

Psalm 56 Commentary

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Psalm 56:1 For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim. A Mikhtam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath. Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me; Fighting all day long he oppresses me.

- Michtam (KJV): or, a golden Psalm, Ps 16:1 57:1 58:1 59:1 60:1 *titles
- when (KJV): 1Sa 21:11-15 29:4
- Be (KJV): Ps 31:9 57:1-3 59:10 69:13-16 136:10,15,17-20 143:12
- swallow (KJV): Ps 21:9 27:2 35:25 57:3 106:17 124:3 Pr 1:12 La 2:2,5,16 Ho 8:8 1Co 15:54

NET NOTE sums up this psalm - Psalm 56:1. Despite the threats of his enemies, the psalmist is confident the Lord will keep his promise to protect and deliver him.

For the choir director According to Jonath elem rehokim - The Hebrew expression (yonath elem rechoqim) is difficult and its precise meaning is uncertain. It has traditionally been rendered something like “*The Dove of the Distant Terebinths*” or “*The Silent Dove of Far-off Places*.” It probably indicated a familiar tune or musical designation to which the psalm was to be sung. Some have seen in the imagery a fitting picture of David himself, helpless and far from home among his enemies, but that interpretation should not be pressed because the precise significance of the title is uncertain.

A Mikhtam of David, - **Mikhtam** (see [note](#)) occurs in the titles of Psalms 16 and 56-60. Its exact meaning is uncertain. Suggestions include a “golden” poem, an inscription, or simply a particular type of psalm. It is better not to be dogmatic where the Hebrew itself leaves us uncertain.

When the Philistines seized him in Gath - The historical context (context is king in interpretation) is 1 Samuel 21:10-15, the same general episode behind Psalm 34. David was fleeing from Saul and sought refuge in Gath, the hometown of Goliath (1Sa 17:4; 21:10). This was an extraordinary predicament. David was carrying Goliath's sword (1Sa 21:9) while entering the Philistine city from which Goliath had come! Woe! When the servants of Achish recognized David and recalled the song, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” David “greatly feared Achish king of Gath” (1Sa 21:11-12).

Be gracious ([chanan](#); LXX - [eleeo](#) - have or show mercy) **to me, O God** - David's first words are not a declaration of his own strength but a plea for grace. **Be gracious** carries the idea of showing favor or mercy to one in need. David had military experience, courage, and considerable ability, but in Gath those resources could not provide the security he desperately needed. His predicament and sense of helplessness drove him to God's mercy (cf. Ps 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 57:1).

For (term of explanation - explains his need for mercy) **man has trampled upon me** - KJV - “for man would swallow me up.” David deliberately contrasts “**man**” with “**God**.” This contrast becomes increasingly important as the psalm develops. Men may threaten him, pursue him, twist his words, and plot against his life (Ps 56:2, 5-6), but they remain only men. Thus David will soon ask, “**What can mere man do to me?**” (Ps 56:4; cf. Ps 118:6; Heb 13:6). The Hebrew translated **trampled** (sha'aph) can convey the idea of

panting after, snapping at, crushing, or relentlessly pursuing someone. David felt hunted like a wild animal. His enemies were not merely disagreeing with him, but were relentlessly pressing on after him.

Fighting all day long he oppresses ([lachats](#); LXX - [thlibo](#) - strictly press, rub together; hence compress, make narrow; figuratively afflict, oppress, cause trouble to) **me** - **NET** = All day long hostile enemies are tormenting me" **All day long** emphasizes the relentless nature of David's distress caused by hostile enemies, which is so marked that David repeats it in verse 2. (Have you ever felt like that?) There seemed to be no respite from the hostility and the result was continual torment for David. Put yourself in David's position -- King Saul was behind him, the Philistines were around him, leaving David few places to turn from a human perspective. It is notable that David does not begin this psalm by telling God how great He is. He begins by telling God how great his trouble is! Don't misinterpret David's reaction. It is not necessarily a reflection of unbelief. Biblical faith does not require us to be an ostrich and put our head in the sand, seeking to minimize our problems. Faith honestly acknowledges the size of the problem and then measures that problem against the greatness of God. And in context this is exactly what David will do in verses 3-4.

NET NOTE on **oppresses** - The [imperfect verbal form](#) draws attention to the continuing nature of the enemies' attacks.

Bob Utley - "**all day long**" Notice that this idiom for continual attack is used in Ps. 56:1, 2, and 5. The psalmist looks forward to a day (cf. Ps. 56:3) when his enemies will be turned back, Ps. 56:9a.

Bob Utley - "**Be gracious**" This IMPERATIVE (BDB 335, KB 334) begins many Psalms (cf. Ps. 4:1; 6:2; 51:1; 57:1 [twice]; 86:3; 123:3 [twice]) and it occurs in many others (cf. Ps. 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 41:4,10; 86:16; 119:29,58,132). It is often associated with (1) deliverance from enemies (2) forgiveness of sins

In this Psalm the prayer is because of reason #1. Notice how the psalmist describes his adversaries (Ps. 56:1-2,5-6).

1. trampled upon (or "pant," same consonants, BDB 983 I) him, Ps. 56:2 – BDB 983 II, KB 1375, *Qal* PERFECT, cf. Ps. 56:3; Ps. 57:3; Ezek. 36:3; Amos 8:4
2. fight proudly against him, Ps. 56:2 – BDB 535, KB 526, *Qal* PARTICIPLE
3. distort (lit. "vex" him) his words, Ps. 56:5 – BDB 780, KB 864, *Piel* IMPERFECT
4. their thoughts are evil against him, Ps. 56:5 – no VERB
5. attack (lit. "stir up strife"), Ps. 56:6 – BDB 158, KB 184, *Qal* IMPERFECT, cf. Ps. 59:3; 140:3
6. lurk (lit. "hide"), Ps. 56:6 – MT has *Hiphil* IMPERFECT, *Qere Qal* IMPERFECT of BDB 860, KB 1049
7. watch his steps (lit., "heels"), Ps. 56:6 – BDB 1036, KB 1581, *Qal* IMPERFECT (i.e., so as to find a time and place to attack), cf. Ps. 71:10
8. have waited to take his life, Ps. 56:6 – BDB 875, KB 1082, *Piel* PERFECT, cf. Ps. 119:95

C H Spurgeon's comments on Psalm 56

TITLE. *To the Chief Musician.* That mighty minstrel by degrees acquired a noble repertoire of hallowed songs, and set them all to music. *Upon Jonathelemrechokim* --this was probably the title of the tune, as we should say Old Hundred, or Sicilian Mariners. Perhaps the title may however belong to the Psalm, and if so it is instructive, for it has been translated "the silent dove in distant places." We have here the songs of God's servant, who rejoices once more to return from banishment, and to leave those dangerous places where he was compelled to hold his peace even from good. There is such deep spiritual knowledge in this Psalm that we might say of it, "Blessed art thou David Barjonas, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee." When David plays the Jonah he is not like the prophet of that name; in David the love of the dove predominates, but in Jonah its moaning and complaining are most notable. Michtam of David. This is the second golden Psalm, we had the first in Psalms 16:0, to which this Psalm has a great likeness, especially in its close, for it ends in the joyful presence. A golden mystery, the gracious secret of the life of faith is in both these Psalms most sweetly unveiled, and a pillar is set up because of God's truth. *When the Philistines took him in Gath.* He was like a dove in strangers' hands, and on his escape he records his gratitude.

DIVISIONS. In Psalms 56:1-2, he pours out his complaint; in Psalms 56:3-4 he declares his confidence in God; in Psalms 56:5-6 he returns to his complaining, but pleads in earnest hope in Psalms 56:7-9, and sings a grateful song from Psalms 56:10 to the close.

EXPOSITION

Ver. 1. Be merciful unto me, O God. In my deep distress my soul turns to thee, my God. Man has no mercy on me, therefore double thy mercy to me. If thy justice has let loose my enemies, let thy mercy shorten their chain. It is sweet to see how the tender dove like spirit of the psalmist flies to the most tender attribute for succour in the hour of peril.

For man would swallow me up. He is but thy creature, a mere man, yet like a monster he is eager for blood, he pants, he gapes for me; he would not merely wound me, or feed on my substance, but he would fain swallow me altogether, and so make an end of

me. The open mouths of sinners when they rage against us should open our mouths in prayer. We may plead the cruelty of men as a reason for the divine interposition--a father is soon aroused when his children are shamefully entreated.

He fighting daily oppresses me. He gives me no interval--he fights daily. He is successful in his unrighteous war--he oppresses me, he crushes me, he presses me sore. David has his eye on the leader of his foes, and lays his complaint against him in the right place. If we may thus plead against man, much more against that great enemy of souls, the devil. We ask the Lord to forgive us our trespasses, which is another way of saying, "Be merciful to me, O God, "and then we may say, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." The more violent the attack of Satan the stronger our plea for deliverance.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS

Title. The words **Jonathelemrechokim** may be rendered, *concerning the mute dove among them that are afar off, or in far places.* John Gill.

Title. **Michtam.** See also Explanatory Notes on Psalms 16:0, in the "Treasury of David, "Vol. 1, pp., 222-223.

Ver. 1. Be merciful. This is the second of the Psalms beginning with the miserere; the fifty-first being the first of them. *C. H. S.*

Ver. 1. Be merciful unto me, O God. This is to me the one source of all my expectations, the one fountain of all promises: *Miserere mei, Deus, miserere mei.* Bernard, 1091-1157.

Ver. 1. Be merciful. His first wrestling in prayer is with the check of his conscience, whether for his daily sins, or in particular for casting himself in such apparent danger, as to have ventured without probable security, to seek shelter among the enemies of the people of God, whose blood he himself had shed abundantly; for this rashness or other sins he begs mercy. *David Dickson.*

Ver. 1. Man. He uses the indefinite term *man* in this verse, though in the next he speaks of having many enemies, the more forcibly to express the truth, that the whole world was combined against him, that he experienced no humanity amongst men, and stood in the last necessity of divine help. *John Calvin.*

Ver. 1. Would swallow me up. *Soop me up* (as the Hebrew word soundeth); make but one draught of me, or suck me in as a whirlpool, swallow me up as a ravenous wild beast. *John Trapp.*

Ver. 1. He fighting daily. There is no morning on which we can arise and go forth into the world, and say, "No enemy will come out against me today." There is no night in which we can retire from that world, and think to find safety in the solitude of our own chambers, and say, "No evil can enter here." *Barton Bouchier, in "Manna in the Heart," 1855.*

Ver. 1-2. The same words are applicable to the situation and circumstances of David, pursued by his enemies; of Christ, persecuted by the Jews; of the church, afflicted in the world; and of the soul, encompassed by enemies, against whom she is forced to wage perpetual war. *George Horne.*

WORK UPON THE FIFTY-SIXTH PSALM

In CHANDLER'S *"Life of David,"* Vol. 1., pp. 104-7, there is an Exposition of this Psalm.

QUESTION - [What is a michtam in the Bible?](http://www.gotquestions.org/What-is-a-michtam-in-the-Bible/) | [GotQuestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org/)

ANSWER - No one is precisely sure what a *michtam* (or *miktam*) was, and that's why the Hebrew word remains as a transliteration in our English Bibles. Translators didn't know how to translate *michtam*, so they spelled it phonetically and called it good enough.

