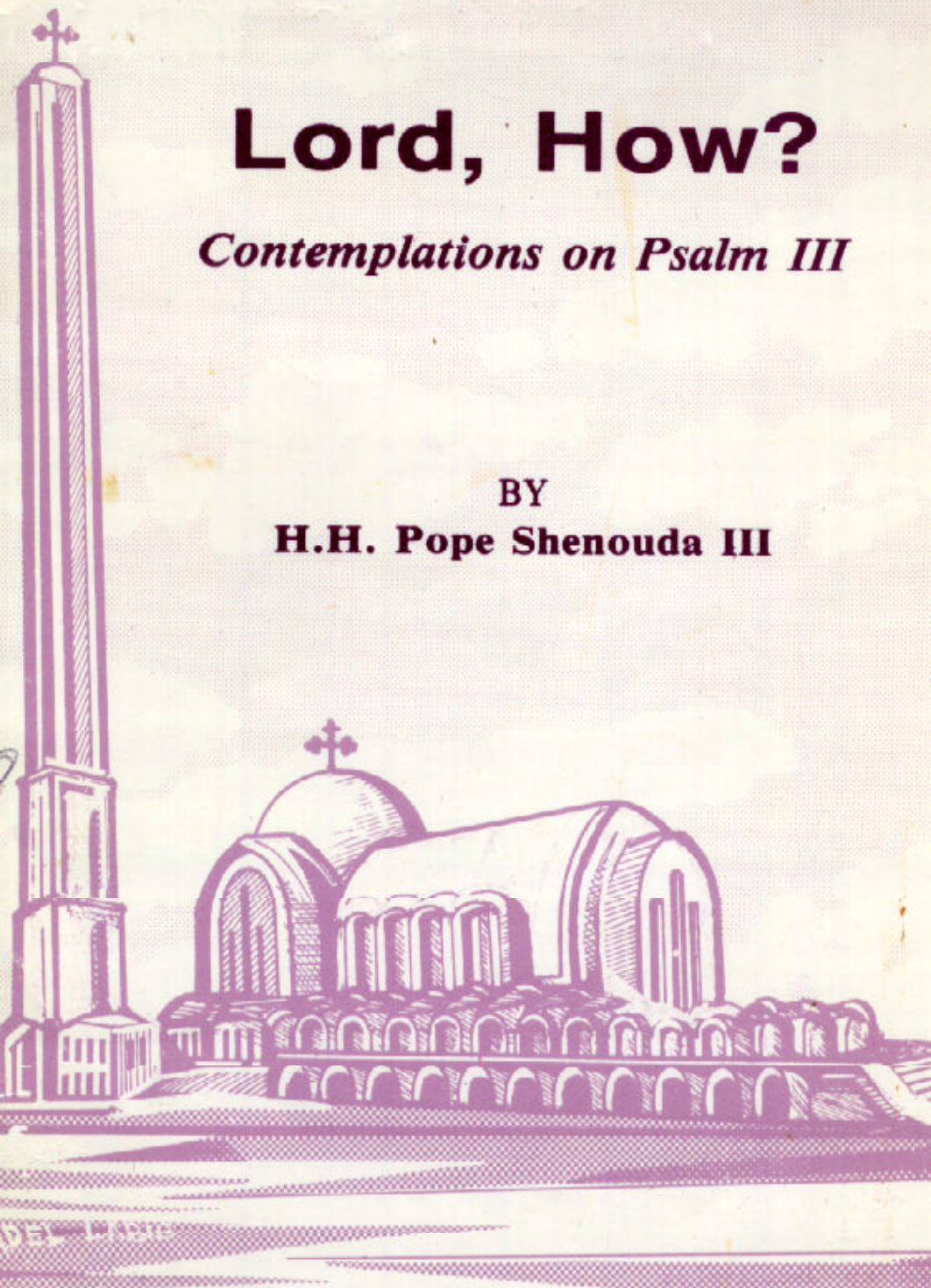


Lord, How?

Contemplations on Psalm III

BY

H.H. Pope Shenouda III





**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

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PREFACE

The Lord gave me an opportunity to contemplate on the Psalms through my lectures late 1968, 1969 and also at other times.

I contemplated on this Psalm, “*Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!*” on Friday, 18 April 1968 at St. Mark Church - Azbakia. It is one of the Psalms of the Matins (Morning Prayer).

I choose some Psalms, which are easy to memorize, to contemplate on before those general lectures.

I hope, beloved reader, to publish those contemplations in small books. I have already published my contemplation on Psalm 19 (20), “*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble*”, which is the first Psalm of the third hour prayer. I also published contemplations on three Psalms of vespers (the eleventh hour prayer), and I hope God may help me proceed with the rest of this collection...

Remember me in your prayers.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Psalm III

“Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!”

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)

INTRODUCTION

David in this Psalm **blames** God saying, "*Lord, how?*". It is a Psalm of **complaint** as he says, "*How they have increased who trouble me!. Many are they who say of me, there is no help for him in God*" - It is also **an appeal for help**, "*Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God*". **Faith** is evident in this Psalm for he says, "*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around*". David in this prayer speaks of **his spiritual experience** saying, "*I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill*". This Psalm shows also **confidence and trust in God** for David says, "*Salvation belongs to the Lord, Your blessing is upon Your people*". He recalls his memories before God and says, "*For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone, You have broken the teeth of the ungodly*". Though David begins his Psalm with complaint, blame and appeal for help, he ends with praise and exultation (Selah) as he remembers God's work for him.

This Psalm is suitable for anyone who is in trouble because of enemies and those who are subject to spiritual wars.

It is also a prophecy about the Lord Jesus Christ, His suffering, death and resurrection.

Let us now contemplate on this Psalm verse by verse with respect to its spiritual application to the human soul. It begins with:

Lord, how?

He blames God. Lord how? How does all this come upon me? How does this happen, in Your existence?

Many people get angry and resentful if you ask them why they behave towards you in such a way; but when we ask God, "why?" He accepts it with an open-heart.

Many people troubled David the prophet, but he did not blame them; he blamed God Himself.

O Lord, why do I face such trouble? Why have they increased who trouble me? Are not all of them in Your grasp? Are You not the Almighty? Why do You allow all this in spite of my being under Your protection and care?

David blames God:

How often does David blame God! It is something distinctive in his Psalms.

1- For example, the similarity in the way he speaks in Psalm 10,

"Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1)

If we say these words to one of our friends, he will not bear them! But God accepts such words and David His servant dared to say, "*O Lord, how?*"

David goes on blaming God, "*The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; and blesses the covetous, whom the Lord abhors. God is not in all his thoughts*". Then David says "*Arise, O Lord! O God, lift up Your hand! Do not forget the humble.*" Why do you hide, Lord, in times of trouble? Arise,

work, save your flock. Why do you let them say there is no God! or say; *"There is no help for him in God!" "LORD, You have heard the desire of the humble"* (Ps. 10:17).

He Talks To God Frankly And Blames Him.

Why do we seek You in time of trouble but do not find You? It is as if You are standing afar off, and we are not Your children? God accepts such words, although He does work but we do not see it.

2 - David says *"O Lord, how"* in (Ps. 44) where he also depicts his troubles and blames the Lord, *"But you have cast off and put us to shame"* and proceeds in the same Psalm (Psalm 44:12) saying,

"You sell Your people for naught, And are not enriched by selling them."

" My dishonour is continually before me, and the shame of my face has covered me; Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, because of the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 44:15,16). Then David concludes saying,

"Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise, do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression?" (Ps. 44:23,24).

David opens his heart before God and depicts his feelings honestly. He does not fabricate words.

