

PSALMS

Chapter 56

Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; ²my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. ³When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. ⁴In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? ⁵All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. ⁶They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. ⁷For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! ⁸You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? ⁹Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. ¹⁰In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, ¹¹in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? ¹²I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. ¹³For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Ps 56 A prayer for help when the psalmist is attacked by enemies and his very life is threatened. It is marked by consoling trust in the face of unsettling fear. Structurally, the prayer is framed by an urgent appeal to God (vv. 1–2) and a word of confident assurance (vv. 12–13). An inner frame, vv. 3–4 and vv. 10–11, confesses a sure trust in God in a form that is almost a refrain. The prayer itself is developed in the intervening verses (vv. 5–9). (CSB)

Psalmist finds himself in great peril from enemies and turns to God with confidence. In 1Sm 21:10–15, David flees from King Saul (who wants to kill him) to the Philistine city of Gath. Since David had killed a great many Philistines, he feared for his life. He survived by pretending to be crazy until he was able to escape back into safe territory. *The Dove on Far-off Terebinths*. Directions to the choirmaster for musical accompaniment. *Miktam*. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, trust in God; vv 5–7, ill will of the attackers; vv 8–11, God is for me; vv 12–13, thanks to God. (TLSB)

This psalm is the first of five *miktam* (Term remains unexplained, though it always stands in the superscription of David's prayers occasioned by great danger.). The circumstances which caused it to be written are described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. During his flight from Saul, David panicked and in weakness of faith left Israel and sought safety by joining himself to the Philistine king Achish of Gath. When Achish's men seized David because he had killed Goliath, David escaped death by faking insanity. This psalm is an expression of faith, written by David after his act of weakness. (PBC)

56:1–2 Initial appeal for God's help. (CSB)

56:1 *be gracious to me* – The psalmist can appeal to God for grace because God is characterized as gracious (Ps. 37:26); it is his nature to bestow grace. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

trample on me – The idea of being crushed into submission occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament (see Ezek. 36:3; Amos 2:7 and Ps. 57:3). Here the perfect tense may be classified as a characteristic perfect, stressing that they have been doing this over and over again until now. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

oppresses me – It has the specific idea of “squeeze, press” someone in a way or a direction. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

David refers specifically to the Philistines who seek his life. They wait in ambush, carefully watching for a time to strike. (TLSB)

56:2 *My enemies* – The enemies’ chief weapon is the tongue. (CSB)

all day long – Means continually. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

attack me proudly – Confident in their position of strength, they take no account of David’s God. (CSB)

In their arrogance they were attacking the psalmist, insidiously pressuring him into subjection. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

56:3–4 These words are a fitting prayer in sickness, in storms, in war, in persecution and in any other danger. When it seems that we are alone in our sorrows, what a comfort to know that God has counted and kept a record of our every tear. If we trust in the Lord, why should we be afraid of what man can do to us? (PBC)

56:4 *word* – God’s reassuring promise that he will be the God of his people and will come to their aid when they appeal to him (see 50:15; 91:15; see also 119:74, 81; 130:5). (CSB)

I shall not be afraid – This does not mean that he had no fear at all; rather, he did not yield to it but lived above it. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

what can flesh do to me – i.e., man’s feebleness compared with God’s power. (CSB)

God’s people should not fear mere human beings—all they can harm is the physical self (cf Mt 10:28). (TLSB)

56:5–7 Accusation and call for redress. (CSB)

56:5 *injure my cause* – David’s enemies say things that make his precarious situation worse, planning together and conspiring against him. David often felt himself the target of verbal attacks (cf 5:9). (TLSB)

Without letting up, throughout the day they kept disturbing his life. (Leupold)

56:6 *waited for my life* – This refers to their plans to cause him harm. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

David prays that God will turn the tables on those who plot against him, speak against him, and seek his life (cf 5:10). (TLSB)

56:7 *peoples* – Those who have one thing in common—their enmity toward David. (TLSB)

56:8–9 Appeal for God to take special note of the psalmist’s troubles. (CSB)

56:8 *tossings* – God cares for His people and pays attention to their pain, fear, and grief. Though David tossed and turned in the night, stressed with anxiety, God has taken careful note of every single moment. (TLSB)

It was not due to any selfish ambitions that David had become involved in his grave struggle with Saul. Therefore he dared believe that God had taken note of what he had suffered. (Leupold)

tears in your bottle – God does not forget a single tear shed in grief (cf Rv 21:4). (TLSB)

The bottle is clearly figurative, for God does not have a tear bottle to retain the physical evidence of his people's suffering as people often had. His full preservation of the knowledge of their sufferings is compared to the practice of the collection of tears by mourners. The word "bottle" is used only a few times; it may refer to a container, probably a wineskin or water skin-bottle, that holds wine, or milk, or some such precious drink (later little glass tear bottles were used symbolically or remembering). Just as people collected and held precious things in their skin-bottles, so God preserved the memory of the psalmist's pain. The prayer is based on the knowledge that God does not ignore or discard the suffering of his people; therefore, he should pay special attention to every part of this suffering. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