Psalm 16 is titled "A *miktam* of David." The other psalms that are called "*michtams*" are Psalms 56-60. All six of these are psalms of David. In Isaiah 38:9, King Hezekiah's song is introduced with these words: "A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery." The Hebrew word for "writing" here is *miktab*, which many scholars believe is related to *michtam*.

A possibly related word to *michtam* is the Hebrew *katham*, which means "an engraving." If the underlying meaning of *michtam* is "engraving," then the songs labeled as "*michtams*" could have been considered of enough value to be stamped or engraved upon tablets for long-term preservation. Some scholars see the word *michtam* as meaning "golden," a definition that would similarly assign great value to a song so labeled. A *michtam* could be "a psalm as precious as stamped gold"; if so, today's top-selling songs that are "certified gold" could be considered "*michtams*" of a sort.

The link between a *michtam* and golden worth is speculative, however. Other scholars think the word *michtam* is simply a [technical term](#) to guide the singer or to denote the tune to be played. In the end, we don't know. Like the words *maskil*, *selah*, and *shigionoth*, *michtam* remains somewhat of a mystery in the Hebrew song book.

KJV Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.

NET Those who anticipate my defeat attack me all day long. Indeed, many are fighting against me, O Exalted One.

NLT I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me.

BGT κατεπ της ν με ο χθρο μου λην τ ν μ ραν τι πολλο ο πολεμο ντ ς με π ψους

LXE Mine enemies have trodden me down all the day from the dawning of the day; for there are many warring against me.

CSB My adversaries trample me all day, for many arrogantly fight against me.

ESV my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly.

NIV My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride.

YLT Mine enemies have swallowed up all the day, For many are fighting against me, O most High,

- enemies (KJV): Heb. observers, Ps 54:5
- many (KJV): Ps 3:1 118:10-12 Ac 4:25-27 Rev 16:14
- most (KJV): Ps 9:2 91:1 92:1,8 93:4 Isa 57:15 Da 5:18 Mic 6:6

DAVID UNDER CONSTANT ATTACK

My foes have trampled upon me all day long, for they are many who fight proudly against me - David intensifies the description of his danger from verse 1. There he spoke of “**man**” trampling upon him; now he speaks of “**my foes**” and emphasizes that “**they are many**.” If you’ve read the background text in 1 Samuel 21:1-15, you know that David was not exaggerating the danger of his circumstances. He was surrounded by enemies. Saul was seeking his life in Israel, and now David fleeing Saul ends up in Philistine territory where he was recognized as the celebrated warrior who had killed their champion Goliath (1Sa 17:49-51; 18:6-9; 21:10-12). Humanly speaking, David was running out of places to hide.

My foes have trampled upon me all day long - The repetition of “**all day long**” from verse 1 emphasizes the relentless pressure David was experiencing. His enemies seemed to give him no rest. The Hebrew verb translated “trampled” (sha’aph) can convey the idea of eagerly pursuing, panting after, or seeking to crush another. The picture is of enemies who are continually pressing upon David, determined to bring him down (cf. Ps 35:4; 38:12; 57:3; 140:1-2).

There are seasons in life when troubles seem to come not one at a time but one after another, until we begin to feel surrounded. David knew that experience well. Yet the repeated “all day long” of his enemies would eventually be answered by David’s repeated confidence “in God” (Ps 56:4, 10-11). His enemies might pursue him all day, but God’s care for him was just as continual (Ps 56:8-9).

Note that the NET Bible has a very different translation - “Those who anticipate my defeat attack me all day long.” The **NET NOTE** says “*Hebrew literally reads* “to those who watch me [with evil intent].” See also Ps 5:8; 27:11; 54:5; 59:10.”

For they are many who fight proudly against me - David does not minimize the numerical advantage of his enemies: “they are many.” This is a recurring situation in Scripture. God’s servants frequently find themselves apparently outnumbered (2Ki 6:15-17; 2Ch 20:12; Ps 3:1-3). But Scripture repeatedly teaches that the decisive question is not how many are against us, but Who is for us (Ps 118:6; Ro 8:31).

The phrase translated “**proudly against me**” is difficult. The Hebrew word marom ordinarily means “height,” “high place,” or “on high.” Thus most modern translations understand David’s enemies as fighting proudly or arrogantly, while a few understand the expression as referring to God as the Most High (KJV = “O thou most High.”) The NASB’s “**proudly**” would express the idea that David’s enemies regarded themselves as being in a position of superiority over him. They had the numbers, the power, and apparently the advantage.

NET Bible translation is very different from NASB - “Indeed, many are fighting against me, O Exalted One.” The **NET NOTE** explains “Some take the Hebrew term מָרוֹם (marom, “on high; above”) as an adverb

modifying the preceding participle and translate, "proudly" (cf. NASB; NIV "in their pride"). The present translation assumes the term is a divine title here. The Lord is pictured as enthroned "on high" in Ps 92:8. (Note the substantival use of the term in Isa 24:4 and see C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs (*Psalms* [ICC], 2:34), who prefer to place the term at the beginning of the next verse.)"

If one takes the NASB (ESV, CSB, NIV) reading that David's enemies may consider themselves high, there is One infinitely higher than they are. And David will soon turn his attention from those who proudly fight against him to God Most High (cf. Ps 57:2; 92:8). Human pride looks impressive only until it is viewed from the perspective of the throne of God (Ps 2:1-4; Isa 40:22-23).

THOUGHT: We may be outnumbered, but we can never be outmatched when the LORD Most High is our refuge (see [Spurgeon](#)). David counted his enemies and discovered they were many. Then in the rest of this psalm he looked to God and discovered that One was enough (Ps 3:6; 27:1-3; Ro 8:31). One plus God is a majority!

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 2. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up. Their appetite for blood never fails them. With them there is no truce or armistice. They are many, but one mind animates them. Nothing I can do can make them relent. Unless they can quite devour me they will never be content. The ogres of nursery tales exist in reality in the enemies of the church, who would crush the bones of the godly, and make a mouthful of them if they could.

For they be many that fight against me. Sinners are gregarious creatures. Persecutors hunt in packs. These wolves of the church seldom come down upon us singly. The number of our foes is a powerful plea for the interposition of the one Defender of the faithful, who is mightier than all their bands. These foes of the gracious are also keen eyed, and ever on the watch, hence the margin calls them "observers."

The greatness of God as the Most High is a fertile source of consolation to weak saints oppressed by mighty enemies.

O thou most High. Thus he invokes against the lofty ones of the earth the aid of one who is higher than the highest. Some translate the words differently, and think that the writer means that his foes assailed him from the high places in which pride and power had placed them. Saul, his great foe, attacked him from his throne with all the force which his high position placed at his disposal: our comfort in such a case is near to hand, for God will help us from a higher place than our proudest foes can occupy. The greatness of God as the Most High is a fertile source of consolation to weak saints oppressed by mighty enemies.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS

Ver. 1-2. See Psalms on "Psalms 56:2" for further information.

Ver. 2. O thou most High. The Hebrew is not that rendered **Most High** in Psalms 7:17; nor in our version is it ever rendered **Most High** in any other place, although found in the Hebrew Bible more than *fifty* times. There are but two other places where it is applied, as an epithet, to God; Psalms 92:8; Micah 6:6. It is commonly rendered, *from above, on high, high places, high*; once *loftily, Psalms 73:8*... The probable meaning is, they "fight against me from the high places of authority, both in Jerusalem and in Gath, *q.d.*, mine enemies are in power. *William S. Plumer's "Studies in the Book of Psalms, "1867.*

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 2-3.

- I. *Fears are common to all men*, at one time or another.
- II. *Improper and inefficacious means* of removing fear are often resorted to.
- III. There is here suggested a *true and effectual method* of removing fear. *Robert Morrison (1782-1834), in "A Parting Memorial."*

Psalms 56:3 When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You

- Ps 34:4 55:4,5 1Sa 21:10,12 30:6 2Ch 20:3 2Co 1:8-10 7:5,6

When (not "if" but "when) **I am afraid, I will put my trust in You** This is one of the simplest and most practical descriptions of faith

in the Psalms. David does not say, "If I am afraid," but "When I am afraid." He freely acknowledges the reality of fear. Only a few verses earlier, the historical account tells us that David "greatly feared Achish king of Gath" (1Sa 21:12). Faith does not require us to pretend that danger is unreal or that fear never enters our hearts. Rather, faith determines what we will do when fear comes.

When I am afraid - Fear is a natural response when we perceive danger, uncertainty, or circumstances beyond our control. David had legitimate reasons to be afraid. He was a fugitive from Saul, had fled into enemy territory, had been recognized in Gath, and was surrounded by Philistines who knew his reputation (1Sa 21:10-12). His fear was not imaginary. Yet David refused to allow fear to have the final word. Notice that David does not say, "When I am afraid, I will try harder," or "I will figure out a way of escape." His first response is directed toward God: "I will put my trust in You."

Bob Utley - Psalm 56:3 is a repeated theme; repeated again in Ps. 56:4 and 11. (1) I am afraid – BDB 431, KB 432, Qal IMPERFECT (2) I will put my trust in God – BDB 105, KB 120, Qal IMPERFECT, see note at Ps. 4:5 (3) then I shall not be afraid, Ps. 56:4,11, cf. Ps. 112:7-8; 118:6

I will put my trust in You - The Hebrew verb *batach* means to trust, rely upon, feel secure, or place one's confidence in another. The idea is not merely believing facts about God, but placing the weight of one's life upon Him (Ps 9:10; 20:7; 37:3, 5; 62:8; Pr 3:5-6). The words "I will" are important. David makes a deliberate choice. Fear may arise involuntarily, but David determines where his mind and heart will turn when it does. He cannot necessarily control the presence of the Philistines, but he can choose whether his thoughts will remain fixed upon the Philistines or turn toward Jehovah.

David moves from fear to faith, and faith begins to displace fear. The circumstances have not necessarily changed. What has changed is the object of David's attention and confidence. He has turned his eyes from what man might do to what God has promised. This same pattern appears throughout Scripture. "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You" finds beautiful parallels in Ps 27:1-3; Ps 46:1-3; Ps 112:7-8; Isa 12:2; Isa 41:10; Jn 14:1, 27; Heb 13:5-6. The antidote to fear is not simply telling ourselves, "Don't be afraid." It is replacing fear's object with faith's Object, the trustworthy God. And notice David says "in You." Ultimately, faith is only as dependable as its object. David's confidence was not in the strength of his faith, but in the strength and faithfulness of his God. Weak faith placed in an infinitely faithful God still has an infinitely faithful God as its object.

THOUGHT: Fear and faith may enter the heart at the same moment, but they look in opposite directions. Fear looks at what might happen; faith looks at the God Who holds what happens in His hands.

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 3. What time I am afraid.

David was no braggart, he does not claim never to be afraid, and he was no brutish Stoic free from fear because of the lack of tenderness. David's intelligence deprived him of the stupid heedlessness of ignorance, he saw the imminence of his peril, and was afraid. We are men, and therefore liable to overthrow; we are feeble, and therefore unable to prevent it; we are sinful men, and therefore deserving it, and for all these reasons we are afraid. But the condition of the psalmist's mind was complex-- he feared, but that fear did not fill the whole area of his mind, for he adds,

I will trust in thee.