When he gives thanks, he does so from all his heart with joy and when he is in trouble, he blames God. In both cases God does not get angry at his frankness nor at his reproach. The Lord Jesus Christ - glory be to Him - even says of David's Psalms *"David in the spirit call Him Lord"* (Matt. 22:43).

David's blame shows God's love and forbearance on one hand and David's boldness and familiarity on the other.

3 - In Psalm 74 David addresses God by saying, *"O God, why have You cast us forever, why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture? O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand?"* (Ps. 74: 1,10,11). Then he says,

"Oh, do not deliver the life of Your turtledove to the wild beast" (Ps. 74:19)

He concludes by saying, *"Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; Remember how the foolish man reproaches you daily."* He considers the reproach of the foolish directed against God Himself, because if God rises and saves His people, the foolish will not behave in that manner.

4 - In Psalm 79, David blames the Lord saying, *"O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance, Your holy temple they have defiled"* (Ps. 79:1) and, *"How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?... Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!"* (Ps. 79:5,8). Then he says,

"Why should the nations say, where is their God?" (Ps. 79:10)

Here David does not only blame God for the transgressions and reproach of the nations, but he also blames God for His anger.

Had not You Lord, been angry with us and forsaken us, the heathen would not have behaved like that against us. Why then do You rage? And why does your anger continue? *"Help us, O*

God of our salvation for the glory of Your name..... we Your people and sheep of Your pasture" (Ps. 79:9,13).

5 -The same reproachful words are repeated in Psalm 80 and 88 where David says, "*O Lord God of hosts, how long will You be angry against the prayer of Your people?"* Then he blames Him,

"You have fed them with the bread of tears; and given them tears to drink in great measure".

"You have made us a strife to our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves" (Ps. 80:4-6). Then he concludes the Psalm saying, "Return... look down from heaven... cause Your face to shine and we shall be saved!"

6 - David blames the Lord also in Psalm. 88,

"Lord, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?"(Ps. 88:14).

This Psalm in particular is full of reproach as David addresses the Lord, "*Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves" (Ps. 88:7), "You have put away my acquaintances far from me;... My eye wastes away because of affliction, Lord, I have called daily upon You, I have stretched out my hands to You. Will You work wonders for the dead? Lord, why do You cast off...?"*

7 - How often David blames God in his Psalms, it cannot be counted. But I wish to conclude the quotations from David with (Ps. 89),

“How long, Lord? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? Lord, where are Your former loving kindness ... ?” (Ps. 89:46, 49).

This reminds us also of what David says in (Ps. 90:13,15), *"Return, O Lord, how long?... Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil"*.

This reproach, so frank, and the words, *"Lord, how?"* are not confined only to David's Psalms but they exist in other Books of the Holy Bible and are uttered by many prophets and holy men...

The Reproach Of Other Holy Men:

1 - Harken to Jeremiah the prophet blaming God and saying also, *"Why?" "Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You; Yet let me talk with You about Your judgements. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously?"* (Jer. 12:1)

I wonder how dust and ashes argue with God concerning His judgements and inquire, *"Why?"* Truly says St. Paul the apostle, *"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:33,34).

However, Jeremiah the prophet addresses the Lord, "Let me talk with You about Your judgements!"

O Lord, it is something I cannot understand, something strange to leave the wicked prosper like that, *"You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear*

fruit... How long will the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither,... for the wickedness of those who dwell there?" (Jer. 12:2,4).

O Lord, why do You let all this happen? Why do the wicked prosper? Where is Your justice? Where is Your goodness?

Answer me, give me an explanation, explain to me Your judgements, *"Teach me Your judgements... teach me Your statutes... Open my eyes, that I may behold..."* (Ps.119) I want to understand as far as my mind can, *"Why does the way of the wicked prosper..?"*

The Lord accepts such reproach calmly and explains that the wicked are like smoke which rises up but then fades away and vanishes, *"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall be no more: Indeed you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more..... the wicked shall perish... they shall vanish... into smoke they shall vanish away."* (Ps.37:10,20).

God, the unbounded and incomprehensible opens His heart and responds to His children when they ask, "Why?"

2 - The same question is asked by the virgin of the canticle:

She blames the Lord whom she loves saying, *"Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed your flock, where you make it rest... Why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?"* (Song. 1:7). The Lord is not annoyed with her words but says to her, *"if you do not in the footsteps of the flock"... follow the steps of the holy people...*

3 - Another person who is frank in blaming God is Job the Righteous...

He blames the Lord with amazing boldness and says over and over, "Why?" as in (Job 7:11, 12,16,) "... *I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I a sea, or a sea serpent, that You set a guard over me?*" If any one of us says to a friend, "**Leave me alone**" perhaps he will not bear it. Yet, Job says this to God Himself and continues his reproach, "*How long? Will You not look away from me. And let me alone till I swallow my saliva?*" (Job 7:19). Then, he goes on, "*Have I sinned; What have I done to You, O watcher of men?*"

"Why have You set me as Your target. So that I am a burden to myself? Why then do You not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity?" (Job 7:20,21).

Who can say such words to any person! However, Job blames God with much more reproach. He says,

"Do not condemn me; Show me why You contend with me!" (Job 10:2)

"I am afraid of all my sufferings, I know that You will not hold me innocent. If I am condemned, why then do I labour in vain? If I wash myself with snow water, and cleanse my hands with soap; Yet You will plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes will abhor me" (Job 9:28-30).

Do you think God gets angry at such reproach? Nay.

At the end of the Book, when Job's three friends rebuked him and vexed his bitter soul with false accusations, God said to them, "... *for you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has*" (Job 42:7).

God Likes Us To Reproach Him:

Believe me, had not there been in this third Psalm except the words, "Lord, how?", they would have been sufficient as comforting words that teach us to blame God...

See how Job the Just addresses God, *"Withdraw Your hand far from me: and let not the dread of You make me afraid. Then call, and I will answer.. Make me know my transgression and my sin. Why do You hide Your face, and regard me as Your enemy? Will You frighten a leaf driven to and fro? and will You pursue dry stubble?"* (Job 13:21-25).

However, our good God does not get annoyed with Job's reproach.

Nor does He consider arguing insulting to His status. Nay, God likes us to talk and argue with Him. He becomes glad and happy for this because reproach shows love and intimacy.

Sometimes, God gives us a chance to blame Him:

He did so with our father Abraham. When He discussed with him the matter of destroying Sodom and Abraham replied, *"Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?... far be it from You... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* (Gen. 18:23-25).

God did the same with Moses the prophet when He raged against the people and decided to destroy them because they worshipped the molten calf. God talked to Moses concerning this but Moses blamed God in the same words, *"Lord, how?"* and said, *"Why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power..? ... Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, "He brought them out, to harm them to kill them in the mountains..."*

Turn from Your fierce wrath and relent from this harm to Your people" (Ex. 32:11,12).

Holy people argue with God and moreover:

God calls for such argument saying, "*Come now, and let us reason together*", says the Lord, "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...* " (Isa.1:18).

Those who flee from the presence of God evidently have no love or hope. Adam fled from the presence of God and hid in fear, but God called upon him to inquire and talk to him. Jonah also fled from the presence of the Lord but God called upon him, talked to him and rebuked him explaining to him the matter and convincing him. (Jonah 4).

It is allowed then to say to God, "*Lord, how?*" as David did in the third Psalm.

The occasion on which this Psalm is said.

In fact, brethren, when David the prophet sang this Psalm, he was passing through a psychological and family crisis besides the trouble which threatened his kingdom and perhaps his life too.

