someone hurts us, what do we do with all that anger and hurt? It's a million-dollar question, right? It's one thing to get the theology, but then there's real life. Yeah, I can talk about loving my enemies all day long, but when someone actually does something to me, man, it's tough to put it into practice. It is a challenge.

But I think it starts with realizing that forgiveness isn't about saying what someone did was okay. It's about letting go of the bitterness that can just eat us up inside. So it's more about us, about our own peace than about the other person.

Yeah, in a sense. Holding on to anger and resentment doesn't hurt them. It hurts us.

It keeps us stuck in the past, and we can't experience real freedom or healing. Wow. It's like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

That's a good one. It really illustrates the point. Forgiveness is taking care of ourselves, reclaiming our peace so we can move on.

So it's not about being a doormat. It's about choosing to respond differently, with love and grace, even when it's super tough. I like that.

It has this transformative power. It can break those cycles of hate and revenge. And it opens the door for reconciliation and healing, both for us and for others.

This deep dive into Psalm 3 has been amazing. We've looked at the history, the theology, even those parts that are hard to understand. And through it all, we've seen that God is both just and merciful.

He hears our cries, He strengthens our faith, and He guides us. So if there's one thing for our listeners to take away from all this, what would it be? What can we learn from David's experience? I think it's this. Even when things are really bad, you know, when it feels like everyone's against you, when you're dealing with betrayal and uncertainty, you can find comfort knowing that God is there.

He's our protector, the one who lifts us up. Yeah. Real confidence isn't about having a perfect life.

It's about trusting God, even when things are falling apart. And when we're facing our own Absalom rebellions, you know, those times of crisis and doubt, we need to remember that God is at work, even when we can't see it. He might use unexpected people, strategic actions, even our own weaknesses to accomplish His plan.

So let's have that kind of faith, like David. Honest, clinging to God's promises and seeking His guidance every step of the way. And when we do that, we can be sure that He'll be with us through the tough times, He'll set things right, and He'll bless us.

You know, I want to leave our listeners with one last thought. If God often works through us, through people, how can you be a part of that today? How can you be an instrument of His peace, His justice, His love in the world around you? Something to think about this week. That's a great question.

And I really encourage everyone to go back and read Psalm 3 again with this fresh perspective in mind. Let those words speak to you. Let them guide you.

Thanks for joining us for this deep dive. Until next time, keep seeking, keep exploring, and keep going deeper into God's Word.