It is possible, then, for fear and faith to occupy the mind at the same moment. We are strange beings, and our experience in the divine life is stranger still. We are often in a twilight, where light and darkness are both present, and it is hard to tell which predominates. It is a blessed fear which drives us to trust. Unregenerate fear drives from God, gracious fear drives to him. If I fear man I have only to trust God, and I have the best antidote. To trust when there is no cause for fear, is but the name of faith, but to be reliant upon God when occasions for alarm are abundant and pressing, is the conquering faith of God's elect. Though the verse is in the form of a resolve, it became a fact in David's life, let us make it so in ours. Whether the fear arise from without or within, from past, present, or future, from temporals, or spirituals, from men or devils, let us maintain faith, and we shall soon recover courage.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS

Ver. 3. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. There is nothing like faith to help at a pinch; faith dissolves doubts as the sun drives away the mists. And that you may not be put out, know that your time for believing is always. There are times when some graces may be out of use, but there is no time wherein faith can be said to be so. Wherefore faith must be always in exercise. Faith is the eye, is the mouth, is the hand, and one of these is of use all the day long. Faith is to see, to receive, to work, or to eat; and a Christian should be seeing or receiving, or working, or feeding all day long. Let it rain, let it blow, let it thunder, let it lighten, a

Christian must still believe. "At what time, "said the good man, "I am afraid, I will trust in thee." *John Bunyan*.

Ver. 3. What time I am afraid, etc. A divine spark may live in a smoke of doubts without a speedy rising into flame. When grace is at the bottom of doubting, there will be reliance on Christ and lively petitions to him. Peter's faith staggers when he began to sink, but he casts a look and sends forth a cry to his Saviour, acknowledging His sufficiency; Matthew 14:30, "Lord, save me." Sometimes those doubtings strengthen our trust and make us take hold faster on God. Psalm 56:3. **What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.** This was a fear of himself or others, rather than a jealousy of God. Had he had unworthy suspicions of him, he would not have trusted him; he would not have run for remedy to the object of his fear. The waverings where faith is, are like the tossings of a ship fast at anchor (still there is a relying upon God), not like a boat carried by the waves of the sea to be dashed against a rock. If the heart stay on Christ in the midst of those doubtings, it is not an evil heart of unbelief. Such doubtings consist with the indwelling of the Spirit, who is in the heart, to perform the office of a Comforter against such fears and to expel those thick fumes of nature. *Stephen Charnock*.

Ver. 3. What time I am afraid, etc. I know not what to do, but I will try my old way, it is good for me to draw near still; I will do so still, as I used to do; I will cast myself down upon the free grace of Christ in the promises; I will lay the weight of my sinking spirit there, I will renew my hold, life, expectation there; this is my old path, I will never be turned or beaten out here. This Christian in his strength may challenge all the gates of hell. This was David's course (Psalms 71:5), "Thou art my trust from my youth, "etc. Thence was it that he could say, **What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee:** his shield and sword was always in his hand, therefore he could make use of it when fear and inward trouble offered themselves. **Afraid!** alas, who is not? but what course will you take then? Even what course you used to take, *i.e.*, believe; use faith always; and have it now. *Elias Pledger(-1676), in "Morning Exercises."*

Ver. 3. What time, etc. Literally, **What day.** As "Man *daily* oppresses me" (Psalms 56:1), so "Every *day*, when I am afraid, I trust in thee." *A. R. Fausset*.

Ver. 3. It is a good maxim with which to go into a world of danger; a good maxim to go to sea with; a good maxim in a storm; a good maxim when in danger on the land; a good maxim when we are sick; a good maxim when we think of death and the judgment--**What time I am afraid, I WILL TRUST IN THEE.** *Albert Barnes*.

Ver. 3. I will trust in thee. Faith and fear stand together; and so fear and love. *John Richardson, -1654.*

Ver. 3-4. Sometimes faith comes from prayer in triumph, and cries, *Victoria*. It gives such a being and existence to the mercy prayed for in the Christian's soul, before any likelihood of it appears to sense and reason, that the Christian can silence all his troubled thoughts with the expectation of its coming. So Hannah prayed, "and was no more sad." 1 Samuel 1:18. Yea, it will make the Christian disburse his praises for the mercy long before it is received. Thus high faith wrought in David. **At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee,** and in the next words, **In God I will praise his word;** that is, he would praise God for his promise before there was any performance of it in him, when it had no existence but in God's faithfulness and David's faith. This holy man had such a piercing eye of faith, that he could see the promise when he was at the lowest ebb of misery, so certain and unquestionable in the power and truth of God, that he could then praise God as if the promised mercy had been actually fulfilled to him. *William Gurnall*.

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 2-3.

I. *Fears are common to all men*, at one time or another.

II. *Improper and inefficacious means* of removing fear are often resorted to.

III. There is here suggested a *true and effectual method* of removing fear. *Robert Morrison (1782-1834), in "A Parting Memorial."*

Ver. 3. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. Whensoever we are afraid of any evil, we are still to put our trust in God.

I. What is it to put our trust in God?

1. To keep our hearts from desponding or sinking down under any fears.

2. To comfort ourselves in God.

3. To expect deliverance from him. II. What is there in God we ought to put our trust in?

1. In his promises.

2. In his properties. His power, wisdom, justice, mercy, all sufficiency. III. Why should we in all our fears put our trust in God?

1. Because there is none else can secure us from our fears. Whereas,

2. There are no fears but God can secure us from them, either by removing the thing feared, or by subduing the fear of the thing. *Bishop Beveridge*.

Ver. 3.

I. There is fear without trust.

II. There is trust without fear.

III. There is fear and trust united. *G. R.*

Psalm 56:4 In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?

- In God I will (KJV): Ps 56:10,11 12:6 19:7,8 119:89,90,160 138:2 Joh 10:35
- in God I have (KJV): Ps 27:1 46:1,2 118:6 Isa 31:3 41:10 Lu 12:4,5 Ro 8:31-39 Heb 13:6

In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?- Verse 4 shows us what happened after David made the choice of verse 3: "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You." Fear drove David to trust, trust rested upon God's Word, and God's Word gave him reason for praise. Notice the progression: fear → trust → the Word → praise → courage. The danger had not necessarily disappeared, but David's perspective had changed because his attention had shifted from what man might do to what God had said.

In God, whose word I praise - David's confidence in God was inseparably connected with his confidence in God's Word. He did not simply trust in a vague idea that somehow everything would work out. He trusted the God Who had spoken. In David's case this was especially significant because God had already promised through Samuel that David would be king (1Sa 16:1, 12-13). Although David was now a fugitive and his circumstances seemed completely contrary to that promise, God's Word had not changed.

This is an important principle of faith: faith does not rest primarily upon what God appears to be doing at the moment, but upon what God has said. Circumstances change; God's Word does not (Nu 23:19; Ps 119:89; Isa 40:8; Mt 24:35). Abraham demonstrated the same kind of faith when circumstances seemed to contradict God's promise, yet he was "fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (Ro 4:20-21).

Whose word I praise - We normally think of praising God, but David says he praises God's Word because the Word reveals the character, promises, and faithfulness of the God Who spoke it. To praise God's Word is to declare that what God has said is true, trustworthy, and worthy of our complete confidence (Ps 12:6; 19:7-10; 119:140, 160).

David could therefore praise the promise before he saw its fulfillment. That is faith. Anyone can praise God after deliverance has arrived; faith praises Him while the enemy is still at the gate because God's promise is as trustworthy before its fulfillment as after it.

Bob Utley - "In God, whose word I praise" Notice this is repeated in Ps. 56:10 in a parallel way where *Elohim* and YHWH are connected. The "word" (BDB 182) is a parallel to "Your vows" (BDB 623), Ps. 56:12. There are many terms used to characterize YHWH's revelations.

In God I have put my trust - David repeats the central theme from verse 3, but notice the change in tense. Verse 3 says, "I will put my trust in You." Now he says, "I have put my trust." The decision has been made. David has deliberately transferred the weight of his confidence from himself and his circumstances to God (Ps 20:7; 37:5; 62:8; Pr 3:5-6).

There is also a beautiful relationship between the Word and faith. David hears God's Word, believes God's Word, and consequently trusts the God Who gave the Word. This principle runs throughout Scripture: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17; cf. Jn 20:30-31).

I shall not be afraid - Only one verse earlier David said, "When I am afraid." Now he says, "I shall not be afraid." This is not a contradiction. It describes the movement of faith. David experienced fear, but he refused to remain controlled by fear. He took his fear to God, deliberately trusted Him, recalled His Word, and emerged with renewed confidence. Faith is not necessarily the absence of fear, but it refuses to allow fear to occupy the throne of the heart (Ps 27:1-3; 46:1-3; 112:7-8; Isa 12:2).

What can mere man do to me? - The word "mere" is supplied by the NASB, but beautifully conveys David's point. The Hebrew is literally "What can flesh do to me?" (basar, flesh). David deliberately reduces his intimidating enemies to what they really are: frail human beings. Earlier they seemed enormous: "they are many who fight proudly against me" (Ps 56:2). Now, viewed alongside God, they are simply flesh (cf. Isa 31:3; 40:6-8; 51:12-13).

Bob Utley - What can mere man do to me" The Hebrew term translates "flesh" (BDB 142, KB 164, cf. Gen. 2:21). This is a rhetorical question that expects a negative answer. This same sentiment is expressed in Ps. 118:6 and quoted in Heb. 13:6. The concept is also seen in relation to spiritual forces in Rom. 8:31,35-39.

David is not saying that people cannot hurt us. People can persecute, imprison, injure, and even kill. Jesus Himself said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul" (Mt 10:28). David's point is that no human being can ultimately overturn God's purposes for the one who trusts Him (Ps 118:6; Ro 8:31, 35-39; Heb 13:5-6).

What a transformation! In verse 2 David was counting his enemies: "they are many." In verse 4 he is counting on his God: "What can mere man do to me?"

THOUGHT: Fear grows when we measure our circumstances against our own resources. Faith grows when we measure our circumstances against God's promises. David's enemies had not become smaller, but his view of God had become larger. When God's Word fills our heart, fear loses its grip on our heart.

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 4. In God I will praise his word. Faith brings forth praise. He who can trust will soon sing. God's promise, when fulfilled, is a noble subject for praise, and even before fulfilment it should be the theme of song. It is in or through God that we are able to praise. We praise as well as pray in the Spirit. Or we may read it--in extolling the Lord one of the main points for thanksgiving is his revealed will in the Scriptures, and the fidelity with which he keeps his word of promise.

In God I have put my trust. Altogether and alone should we stay ourselves on God. What was a gracious resolve in the former verse, is here asserted as already done.

I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Faith exercised, fear is banished, and holy triumph ensues, so that the soul asks, "What can flesh do unto me?" What indeed? He can do me no real injury; all his malice shall be overruled for my good. Man is flesh, flesh is grass--Lord, in thy name I defy its utmost wrath. There were two verses of complaint, and here are two of confidence; it is well to weigh out a sufficient quantity of the sweet to counteract the sour.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 3-4. See **Psalms on "Psalms 56:3"** for further information.

Ver. 4. In God I will praise his word. Or, praise him for his word; for the whole Scripture that was then in being. *John Gill*.

Ver. 4. The best hold that faith can have of God, is to take him by **his word**, however his dispensation seems to be; this will give satisfaction at length; for **In God I will praise his word**, is as much as to say, albeit he withhold comfort and deliverance from me, so that I cannot find what I would, yet let me have **his word**, and I will give him the glory of all his attributes. *David Dickson*.

