

Psalm 56 David at Gath

by Pastor Roy Hogan

This is another of the Psalms God instructed David to pen down. In the previous Psalm, Psalm 55, David was hiding in the wilderness having fled Jerusalem when his son, Absalom, attempted to take the throne from him. In this Psalm 56, David reflects back to a time when he was fleeing King Saul and ran to the city called Gath. The situation he is in is strange considering one would think David would never seek refuge among one enemy while fleeing another enemy. The inhabitants of Gath were philistines. Some years earlier, David had killed their hero, the philistine giant, Goliath.

The king of Gath had arrested David. The king's advisors pressured the king to put David to death. What a perfect occasion to administer revenge on the man who slew the people's giant! Under lock and key, David was at the mercy of God. Likely, he had never been in such a fix. His life was hanging on a thread. As the king's men marched by his cell clamoring for his life, cold chills must have run up and down his spine. David must have thought "this is it."

Like the situation David had found himself in, life is filled with seemingly hopeless situations. Many of God's children have found themselves locked up in enemy territory. Hope is dim. The mind becomes fatigued and numb seeking for answers.

Let us, in studying this Psalm 56, see how David faced this dreadful situation in Gath. Perhaps, then, when and if such a situation comes our way, we can glean from David's experience. So grave is his situation that his life was, simply put, in the hands of God. We rest assured, no situation is too grave for God to handle.

56:1-2

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

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

David went to Gath out of God will. He stepped outside the circle of protection God had placed him in. That happens in the walk of most Christians. David wandered into enemy territory out of the will of God. He was on his own. He was outside the realm of God's blessings. It can be said he was not thinking clearly because of the intense pursuit of Saul against him. Perhaps he collapsed under such pressure. The lesson for you and I is that there is no reason to run to an enemy for help when being pursued by another enemy.

It seems David knew he had done wrong by going to Gath for the opening words of this chapter, *be merciful onto me*, appeared to be the plea of a man who realized his mistake. I am thankful for the mercy of God. All God's children have received God's mercy, for it is because of God's mercy that we have a salvation plan. Titus 3:5 tells us *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

David, like you and I, must often plea for God's mercy. Have you ever done something sort of senseless in your Christian walk as David did by going to Gath? The Bible tells us no one is perfect. Lamentations 3:22 reads *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

David's life is in a state of conflict day and night. Since the fall in the Garden of Eden, men have been at war. In the first family, one brother, Cain, slew his brother, Abel. Since that bloody day, war among men has raged. No one is able to count the number of battles that have taken place. Some conflicts involve only two people while others rise to the level of nation against nation. In the eyes of God, it took the blood of only one man, Abel, to taint the soil of this planet. Considering the blood that now rest in the soil of earth, we need not wonder why sin prevails.

According to his words in verse 1, fighting *oppressed* David. He was one of the greatest warriors recorded in the Bible. However, even the strongest of men have a breaking point. Conflict wears men down. Soldiers sometimes lose their mind in war. David's conflict

was daily. His enemy desired to swallow him. There are certainly degrees of animosity held by our enemies, but I suppose I have never had an enemy who desired to swallow me. David pleads for the Lord's mercy.

David's enemy outnumbered him for he states, in verse 2, that there were *many*. His enemies were personal for he refers to them in verse 2 as *mine*.

56:3-4

What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. 4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

Verse 3 and 4 are two of the marquee verses, so to speak, in the book of Psalm. Through the ages, children of God have run to these verses for peace in time of great challenges. It has been written by scholars that this occasion in Gath was the only time in David's life where he expressed fear of men. Men can be awesome enemies. Stormy weather strikes fear in people. Some fear darkness. However, the fear men can bring upon another man seems to surpass other sources of fear.

David was not afraid of the lion nor the bear that he encountered while tending his father's sheep. He was not afraid of the giant, Goliath. However, we find David's heart stricken by fear while in Gath. I believe the reason for this is that he was out of God's will on this occasion in his life. As mentioned previously, he had stepped outside the circle God had drawn for his life. God's blessing of protection had been withdrawn.

As did David, thanks to the mercy of God, we can take our fears before the Lord. *Flesh* is a huge enemy, but God is not afraid of flesh. We can place our trust in him. We can place our hope in his *word* that he will never leave us nor forsake us. Some years earlier, God had given a word of promise to David that he would sit on the throne of Israel. Will God now break his word? IF David dies in Gath, God has broken his word. He will never do this.

56:5-6

Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.

David got little rest. The torment of the enemy was *daily*. It has been said that the communist regimes of the past were the forerunners of interrogating. Many were their methods such as sleeplessness, bright lights, and continual threats. David's enemies came unto him daily and, using words, interrogated him. They followed his every step. He no time of privacy. Just when he thought he was alone with the hope of a little rest, a hidden enemy would confront him.

The Devil is the master of interrogation. Many have been the times he has worn me down. How do those who do not have the Lord as their master survive the interrogation of Satan?

56:7

Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.

Wrong is never right. Sin never pays. Often, evil doers think they have gotten by. However, Vengeance belongs to the Lord. *Iniquity* never gets a pass. Every wrong must be reconciled before Jehovah God.

56:8-9

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? 9 When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.

In studying the Psalms of David, one needs to be mindful of God's plan to place David on the throne of Israel. I often wonder if the hardships David faced were actually his training for the kingship planned for him. He seemed to be in God's school of "hard-knocks." The exams in God's school were extremely difficult. David cried

tears in Gath and doubtless, in other places in his time of fleeing Saul.

God has a massive bottle in heaven, maybe even a bottle designated for each of his children. Tears are never shed in vain. David requested that God *put thou my tears into thy bottle*. Many are the tears shed through the ages by God's children.

We are strangers and pilgrims in this world. We spend a lot of time wandering. Is it not both amazing and precious that God is in Heaven mapping our journey? Verse 8 reads, in part, *Thou tellest my wanderings*. *Tellest* means *recordist*. David path to the throne went through briar-patches, over deep canyons, up steep mountains, and across burning sand. God followed him using his divine satellite which, in turn, recorded his every move.

56:10-11

*In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.
11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*

In time of stress, we can rest on the promises of God's Word. Family and friends may fail, but God's word will never fail. Often, I feel tired. Sometimes, I feel weak. At times, I find myself doubting. There has never been a time when God's word failed rescue me. I have been so sick I could not read nor understand the reading of God's Word. However, I got strength by simply touching my Bible. What a gift God gave mankind when he gave us the Bible, the book of the ages!

56:12

Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.
How good is God? We make vows to God. We are going to do better starting now. We apologize for our mistakes and promise to never do it again. Sometimes our vows are broken, even meaningless.

Did you know God makes vows to us? This verse states *Thy vows are upon me*. God cannot change. God cannot fail. God cannot be

defeated. God cannot get tired or weary. Perhaps best of all, God cannot break a vow. It has been estimated by Bible scholars that there are some 30,000 promises made by God in the Bible. They may not all apply to me or to you, but seek out those that do and stand on them. The old time song *Standing on the Promises* has blessed many souls.

56:13

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

The word *delivered* is literally “plucked.” David got out of Gath alive. God delivered him. The same God who delivers souls can keep our feet from falling. Once delivered, we who were sometimes imperiled can say *walk before God in the light of the living*.