



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 56

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *To the Chief Musician. Set to "The Silent Dove in Distant Lands."* A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath
- According to the title, the author is David
- The title indicates that it was directed toward the *Chief Musician*, whom some suppose to be the Lord God Himself, and others suppose to be a leader of choirs or musicians in David's time, such as Heman the singer or Asaph
- Some believe that *The Silent Dove in Distant Lands* was the tune to which this Psalm was sung



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- And some connect it with the theme of the Psalm, thinking it represents a dove in trouble just as David was in trouble
- The *dove* is a symbol of innocence
- So, David may be compared to a dove for his innocence
- Some interpreted *A Michtam* as golden
- *when the Philistines captured him in Gath* evidently refers to the event recorded in (1 Samuel 21:10-15) when David escaped from the hands of the Philistines; particularly from the hands of Achish, king of Gath



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- So, this Psalm is composed to describe the feelings of David when driven from home, and compelled to seek a place of safety in a remote region, like a dove driven from its nest
- The whole title is a description of David as an innocent and uncomplaining sufferer among strangers
- This Psalm and Psalm 34's titles are almost identical and were written about the same period in David's life
- The Psalm can be described as a lament with a strong emphasis on trust in God and praise for His word



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- The Psalm is an expression of personal experience
- And can be an expression and prayer of a nation in exile
- These words may be also applied to Christ, who is like a dove for His innocence, meekness and humility; *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.”* (Isaiah 53:7)
- He was silent before Pontius Pilate the Roman governor, when His enemies accused Him
- And He was also silent when the Roman soldiers mocked Him and reviled Him



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- And when He was led to be crucified, He did not open His mouth
- They may be also applied to the church, which is often called a dove, (Song of Solomon 4:1)
- The church is silent under all afflictions and persecutions by ungodly wicked men
- The words may be applied to any truly gracious soul who is innocent and humble as a dove and living among ungodly men, and is afflicted by them, yet patiently bears all that is said and done unto it



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Psalm Outline

- An Earnest Prayer 56:1-2
- David Declares his Confidence in God 56:3-4
- A Description of the Wickedness of his Enemies 56:5-6
- David Pleads in Earnest Hope 56:7-9
- Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



An Earnest Prayer 56:1-2

- David begins the Psalm by describing the severity of the attacks he is suffering
- He was in great and constant danger from many enemies – both the Philistines and Saul's servants
- He cried out to God, knowing that divine help could rescue him from any man-made threat
- He appealed to the *mercy* of God, for with men he could find none
- David pleads not relying on what he may or may not deserve, but beseeches the grace and mercy of God
- *swallow me up*, They are like a wild beast rushing upon its prey



An Earnest Prayer 56:1-2

- They are pursuing him across the wilderness and are pressing their attacks on David all day long
- *Fighting all day he oppresses me*, This may be applied to the old man and the lusts of the flesh, which are continually fighting against the soul, oppress it, bring it into captivity, and threaten to swallow it up
- His own followers and friends were few; his enemies were many
- David encountered enemies wherever he went
- David's enemies trust their great numbers and they thought of themselves to be much superior to him



An Earnest Prayer 56:1-2

- On earth David was greatly outnumbered, so he looked for help from the God who is enthroned above
- *O Most High*, Who from His high place watches and sees all things, their plans and conspiracies, and can easily disrupt and demolish them
- The psalmist prays that God will prove His own supreme exaltation against these self-exalted boasters
- The believer has many enemies, sin, Satan, and the world, seeking to devour and destroy him, though they cannot

David Declares his Confidence in God 56:3-4



- David who killed the lion and the bear, who killed Goliath, and was a successful young leader in Israel's army, did not deny the presence of fear
- There were times when he was *afraid*
- David was not a boaster and did not hesitate to admit that there were times when he was afraid
- Yet he knew what to do with that fear, to boldly proclaim His *trust in God* despite the fear
- He is afraid but knows within himself that he does not need to be afraid because he has God

David Declares his Confidence in God 56:3-4



- God is unchangeable and is faithful and true to every word of His promises and that is why there is great reason to trust in Him, and not be afraid
- Therefore, he puts his confidence in God and will praise His Word
- His trust in God was directly connected with God's Word
- His trust was not a blind hope; it was based on God's revealed *character* and revealed *promises*
- Trusting God has given David the momentum toward even greater faith
- He began by trusting God even while *afraid*, with that trust he can take a further step, *I will not fear*

David Declares his Confidence in God 56:3-4



- Faith brings forth praise
- *In God I have put my trust*, This is the essence of the Psalm
- In all dangers, in all troubles, whatever happens, whatever seems to be approaching, the psalmist will never cease trusting in the Almighty
- David realized that with God for him, it does not matter what man or men may be against him
- This is the true martyr spirit, *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* (Matthew 10:28)

A Description of his Enemies and their Wickedness 56:5-6



- From the heights of faith, David returns to the urgent reality of present distress
- Again, David uses the phrase *all day long* to show the rebuking duration of what David is enduring
- The assault that David is receiving is not deserved
- His enemies are twisting his words to give reason to attack even more
- *twist my words*, This is a common way of warfare among the ungodly
- As the Jews twisted and changed the words of Christs to catch Him by a word

A Description of his Enemies and their Wickedness 56:5-6



- The attacks against David were not only violent; they were also deceitful, with the twisting and reshaping of his words and intentions seeking to give his words an evil meaning
- *All their thoughts are against me for evil*, They are entirely determined on doing him some hurt
- It did not stop at planning evil against him, but the thoughts of the wicked turned into meeting in secret plotting to harm him
- *They gather together*, They do not attack him alone, but they unite their forces against him
- *They hide*, Wicked evil men are weak, coward, and wretched