Ver. 4. I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Fear not man, he is but flesh. Thou needest not, thou oughtest not to fear. Thou needest not. What, not such a great man; not such a number of men, who have the keys of all the prisons at their girdle; who can kill or save alive? No, not these; only look they be thy enemies for righteousness sake. Take heed thou makest not the least child thine enemy, by offering wrong to him; God will right the wicked even upon the saint. If he offends he shall find no shelter under God's wing for his sin. This made Jerome complain that the Christian sin made the arms of those barbarous nations which invaded Christendom victorious: *Nostris peccatis fortes sunt barbari*. But if man's wrath find thee on God's way, and his fury take fire at thy holiness, thou needest not fear though thy life be the prey he hunts for. Flesh can only wound flesh; he may kill thee, but not hurt thee. Why shouldst thou fear to be stripped of that which thou hast resigned already to Christ? It is the first lesson you learn, if a Christian, to deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow thy Master; so that the enemy comes too late; thou hast no life to lose, because thou hast given it already to Christ; nor can man take away that without God's leave; all thou hast is insured; and though God hath not promised thee immunity from suffering in this kind, yet he hath undertaken to bear the loss, yea, to pay thee a hundredfold, and thou shalt not stay for it till another world. Again, thou oughtest not to fear flesh. Our Saviour (Matthew 10:0) thrice, in the compass of six verses, commands us not to fear man: if thy heart quail at him, how wilt thou behave thyself in the last against Satan, whose little finger is heavier than man's loins? The Romans had *arma proelusoria*, weapons rebated or cudgels, which they were tried at before they came to the sharp. If thou canst not bear a bruise in thy flesh from man's cudgels and blunt weapons, what wilt thou do when thou shalt have Satan's sword in thy side? God counts himself reproached when his children fear a sorry man; therefore we are bid sanctify the Lord, not to fear their fear. *William Gurnall*.

Ver. 4. I will not fear, etc. Eusebius tells us of a notable speech that Ignatius used when he was in his enemies' hands, not long before he was to suffer, which argued a raised spirit to a wonderful height above the world, and above himself. "I care," says he, "for nothing visible or invisible, that I might get Christ. Let fire, the cross, the letting out of beasts upon me, breaking of my bones, the

tearing of my members, the grinding of my whole body, and the torments of the devils come upon me, so be it I may get Christ." *From Jeremiah Burroughs' "Moses his Self denial," 1649.*

Ver. 4. What flesh can do, etc. It is according to the phrase of Scripture, when it would speak contemptibly of man and show him to be the lowest creature, to call him "flesh," to set forth the weakness that man is subject to. *John Arrowsmith, 1600-1660.*

Ver. 4. (last clause). *Fear of man* --grim idol, bloody mouthed; many souls has he devoured and trampled down into hell! His eyes are full of hatred to Christ's disciples. Scoffs and jeers lurk in his eye. The laugh of the scorner growls in his throat. Cast down this idol. This keeps some of you from secret prayer, from worshipping God in your family, from going to lay your case before ministers, from openly confessing Christ. You that have felt God's love and Spirit, dash this idol to pieces. "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die?" "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." "What have I to do any more with idols?" *Robert Murray Macheyne, 1813-1843.*

Ver. 4. Faith groweth valiant in fight; albeit it began like a coward, and staggered in the first conflict, yet it groweth stout, incontinent, and pulls its adversaries under foot: **In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.** *David Dickson.*

Psalm 56:5 All day long they distort my words; All their thoughts are against me for evil.

- they (KJV): Isa 29:20,21 Mt 22:15 26:61 Lu 11:54 Joh 2:19 2Pe 3:16
- all (KJV): 1Sa 18:17,21,29 20:7,33 Jer 18:18 Lu 22:3-6

All day long they distort my words; all their thoughts are against me for evil - David now describes another weapon being used against him. His enemies were not only attacking his person, they were attacking him with words. They took what David said and twisted it, misrepresented it, and used it against him. David knew the pain not only of physical danger but also of being deliberately misunderstood and falsely represented (cf. Ps 35:11; 57:4; 64:2-4).

All day long - This is the third occurrence of this expression in the opening verses (Ps 56:1, 2, 5). David emphasizes the relentless nature of the opposition. It seemed there was no respite. His enemies pursued him "all day long" (v1), trampled upon him "all day long" (v2), and now distorted his words "all day long" (v5). Yet their continual opposition will be matched by David's continual confidence in God (Ps 56:10-11).

They distort my words - The Hebrew verb (*atsab*) can mean to hurt, grieve, cause pain, shape, or distort. In this context the idea is that David's enemies were twisting his words into something he had not intended, presumably in order to accuse or condemn him. The NET renders it, "All day long they cause me trouble; they make a habit of plotting my demise." Thus there is some uncertainty about whether the object is specifically David's spoken "words" or more broadly his affairs, but the NASB's rendering gives the vivid picture of malicious misrepresentation.

This is a particularly painful form of persecution because the victim may have spoken truthfully, yet his words are rearranged, given a sinister interpretation, or repeated without their proper context. David experienced it, and so did the greater Son of David. Christ's enemies repeatedly attempted to trap Him in what He said (Mt 22:15; Lk 11:53-54), and at His trial false witnesses distorted His words concerning the temple (Mt 26:59-61; cf. Jn 2:19-21).

There is an important lesson here. We can control what we say, but we cannot always control what others say we said. Our responsibility is to speak truthfully and graciously and then entrust our reputation to God (Ps 37:5-6; Pr 12:19; Eph 4:25; 1Pe 2:23).

All their thoughts are against me for evil - The problem went deeper than their words. Their thoughts were hostile toward David. Their distortion was not accidental misunderstanding but flowed from malicious intent. They were continually devising ways to harm him. The same pattern appears elsewhere: "They devise injustices, saying, 'We are ready with a well-conceived plot'" (Ps 64:6; cf. Ps 36:4; 41:7; 140:2).

THOUGHT: One of life's painful experiences is to have our words misunderstood or deliberately twisted. We cannot always defend ourselves against every accusation, nor do we need to. When others misrepresent our words, we can entrust our reputation to the God Who knows our heart and knows exactly what we said and meant (Ps 139:1-4; 1Pe 2:23).

EXPOSITION- SPURGEON

Ver. 5. Every day they wrest my words. This is a common mode of warfare among the ungodly. They put our language on the rack, they extort meanings from it which it cannot be made fairly to contain. Thus our Saviour's prophecy concerning the temple of

his body, and countless accusations against his servants, were founded on wilful perversions. They who do this every day become great adepts in the art. A wolf can always find in a lamb's discourse a reason for eating him. Prayers are blasphemies if you choose to read them the wrong way upwards.

All their thoughts are against me for evil. No mixture of good will tone down their malice. Whether they viewed him as a king, a psalmist, a man, a father, a warrior, a sufferer, it was all the same, they saw through coloured glass, and could not think a generous thought towards him. Even those actions of his which were an undoubted blessing to the commonwealth, they endeavoured to undervalue. Oh, foul spring, from which never a drop of pure water can come!

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 5. Every day they wrest my words; or, they put my words to pain and grief, or, they painfully and grievously wrest my words. David's enemies took up what he spake, and put a new shape upon it; and this they did so vexingly, that they are said to **wrest** his words; a thing is vexed when it is wrested or wrought out of the form it before had. The same metaphor the apostle Peter useth in reference to doctrine, speaking of the Epistles of Paul, in which "are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable *wrest*, 'or put upon the rack; they painfully form his words, and represent them in a meaning which he never intended. 2 Peter 3:16. What is spoken may be right, both in the matter and intendment of the speaker, yet another wrests, forms and fashions it in his own mould, and makes it bear a sense which the speaker never dreamed of. *Joseph Caryl*.

Ver. 5. Every day they wrest my words, etc. Mr. Jewel, the Bishop of Salisbury, who, according to his life, died most godly and patiently, at the point of death used the versicle of the Hymn, "Te Deum, "'O Lord, in thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded, " whereupon, suppressing the rest, they published that the principle champion of the heretics, in his very last words, cried he was confounded. *Lord Bacon's "Bible Thoughts."*

Ver. 5. They wrest my words. Whatever Christ said in justification of himself was twisted to a meaning injurious to him. So it is still in the world, self justification by words answers but little purpose with ungodly men. *W. Wilson, D.D., 1860.*

Psalm 56:6 They attack, they lurk, They watch my steps, As they have waited to take my life.

- gather (KJV): Ps 2:1-3 59:3 71:10 140:2 Mt 26:3,4,57 27:1 Ac 4:5,6 23:12-14
- hide (KJV): Ps 10:8-10 64:2-6 Da 6:4
- mark (KJV): Ps 37:32 57:6 89:51 Job 14:16 31:4 Jer 20:10 Lu 20:20

They attack, they lurk, they watch my steps, as they have waited to take my life - David's description becomes increasingly vivid. His enemies are not merely speaking against him or distorting his words (Ps 56:5); they are actively stalking him. Their hostility moves from thoughts, to words, to actions. David feels like a hunted man whose enemies are watching every movement, waiting for the opportunity to destroy him (cf. Ps 10:8-10; 37:32; 59:3; 140:4-5).

They attack - The Hebrew verb (gur) can have the sense of gathering together, assembling, or banding together, especially with hostile intent. Thus the picture is of David's enemies conspiring together against him. Opposition is frightening enough when it comes from one person, but David describes enemies combining their efforts against him (Ps 2:1-2; 31:13; 83:3-5).

There is an interesting contrast with verse 2, where David says, "they are many." His enemies have numbers on their side and are gathering together against him. But David has already declared, "In God I have put my trust" (Ps 56:4). The issue is not ultimately how many are against David, but Who is for David (Ps 3:6; 27:3; 118:6; Ro 8:31).

They lurk - The picture is of enemies who hide themselves and wait for the right opportunity to strike. They do not necessarily attack openly. They watch, scheme, and wait. Similar imagery appears in Psalm 10:9: "He lurks in a hiding place as a lion in his lair; he lurks to catch the afflicted." David knew that some dangers announce themselves openly, while others remain hidden until the moment of attack (Ps 17:11-12; 64:2-6).

They watch my steps - David feels that every movement is being observed. His enemies are looking for an opportunity, perhaps waiting for him to make a mistake that they can exploit. This recalls Saul's relentless pursuit of David, when David was repeatedly forced to move from place to place to escape him (1Sa 23:14, 22-26; 24:1-2; 26:1-4).

But there is a beautiful contrast coming in the next verses. David's enemies are watching his steps, but God is watching David. His enemies keep track of him in order to destroy him, while God keeps track of him in order to care for him. Thus David will soon say, "You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" (Ps 56:8). The enemy watches to harm; God watches to help.

As they have waited to take my life - Their ultimate purpose is now revealed. This is not mere criticism or harassment. David believes they are waiting for an opportunity to take his life. The Hebrew *nephesh* literally means soul, life, or person. David's enemies are hunting for his very life (cf. 1Sa 20:1; 23:15; Ps 35:4; 38:12; 54:3). This makes David's declaration in verses 3-4 even more remarkable. He is not writing about fear from the comfort of safety. He is confessing trust while men are actively seeking his life. His faith does not arise from the absence of danger but from confidence in God in the presence of danger.