He wrote this Psalm when he was escaping from his son Absalom who revolted against him and wanted to take possession of the kingdom.

The divine inspiration depicts this story in the Holy Bible in effective words, "*So David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up.*" (2 Sam.15:30).

David was informed that his counsellor Ahithophel - with all his resourcefulness and knowledge of David's methods - took part in the conspiracy with Absalom. Shimei the son of Gera too, came out to David on the way and cursed him and cast stones at him saying, "*Come out, come out, you bloodthirsty man, you rogue.*" (2 Sam.16:5-7), and, "*... for the people with Absalom continually increased in number*" (2 Sam.15:12).

Absalom and all the people came to Jerusalem and according to the counsel of Ahithophel, "*Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*"(2 Sam.16:15,22). Thus were they increased who troubled David and many were those who revolted against him and betrayed him, so he sang,

"Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!"

They have increased who trouble me "*Many are they who rise up against me*" or as the poet says when the multitude of afflictions trouble him,

(Had it been for one affliction, I would have endured; but there are a second and a third).

Why Lord, are all these afflictions? Why do you leave your servant in such troubles and to those who set themselves against him all around?

As for Absalom in particular, David did not do him any wrong but he was led by his own treachery in spite of his being David's son! Why then, O Lord?

How did all those who cried out shouts of joy at the time of victory, change and join a treacherous son, knowing well that he was betraying his father?

David complained to God, the Almighty, who is able to turn evil into good, in whose hands is the life of Absalom, Ahithophel, Shimei the son of Gera and the lives of all the people.

David was not confined to troubles in distress and sorrow, instead, he put them aside and sought God's help through his prayers.

His troubles made him seek the Lord and say:

"O Lord, how do you permit all this to take place in your hearing and sight?"

To you, Lord, I complain; for You alone are able to give me comfort and power and can save me from this tribulation. Complaining to other than God is humiliating as the common saying goes. Whenever I talk to You, I find comfort. I feel content trusting your work and intervention, in my life. On Your kind breast I will lean, and ask You ***"Why? or "how does this happen?"***.

If I ask anyone, "Why do you trouble me?" they will scorn me and sneer at me.

Shimei the son of Gera did so, though I said nothing to him. He rejoiced against me saying, *"Come out, come out, you bloodthirsty man... the Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned... So now you are caught in your own evil..."* (2 Sam.16:7,8).

This trouble which I am suffering from, may be due to my sins.

Now, I remember, Lord, when You sent me Nathan the prophet with a message from You saying, *"Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?"*

You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife... Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house... your neighbour.. shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun... before all Israel.” (2 Sam.12:9-12). Now, do you know why are they increased that trouble you?

However, David, in spite of his sin, remembers also the words of Nathan the prophet to him, *"The Lord has also put away your sin; you shall not die."* (2 Sam. 12:13)

The Lord has put away sin and put it on the Lamb who takes away the sin of the whole world (John 1:29). David knows God's kind heart as God Himself says, *"He has not dealt with us according to our sins; nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us"* (Ps.103:10-12). So, David addresses the Lord in his Psalms saying,

"Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindnesses, For they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions " (Ps. 25:6,7)

O Lord, do You still remember for me this sin? We have discussed it and I repented, and according to Your faithful true promise You have put it away. As for me, because of this sin, *"... all night I make my bed to swim; I drench my couch with my tears"* (Ps.6:6). How then Lord, You remember my iniquities? *"If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You..."* (Ps.130:3,4) *"Do not enter into judgement with Your servant: For in Your sight no one living is righteous"* (Ps.143:2)

True Lord, they are increased that trouble me; but certainly You are not among those, because You are my comfort and salvation.

Thus, in the depth of my troubles, I hold my harp and sing this Psalm. Indeed, *"is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms"* (James 5:13), but I, in the midst of my deep tribulation sing to You because my pleasure is in You.

I do not account these tribulations as punishment for me but I consider them something which brings me closer to You.

As for my sin, You have forgiven it. However, if You consider these earthly punishments of some benefit to me, I shall accept them with thanks. But, have compassion upon Your son as I asked for my son, *"Deal gently for my sake with the young man, Absalom"* (2 Sam.18:5) In spite of his treachery and all his faults... So I inquired, *"How they have increased who trouble me? Many are they who rise up against me"*(Ps 3:1).

In fact, not all tribulations are due to sins.

The friends of Job the righteous wronged him and vexed him by saying that he was tempted because of his sins (Job 4:7,8). God reproved them for this because they have not spoken of Him what was right (Job 42:7).

The disciples thought the man born blind was born with this disability due to the sins of his parents. The Lord answered them, *"Neither this man, nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him"* (John 9:3).

St. Athanasius the Apostolic suffered much though he was righteous and St. Paul the apostle suffered also and described his suffering in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor.2)

The Holy Bible says too, *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all"* (Ps.34:19). It is even said of the Lord Jesus Christ the most Holy that He was, *"A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"* (Isa.53:3).

Though some of David's troubles were not due to his sin, other tribulations were.

He suffered many troubles in his life, from Saul the king at a time when David was deeply attached to God and had the Spirit of the Lord. As for the present troubles, though the Lord warned him against some of them as in 2 Sam.12, yet he did not imagine the affliction would be so severe and that those who troubled him would be so increased. So, he blamed the Lord saying: *Lord, how they have increased who trouble me, Many are they who rise up against me"*.

Afflictions accompanied David in his righteousness and in his sins.

Afflictions did not leave him at all, since his youth. He describes the details of such afflictions in his Psalms. Then he finds the matter has become too serious, so he cries out to the Lord,

"Many are they who rise up against me"

He explained the word *"Many"* by *"Ten thousands of people, who have set themselves against me all around"* (Ps. 3:6). O Lord, how do You allow so many people to rise up against me? have I sinned? I have confessed that. Even before this sin also many have troubled me, *"Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth"* (Ps. 129:1) and moreover *"they that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head."* (Ps.

69:4), *"They surrounded me,. they surrounded me about like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns"* (Ps. 118:11,12).

It is a great comfort for us to see a great prophet like David suffer from many people.

A greater comfort is to see him delivered from all such troubles and not a hair of his head fell but his soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers (Ps. 124:7). Blessed be the Lord who has not given him as a prey to their teeth. Indeed, *"... we must, through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22).

See, how many tribulations Joseph the righteous suffered from!

Many have risen up against him, even his brothers. He was cast into a pit, sold as a servant, the wife of his master rose up against him and accused him falsely though he was innocent. Potiphar also resisted him and put him in prison (Gen. 39; 17,20). I wonder if Joseph has said the same words *"Lord, how they have increased that trouble me?!"*

Usually, a believer is surrounded by troubles and afflictions...

We must enter through the narrow gate and follow the straight path always bearing our own cross and going forth unto the Lord outside the camp bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13). The Lord did not conceal from us such troubles but said expressly, *"in the world, you will have tribulation"* (John 16:33).

However, where afflictions exist, there is God the Saviour.

There is the divine help which gives comfort and salvation. The Holy Bible did not only say, *"Many are the afflictions of*

the righteous", but said directly after that, "*but the Lord delivers him out of them all*", and did not only say, "*in the world you will have tribulation*" but said also, "*But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*". I **remember a time when birds were of great danger to the provisions of the monastery**. They swallowed up crops and fruit greedily... I asked the fathers when I was coming down from the monastery if they wanted me to bring anything for them with me, and one of the old fathers answered, "We want a trap to catch the birds" I said, I shall bring it but I shall teach the bird a Psalm." The father inquired, "Which Psalm will you teach the bird?" I answered, Psalm 124 which says, "*Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*". *Yea, the snares are set in the way of believers, but there exists also God's help*".

