

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 56 — Praise for God's Word

1.0 Introducing Psalm 56

- David's flight to the Philistine city of Gath to escape Saul forms the background for Psalm 56.
 - ♦ 1 Samuel 21:10-12
 - ♦ Psalm 52's background takes place just prior to this event (1 Samuel 21:1-9).
 - ♦ Psalm 34's background takes place at the end of this event (1 Samuel 21:13-22:1).
- Psalm 56 is the first of a series of psalms given the title, "A Mikhtam of David" (Psalms 56-60).
 - ♦ In addition, the musical subscription (taken from the following psalm heading) on Psalms 56-58 is "*set to Al-tashheth.*"

2.0 Reading Psalm 56 (NAU)

56:1 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.

56:2 My foes have trampled upon me all day long,
For they are many who fight proudly against me.

A **56:3** When I am afraid,

B I will put my trust in You.

C **56:4** In God, **whose word I praise,**

B' In God I have put my trust;

A' I shall not be afraid.

What can *mere* man do to me?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

- A **56:13** For You have delivered my soul from death,
B Indeed my feet from stumbling,
B' So that I may walk before God
A' In the light of the living.

For the choir director; *set to* Al-tashheth.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 56

3.1 Outline

- I. Prayer for Divine Mercy (vv. 1-4)
- II. Proclamation of Divine Care (vv. 5-11)
- III. Promise of Offerings for Divine Deliverance (vv. 12-13)



3.2 Notes

- v. 1 “Mikhtam”
 - See notes on Psalm 16.
 - “Inscription” fits well with the idea of indelible preservation.
 - Jeremiah 2:22 — a related word (*nikhtam*) is translated “stain” to express that something is indelible.
 - Job 19:23-24 — the description of words written on stone in order to preserve them.

- **v. 1** “Be gracious to me”
 - See Psalm 51:1. David relies on God’s grace.

- **vv. 1, 2** “trampled ... Fighting”
 - The repetition of these terms emphasizes the hostility involved in David’s time of trouble.
 - “Trampled” could also be translated as “pursued”—the picture of being hounded relentlessly.

- **vv. 1, 2, 5** “all day long”
 - The threefold occurrence of this phraseology demonstrates the continual nature of David’s trouble.
 - Such continual stress came at a time when David was alone. He had not yet gathered others around him.

- **vv. 3, 4** “When I am afraid ... I shall not be afraid”
 - See 1 Samuel 21:12.
 - Refrain—see verses 10-11.
 - We need to recognize the nature of our fear and trust God for help.

- **v. 4** “whose word I praise”
 - David relied upon the Torah (the Pentateuch) and the promises which God had revealed to Samuel.
 - ✓ David’s faith is based upon the Word of God.
 - ✓ David’s security is based upon the Word of God.

- **v. 4** “What can *mere* man do unto me?”
 - See verse 11.
 - David’s question is rhetorical. The answer is obvious: “Nothing!”
 - See Matthew 10:28.

- **vv. 5, 6** “my words ... my steps ... my life”
 - Compare verse 13, “my soul ... my feet.”
 - This psalm’s references and applications are personal.

- **v. 8** “Put my tears in Your bottle.”
 - Imagery is significant in the Psalms.
 - No tear falls without God knowing the reason and the pain. Because He cares, He remembers.

- **v. 8** “Are *they* not in Your book?”
 - No matter what is involved in the imagery of the bottle of tears or the book, the fact remains that God remembers.

- **v. 9** “This I know, that God is for me.”
 - David’s confidence is clear.

- This is what he means by the bottle and the book in the preceding verse.
- **v. 12** “thank offerings”
 - Those who place their trust in God are thankful.
 - David commits himself to a public declaration of God’s gracious care and deliverance.
 - Compare Psalm 34.
- **v. 13** “So that I may walk before God”
 - Because of God’s deliverance, David is enabled to continue his life.
 - He lives that life with the full awareness of God’s presence.
- **Subscription:** “*set to Al-tashheth*”
 - The title of the tune to which the psalm is to be sung is “Do not destroy.”
 - This was evidently a familiar tune to the Temple singers and to the Israelites.
- **New Testament**
 - Psalm 56:9, 11 and Romans 8:31—“If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?”
 - Psalm 56:11 and Hebrew 13:6—“I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?” (cf. Psalm 118:6).
 - Psalm 56:13 and John 8:12—“the light of life.”

4.0 Singing Psalm 56



O Thou Whose Justice Reigns on High

(Tune: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”)

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|---|--|
| 1 O Thou whose justice reigns on high,
And makes th’oppressor cease,
Behold how envious sinners try
To vex and break my peace. | 2 The sons of violence and lies
Join to devour me, Lord;
But as my hourly dangers rise,
My refuge is Thy Word. |
| 3 In God most holy, just, and true,
I have reposed my trust;
Nor will I fear what flesh can do,
The offspring of the dust. | 4 They wrest my words to mischief still,
Charge me with unknown faults;
Mischief doth all their counsels fill,
And malice all their thoughts. |
| 5 Shall they escape without Thy
frown?
Must their devices stand?
O cast the haughty sinner down,
And let him know Thy hand. | 6 God counts the sorrows of His saints,
Their groans affect His ears;
Thou hast a book for my complaints,
A bottle for my tears. |

7 When to Thy throne I raise my cry,
The wicked fear and flee;
So swift is prayer to reach the sky,
So near is God to me.

8 In Thee, most holy, just, and true,
I have reposed my trust;
Nor will I fear what man can do,
The offspring of the dust.

9 Thy solemn vows are on me, Lord,
Thou shalt receive my praise;
I'll sing, "How faithful is Thy Word,
How righteous all Thy ways!"

10 Thou hast secured my soul from death,
O set Thy pris'ner free!
That heart and hand, and life and breath,
May be employ'd for Thee.

— Isaac Watts (1719)

5.0 Praying Psalm 56

- Lord, teach me to trust you when I am afraid. [v. 3]
- I praise You for Your Word, O God. [vv. 4, 10]
- Thank You, Father, for caring about my troubles and tears. [v. 8]
- Lord, give me the privilege of demonstrating my thanks to You. [v. 12]
- Father, let me in Your ways while I have life. [v. 13]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 56

- The best antidote to fear is trust in God and His Word.
- God is for us—hostility against His people ultimately will fail.
- We should practice the giving of thank offerings.