THOUGHT: Sometimes it seems that those against us are watching our every step, waiting for us to stumble. But Psalm 56 reminds us that God is watching even more closely, not to condemn His child, but to preserve, guide, and care for him (Ps 32:8; 33:18; 121:3-8).

Bob Utley - Because of the vicious and continuing attacks, the psalmist asks God to act in judgment against his adversaries.

1. cast them forth (lit. "for crimes, will they escape," NKJV) – BDB 812, KB 930, *Piel* IMPERATIVE
 1. the VERB means "deliver," cf. Ps. 17:13; 18:3, so here it must be a question or the translation must add a negative by emendation (NET)
 2. it is also possibly to change "deliverance," BDB 812, פל, to "weigh out," BDB 814, פל
2. put down the peoples – BDB 432, KB 434, *Hiphil* IMPERATIVE, cf. Ps. 55:23. It is surprising that "the peoples," which is usually used of national groups (NEB, REB), is used here. There are several theories.
 1. this is a royal Psalm and refers to other nations (Peshitta)
 2. this is an Israelite/Judean living among foreigners
 3. just a way of referring to his enemies who act like non-covenant peoples

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 6. They gather themselves together. Firebrands burn the fiercer for being pushed together. They are afraid to meet the good man till their numbers place terrible odds against him. Come out, ye cowards, man to man, and fight the old hero! No, ye wait till ye are assembled like thieves in bands, and even then ye waylay the man. There in nothing brave about you.

They hide themselves. In ambuscade they wait their opportunity. Men of malice are men of cowardice. He who dares not meet his man on the king's highway, writes himself down a villain. Constantly are the reputations of good men assailed with deep laid schemes, and diabolical plots, in which the anonymous enemies stab in the dark.

They mark my steps, as hunters mark the trail of their game, and so track them. Malicious men are frequently very sharp sighted to detect the failings, or supposed failings, of the righteous. Spies and *mouchards* are not all in the pay of earthly governments, some of them will have wages to take in red hot coin from one who himself is more subtle than all the beasts of the field.

When they wait for my soul. Nothing less than his life would content them, only his present and eternal ruin could altogether glut them. The good man is no fool, he sees that he has enemies, and that they are many and crafty; he sees also his own danger, and then he shows his wisdom by spreading the whole case before the Lord, and putting himself under divine protection.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 6. They mark my steps. Go whither I will, they are at my heels. *William Nicholson*(-1671), in "*David's Harp Strung and Tuned*."

Psalm 56:7 Because of wickedness, cast them forth, In anger put down the peoples, O God!

- escape (KJV): Ps 94:20,21 Ec 8:8 Isa 28:15 Jer 7:10 Hab 1:13
- in thine (KJV): Ps 55:9,15,23 Jer 10:25 18:19-23

Because of wickedness, cast them forth, in anger put down the peoples, O God! - After describing the relentless hostility of his enemies in verses 5-6, David turns directly to God and asks Him to judge them. David does not take vengeance into his own hands. Instead, he places his enemies and their wickedness into the hands of the righteous Judge. This is an important biblical principle: the believer may appeal to God for justice while leaving the execution of that justice with God (Dt 32:35; Ps 7:6-11; 94:1-3; Ro 12:19; 1Pe 2:23).

Because of wickedness - David identifies the reason judgment is deserved. His enemies are not innocent people whom David simply dislikes. The preceding verses have described deliberate evil: they distort his words, continually devise evil against him, gather together, lurk, watch his steps, and seek his life (Ps 56:5-6). David's prayer therefore arises from a concern for divine justice,

not merely personal irritation.

The Hebrew construction is difficult, and some translations render the opening as a question, essentially, "Shall they escape because of their wickedness?" This probably captures David's thought particularly well. He is asking, Can these men commit such evil and simply escape the consequences? The implied answer is No! God is righteous and will ultimately call wickedness to account (Ps 7:11-16; 10:13-15; Eccl 12:14; Ro 2:5-6). This is an important truth when evil appears to prosper. God's patience must never be mistaken for God's indifference. Judgment may be delayed, but wickedness has not escaped His notice (Ps 50:21; Eccl 8:11-13; 2Pe 3:9-10).

Cast them forth - David asks God to bring his enemies down and prevent them from escaping justice. The idea is not that David personally intends to destroy them. Quite the opposite. David appeals to God because judgment belongs to God. This principle becomes strikingly evident in David's dealings with Saul. Although Saul repeatedly sought David's life, David twice refused opportunities to kill him, leaving Saul's fate in the LORD's hands (1Sa 24:4-12; 26:8-11, 23). Thus David could pray strongly for divine judgment while refusing to carry out personal vengeance. There is an important distinction between "God, judge wickedness" and "I will avenge myself." Scripture permits the former while forbidding the latter (Dt 32:35; Ro 12:19).

In anger put down the peoples, O God! - David appeals to God's righteous anger against evil. Divine anger is not uncontrolled emotion or sinful rage. God's wrath is His holy and settled opposition to sin (Ps 7:11; 11:5-7; Nah 1:2-3; Ro 1:18). "**Put down**" vividly reverses the situation described in verse 2. David's enemies "fight proudly" against him, apparently occupying the superior position. Now David asks God to bring them down. Those who exalt themselves against God's purposes will ultimately discover that there is One infinitely higher than they are (Ps 18:27; 75:6-7; Isa 2:11-12; Lk 18:14). Notice also the movement from "my foes" (v2) to "the peoples" (v7). David's prayer broadens beyond his immediate enemies. God is not merely David's personal defender; He is the sovereign Judge of all peoples and nations (Ps 9:7-8; 96:10, 13; 98:9).

This is one of the great lessons of the imprecatory passages of Scripture. When we are wronged, our instinct may be to retaliate. David teaches us a better way: take the injustice to the Judge of all the earth and leave it there (Ge 18:25; Ro 12:19).

THOUGHT: When others wrong us, we do not need to become judge, jury, and executioner. We can entrust both our cause and our enemies to the God Who judges righteously (1Pe 2:23; 4:19).

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 7. Shall they escape by iniquity? Will such wickedness as this stand them in good stead? Can it be that this conduct shall enable them to avoid the sentence of earthly punishment? They slander the good man to screen themselves--will this avail them? They have cunningly managed hitherto, but will there not be an end to their games?

In thine anger cast down the people, O God. Trip them up in their tricks. Hurl them from the Tarpeian rock. A persecuted man finds a friend even in an angry God, how much more in the God of love! When men seek to cast us down, it is but natural and not at all unlawful to pray that they may be disabled from the accomplishment of their infamous designs. What God often does we may safely ask him to do.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS None.

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 7.

I. From iniquity there is an escape.

II. By iniquity there is no escape. The mercy of God secures the one. The justice of God prevents the other.
R.

Psalm 56:8 You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?

- tellest (KJV): Ps 105:13,14 121:8 Nu 33:2-56 1Sa 19:18 22:1-5 27:1 Isa 63:9 2Co 11:26 Heb 11:8,13,38
- put (KJV): Ps 39:12 126:5,6 2Ki 20:5 Job 16:20 Rev 7:17
- are they (KJV): Ps 139:16 Mal 3:16 Mt 10:30 Rev 20:12

Bob Utley - Ps 56:8-13 This strophe deals with the psalmist's faith conviction that God was with him and for him (cf. v. 4). One day his adversaries will face the consequences of their actions (Ps. 56:9). We reap what we sow (see full lists of texts at Gal. 6:7-10).

You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?- This is one of the most tender and personal statements about God's care in the Psalms. David has just described his enemies watching his steps (Ps 56:6). Now he remembers that God has also been watching his steps, but for an entirely different reason. His enemies watch in order to destroy; God watches in order to care. Not one mile of David's wandering and not one tear from his suffering has escaped God's notice.

You have taken account of my wanderings - The Hebrew word translated "wanderings" (nod) conveys the idea of wandering, restlessness, or being driven about as a fugitive. How appropriate for David! Saul's persecution had forced him from place to place. He fled from Saul to Samuel at Ramah (1Sa 19:18), to Nob (1Sa 21:1), and then to Gath among the Philistines (1Sa 21:10). Later he would hide in caves and wilderness strongholds (1Sa 22:1; 23:14).

To David, these movements may have seemed chaotic. To God, every step was accounted for. David might have been a fugitive on earth, but he was never lost to heaven. Compare Job's words, "He knows the way I take" (Job 23:10), and David's later testimony, "You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways" (Ps 139:3; cf. Ps 37:23; Pr 5:21).

There is great comfort here for seasons when life seems to have lost its direction. What appears to us as wandering is never outside the watchful providence of God. We may not know where the road is taking us, but God knows every step along the road (Pr 3:5-6).

Put my tears in Your bottle - David moves from his feet to his eyes, from his wanderings to his weeping. The imagery is extraordinarily intimate. David pictures God as though He were gathering and preserving every tear that falls from his eyes. The point is not necessarily that God possesses a literal bottle containing our tears. It is poetic imagery declaring that no sorrow experienced by God's child is unnoticed, insignificant, or forgotten by Him.

Tears occur frequently in the Psalms. David could say, "Every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears" (Ps 6:6). Elsewhere the psalmist says, "My tears have been my food day and night" (Ps 42:3; cf. Ps 39:12; 126:5). Scripture never treats tears as evidence that faith has failed. Sometimes tears are the language of faith when suffering has left us with few words.

This truth reaches its beautiful culmination in Revelation, where God Himself "will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 21:4; cf. Rev 7:17). The God Who notices every tear now will one day remove every reason for tears forever.

Are they not in Your book? - David changes the metaphor from a bottle to a book. What God gathers in the bottle He also records in the book. Again, the language is poetic, emphasizing God's perfect knowledge and remembrance. Human beings may forget what David suffered, but God keeps the record (cf. Ps 69:28; 139:16; Mal 3:16).

THOUGHT: There are tears that no other person sees and sorrows that no other person fully understands. But there are no secret tears in heaven. The God Who numbers the hairs of our head (Mt 10:30) also knows every tear that falls from our eyes.

Bob Utley - God knows what the psalmist is going through (cf. Exod. 3:7). He expresses this faith worldview (i.e., based on the promises of Scripture) in

1. the VERB, "taken account" (i.e., God knows) – BDB 707, KB 765, *Qal*/PERFECT
2. the VERB, "put my tears in a bottle" – BDB 962, KB 1321, *Qal*/IMPERATIVE (i.e., prayer request); imagery for remembering the suffering and evil the psalmist experienced at the hands/words of his enemies
3. Your book – the word "book" (BDB 707) is very similar to the VERB "take into account" (BDB 707). "Book" is a biblical idiom of God's memory. This rhetorical question expects a "yes" answer.

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 8. Thou tellest my wanderings. Every step which the fugitive had taken when pursued by his enemies, was not only observed but thought worthy of counting and recording. We perhaps are so confused after a long course of trouble, that we hardly know where we have or where we have not been; but the omniscient and considerate Father of our spirits remembers all in detail; for he has counted them over as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in his sight.

Put thou my tears into thy bottle. His sorrows were so many that there would need a great wineskin to hold them all. There is no allusion to the little complimentary lachrymators for fashionable and fanciful Romans, it is a more robust metaphor by far; such floods of tears had David wept that a leathern bottle would scarce hold them. He trusts that the Lord will be so considerate of his tears as to store them up as men do the juice of the vine, and he hopes that the place of storage will be a special one-**-thy bottle**, not a bottle.