The danger which threatened David was merely that many rose up against him.

The fact that the words refer to "*How have they increased who trouble me*" can be endured, and also the fact that, "*Many are they who rise up against me*". But the thing which cannot be endured is, "*Many are they who say of me, there is no help for him in God ... !*"

There is no help for him in God:

David knows well that it is God who saved him from all his previous troubles and from all the dangers, which surrounded him. God saved him from the paw of the lion and the bear when they took a sheep of his flock and saved him from Goliath. So, he addressed king Saul, "*The Lord who delivered me out from*

paw of the lion, and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine". (1 Sam. 17:37).

The words, "Salvation belongs to the Lord", or, "The battle is the Lord's" are very familiar on the lips of David and in his Psalms.

He says to Goliath, *"The battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam.17:47).* He says also, *"You come to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts... This day will the Lord deliver you into my hand..." (1 Sam.17:45, 46).*

David says the same thing concerning his enemies, *"They surrounded me about like bees... For in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. You pushed me violently that I might fall: but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength, and song, and He has become my salvation" (Ps. 118:12-14).*

As God was the cause of salvation of David from the lion and the bear, He saved him also from king Saul.

How many times Saul wanted to kill David, and how many times he pursued David from one wilderness to another and the Lord saved him. Thus, David said to Saul, *"Let the Lord judge between me and you" (1 Sam. 24:12,15);* and when Saul fell in the hands of David, he said to him, *"The Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. And, indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation." (1 Sam. 26:23, 24).*

Since God delivers him out of all afflictions, how serious are the words of gloating that there is no help for him in God!

They frighten him with this dreadful matter: that there is no help for him in God. Not only one person utters such words but as David cries out in his prayer complaining. *"Many are they who say of me: there is no help for him in God!"*

He tells the Lord what people say, but he does not believe that at all.

His experience with the loving God, who helps, delivers and saves; and the life of faith which he leads besides God's promises to him... all this makes him not believe their gloating. It may seem that God has delayed or that His help has not yet come..! but it certainly will come even in the small hours.

God will never forsake him. It is impossible. Salvation will come.. it is certain... no matter how long it may take.

They say of my soul, *"There is no help for him in God. They say so because they are enemies and malevolent, rejoicing at my troubles, at the treachery of Absalom, Ahithophel and at the curses of Shimei the son of Gera. They rejoice because I came out of Jerusalem bare-footed and weeping... they rather say such words because they do not know God, nor His love for me nor His relationship with me!"*

Thus, David said after these words, 'Selah' which means a music pause.

He says to the musical band that accompany him while singing, *"Stop here, in order to contemplate this matter and let us change the time or even change that which the enemies and*

malevolent say... stop here because I do not accept such words".

It is the first time in which the word 'Selah' comes in David's Psalms.

This word did not come in the first or the second Psalm but came for the first time in the third Psalm. It is included 74 times in David's Psalms and shows a musical pause in order to change the tune or perhaps to introduce a new theme or view... David perhaps intends by it to say also, *"Stop, you; musicians for I shall talk with God instead of talking with people I want to tell Him about that which people say..."*

Truly, Lord, I have sinned, against You, "and done this evil in Your sight." (Ps. 51:4); but You will never forsake me.

If all people forsake me, You will not; and if no one comes to save me, this will not trouble me nor make me astonished. Suffice it that - You - do not forsake me, for salvation is Yours. However sinful I may be, *"He has not dealt with us after our sins"* I cannot believe that You see me in trouble and do not care! for I am Your servant and the son of Your maidservant (Ps.116:16). Whenever I sin, Your hand is upon me and not Your rod. Though many rise up against me and wish I were dead, *"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for You are with me"* (Ps 23)... *"Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear, though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident"* (Ps. 27:3).

The words, "There is no help for him in God" are of the devil, intended to make one suspect God's help.

It is the devil who put such lies and feigning on their lips to reduce my faith and my trust in Your love and help, to lead me to despair, submission and to make people doubt God's help to His children. However, I shall never get desperate of waiting for Your help.

I am still waiting for Your help in confidence and faith no matter how long it may take.

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is for me among those who help me; therefore I shall see my desire upon those who hate me" (Ps.118:6,7). With such confidence, I wait for the Lord, I wait for Him more than those who watch for the morning (Ps. 130:6).

Though God sometimes punishes, He is compassionate in His punishment.

So, *"Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man"* (2 Sam. 24:14). It is He who does not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax (Matt. 12:20), who wounds and His hands make whole (Job 5:18).

The words, "There is no help for him in God" remind me of the cruel words uttered by Job's friends.

How painful they were for a bitter soul and how hurting for a righteous person; but God rebuked them (Job 42:7) and at the same time, *"The Lord restored Job's losses"* (Job 42:10) because God does not forsake His children. Thus, *"We are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed"* (2 Cor. 4:8,9). Let people then say whatever they want... and let them try the weapons of gloating and suspicion.

As for me, Lord, I know who You are:

You are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head.

You, O Lord, Art A Shield For Me:

I imagine some of those who hear David are amazed. They exclaim, "*What do you see, you poor man? A shield for me! My glory! The one who lifts up my head! How do you say this though you came out bare-footed and weeping and all who came out with you wept too!! Your friend Hushai the Archite came out to meet you with his coat torn and dust on his head*" (2 Sam. 15:32)! Where is glory and victory in that? Here is Shimei the son of Gera cursing you saying, "*Come out, you bloodthirsty man, you rogue!*" In spite of this, you say to your friends in humility, "... *let him curse because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David...'. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction.*" (2 Sam. 16:5-12). Do you say after all this, "*My glory and the one who lifts up my head!*"

However, David said these words with the spirit of faith not looking at his present condition but unto the coming help of the Lord. He was not living the present affliction but the future joy putting in his heart, *'The evidence of things not seen'* (Heb. 11:1).

In spite of the bitterness of his affliction, he saw God's salvation in front of him even before it came. This is the virtue of hope which knows no affliction nor despair. This is not only hope but also, "*The substance of things hoped for*" (Heb. 11:1), through which a believer proceeds to say with the apostle, "*Rejoicing in hope*" (Rom. 12:12).

Troubles exist, but God exists too. Faith in God and His work overcomes troubles so we do not see them but see God's work, so we rejoice and praise it in our Psalms.

Thus, we say in the depth of troubles, "*You, O Lord, are a shield for me; my glory and my pride*". You, Lord, are the Almighty. You do not forsake the universe which You created but look after it. You see all that happens on earth and set up justice among people as Your prophet Malachi said, "*The Lord listened, and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him.*" (Mal. 3:16).

Perhaps You did not see Absalom, Shimei and Ahithophel! Nay, but You saw them and saw their conceit, revolt and treachery. You saw my oppression and humility and behold, I hear Your voice saying, "***For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, says the Lord, I will set him in the safety for which he yearns***" (Ps. 12).

David is fully aware of this, so he says on many occasions, "*God is a shield for me*" (Ps. 3:3); (see also Psalms 18:20, 7:10, 28:7 and 59:11) a shield that protects against blows of the enemies, a shield or an armour against all the arrows of king Saul and even against "*The fiery darts of the wicked*" (Eph. 6:16). Yea, it is God who lets not, "*The scepter of the wicked... rest upon the lot of the righteous*" (Ps. 125:3).

He is the God of the poor, the weak and the helpless against those who are more powerful than them.