A Description of his Enemies and their Wickedness 56:5-6



- *they mark my steps*, They watch him constantly
- They spy so that he can never be sure that he is not watched and stalked
- His many enemies constantly plotted against him *for evil*, hoping to *lie in wait* and kill David with a surprise attack
- Nothing would please the wicked more than the death of the righteous
- Godly men are wise, seeing that they have many crafty enemies and seeing their own danger, they place the whole case before the Lord, and put themselves under divine protection

David Pleads in Earnest Hope

56:7-9



- David appealed to God's justice
- It was not right for these wicked enemies to triumph over him
- He is wondering *Shall* such iniquity as this go unpunished, or *escape* righteous judgment, and the punishment of God?
- *In anger*, Show them by Your intervention and by preventing the success of their plans that under the divine authority and justice wickedness does not establish security
- *cast down*, This is opposed to their present exaltation and triumphs over David, and to their hopes and confidence of safety and success

David Pleads in Earnest Hope

56:7-9



- The wicked may prosper and succeed, yet their success will not be sustained
- In this period of David's life, he was completely alone
- This made him value the sympathy and care of God even more, and he found great comfort in the thought that God noted his misery
- Every step David had taken when pursued by his enemies, was not only watched but thought worthy of counting and recording
- While the wicked mark the steps of the righteous, to plan to harm him, God watches the righteous during his wanderings, and collects his tears as a deposit of glory prepared for him

David Pleads in Earnest Hope

56:7-9



- By a bold figure God is said to collect and treasure his tears, as though they were precious wine
- He trusts that the Lord will be so considerate of his tears as to store them up as men store the wine, and he hopes that the place of storage will be a special one *Your bottle*, not *a bottle*
- God records the troubles and tears of His believers in His book, as events that preoccupy His heart
- *Are they not in Your book?* This expresses strong confidence that his tears would be remembered; that they would not be forgotten
- All the tears that godly people shed are remembered by God

David Pleads in Earnest Hope

56:7-9



- If properly shed; shed in sorrow, without murmuring or complaining, they will be remembered for our good
- The psalmist felt that he had only to cry unto God, to secure the overthrow of his enemies
- The certainty that God is on his side is the ground of his assurance that his enemies will be scattered
- The powerful fervent passionate prayer of the righteous avails much against their enemies
- *because God is for me*, This was the ground of David's confidence
- He knew that God was *for* him and would answer his prayer for rescue

David Pleads in Earnest Hope

56:7-9



- St. Augustine says, “A great knowledge. He does not say, ‘I have known that You are God’ but, “that You are my God’...Of all things indeed God He is: but of those men the God peculiarly He is said to be, that love Him, that hold Him, that possess Him, that worship Him, as though belonging to His own House: the great family of Him are they, redeemed by the great blood of the Only Son. How great a thing has God given to us, that His own we should be, and He should be ours!”

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- For the second and third times in this psalm, David declared the greatness of God's word
- This was how he knew that God was *for* him
- It wasn't just a wish or a hope
- It was well-grounded, because God said it in *His word*
- David will firmly depend upon the promise for the sake of Him that made it, who is true and faithful
- *I will not be afraid*, Having thus put his trust in God, he looks with a holy contempt upon the threatening power of man

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- St. Paul puts this triumphant word into the mouth of every true believer, *“So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”* (Hebrews 13:6)
- *What can man do to me?* The sentiment in this verse is the same as in verse 4, except that the word *man* is used here instead of *flesh*
- The Psalm ends with an expression of thanksgiving and gratitude to God for the deliverance, which is so confidently expected, that it is looked upon as assured, and even spoken of as past

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- David, under his affliction, has made vows to God; promises of thank offerings if God would come to his aid, and save him from his enemies
- These vows he considers to be now due, and himself to be under the obligation of paying them
- They were debts upon him he ought to pay off
- *I will render praises to You*, Which explains what he meant by his vows; namely, sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord
- *You have delivered my soul*, The psalmist views his entire deliverance as accomplished

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- God delivered him from imminent danger of death, when in the hands of the Philistines
- This may include the deliverance of his soul from a spiritual death, in which he was by nature, *“was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”* (Psalm 51:5)
- *Walk before God* is to walk as in His sight, who sees and knows all hearts, thoughts, words, and actions
- It is to do the will of God and so as to please Him, as Enoch did, who walked with Him, and whose walking with Him is interpreted by pleasing Him, Hebrews 11:5

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- *In the light of the living*, It is to walk as the children of the light; and to walk in Christ the light, *“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”* (John 8:12)
- St. Augustine says, “Therefore, brethren, to this end let all these things serve us, that God freely we love, in Him hope always, neither man nor devil fear. Neither the one nor the other does anything, except when it is permitted: permitted for no other reason can it be, except because it does profit us. Let us endure evil men, let us be good men: because even we have been evil.”

Confidence in God Declared Again 56:10-13



- He continues and says, “Even as nothing God shall save men, of whom we dare to despair. Therefore of no one let us despair, for all men whom we suffer let us pray, from God let us never depart. Our patrimony let Him be, our hope let Him be, our safety let Him be. He is Himself here a comforter, there a rewarder, everywhere Maker-alive, and of life the Giver, not of another life, but of that whereof has been said, ‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life:’ in order that both here in the light of faith, and there in the light of sight, as it were in the light of the living, in the sight of the Lord we may be pleasing.”



Discussion

- What motivated David to write this Psalm?
- How did David feel about his situation?
- How did David deal with his fears?
- How did the psalmist demonstrate his trust in the Lord?
- What appeal did David present to God?



Discussion

- What commitment did David make to God even before God had answered his prayers?
- What did David expect the Lord to do for him?
- Why is the Word of God so important to David?
- In what ways is David a role model for us?
- How do we apply this Psalm?