Are they not in thy book? Yes, they are recorded there, but let not only the record but the grief itself be present to thee. Look on my griefs as real things, for these move the heart more than a mere account, however exact. How condescending is the Lord! How exact his knowledge of us! How generous his estimation! How tender his regard!

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 8. Put thou my tears in thy bottle. Among other things in the collection of Mr. Abbott, of Cairo, he had a lachrymatory, or tear bottle, which had been found in a tomb at Thebes. This interested me very much. The custom in old times was, when a person was ill or in great distress, for his friends to go to see him, and take with them a tear bottle. Then, as the tears rolled down the cheeks of the sufferer, they were caught in these bottles, sealed up, and preserved as a memorial of the event. This is what David referred to in Psalms 56:8. **Put thou my tears into thy bottle.** But it implies much more than at first suggests itself, and much more than I can attempt to write. For instance, it is as if David had said, "Visit me, and behold my tears; ("O visit me with thy salvation!") for without such *visit* there could be no bottling of his tears. "Thou tellest my wanderings; O visit me, and behold my anguish; put my tears into thy bottle, "for "they have been my meat day and night." Psalms 42:3. "Keep them before thee, by way of remembrance, and when thou seest the bottle, O think of him whose tears it contains. Are they not in thy book?" That is, God's book of remembrance, that was written for those "who thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16), just as the kings of old used to keep a book of chronicles of important events. See Ezra 6:1-11. *John Gadsby*, 1860.

(We insert this to show what has been said by others; but we do not think there is the slightest allusion to this piece of *Roman* etiquette in this text. *C. H. S.*)

Ver. 8. My tear: the singular used collectively. **In thy bottle:** as if one should say, take care of my tears, as of a kind of wine that is very costly, and very pleasant to thee; or, that hereafter you may measure out to me just that quantity of joys: a metaphor from the keeper of a vineyard, who receives into his vessel the drops of the grapes pressed out by the winepress of affliction. The word *dag* (*iter*) (leather or skin bottle) denotes the manner in which they preserved their wine. (1 Samuel 16:20; Joshua 9:4, Joshua 9:13), and milk also (Jude 1:4:19). *Martin Geier*.

Ver. 8. Put thou my tears into thy bottle. What a sweet thought is suggested here of God's remembrance of his people's affliction! It is an interesting figure of speech, of *bottling their tears*. But the sense is, they are remembered. And woe will be to the man that offends one of God's little ones on his account. What are now bottles of tears, will be poured out in the end as so many vials of wrath. But reader! think how the tears of Jesus have been treasured up when shedding for the sins of his people. *Robert Hawker*, 1753-1827.

Ver. 8. Put thou my tears into thy bottle. It is the witty observation of one, that God is said in Scripture to have a bag and a bottle, a *bag* for our sins, and a *bottle* for our tears; and that we should help to fill this, as we have that. There is an allusion here in the original that cannot be Anglicized. *John Trapp*.

Ver. 8. Are they not in thy book? While we remain in this vale of misery, God keeps all our tears in a bottle; so precious is the water that is distilled from penitent eyes; and because he will be sure not to fail, he notes how many drops there be in his register. It was a precious ointment wherewith the woman in the Pharisee's house (it is thought Mary Magdalene) anointed the feet of Christ; but her *tears*, wherewith she washed them, were more worth than her spikenard. *Abraham Wright*, in "A Practical Commentary or Exposition upon the Book of Psalms," 1661.

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 8. Here are--

- I. Manifold mercies, to reclaim from wanderings.
- II. Tender mercies, putting tears in a bottle.
- III. Covenant mercies, "Are they not, "etc. *G. R.*

Psalm 56:9 Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; This I know, that God is for me.

- When (KJV): Ps 118:11-13 Ex 17:9-11 Jer 33:3
- then (KJV): Ps 18:38-42 27:2 Joh 18:6
- for (KJV): Ps 46:7,11 Isa 8:9,10 Ro 8:31

Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; this I know, that God is for me- What a remarkable change in David's

perspective! Earlier his enemies were trampling him, pursuing him, distorting his words, plotting evil, watching his steps, and seeking his life (Ps 56:1-2, 5-6). Yet now David confidently declares, "My enemies will turn back." What accounts for this transformation? David has turned from looking at those who are against him to remembering the God Who is for him.

Then my enemies will turn back - "Then" marks the anticipated result of God's intervention. David's enemies may presently appear to have the advantage, but David is convinced that their advance will not continue indefinitely. When God acts, those who were pursuing David will themselves be forced to retreat (cf. Ps 9:3; 18:37-40; 27:2-3; 118:10-12). Notice that David does not say, "I will make my enemies turn back." His confidence is not ultimately in his military skill, ingenuity, or ability to escape. The decisive factor is God. This is the same principle seen when Jehoshaphat confessed, "We are powerless before this great multitude...nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You" (2Ch 20:12).

Bob Utley - "will turn back" This VERB (BDB 996, KB 1427, *Qal*/IMPERFECT) is a common VERB and has a wide semantic field. It is often used of "repentance," but here, it denotes the defeat of the psalmist's enemies, in imagery, meaning to turn one's back in battle (i.e., retreat). Their plans (vv. 5-6) have been thwarted.

In the day when I call - David has learned to respond to danger with prayer. Earlier he said, "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You" (Ps 56:3). Now that trust expresses itself in calling upon God. The pattern is repeated throughout the Psalms: "In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, for You will answer me" (Ps 86:7; cf. Ps 18:3, 6; 50:15; 116:1-2).

There is no suggestion that prayer is a mechanism by which David controls God. Rather, prayer expresses his dependence upon God. David calls because he believes God hears; he expects his enemies to turn back because he believes God acts.

Bob Utley - "when I call" It is possible the "call" is a statement of faith. Ps. 56:9b Ps. 56:3a Ps. 56:4a-b Whichever it refers to, it denotes an act of volitional faith. There is a theological tension between the sovereignty of God and the freewill of man. Both are necessary for covenant.

This I know - These three words are especially significant. David does not say, "This I hope," "This I feel," or "This seems likely." He says, "This I know." His circumstances are uncertain, but his conviction about God is certain.

There are many things David does not know. He does not know how long he will remain a fugitive. He does not know exactly how he will escape Gath. He does not know when God's promise concerning the throne will be fulfilled. But there is one thing he knows: "God is for me."

Faith does not require us to know what God is going to do next. It requires us to know Who God is and where He stands in relation to those who belong to Him.

That God is for me - This is the theological heart of the verse. David's confidence is not ultimately that circumstances are favorable, because they clearly are not. His confidence is that God is favorable toward him.

This anticipates Paul's magnificent declaration in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who is against us?" Paul does not mean that nobody will oppose the believer. Romans 8 itself speaks of tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword (Ro 8:35). Rather, if the sovereign God is for us, no opposition can ultimately defeat His purposes for us (Ro 8:28-30, 35-39).

THOUGHT: We may not know what tomorrow will bring, how God will deliver, or when our circumstances will change. But the believer can say with David, "This I know, that God is for me." And if God is for us, those things which are against us can never have the final word (Ro 8:31-39).

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 9. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back. So soon as I pray they shall fly. So surely as I cry they shall be put to the rout.

"So swift is prayer to reach the sky,
So kind is God to me."

The machinery of prayer is not always visible, but it is most efficient. God inclines us to pray, we cry in anguish of heart, he hears, he acts, the enemy is turned back. What irresistible artillery is this which wins the battle as soon as its report is heard! What a God is this who harkens to the cry of his children, and in a moment delivers them from the mightiest adversaries!

This I know. This is one of the believer's certainties, his axioms, his infallible, indisputable verities.

For God is for me. This, we know, and we know, therefore, that none can be against us who are worth a moment's fear. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who will restrain prayer when it is so potent? Who will seek any other ally than God, who is instantly

present so soon as we give the ordained signal, by which we testify both our need and our confidence?

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS

Ver. 9. When I cry. The cry of faith and prayer to God is more dreadful to our spiritual foes than the war whoop of the Indian is to his surprised brother savages. *Adam Clarke.*

Ver. 9. (first clause). It was somewhat that when David prayed he was saved from his enemies. "I will call on the Lord: so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (2 Samuel 22:4); there is the *defensive* power of prayer; but it is more that it puts enemies to the foil. **When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back** and be put to flight; there is the *offensive* power of prayer. In David's tower there was an armoury, *thalpijoth*, a place to hang swords with two edges, swords with two mouths (Song of Solomon 4:4); a defensive and an offensive edge. Both edges must be used by such as seek safety. Prayer is a sword with two edges. "Put up thy sword into his place," says Christ to Peter: "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matthew 22:52. But he that takes not this sword may happen to perish by the sword; and the drawing of this sword may save a man from perishing by the sword. Mark that last reason that our Saviour adds why Peter should put up his sword: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 22:53). As if he had said, If it were my mind to confound these mine enemies that now set upon me, I should not need thy sword to do it. I could pray to my Father, and could presently by prayer bring such forces into the field as should rout and scatter all mine enemies; hereby implying, that if he would, he could do his enemies more damage and mischief by his prayers against them than by the sword and all instruments of war. Prayer is *twelve legions* strong, yea, twelve legions of angels strong against enemies. *Jeremiah Dyke (1620), in the Righteous Man's Tower.*

Ver. 9. This I know. Faith goeth upon solid grounds, and is not a fallible conjecture, but a sure knowledge. *David Dickson.*

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 9.

- I. God is on the side of his people.
- II. He is known to be on their side.
- III. In answer to prayer he appears on their side.
- IV. When he appears enemies flee.

Or--

- I. The fact, God is for me.
- II. The knowledge of that fact--**This I know.**
- III. The use of that knowledge--**When I cry**, etc.
- IV. The consequence of that use--**Mine enemies turn back.** *G. R.*

Psalms 56:10 In God, whose word I praise, In the LORD, whose word I praise,

- Ps 56:4 60:6 Ge 32:11 Mt 24:35 Heb 6:18 2Pe 1:4

In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise - David repeats almost exactly what he declared in verse 4: "In God, whose word I praise." The repetition is deliberate and emphatic. Surrounded by enemies and uncertain circumstances, David repeatedly returns to the same solid ground: God and His Word. His enemies' words had been distorted and deceptive (Ps 56:5), but God's Word was completely trustworthy. What God had spoken became the anchor of David's faith.

In God, whose word I praise - David does something remarkable: he not only praises God, but praises God's Word. Why? Because God's Word is the revelation of God's character, will, promises, and faithfulness. To praise His Word is to declare, "What God has said is true, trustworthy, and worthy of my complete confidence." God's Word is pure (Ps 12:6), right (Ps 33:4), settled forever in heaven (Ps 119:89), and true (Ps 119:160).

This explains why God's Word is so important when we are afraid. Fear tends to listen to the voice of our circumstances: "Look what might happen!" Faith answers by listening to the voice of God's Word: "Remember what God has said!" David's circumstances were constantly changing, but the Word upon which he rested had not changed.

In the LORD, whose word I praise - Notice the deliberate change from “God” (Elohim) to “the LORD” (YHWH, Jehovah). David's confidence is not in some undefined higher power. His trust rests in Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God of Israel, the God Who had revealed Himself and had made promises to His people.

This is especially significant in David's case. Years earlier, God had sent Samuel to anoint David as Israel's future king (1Sa 16:1, 12-13). Now David was a fugitive, running from Saul and hiding among the Philistines. Everything David could see seemed to contradict what God had said. Yet David chose to praise God's Word rather than judge God's Word by his circumstances.