We address Him in the Divine Liturgy, "*You are the hope of those who have no hope and the aid of those who are helpless. You are the comforter of the weak-hearted and the refuge of the troubled*". Also David the prophet says to Him, "*All my*

bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You, Delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him?" (Ps. 35:10).

So, we find the strong depend on themselves, but the weak cry unto God.

David did not cry unto God when he was aware of his power and ability to strike Nabal of Carmel (1 Sam. 25:13-22) but cried unto God when he felt helpless before Saul and Absalom because of their power on the one hand and on the other hand because Saul was the Lord's anointed and Absalom was David's own son. So, he was unable to strike them due to causes within himself and also because they did not care for any act due to their low spiritual condition. Thus, he cried unto God, *"How does this happen? How they have increased who trouble me!"*.

Indeed, as long as a person feels weak before God, he deserves His Divine help.

It is God's concern to preach good tidings unto the meek; and to bind up the broken hearted (Is 61:1), and as the Lord has said about His sheep, *"I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down...I will bind up the broken, and strengthen what was sick..."* (Ez. 34:15,16). Here, David was that broken and sick sheep, not the great king sitting on the throne but the rejected king flying away from his enemies.

A strong person is more liable to fall than any other person probably because of his pride and self-conceit!

And, *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov. 16:18).

Strong persons are not on guard because of extreme vanity in their power, and fall because they are not cautious. Besides,

due to their self-confidence, they do not feel in need of an external power" so they do not pray for help, and being away from the act of Grace, they fall. Thus, it is said of sin, "... *And all who were slain by her were strong men*" (Prov. 7:26).

David prayed to the Lord to save him from the oppressors.

He used to say: *"Save me, O God, by your name, for strangers have risen up against me, and oppressors (in another translation (the strong), and in a third one (the Ruthless) which means void of compassion who have no mercy nor compassion have sought my life; they have not set God before them"* (Ps. 54:1,3).

So were the strong that rose up against David: the lion and the bear, Goliath, Saul and Absalom; all of them, *"have not set God before them"*. David experienced how God gave him victory over all those and he said, *"You are a shield for me; My glory and the One who lifts up my head", "You were an armour and a shield for me against all the darts of my enemies "* So, David did not kill Saul, nor Absalom but the Lord delivered him from them because the battle is the Lord's.

True are the words of Moses the prophet, *"Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace* (Ex. 14:13, 14).

As for David, the Lord was not merely a shield for him and an armour against any attacks, but He was moreover as David says, *"My glory and the One who lifts up my head"*

My Glory and the lifter up of my head:

So, the Lord says of him in the Psalm, *"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him: I will set him on high, because he has known My name I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him"* (Ps. 91:14, 15). He did not only say, *"I will deliver him"* but also said directly after it, *"I will set him on high"* - not only, *"in trouble will I deliver him"*, but also what is more, *"I will honour him"* and that is what happened with David.

The Lord delivered him from Goliath the valiant, and on that occasion, honoured him and lifted up his head.

So, women came out singing and dancing with tambourines; with joy saying, *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"* (1 Sam. 18:6,7). David was made leader of the men of war and won the love of all the people. Prince Jonathan put on David his clothes, his sword, his bow and his girdle. Afterwards, David could marry Michal, the king's daughter, and God helped him to win in other battles (1 Sam. 19). It is even said of him, *"David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name became highly esteemed"* (1 Sam. 18.30).

The Lord did not only delivered him from king Saul, but also glorified him and lifted up his head.

King Saul who was seeking David's life died and so David got rid of all Saul's attempts to kill him. Upon Saul's death, God set up David on the king's throne, "And the men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah" (2 Sam. 2:4), and, *"David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker"* (2

Sam. 3:1), The Lord delivered him from Abner the captain of Saul's host as he died (2 Sam. 3:30), *"Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh, and they anointed David king over Israel"* (2 Sam. 5:1,3) and the matter was settled for him as king over all the people, so God lifted up his head.

David remembered all this when Absalom rose up against him and the memories gave him comfort within, so he said: **I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill.**

Undoubtedly, the heart is comforted and faith is strengthened whenever one remembers God's previous loving kindness, and how He heard one's previous prayers; one feels God's love and work for him and say to oneself, *"God, who heard in the past, will hear now and at all times"* So, we say in the Divine Liturgy, *"You who has blessed at past times, now also do bless"*.

God's salvation of David was the story of his whole life. Whenever he remembered the particulars of his life, he remembered the Lord's salvation.

So, we find in the Holy Bible a very comforting verse dictated by the divine inspiration, *"And the Lord preserved David wherever he went"* (2 Sam. 8:6).

David could not forget such salvation in the midst of his afflictions, nor can the church forget it.

History is long, full of lovely memories. He who saved from the hands of Niron, saved also from Diocletian, from Irianus the governor of Insena and from many others afterwards, *"No weapon formed against you (God's children) shall prosper"* (Is

54:17). These memories give comfort to a heart which cries out unto God irrespective of the hardships. A person remembers the words of the Lord concerning Zerubbabel when the temple was being rebuilt, *"Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!"* (Zech. 4:7).

Many times David cried unto God and God heard him. David did not forget this but remembered it and was comforted. He did not lead an easy life but walked in a way surrounded by afflictions and troubles and the Lord saved him and granted him what he prayed for. So, he said, *"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones: not one of them is broken"* (Ps. 34:19, 20).

A person's experience with God encourages him at the time of affliction. Here, David remembers his experiences.

"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill". The word "cried". indicates deep prayer and urgent need. It indicates also the severe condition in which he was. David's Psalms are full of his cries unto the Lord and you can follow this up in his other Psalms. These cries exist also in Jonah's prayer out of the fish's belly. He was actually in a crisis which needed cries, so, he said to the Lord, *"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice."* (Jonah 2:2). He cried out and the Lord heard, *"And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land"* (Jonah 2:10).

A person raises his prayers unto the Holies of God.

So, David says here, *"He heard me out of His holy hill"* and says in (Ps. 20:6), *"Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed. He will answer him from His holy heaven."* Thus, it

is supposed that we ask holy things or at least things which conform with God's will.

David proceeds telling his experiences with God;

I laid down and slept; I awoke:

How amazing it is that David lies down and sleeps in spite of the many who trouble him and the ten thousand who set themselves against him. The normal thing is that sleep quits him in the middle of such troubles and outer threats. Harken to what the divine inspiration says about King Darius when he cast Daniel into the lion's den: *"Now the king went to his palace, and spent the night fasting, ... and his sleep went from him"* (Dan. 6:18)

However, in spite of these afflictions, a person sleeps when his heart is full of faith and peace.

With such faith and peace, Peter the apostle slept in prison guarded by four squads of soldiers and knowing that Herode the king intended to bring him forth to the Jews after Easter (a few days later) to be killed (Acts 12:3,4). He did not sleep a disturbed sleep but slept so heavily that the angel who came to rescue him struck him on the side (Acts 12:7). Thus David lay down and slept.

Afflictions were pressing from without, but did not enter into his soul to disturb him or hinder his sleep.

Thus, David was able to sleep, not in unawareness or death, but in confidence feeling that he was sleeping in God's kind bosom. Absalom with his army were pursuing him and he slept in the wilderness leaving the Lord to protect and guard him.

David in his sleep was more peaceful than Absalom who was conceited with his power; so he said, "*I lay down and slept*".

When contemplating this verse - in particular with you, I remember the evening of Good Friday at the time of (Burial) when we remember the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ and read the Psalms.

