

Psalm 56

To the chief Musician upon Jonath-elem-rechokim,
Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

Psalm 56: The superscription relates the psalm to David's first stay in Gath under Achish (1 Sam. 21:10-15). The refrain of (verses 4, 10 and 11), mark off two sections in the psalm. First, David contrasts his threatening enemies with his faithful God (verses 1-4). Second, he expresses the truth that he is watched from two directions: on the one side by his enemies; on the other by God, his Protector (verses 5-11). The refrain (of verse 4), is now strengthened and expanded into two verses (verses 10-11). The two final verses serve as a conclusion that assumes his upcoming deliverance as a present reality.

Verses 1-13: This psalm, apparently written when David had been endangered by the Philistines (1 Sam. 21:10-15), expresses the kind of confidence in the Lord that believers should exude when they find themselves in terrifying circumstance. David's natural reaction was to panic (verses 3, 4, 11). But he demonstrates in the psalm that the believer can replace potential terror with the composure of trust.

- I. Fear and Faith (56:1-4).
- II. Destroyer and Deliverer (56:5-9).
- III. Trust and Thanksgiving (56:10-13).

Title: "According to Jonath-elem-rechokim": Possibly a tune name which links Psalm 56 with Psalm 55 (compare Psalm. 55:6; see note on Psalm 16 - Title).

Psalm 56:1 "Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me."

For David could expect no mercy at the hands of men, among whom he was. Whose tender mercies were cruel; he being at Gath, the city of Goliath, whom he had slain. And whose sword he had now with him. And among his brethren and friends, who he might justly fear would revenge his death upon him. Wherefore he betakes himself to God, and pleads not any merit or righteousness of his own, but implores the grace and mercy of God. And he might expect to find grace and mercy in this his time of need, since there is mercy with the Lord. He is plenteous in it, distributes it freely, delights in so doing, and does it constantly. His mercy endures forever; it is from everlasting to everlasting for them that fear him.

David wrote this psalm when he fled to Gath to get away from Saul (1 Sam. 21:10-15). Psalm 34 is also about this event; although there, Achish is called by his royal name, Abimelech.

This is yet another instance where David is in peril of his life. It appears that his enemy will never let up. He pursues him every day. If we were to look at this and seek a lesson to be learned, we would find that we must constantly be on guard. Our enemy the devil, is in constant pursuit of those he might deceive and get into his trap. It seems he never lets up.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

Psalm 56:2 "Mine enemies would daily swallow [me] up: for [they be] many that fight against me, O thou most High."

For not one man only, but many, were his enemies. Who observed and watched him, and were eagerly desirous of his ruin. The believer has many enemies, sin, Satan, and the world, seeking to devour and destroy him, though they cannot.

"For they be many that fight against me": His own followers and friends were few; his foes were many. Saul had numerous followers, and David encountered foes wherever he went.

This never-ending battle that David is fighting is the very same enemy that we fight. The characters may be a little different, but they are all sent on an evil mission by our adversary, the devil. Evil men of all ages are controlled by the devil. They cannot do good, because they are sold out to him. David mentions the only one that can help any of us in this same predicament; O thou Most High.

Psalm 56:3 "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."

"I will trust in thee": Confidence in the Lord is a purposeful decision, replacing an emotional reaction to one's circumstances.

How can I fear? God is on my side. David saw the magnitude of the opposition, and it was enough to make the bravest of them all afraid. He did not panic, because he had put his trust in the Lord. It is reasonable to be cautious in the face of danger. We would not walk out in front of an oncoming truck to see if God would protect us. This would be testing God. We must use our own knowledge and ability to the best of our ability, and God will do the rest.

Psalm 56:4 "In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."

Or praise him for his words for the whole Scripture that was then in being. For those testimonies which were David's counsellors in times of difficulty and distress. And particularly for some word of promise made unto him, he was persuaded would be fulfilled. And in which he gloried and made his boast of, and on which his faith and hope were built. And this he did, and determined to do, in the strength of the Lord, and by the assistance of his grace.

"In God I have put my trust": Either in times past, and was not ashamed or confounded. Or now, as he determined he would in (Psalm 56:3).

"I will not fear what flesh can do unto me": Or continue to fear any or all of my enemies. Though I have been afraid of them, I will shake off these fears, trusting in the Lord, and depending on his word. Or, "what can flesh do unto me?" which is as grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. Poor, frail, mortal man! What can he do against me, if God be for me? And

therefore, why should I fear? Men may contrive schemes, form weapons, and attempt many things against the saints, but can execute nothing, except permitted by the Lord. And the utmost they can do, when suffered, is to kill the body.