That is one of the great tests of faith: Will I interpret God's Word by my circumstances, or will I interpret my circumstances in the light of God's Word? Abraham faced the same test. His body and Sarah's womb seemed to make God's promise impossible, yet he did not waver in unbelief but was “fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform” (Ro 4:18-21).

There is also a striking contrast in this psalm between man's words and God's Word:

“They distort my words” (Ps 56:5).

But...

“Whose word I praise” (Ps 56:4, 10).

Men could twist David's words, but they could never change God's Word. His enemies might misrepresent what David had said, but they could not invalidate what God had said.

And why repeat “whose word I praise” twice in the same verse? Because David's confidence needed continual reinforcement. Faith often survives difficult circumstances by repeatedly returning to truths it already knows. We do not outgrow our need to hear God's promises again and again (Ps 119:49-50; Ro 10:17; 2Pe 1:12-13).

The progression through Psalm 56 is beautiful:

“When I am afraid” (v3) - fear is acknowledged.

“I will put my trust in You” (v3) - faith is exercised.

“Whose word I praise” (v4) - faith rests upon revelation.

“This I know, that God is for me” (v9) - faith reaches assurance.

“Whose word I praise” (v10) - assurance returns again to the Word.

David's circumstances did not give him certainty. God's Word did.

THOUGHT: When circumstances contradict what God has promised, do not judge God's faithfulness by what you see. Judge what you see by what God has said. Heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will not pass away (Mt 24:35).

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 10. In God will I praise his word. Now comes the thanksgiving. He is a wretch who, having obtained help, forgets to return a grateful acknowledgment. The least we can do is to praise him from whom we receive such distinguished favours. Does David here mean “by God's grace I will praise him”? If so, he shows us that all our emotions towards God must be in God, produced by him and presented as such. Or does he mean, “that which in God is most the object of my praise is his word, and the faithfulness with which he keeps it”? If so, we see how attached our hearts should be to the sure word of promise, and especially to *him* who is the WORD incarnate. The Lord is to be praised under every aspect, and in all his attributes and acts, but certain mercies peculiarly draw out our admiration towards special portions of the great whole. That praise which is never special in its direction cannot be very thoughtful, and it is to be feared cannot be very acceptable.

In the Lord will I praise his word. He delights to dwell on his praise, he therefore repeats his song. The change by which he brings in the glorious name of Jehovah is doubtless meant to indicate that under every aspect he delights in his God and in his word.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 10. In God will I praise his word: in the Lord will I praise his word. The first word, *Elohim*, is a name belonging to God as a judge, the second word, *Jehovah*, is a name of mercy. I will praise God whether he deal with me in a way of justice or in a way of mercy, when he hath thunder in his voice, as well as when he hath honey under his tongue. Oh, how should we praise God, and pleasure ourselves by such a frame! *Stephen Charnock*.

Ver. 10. (*first clause*). By the assistance of God I shall be enabled to praise him for the performance of his promises. *Symon Patrick*, 1626-1707.

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 10.

- I. "I will praise God *for* his word."
- II. *In* his word, as he is there revealed.
- III. *By* his word. "Thou hast put a song, "etc.

Psalm 56:11 In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

- I will not (KJV): Ps 27:1 112:7,8 Isa 51:7,8,12,13

In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?- David now repeats and strengthens the declaration he made in verse 4. Repetition in this psalm is not needless redundancy. David is preaching truth to his own heart. His enemies are still present, the danger is still real, but David deliberately brings his mind back to the truth that has already steadied him: "In God I have put my trust." Faith often needs to rehearse what it knows when circumstances continue to provoke fear (Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5).

In God I have put my trust- The Hebrew verb *batach* speaks of trusting, relying upon, or placing one's confidence in someone. David's confidence is not in his ability to escape Gath, outwit the Philistines, or protect himself. He has transferred the weight of his confidence to God (Ps 20:7; 37:3-5; 62:8; Pr 3:5-6).

Notice the relationship with the preceding verse: "In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise" (Ps 56:10). David's trust is not a vague optimism that things will somehow work out. His trust is anchored in the God Who has spoken. God's Word gives substance to his faith. David can trust because God has revealed Himself to be trustworthy (Nu 23:19; Ps 33:4; 119:89-90).

I shall not be afraid - Compare this with verse 3: "When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You." There is no contradiction. Rather, David shows us how fear is dealt with:

- "When I am afraid" - fear arises.
- "I will put my trust in You" - faith responds.
- "I shall not be afraid" - faith begins to overcome fear.

David does not deny his fear; he redirects it into trust. Biblical courage is not necessarily the absence of fear. It is confidence in God that enables us to move forward despite the things that frighten us (Ps 27:1-3; 46:1-3; 112:7-8; Isa 12:2).

What can man do to me? - David asked almost the identical question in verse 4, "What can mere man do to me?" He is not claiming that human beings are incapable of hurting him. David knew very well that men could wound, imprison, persecute, and kill. Jesus likewise acknowledged that men can "kill the body" (Mt 10:28).

David's point is that man can do nothing beyond what the sovereign God permits, and nothing man does can ultimately frustrate God's purposes for His servant. This is why the writer of Hebrews combines the same confidence with God's promise, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," and then quotes, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" (Heb 13:5-6; cf. Ps 118:6).

This question becomes even more powerful when connected with verse 9: "What can man do to me?" (Ps 56:11) Why? "This I know, that God is for me." (Ps 56:9) David is not saying man is powerless. He is saying that man is never more powerful than God. His enemies may control some of David's circumstances, but they cannot control David's destiny.

There is also a striking transformation from the beginning of the psalm. In verse 2 David looked at his enemies and said, "They are many." By verse 11 he looks at God and asks, "What can man do to me?" The enemies have not necessarily become fewer. David's view of God has become greater.

THOUGHT: Fear asks, "What can man do to me?" and imagines the worst. Faith asks the very same question and remembers that God is for me. The difference is not the size of the threat but the size of our God. This reminds me of the title of an old book I saw many years ago "How Big is Your God."

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 11. In God have I put my trust. This and the former verse are evidently the chorus of the Psalm. We cannot be too careful of our faith, or see too sedulously that it is grounded on the Lord alone.

I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Faith has banished fear. He views his foes in their most forcible character, calling them not *flesh*, but indicating them as *man*, yet he dreads them not; though the whole race were his enemies he would not be afraid now that his trust is stayed on God. He is not afraid of what they threaten to do, for much of that they cannot do; and even what is in their power, what they *can do*, he defies with holy daring. He speaks for the future, "I will not," for he is sure that the security of the present will suffice for days to come.

Psalm 56:12 Your vows are binding upon me, O God; I will render thank offerings to You.

- Thy (KJV): Ps 66:13,14 76:11 116:14-19 119:106 Ge 28:20-22 35:1-3 Nu 30:2-16 1Sa 1:11,24-28 Ec 5:4-6
- I will (KJV): Ps 9:1-3 21:13 59:16,17 Isa 12:1

Your vows are binding upon me, O God; I will render thank offerings to You - David moves from trust to thanksgiving. Although he is still in the midst of danger, he speaks as a man who is already confident of God's deliverance. His thanksgiving does not have to wait until every enemy disappears. Faith can thank God in anticipation because it trusts the God Who has promised (Ps 50:14-15; 116:12-14, 17-18; Php 4:6).

Your vows are binding upon me, O God - The Hebrew is literally something like "Upon me, O God, are Your vows." The expression refers to vows David had made to God, not vows God had made to David. They are called "Your vows" because they are vows made to God and therefore owed to Him. The NASB's "binding upon me" nicely conveys David's sense of obligation. He has made promises to God, and he intends to keep them.

In the Old Testament a person in distress might make a vow promising an offering or public thanksgiving when God delivered him. Such vows were voluntary when made, but once made they were to be fulfilled faithfully (Nu 30:2; Dt 23:21-23; Eccl 5:4-5). Thus David is essentially saying, "O God, I have not forgotten what I promised You when I cried to You for help."

Bob Utley - "vows" This may be another way of referring to God's promises (cf. Ps. 56:10b) or it may refer to promises the psalmist made to God. Once they are fulfilled then (1) an offering is required (cf. Ps. 56:12b) (2) verbal praise is required. In context it may refer to the psalmist's fear of death by his adversaries and thereby he asked God to save him. In this request he made some kind of a vow. God did save him, now he must fulfill his vow.

There is something significant about the timing. David has not yet reached the end of the psalm, nor has the historical danger necessarily disappeared. Yet he is already preparing to fulfill his vows. His expectation of deliverance is so certain that thanksgiving is already on his heart.

I will render thank offerings to You - The "thank offerings" (todah) were expressions of gratitude to God for His goodness and deliverance. Under the Mosaic Law, thanksgiving could accompany a peace offering (Lev 7:11-15). The worshiper who had cried to God in distress could publicly acknowledge that God had heard and delivered him (Ps 50:14-15; 107:21-22; 116:17).

This gives us an important picture of biblical thanksgiving. David does not merely feel thankful. He intends to express his gratitude to God. Thanksgiving that fills the heart should eventually find expression through the lips and life (Ps 26:7; 69:30; 100:4; Heb 13:15).

Notice the progression through Psalm 56:

"When I am afraid" (v3) - David acknowledges his fear.

"I will put my trust in You" (v3) - fear drives him to faith.

"Whose word I praise" (vv4, 10) - faith rests upon God's Word.

"This I know, that God is for me" (v9) - faith produces assurance.

"I will render thank offerings to You" (v12) - assurance produces thanksgiving.

David has moved from fear to faith, from faith to assurance, and from assurance to thanksgiving.

There is also an important spiritual lesson in David remembering his vows after expecting deliverance. It is easy to make promises

to God when we desperately need His help and then forget them when the crisis has passed. David refuses to do that. The God Who was remembered in trouble must not be forgotten after deliverance (Dt 8:11-14; Ps 103:2).

THOUGHT: Do not let the blessing of deliverance cause you to forget the Deliverer. The God we call upon in our distress deserves our thanksgiving when the distress has passed. Prayer remembers God in the crisis; thanksgiving remembers God after the crisis. Or to say it another way faith can begin thanking God before the answer arrives, because its confidence rests in the God Who hears.

Believer's Study Bible - thank offerings. Could be either actual sacrifices (see note on Lev. 7:12-17) or songs of praise (Ps. 26:7) or, as here, both.

EXPOSITION - SPURGEON

Ver. 12. Thy vows are upon me, O God. Vows made in his trouble he does not lightly forget, nor should we. We voluntarily made them, let us cheerfully keep them. All professed Christians are men under vows, but especially those who in hours of dire distress have rededicated themselves unto the Lord.