We pray this Psalm till the words, "*I lay down and slept*" which refer to the death of Christ. Then, we stop and do not proceed with the rest of the Psalm; and in the prayers of Easter Eve we complete the Psalm beginning with "*I awoke*" which refer to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sleep, sometimes, symbolises death as when the Lord was speaking about the death of Lazarus, He said to His holy disciples, "*Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.*" (John 11:11), He was referring symbolically to the death of Lazarus, and meant by the words, "*I go, that I may wake him*" that He would raise him from the dead. Here, the same meaning applies to the words, "*I lay down and slept, I awoke*" which refers to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This interpretation shows us three trends in interpreting this Psalm and contemplating on it:

Three interpretations of this Psalm:

1 - The first trend concerns King David, his troubles and tribulations as we explained on the preceding pages.

2 - The second trend concerns the Lord Jesus Christ - glory be to Him - as we indicated when applying the verse, *"I lay down and slept, I awoke,"* to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This trend is evident in the rituals of Good Friday, and it is also the trend which St. Augustine followed when interpreting many Psalms.

3 - The third trend is spiritual and applies to everyone in his personal life. We shall deal with this trend on the following pages, if God wills.

The interpretation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 - Let us start from the beginning of the Psalm where the Lord says to the Father, *"Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me!"* How could all those rise up against me: the scribes, pharisees, sadducees, the elders, the priests and chief priests, even the multitudes whom He served! Indeed it is an amazing matter.

2 - It is amazing also that they think that I want to get rid of the cross (Matt. 27:42) and say; *"There is no help for him in God!"* *".. let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him"* (Matt. 27:49). They mocked Him saying, *"If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us."* (Luke 23:39), and considered His death the end for Him and that He will have no salvation.

3 - But You Lord, are a shield for Me, My supporter, My glory and the lifter of my head. In the crucifixion and the resurrection the Son was glorified. When He came to Calvary, He said, *"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You "* (John 17:1). He saw Himself glorified in His cross; the glory of love and sacrifice, the glory of destroying the devil's state and purchasing the whole creation with His

precious Blood, the glory of the kingdom which He was to establish with His blood and the glory of redemption and atonement. Such glory would lift up His head as the saviour of the whole world through his death because through His death He would tread death and Satan who brought death unto the world. Such was the glory that the Son would bruise the head of the serpent on His cross. As for the glory of the resurrection, it is evident to all.

4 - *"I lay down and slept. I awoke"*. I did not die that death which they thought would be the end, for My soul is immortal. In divinity I am alive, I do not die. However, this death is only like sleep from which I awoke by the resurrection. Truly, the soul was separated from the body to satisfy divine justice, but it returned to the body in the glory of the resurrection by which it trod death forever.

5 - Thus, *"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around"*, those who cried out *"Crucify him, crucify him"*, for most of them will return to me repenting and join the faith. None of those has any authority over me for I lay down my life by my own will *"...I lay down My life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again"* (John 10:17,18).

Spiritual Contemplation For Any Person:

1 -A person may either apply these verses to himself with respect to his problems and troubles and in the case of increased enemies or surrounding him.

2 - He may profit from them spiritually and call the Lord asking His help in his spiritual wars saying, *"How they have increased*

who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. "": Wars of thoughts, of the senses, of the emotions and lusts of heart, wars of the devils, stumbling blocks and tongue faults.

3 - All these pressing wars, gloat in my failure and fight me with despair saying, *"There is no help for him in God"* as if the Lord has forsaken me and His Grace left me delivering me into perdition.

4 - But You, Lord, with Your kind heart, will not leave me in my sinful state. You are a shield for me, and my supporter. Certainly, You will lift me up from my fall and restore me unto my former rank. You will wash me and I shall be whiter than snow and restore unto me the joy of Your salvation. You will lift up my head and restore unto me my former image and I shall be glorified in You.

5 -That was what You have done with Jerusalem the sinner in (Ezek. 16:6-14), *"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' "I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord God. "Then I washed you in water;(in baptism)... and I anointed you with oil. (the anointment of the Holy Chrism)... "I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; (Justification of the holy person)...and a beautiful crown on your head... You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to*

royalty. "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendour which I had bestowed on you..."

6 - Thus, a sinner finds that God lifts his head and puts a beautiful crown upon his head.

This happens when God cleans and purifies him of all his filthiness as He promised also in Ezek. 36:25-27, *"Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your filthiness.... I give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you: and I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes..."*

O Lord, all this you do for a sinner...

7 - Indeed, Lord, Ye are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head. They are liars who say to me, "There is no help for him in God."

Though I fall, I shall - with Your help - repent. I experienced this in my life for many times, *"I lay down and slept, I awoke"* because You Lord support me in all my weakness. Many times I slackened in my spiritual course but then came a spiritual wake in which I heard the apostle saying,

8 - "Awake you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph. 5:14)

9 - I thank God that I awoke and that sleep was only casual in my life and Grace which guards, did not quit me. Thus, in whatever spiritual wars the enemy fights me, *"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around". God is more powerful than all of them.*

Suffice me that I cry unto God as I did many times before, And He heard me out of His holy hill".

10 - In this way, a person goes on contemplating this Psalm with respect to his afflictions and enemies or with respect to his sins.

11 -This Psalm may be said by the Church being the congregation of believers and the Body of Christ.

Thus contemplation on this Psalm extends and does not stop at a certain trend. St. Augustine at the beginning of his interpretation, concentrated on the Lord Jesus Christ, then applied it to the church and then to the ordinary person.

David the symbol of Christ:

1 - David was betrayed by Absalom, and the Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed by Judas and the people cried out, "*Crucify him, crucify him*".

2 - David cried out, "*Many are they who rise up against me*", and many rose up against the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 - David did not resist Absalom who betrayed him but said to the leader of his army, "*Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom*" (2 Sam. 18:5); and when Absalom died, David was sorry for him and wept saying, "*O my son Absalom --my son, my son Absalom --if only I had died in your place!*" (2 Sam. 18:23).

The word "*Absalom*" means the peace of the father because it consists of two syllables: Ab (father), and Salom (peace), for though Absalom resisted his father, the father did not resist him but rather was peaceful towards him in spite of his revolt.

4 - As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He died for the people and asked forgiveness for those who crucified Him, "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). Thus, though people resisted Christ, He was peaceful towards them and warned Judas many times revealing to him the results of his wrongdoing.

5 - David seemed weak at the beginning of this rebellion against him, and wondered how they were increased that trouble him. But at the end he conquered and God saved him from all his enemies, and some of those enemies even returned to him in loyalty.

Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared weak on the cross in front of people and they mocked Him saying, "*He saved others; Himself He cannot save*" (Mark 15:31). Yet, he conquered at last, by the resurrection and many of those who took part in His crucifixion believed in Him. Thus He saved the whole world.

Let us proceed with our contemplation on this Psalm. David says: "***I will not be afraid***".

"I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, who have set themselves against me all around".

God's children do not fear at all no matter how the enemy encompasses them. They feel God's existence with them and this casts away every fear.

God Himself says to His children, "*Fear not*" . He said to our father Abraham, "*Fear not, Abram: I am your shield*" (Gen. 15:1); and said to Joshua the son of Nun, "*Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go*", "*No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life*" (Josh. 1:9,5). To

Paul the Apostle He said, *"Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent: For I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you..."* (Acts 18:9,10).

Many times God has said to His children, *"Fear not"* He said to His disciples, *"Do not fear those who kill the body..."* (Matt. 10:28), and assured them, *"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered"*.

Only those who do not feel God's existence in their lives may fear, or those whose sins separate them from God and consequently are deprived of help and protecting power.