One can also listen to the song "Tears in the Bottle" which has its basis of this verse. Several artists can be found on youtube.

in your book – Record my troubles in your heavenly royal records as matters calling for your action – The image is that of a papyrus scroll on which God had recorded David's deeds. The "blotting out" of sins pictures forgiveness. For the imagery of God's keeping records of the events in his realm in the way that earthly kings do. (CSB)

Permanently recorded on a scroll or tablet. Such is the comforting depth of God's love for His children. (TLSB)

56:9 If God takes such note of his tears that he records them in his book, he will surely respond to David's call for help. (CSB)

I know that God is for me – David knows that God is with him because God chose him to be king (1Sm 16:1–13), empowered him to defeat Goliath (1Sm 17), gave him victory in many battles, and protected him from King Saul and other enemies. In short, David and we know God loves us regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. (TLSB)

56:10–11 Renewed confession of trust in the face of fear (see vv. 3–4). (CSB)

The repetition of these ideas indicates that this is the central and unifying theme of this psalm. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

56:10 *God...Lord* – In poetic fashion, David confesses his faith in the one true God, who has rescued His people time and again (*Yahweh*, the great "I AM" of Ex 3:14). (TLSB)

God – Translated from three Hbr terms. (1) *'elohim* appears c 2,550 times. It is the first and most commonly used word for God in the OT (cf Gn 1:1). References to the true God always take singular verbs, even though *'elohim* is a plural noun. This grammar may signal God's unique majesty and trinitarian character. The Hbr term is occasionally used of men, such as judges (Ex

4:16; Ps 82:6). This may signal that Israelites understood *'elohim* to describe God's authority. (2) *'el* appears c 400 times, an ancient word for God appearing in every Semitic language except Ethiopic. It is esp common in Jb, appearing there more often than the other terms for God. *'eloah* appears c 400 times. It is similar in spelling to the common Aram word for God. (Some have regarded *'eloah* as a singular form of Hbr *'elohim*, but this is not proven.) The term appears frequently in older poetry (cf Dt 32:15, 17; Jb uses it 41 times). Uses of *'eloah* outside of Jb associate the name with God's ability to defend His people. (TLSB p. 1227)

LORD – God's personal name. It is a translation of the Hbr words *yahweh* and *yah*. *Yahweh* is used more than 6,820 times and is the most common referent for God in the Bible. Though God instructs His people to call on Him using His personal name (Ex 3:15; Ps 105:1), and doing so is presented as a sign of faith (Ps 116:13; Zep 3:9; Zec 13:9), traditions of not saying "Yahweh" arose in Jewish circles during the intertestamental period. Apparently, people feared to speak this name because they feared breaking the Second Commandment (Ex 20:7). Jewish writers used the euphemism "the Lord" (Hbr *'adonai*) in place of God's personal name. Early Christians picked up this practice. *Yah* is an abbreviated form of *Yahweh*, appearing sometimes by itself but most often as a syllable in other names and terms (e.g., *Jeremiah*, *Halleluiah*). (TLSB p. 1227)

56:12–13 Assurance of being heard – A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard.). (CSB)

56:12 *I must perform my vows* – Speaking as if his prayer has already been heard, David acknowledges that now he must keep the vows he made to God when he was in trouble (see 66:14) – A vow to praise. Many prayers in the Psalter include such vows in anticipation of the expected answer to prayer. They reflect Israel's religious consciousness that praise must follow deliverance as surely as prayer springs from need—if God is to be truly honored. Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God's saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple.). (CSB)

David will return to the tabernacle to fulfill his commitments in joy and thanksgiving, publicly proclaiming God's salvation. "Sacrifices of praise ... are the preaching of the Gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, the troubles of saints, yes, all good works of saints. These sacrifices are not satisfactions for those making them, nor can they be applied to others to merit the forgiveness of sins or reconciliation" (Ap XXIV 25). (TLSB)

56:13 *falling* – He was brought low by circumstances. (CSB)

Walk – Hebrew *halak*, a common term that can describe one's life or way of life (Gn 17:1) (TLSB)

before God – The Hebrew for "see the king's face" was an expression denoting access to the king. (CSB)

light of life – The full blessedness of life – Life in its fullness as it was created to be. For the association of light with life.). (CSB)

David anticipates living a life pleasing to God, in the light of His love and salvation. Luther: "[Christ] ushers in the morning and the day. He teaches us how to be saved and how to be delivered from death and sin. Therefore He says: 'I am the Light which illumines the whole world'; for He alone liberates from sin, death, the devil, and hell" (AE 23:324). (TLSB)

Ps 56 Even in the midst of danger, David rejoices in God's love and His certain deliverance from death. When we face trials, we may be tempted to worry about our own welfare or feel like giving up in hopelessness. Instead, we can remember that our problems are nothing new and that God is able to help in every situation. Through these experiences, He strengthens our faith and draws us closer to Jesus Christ, our Savior. • Father, by Your Spirit, help us walk before You in faith, joy, and humble obedience. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (TLSB)