I will render praises unto thee. With heart, and voice, and gift, we should cheerfully extol the God of our salvation. The practice of making solemn vows in times of trouble is to be commended, when it is followed by the far less common custom of fulfilling them when the trouble is over.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAINT SAYINGS

Ver. 12. Thy vows are upon me, O God. Whoever is conversant with the Psalms of David, will find him frequently making *vows*, and careful in paying them. When these words dropped from him he was just delivered out of a pressing danger among the Philistines, with whom he took shelter from the rage of King Saul, who unweariedly pursued him; but he soon found that the remembrance of his past achievements to their damage was still so fresh amongst them, and they so exasperated thereupon, that his life was in constant danger. In his distress he flies to God, his wonted refuge, and sends up earnest addresses to him, *vowing* if he would open a way for his deliverance out of these new straits, he would show his grateful sense of so signal a mercy, by the exactness and accuracy of his future obedience. God hears and succours him; and he thereupon grateful looks back, endeavours to renew the sense of his former obligation to his great Deliverer, and to stir up himself by suitable returns, and so cries out, **Thy vows are upon me, O God;** as if he should say, I resolve, O Lord, not to forget what was transacted while I was under my fears. Thou hast heard my cries, and I own myself firmly bound by my *vows*. I was serious and in earnest when I made them, and I will endeavour to show that I was so by my care to perform them. **Thy vows,** O God, made indeed on my part, but justly to be exacted on thine, **are upon me,** they do in reality hold me fast, and I desire not to be released. I am sensible I deserve to be stigmatised for a perfidious wretch if I ever forget them. This temper of holy David with reference to the vows he made on this occasion, should be ours with reference to all the sacred *vows* we any way come under. All Christians, as such, are necessarily under *vows* to the blessed God: and particular circumstances may make it expedient for us to come under special engagements to him. But wherever they are such as that they may justly be denominated *vows of God*, *i.e.*, are such as his word will warrant; we should make holy David, as speaking in this text, our pattern, and set ourselves to imitate him, in seriously owning their binding force, and endeavouring to answer and pay them. *Edmund Calamy, in "A Practical Discourse Concerning Vows," 1704.*

Ver. 12. Thy vows are upon me, O God. A well composed *vow* will make thee more circumspect and wary in the general course of thy life. Such an influence it hath, as doth more directly work on one particular part, yet is not terminated to that particular only. Thus it was with David. These **vows** were made when he was in danger of his life, as it seemeth from Psalms 56:13; for when God heard him, he delivered his soul from death: for this he vowed praises in particular, and he will render them. But, withal he takes himself to be hereby engaged to a more exact and circumspect walk before God in all duties: so he expresses himself in the latter part of Psalms 56:13. *Henry Hurst (1629-1696), in "The Morning Exercise at Cripplegate," 1661.*

Ver. 12-13. Thy vows are upon me, O God. Passively, vows made to God, not by God; or the obligations of those vows and prayers which I have made and upon which I have received answers. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were called *vows*, as having been vowed to God upon the want, and to be paid upon the receipt, of mercy. Leviticus 1:1, "If the sacrifice that is offered be a *vow*." Thy *vows* are upon me; the fruit of my *vows*, so that I stand indebted to God for the return of praise. **Thou hast delivered.** He understands some great danger wherein he had sunk had not God stood by him, and from a greater mercy, the deliverance of his soul from death, argues for a less, the keeping his feet from falling. **That I may walk before God in the light of the living.** By light of the living is meant life, which is called being enlightened with the "light of the living." Job 33:30. Sometimes eternal life in heaven. John 8:12, "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "To walk before God." To walk obediently in the sight of God; with a respect to his presence; a walking unto all well pleasing. This is the last argument in the Psalm whereon he builds his strongest plea, as if he knew not what to urge if this should fail him; as if he should have said, Lord, I have had experience of thy wisdom in contriving, thy power in effecting, thy mercy in bestowing deliverance upon me, thy goodness in

answering my vows and prayers. "Thou hast delivered from death, "a danger as great and unavoidable as death itself. O Lord, art not thou the same as thou wert? Art not thou still as wise to design, and as gracious to confer further mercy? Wilt thou not as certainly also deliver my feet from falling? The one contains his experience, the other the inference or conclusion he draws from it. Mercies received are in a special manner to be remembered. Mercies received are encouragements to ask, and strong grounds to hope for the mercies we want. *Stephen Charnock*.

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 12. Here is--

- I. Past dedication.
- II. Present consecration.
- III. Future glorification. *G. R.*

Ver. 12-13. You have here--

1. The commemoration of former mercies: **Thou hast delivered.**
2. The confidence of future: **Wilt not thou.**
3. The end of all: **To walk before God in the light of the living.** *Stephen Charnock.*

Psalm 56:13 For You have delivered my soul from death, Indeed my feet from stumbling, So that I may walk before God in the light of the living.

- For (KJV): Ps 86:12,13 116:8 2Co 1:10 1Th 1:10 Heb 2:15 Jas 5:20
- wilt (KJV): Ps 17:5 94:18 145:14 1Sa 2:9
- walk (KJV): Ps 116:9 Ge 17:1 Isa 2:5 38:3
- the light (KJV): Job 33:30 Joh 8:12 12:35,36 Eph 5:8-14 Rev 21:23,24

For You have delivered my soul from death, indeed my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living - David closes Psalm 56 by looking back upon God's deliverance and forward to the purpose for which he has been delivered. The verse moves beautifully from what God has done to how David should now live. God has preserved his life, kept his feet, and given him the opportunity to walk before Him. Deliverance is not merely rescue from something; it is rescue for something.

For You have delivered my soul from death - "Soul" (nephesh) here has the sense of life. This directly answers the danger David described in verse 6, where his enemies "waited to take my life." They were seeking David's life, but David's life was ultimately in God's hands (Ps 31:15; 54:3-4; 116:8).

Notice David's certainty: "You have delivered." His confidence in God's intervention is so strong that he can speak of deliverance as an accomplished fact. The danger had been real. David had "greatly feared Achish king of Gath" (1Sa 21:12), yet the God in Whom he placed his trust had preserved him (Ps 56:3-4).

There is a wonderful contrast: "They have waited to take my life" (v6) but "You have delivered my soul from death" (v13).

What his enemies intended to take, God was able to preserve.

Indeed my feet from stumbling - David moves from preservation of his life to preservation of his walk. The picture is of someone whose feet are in danger of slipping or falling but who is kept upright by God. Similar language appears in Ps 66:9, where God "keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip" (cf. Ps 17:5; 18:36; 37:23-24; 121:3).

David had been wandering from place to place as a fugitive (Ps 56:8), yet through all those wanderings God had been watching over his steps. The enemies were "watching my steps" (v6), but God was keeping David's feet from falling.

This is another beautiful contrast within the psalm: His enemies watched his feet to catch him (v6). God watched his feet to keep him (v13).

Bob Utley - The psalmist mentions several things God has done for him. (1) delivered his soul from death – BDB 664, KB 717, *Hiphil* PERFECT; this must relate to Ps. 56:6. (2) kept his feet from stumbling and, thereby allowing him to walk before God; godly living was described as a clear, level, unobstructed path/road (see note at Ps. 1:1). They "watched his steps" in Ps. 56:6, but now God helps him walk.

So that I may walk before God - **So that** is a hinge word that introduces a purpose or result. Here we reach the purpose of deliverance. God did not preserve David merely so that David could continue living for himself. He delivered him so that he might "walk before God."

To **walk before God** is a rich biblical expression describing a life consciously lived in God's presence, under God's eye, and for God's pleasure. God told Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be blameless" (Ge 17:1). Hezekiah prayed, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart" (2Ki 20:3; cf. Ps 116:9).

David understands that every step of life is lived *Coram Deo*, before the face of God. He has been preserved so that the remainder of his life might be lived with a conscious awareness of God's presence, dependence upon God's strength, and desire for God's glory (Ps 16:8; 116:8-9; Col 3:17). O, to seek to imitate David's walk in our lives! (cf Heb 6:12).

In the light of the living - This expression means in this present life, in contrast to death and the darkness of the grave. Compare Job 33:28, 30, where being brought back "to the light" describes preservation of life. David is essentially saying, "You have kept me alive so that I may continue to live before You."

There is an important spiritual principle here. David does not view his deliverance simply as an opportunity to enjoy more life, but as an opportunity to live more life for God. Preservation creates responsibility. The life God preserves should become a life increasingly devoted to the God Who preserved it (Ro 12:1; 2Co 5:15).

The entire psalm has now come full circle: David was afraid (v3), so he trusted (vv3-4). His enemies sought his life (v6), but God counted his wanderings and tears (v8). David called upon God (v9), knowing "God is for me" (v9). He praised God's Word (v10), renewed his trust (v11), and now declares that God has delivered his life and kept his feet (v13).

And what is the result? "So that I may walk before God." That is the goal of deliverance.

THOUGHT: When God delivers us from danger, difficulty, or distress, the question should not merely be, "What did God deliver me from?" but also, "What did God deliver me for?" David's answer is clear: He delivered me that I might walk before Him.

Or simply: God preserves our lives so that we might live our lives for Him.

And another: We are not merely saved from falling; we are saved to keep walking with God.

Perhaps the best summary of the verse: The God Who keeps our feet expects us to use those feet to walk before Him.

EXPOSITION-SPURGEON

Ver. 13. For thou hast delivered my soul from death. His enemies were defeated in their attempts upon his life, and therefore he vowed to devote his life to God.

Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling? One mercy is a plea for another, for indeed it may happen that the second is the necessary complement of the first. It little boots that we live, if we are made to fall in character by the thrusts of our enemies. As lief not be, as live to be bereft of honour, and fallen prostrate before my enemies.

That I may walk before God in the light of the living, enjoying the favour and presence of God, and finding the joy and brightness of life therein. Walking at liberty, in holy service, in sacred communion, in constant progress in holiness, enjoying the smile of heaven--this I seek after. Here is the loftiest reach of a good man's ambition, to dwell with God, to walk in righteousness before him, to rejoice in his presence, and in the light and glory which it yields. Thus in this short Psalm, we have climbed from the ravenous jaws of the enemy into the light of Jehovah's presence, a path which only faith can tread.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS

Ver. 12-13. Thy vows are upon me, O God. See Psalms on "Psalms 56:12" for further information.

Ver. 13. From falling, or, as more literally translated, from a *thrust*, or a *push*, by which one is caused to fall. *O. Prescott Hiller.*

Ver. 13 (last clause). *To walk in the presence of God* is partly under his eyes, his guidance and care, partly in particular, where God is wont to be *present*, where he is *worshipped* by his people and scatters his blessings, opposed to his present state by which he was removed from the place of his worship and presence. Conf. 1 Samuel 26:19, etc. Lastly, *to walk in the light of the living* denotes in general to live amongst *those who live in the light*, or who enjoy the *light*, as it is said elsewhere, *in the land of the living* --Psalms 27:13 Isaiah 38:11 Isaiah 38:53:8; Ezekiel 32:32; Ps 142:6 --opposed to the *dead* or *the region of the dead*, who dwell in

darkness. But in particular it signifies to live in a *safe* and *prosperous* state, whose well known emblem is *light*. *Hermann Venema*.

Ver. 13 (*last clause*). We cannot restrict this phrase to the light of mortal life; David's vows bound him to walk in the *light of spiritual life*, and also in the *light of eternal life*, of which by faith he was a partaker. And most commentators have applied this verse to the *light of glory* in the world to come, as the real and final object of the believer's conversation here on earth. *W. Wilson, D.D.*

HINTS TO THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Ver. 12-13. You have here--

1. The commemoration of former mercies: **Thou hast delivered.**
2. The confidence of future: **Wilt not thou.**
3. The end of all: **To walk before God in the light of the living.** *Stephen Charnock.*

Ver. 13.

- I. The language of Gratitude--**Thou hast**, etc.
- II. Of Faith--**Wilt not thou**, etc.
- III. Of Hope--**That I may walk**, etc. *G. R.*