As for David, he was completely aware of the deep relation between himself and God, so he was not afraid but laid down and slept in peace in spite of troubles and Absalom's army revolting against him. He slept confident that God is watchful for his safety and angels sing to him, *"... He who keeps you will not slumber.. neither slumber nor sleep... The Lord shall preserve you from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in..."* (Ps. 121). Thus, David sleeps in peace, not afraid, leaving his safety in the hands of the watchful God and says moreover,

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. for you are with me" (Ps. 23).

Likewise, Daniel was not afraid when he was cast in the lions' den, nor the three lads were afraid when cast into the fire furnace. The martyrs also were not afraid while they were led unto death or while facing all kinds of suffering... David was not afraid of Absalom's uprising against him but said, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* (Ps. 27:1). If

you ask David, *"Why are you not afraid, ye great prophet?"* he will answer you "because of experience", "Because of experience, of what?" *"When the wicked came against me to eat up my flesh, my enemies and foes, they stumbled and fell".* So, *"though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this I will be confident"* (Ps. 27:2,3).

"They have bowed down and fallen: but we have risen and stand upright" (Ps. 20:8).

It is David's experience in life, his experience of God's work for him and with him, his experience of God hearing his prayers and of God's mercies which never quit him. Let his enemies do whatever they want, and let people set themselves against him all around, suffice it to destroy them that he says, **"Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God:**

David was not afraid but was entirely aware of the danger so, *"David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly..."* (2 Sam. 15:14). He said so because danger was surrounding him and them, *"... for the people with Absalom continually increased in number "* (2 Sam.15:12).

However, danger occupied only his mind not his heart making him to fear.

He was aware of the danger but was not alarmed, for he saw that the solution was to resort to God alone who is able to save; so he said, *"Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God..."*

He did not allow dangers to encompass him but asked God to interfere. He did not face troubles alone but cast them upon God to face them and deliver him out of them.

It is good for a person to know that he cannot save himself but it is God who saves him.

This is usually obvious in David's Psalms, as he says for example, "Help, Lord,. for the godly man cease; for the faithful disappear from among the sons of men" (Ps. 12:1), "Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength" (Ps. 54:1), "Now I know that the Lord save His anointed" (Ps. 20:6), "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust" (Ps. 16: 1), "For you are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day" (Ps. 25:5), and, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Ps. 27:1). Time is lacking to mention all the examples in this respect.

As David says here, "Arise, O Lord; save me" he says also at the end of the Psalm, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Ps. 3:8).

David experienced that salvation is the act of the Lord and not dependence on a human arm. He experienced this in his fight with Goliath where he said, "*This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand*" (1 Sam. 17:46), and said also on the same occasion, "*...for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands*" (1 Sam. 17:47). He meant to say here that salvation belonged to the Lord.

Indeed, salvation belongs to the Lord, "*for nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few*" (1 Sam. 14:6).

Here, David says in the Psalm, "Arise, O Lord"

These words are repeated in his Psalms and in the Holy Bible as a whole. We quote them in the Holy Liturgy, *"Rise, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You"* (Num. 10:35).

The Lord answers, *"Now I will arise, says the Lord; I will set him in the safety for which he yearns"* (Ps. 12:5), and David sings, *"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away"* (Ps. 68:1).

It is not something new Lord, for Your mercies are extended everyday and Your salvation is seen every moment.

For Thou hast smitten all mine enemies.

"For thou has smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly".

So many were those who rose up against David without a cause, that he said once,

"Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head." (Ps. 69:4).

He did not make an offence which made king Saul hate him. The only cause for such hatred was that David behaved more wisely than all the others (1 Sam 18:29,30).

Absalom also hated him without a cause for David did him no evil; but Absalom's lust for dignity and rule made him in war with his father.

David did not do anything wrong to Shimei the son of Gera and Ahithophel, nothing but the treachery within their hearts. Likewise was Judas towards the Lord Jesus Christ who chose him among His disciples and gave him the box, sent him to

serve and gave him power to do miracles. Even at the last supper, Judas was sitting near the Lord dipping his hand with the Lord in the same dish (Matt. 26:23). However, the treachery in Judas' heart led him to betray the Lord.

Those who hate without a cause are oppressors and the Lord revenges on them for the oppressed.

For the Lord says, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord*" (Rom. 12:19). Thus, God smote Pharaoh with various blows because he afflicted the people and persecuted them without a cause. He smote also the men of Sodom with blindness when they tried to do wrong to the two guests of Lot the righteous (Gen. 19:11). The Lord smote all those who persecuted the church; some with madness and some died because they persecuted the church without a cause... He smote Arius and he died because he became an enemy of the church without a cause.

Thus, David remembers all the events that he passed through how the Lord smote Saul, Abner, and the Amalekites when they invaded Zikiag and burnt it unjustly with fire (1 Sam. 30). So, David sang to the Lord, "*You have struck all my enemies ; You have broken the teeth of the ungodly*" (Ps. 3).

You have broken the teeth of the ungodly:

Sinners are like fierce beasts which want to devour God's children. So, the Lord once compared them to ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). and St. Paul the apostle said about them, "*savage wolves... not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20:29). He also gave an example of this, "*I have fought with beasts at Ephesus*" (1 Cor. 15:32). St. Peter the apostle also said, "*Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring*

lion, seeking whom he can devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Thus, there must have been divine help to protect from the teeth of such beasts.

In another Psalm, David says, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth" (Ps. 124:6) and in the present Psalm, he addresses the Lord, "You have broken the teeth of the ungodly" (Ps. 3).

Our delivery from the teeth of the ungodly so as not to fall prey to them is only a preliminary salvation; only a step unto delivery but the devouring teeth still exist. Here, the experienced prophet tells us about a more effective and saving act by God that is *"breaking the teeth of the ungodly"* so that they might no longer have power to devour. It is an ultimate delivery through destroying the enemy completely. Truly, blessed be the Lord's Name.

David says this with the spirit of faith at the same time in which he says, ",Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God". He asks for salvation and sees it with the eye of faith.

Salvation is the story of his relation to God all his life as if he says with Zacharias the priest, *"That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us"* (Luke 1:71). A salvation which the Lord gives, salvation from Goliath the foreigner and Saul the malevolent with his darts and conspiracies, salvation from Ahithophel the treacherous and Absalom the undutiful son.

Arise, O Lord, save openly, for salvation belongs to the Lord.

It is something which belongs to the Lord and we depend on Him concerning it completely remembering all His previous loving kindnesses towards us.

This may be said also by any person who is in trouble or overcome by a certain sin.

O Lord, I did my best but still fall due to the myriads of lusts and stumbling blocks rising up against me all around which are about to become fixed habits or part of my nature corrupting it. Yet, I trust in You because You can break the teeth of the devils and the ungodly who hate me without a cause and save me from them; so I cry out with David, "*Salvation belongs unto the Lord*".

The Church says so also; in all its troubles.

Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God: for Thou hast smitten all my enemies. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Your blessing is upon Your people.

Your blessing is upon Your people;

You save and bless, You save us from negativism and afflictions, and bless us with every spiritual blessing from high above. This is the positive factor in salvation.

In the salvation granted by God, He does not only save us from the original sin and the actual sins but He also grants us the blessings of the New Testament via sonship, rebirth, Holy Unction of the Holy Ghost, and all the holy sacraments; so as we may rejoice with David saying, "*Your blessing is upon Your people...*"

God's blessing is upon His people, not upon strangers.

Those who benefit from the salvation of the Lord and say salvation belongs to the Lord, who become branches in the True Vineyard and its juice flows in them so they give fruit and become living organs in it. Those only enjoy the blessing of the Lord in their lives, in their ministry and in all their works and they say, "*Salvation belongs to the Lord; Your blessing is upon your people*".