David should know better than any of us, that the statement he has made above is true. To look at the giant Goliath, was a very frightening thing. David did not let the size and power of Goliath stop him. He came against Goliath in the power and might of Almighty God. Flesh did not cause him great fear then, even though that flesh was several times as big as he was. The very worst this enemy of David's can do is destroy David's body. We see in the next Scripture that we are not to fear him who can destroy the body.

Matthew 10:28 "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Psalm 56:5 "Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts [are] against me for evil."

Form, fashion, and shape them at their pleasure. Construe them, and put what sense upon them they think fit. The word is used of the formation of the human body (in Job 10:8). They put his words upon the rack, and made them speak what he never intended; as some men distort the meaning of the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). And as the Jews distorted the words of Christ (John 2:19). The word has also the sense of causing vexation and grief (Isaiah 63:10); and so, it may be rendered here, "my words cause grief" to his enemies. Because he had said, in the preceding verses, that he would trust in the Lord, and praise his word, and not be afraid of men. Just as the Sadducees were grieved at the apostles preaching, through Jesus, the resurrection of the dead (Acts 4:1). Or they caused grief to himself; for because of these his enemies reproached him, cursed him, and distressed him. The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin render it, "they cursed my words"; or despised them, as the Ethiopic and Arabic versions. Anguish is intensified by unceasing harassment.

"All their thoughts are against me for evil": Their counsels, schemes, and contrivances, were all formed to do him all the hurt and mischief they could.

Wrest in the verse above, means to carve. This then, would mean that they carve up the words of David. They destroy the things he has said by twisting them around and making things out of them that David had not said. They have evil thoughts about David constantly. This is not only a problem of David's, but it is a problem of all those who try to do the will of God.

Psalm 56:6 "They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul."

That is, they do not attack me singularly, but they unite their forces and they combine against me.

"They hide themselves": They lurk in ambush. They do not come upon me openly, but they conceal themselves in places where they cannot be seen, that they may spring upon me suddenly.

"They mark my steps": They watch me whatever I do. They keep a spy upon me, so that I can never be sure that I am not observed.

"When they wait for my soul": As they watch for my life; or, as they watch for opportunities to take away my life. I am never secure; I know not at what time, or in what manner, they may spring upon me. This would apply to David when he fled to Achish, king of Gath; when he was driven away by him. And when he was watched and pursued by Saul and his followers as he fled into the wilderness. (1 Sam. 21:1-15; 22).

If one demon cannot destroy you, the devil just keeps on dispatching more, until it seems there is an army of them trying to make you foul up. They are everywhere we step trying to trip us up.

This is the very thing the serpent did to Eve. He waited and caught her away from Adam, and at a weak moment and he deceived her. As I said, the devil never changes his tactics. He just colors them up a little and passes them by us again, to see if he can catch us at a weak moment. This is the very thing happening to David here. David is the beloved of God. If the devil could trip him up, wouldn't that be a feather in his cap? If you are under constant attack of the devil, it probably means you are one of God's anointed.

Psalm 56:7 "Shall they escape by iniquity? in [thine] anger cast down the people, O God."

"In thine anger": The anger of God is not an emotional loss of temper, but a judicial outrage resulting from God's holy nature reacting to wickedness and ungodliness.

Sometimes it seems like those who are living sinful lives are the ones who are prospering in this life. David asks, are they going to get out of this with their evil ways? They may get away with it for a while, but the day of reckoning is coming when they will have to face the righteous Judge. David's request will come true at that day. God will cast them down into the pit.

Verses 8-9: The bold statement of trust in verse 9, "God is for me", is backed up by the claims that God keeps track of His people wherever they "wander" (Rom. 8:31). He is so concerned for their pain that He keeps their "tears" in a "bottle" (Rev. 7:17; 21:4). That is God Most High! He cares intimately for every detail of a person's life.

Psalm 56:8 "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: [are they] not in thy book?"

My tears ... thy bottle": David asked God to keep a remembrance of all of his sufferings, so that God would eventually vindicate him.

It was the custom in those days to catch the tears of the mourners in a bottle. God is so observant of us that every step we take, every word that we utter, every prayer that we pray, and everything that we do is recorded. God knows everything about you and me. We may deceive those around

us, but we cannot deceive God, He knows everything. Someday the book of our life will be opened. Will we be ashamed when He reads to us out of the book?

Psalm 56:9 "When I cry [unto thee], then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God [is] for me."

In prayer.

"Then shall mine enemies turn back": Great is the strength of prayer. The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much against their enemies. When Moses lifted up his hands, Israel prevailed. The cases of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah, prove it. This David was assured of, and knew it to be true by experience. His prayer being often the prayer of faith in this respect.

"This I know; for God is for me": He knew that when he prayed his enemies would flee; because God was on his side, who is greater than they. Or by this he knew that God was for him, and was his God, by hearing his prayers, and causing his enemies to turn back. Or, however, let things go how they will, this he was assured of. That he had a covenant interest in God, and who would be his God and guide even unto death.

