



Translation, Interpretation and Exposition of Psalm 56 in Its Canonical Context

"[David's] psalms form a record of a conscious effort to reorient his own daily life to the reality of that supernatural world beyond him. Now, centuries later, we can use those very same prayers as steps of faith, a path to lead us from an obsession with ourselves into the actual practice of the presence of God."
(Philip Yancey).

*"The full titles [such as we find in Psalm 56] imply that the psalms **David** sang on occasions in his life were precisely the psalms Israel uses in its corporate public worship to express the need, trust, and thanksgiving of many **others**" . . . including **our LORD** and **ourselves**. (J. L. Mays, with personal supplement.)*

"The Davidic connection directs the reader to think of each psalm and the entire Psalter as an expression of faith in the reign of the Lord as the sphere in which individual and corporate life is lived." (Mays, 97.)

Interim Pastor Prof. Glen Taylor

THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Psalm 56

For the choir director. Upon *yônath 'elem rěhōqîm*.^a For David, a "Miktām."^b When the Philistines seized him in Gath.^c

Cry for help

¹Be gracious to me, O God,*

for a man has sorely pressed^d me.

²All day long a fighter attacks me,

My enemies sorely press all day,*

for many are those who attack me, O Exalted One^e.

Expression of Trust

³The day I am afraid,*

I myself will trust you.

⁴In God, whose word I praise,

In God I trust;*

I will not be afraid—

What can mere flesh do to me?

Description of enemies' actions

⁵All day they misuse my words,*

All their machinations regarding me are evil.

⁶They stir up^f, they sneak^g*

It is they who watch my every step,

As they expectantly seek my life.

Request for intervention

⁷For such a crime, dispel^h them.*

In anger O God, subdue these people.

⁸'Tis you who track my wandering;*

**Put my tears in your flask,
If not outright in your book!**

⁹Then shall my enemies retreat when I call;*

This I know, for God is with me.

Expression of trust--repeated

¹⁰In God whose word I shall praise,
In Yahweh whose word I shall praise".ⁱ

¹¹In God I trust,*

**I will not be afraid--
What can a human do to me?**

Pledge to give thanks for deliverance

¹²Your vows are [binding] upon me, O God,*

I shall wholly render thanks to You.

¹³For you have rescued my life from death,*

If not also my feet from falling,

To walk before God*

in the light of life.^j

^a The Hebrew words are "a dove of speechlessness, far places." Many make a slight change in the Hebrew text that changes "speechless" to "oak." In either case, most take this to be a reference to a known melody by that name.). The translators of the ancient and influential Greek translations expanded the title to read "Over the people that are removed far away from holy things"; but they might have been guessing as to its meaning. An Aramaic paraphrase reads "For the congregation of Israel, which is compared to a silent dove at the time when they are far from their cities, and turn again and praise the Lord of the world.")

^b The meaning of the term is unknown. The term occurs only in six psalms titles, all attributed to David (16:1, 56:1, 57:1, 58:1; 59:1, 60:1) and in Books I-II.

^c For the setting implied by the psalm, see 1 Sam 21:10-15. This is the ninth psalm with a historical reference to an event in the life of David in the title; and the fourth in a sequence of eight consisting of 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63.

^d The word *šā'aph* can mean "crush/trample" or "pant" (presumably as in "to wind"). I have chosen to render the term in a general sense for causing physical harm.

^e The word is “high/lofty” which some take to mean that the attackers are proud/haughty. Yet the same word is a reference to God in Psalm 92:8.

^f Alternatively, “they attack.”

^g The JPS version likely catches the sense in translating, “they plot, they lie in ambush, they watch my every move, hoping for my death.”

^h The word is normally translated “deliver, escape.”

ⁱ Literally, “In God, I shall praise the word (or matter), In Yahweh, I shall praise the word (or matter).” (Depending on the context, this common Hebrew word for “word” can also mean “matter,” “thing,” “affair,” “cause,” “situation.”)

^j Or “the living.” Compare Psalm 49:19 where this expression contrasts with the “pit” (i.e., grave).