This blessing has been intended by God for the world since the beginning.

God blessed Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:28), gave them the blessing of fruitfulness, multiplication and authority. He blessed Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1) when He recreated earth, and gave them the same blessing which He gave Adam and Eve. God also blessed our father Abraham and made his name great and made him a blessing so that those who blessed him might be blessed and in him all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:2,3). Such blessings were told to all the people upon mount Gerizim (Deut. 27:12).

Blessing became the utmost thing a person may seek and it carried within it everything else.

Solomon the Wise said in this respect, "*The blessing of the Lord, makes one rich...*" (Prov. 10:22). But whoever has no blessing, his life becomes completely empty and he fails in everything.

So, the Psalm ends with the blessing to show that David has attained all that he wished for.

So are David's Psalms:

How wonderful David the prophet is in his Psalms! and how wonderful his Psalms are! How they begin and how they end!

He begins this Psalm with complaint and reproach. Complaint of the increase of those who trouble him, who rise up against him and who lead him into despair saying, "*There is no help for him in God...*" He ends the Psalm with the blessing and salvation of the Lord insisting that the Lord is his supporter and saviour against his enemies.

The turning point in the Psalm from affliction to salvation lies in the words of the psalmist, "*I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.*"

The Lord interfered and the problem ends and the direction of events change so the person praying becomes not afraid of the myriads of people setting against him all around.

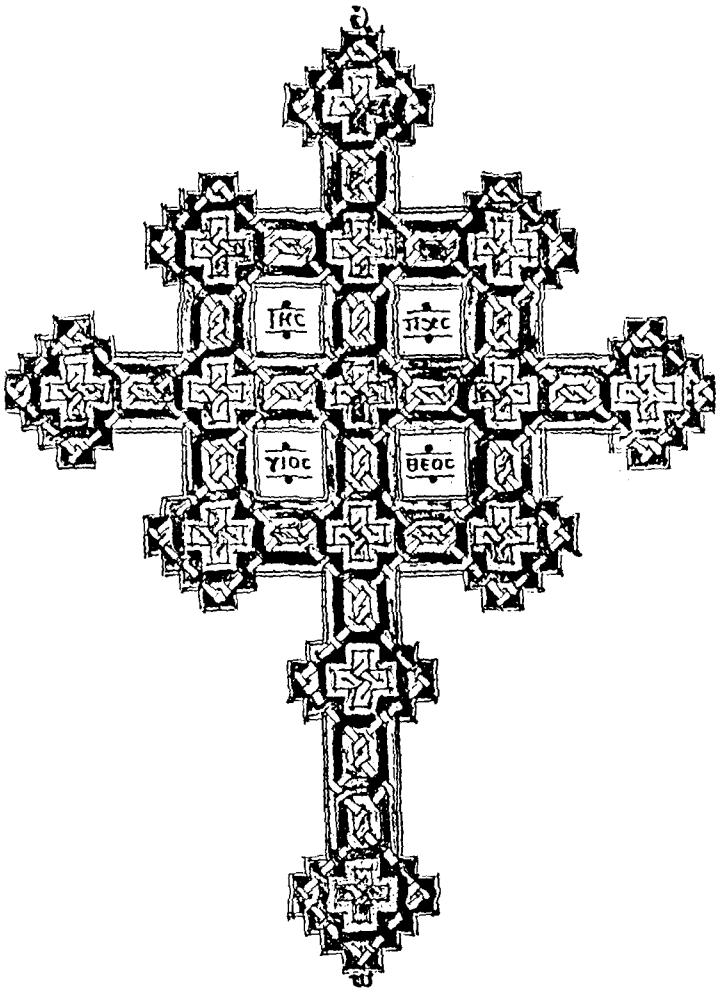
Indeed, a person becomes tired most when he deals with his problems alone and does not call upon God to interfere and deliver him from them.

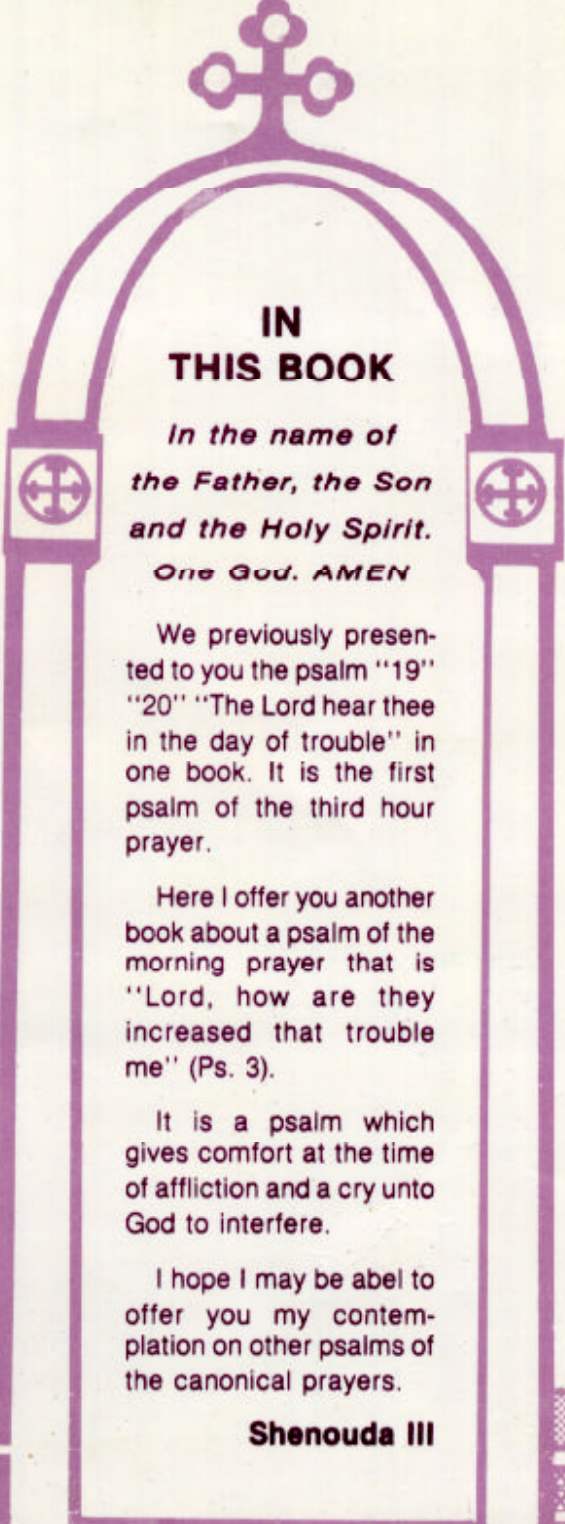
David's Psalms give us deep comfort concerning all our troubles whether spiritual or social.

Take for example the sixth Psalm, "*O Lord, rebuke me not in Your anger*". It begins with David moaning and saying "*my bones are troubled, my soul is also greatly troubled...*" Then comes the turning point at the end of the Psalm, "*Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer*".

May we sing the Psalms with the same spirit and say to the Lord with David, *"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing... I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up"* (Ps. 30:11, 1).

Thank God





IN THIS BOOK

*In the name of
the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit.
One God. AMEN*

We previously presented to you the psalm "19" "20" "The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble" in one book. It is the first psalm of the third hour prayer.

Here I offer you another book about a psalm of the morning prayer that is "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me" (Ps. 3).

It is a psalm which gives comfort at the time of affliction and a cry unto God to interfere.

I hope I may be able to offer you my contemplation on other psalms of the canonical prayers.

Shenouda III