David knows, as we should know, that when God hears his cry, the enemy better run. If God be for me, who can be against me? The answer would be only the very foolish.

Psalm 56:10 "In God will I praise [his] word: in the LORD will I praise [his] word."

These words are repeated from (Psalm 56:4). And for the greater certainty of the thing, and to show his fixed resolution to do it, and his strong affection for the Lord and his word, they are doubled.

"In the Lord will I praise his word": In "Yahweh." That is, whether I contemplate God in the usual name by which he is known, Elohim. Or by that more sacred name which he has assumed, Yahweh. That which seems now to me to lay the foundation of loftiest praise and heartiest thanksgiving, is that he has spoken to people, and made known his will in his revealed truth.

God inhabits the praises of His people. I am not really sure about what this Scripture is saying. The best I can do with it, is to say that even our praise has to be in Him. The Word of God (Christ), in us is actually what causes us to praise. The Word, Jesus Christ, Lord, God, are all involved in my praises, if I truly have Christ in me.

Psalm 56:11 "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me."

"What man can do unto me": No human has the power to overcome God's providential control.

As I said before, about all man can do is to kill our body. Our spirit will live on. If our trust is truly in God, we should have no fear of death. Death is just a release for our spirit, which has been encumbered by flesh. Paul goes into the fact that life after death is better than life in the flesh, in (Phil. 1:20-21). I will give just one Scripture here, but read it all for yourself.

Philippians 1:21 "For to me to live [is] Christ, and to die [is] gain."

Psalm 56:12 "Thy vows [are] upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee."

“Vows”: Confident that the Lord would deliver him, David had already vowed to present a thank offering to God (compare Lev. 7:12; Psalm 50:14).

It is a dangerous thing to make a vow to God and then not keep it. David is saying here, that the vows he made to God, he would keep. He also says that he will never stop praising God. That is my desire as well. As long as there is breath in my body, I want to use that breath praising God in some way.

Psalm 56:13 "For thou hast delivered my soul from death: [wilt] not [thou deliver] my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"

That is, my "life." Thou hast kept "me" from death. He was surrounded by enemies. He was pursued by them from place to place. He had been, however, graciously delivered from these dangers, and had been kept alive. Now he gratefully remembers this mercy, and confidently appeals to God to interpose still further, and keep him from stumbling.

"Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling": This might be rendered, "Hast thou not delivered;" thus carrying forward the thought just before expressed. So the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and Luther and DeWette render it. The Hebrew, however, will admit of the translation in our common version, and such a petition would be an appropriate close of the psalm. Thus understood, it would be the recognition of dependence on God. The expression of gratitude for his former mercies and the utterance of a desire to honor him always. The acknowledgment of the fact that God only could keep him; and the manifestation of a wish that he might be enabled to live and act as in His presence. The word here rendered "falling" means usually a "thrusting" or "casting down," as by violence. The prayer is, that he might be kept amid the dangers of his way. Or that God would uphold him so that he might still honor Him.

"That I may walk before God": As in his presence; enjoying his friendship and favor.

"In the light of the living": See the notes at (Job 33:30). The grave is represented everywhere in the Scriptures as a region of darkness (see the notes at Job 10:21-22; compare Psalms 6:5; 30:9; Isa. 38:11, 38:18-19), and this world as light. The prayer, therefore, is, that he might continue to live, and that he might enjoy the favor of God: a prayer always proper for man, whatever his rank or condition.

This is a very good request David is making. He wants God's Light to guide his steps, so that he will not stumble and fall. He is saying, Lord you saved me, help me stay saved. The only path that any of us should walk is the straight and narrow path that God has chosen for us. We cannot see the way without the Light of Jesus to guide our every step.

1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Psalm 56 Questions

1. What lesson can the modern Christian receive from verse 1?
2. Evil men of all ages are controlled by the _____.
3. Who is the only One who can help David, or us?
4. Why did David not panic with such great odds?
5. In David's youth, what was the name of the giant he fought?
6. David came against the giant in the name of the _____.
7. What was the very worst the enemy could do to David?
8. What does wrest, in verse 5, mean?
9. If one demon cannot destroy you, what does the devil do?
10. What does the statement "they mark my steps" mean?
11. What does it probably mean, if you are under constant attack of the devil?
12. Who will cast the evil ones in the pit?
13. What is meant by, catching tears in a bottle?
14. Who can we not deceive?
15. Will we be ashamed when He reads to us out of the book?
16. If God be for me, _____ _____ _____ _____ _____?
17. In _____ have I put my trust.
18. It is a dangerous thing to make a vow to God, and not _____ _____.