

PSALM FIFTY-FIVE AND FIFTY-SIX

7. The psalmist longs to fly away "like a dove"—is this a healthy attitude? Discuss.
8. Why did Ahithophel commit suicide? How does this relate to the psalm? (Cf. vs. 23 and II Sam. 17:23)
9. Read verse 17 of this psalm and pause to ask yourself—"when did we lose the holy habit of regular private worship"? The early church practiced it—Discuss.
10. There is a marvelous provision and promise in verse 22—what is it?—how can we make it ours?

PSALM 56

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Song by David in Captivity.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, In a few words, David Describes his Captive Condition, and Composes a *Refrain* of Praise. Stanza II., vers. 5-11, After a Fuller Description of his Captors, the Prisoner prays for their Subjugation because of their Iniquities, Asks that His Own Sufferings may be recorded, Anticipates Future Victory over his Enemies, and Repeats and Enlarges his *Refrain*. Stanza III., vers. 12, 13, The Captive, Remembering his Vows, Promises to Fulfil them; and Anticipates Freedom for his Spared Life.

(Lm.) By David—A Tablet—

When the Philistines seized him in Gath.

- 1 Be gracious unto me O God, for mere man hath crushed me:
all the day a warrior keeps on oppressing me.
- 2 They who are watching me have crushed me all the day.
for multitudes are warring on me loftily.
- 3 What day I am afraid I unto thee will direct my trust.
- 4 In God will I boast as my theme,¹
In God do I trust without fear,—
What can flesh do unto me?

1. The M.T. and versions have "his" word or theme; but as the difference in Heb. is merely the length of a single fine stroke, "my" is preferred here, as better preparing for the omission of the pronoun in ver. 10.

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- 5 All the day my words¹ do they wrest,
against me are all their plots:
6 For mischief they gather, lie hid,
they themselves mark my footprints,²
as they have waited for my life.
7 Because of iniquity there is no³ deliverance for them:—
in anger bring down peoples O God!
8 My wandering thou thyself hast recorded:
put thou my tears in thy wine-skin,
are they not in thy scroll?
9 Then shall my foes turn back—on the day I proclaim.⁴
this I know for God is for me!
10 In God will I boast as a theme,
In Jehovah will I boast, as a theme;
11 In God do I trust without fear:
What can a son of earth do unto me?
12 Upon me O God are thy vows,
I will pay back thankofferings to thee;
13 For thou hast rescued my soul from death,
wilt thou not (rescue) my feet from thrusts⁵?
that I may walk to and fro before God in the light of the
living?⁶

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician. (CMm.) Do not destroy.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 56

Lord, have mercy on me; all day long the enemy troops press in. So many are proud to fight against me; how they long to conquer me.

3, 4 But when I am afraid, I will put my confidence in You. Yes, I will trust the promises of God. And since I am trusting Him, what can mere man do to me?

5 They are always twisting what I say. All their thoughts are how to harm me.

6 They meet together to perfect their plans; they hide beside the trail, listening for my steps, waiting to kill me.

1. Or: "affairs."

2. Ml. "my heels"—perh. "to trip me up."

3. So *Ge.*, and so Baethgen, in O.G. 812b.

4. That is: Either proclaim myself King, or proclaim war against them.

5. Ml.: "from thrusting": i.e., by an enemy to trip me up. See 116:8.

6. "In the light of the land of the living." Cp. 116:9—Br.

PSALM FIFTY-SIX

7 They expect to get away with it. Don't let them, Lord. In anger cast them to the ground.

8 You have seen me tossing and turning through the night. You have collected all my tears and preserved them in Your bottle! You have recorded every one in Your book.

* * * * *

9 The very day I call for help, the tide of battle turns! My enemies flee! This one think I know: God is for me!

10, 11 I am trusting God—oh, praise His promises! I am not afraid of anything mere man can do to me! Yes, praise His promises.

12 I will surely do what I have promised, Lord, and thank You for Your help.

13 For You have saved me from death and my feet from slipping, so that I can walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

EXPOSITION

Nothing is lost, but much is gained, by letting this bright little psalm into the niche provided for it by its superscription. It can still be regarded as subsequently employed in national worship, with the obvious gain of bringing up afresh into the memories of the people the story of their beloved hero-king. Any analogies between the chequered experiences of the nation and those of David, would leave intact those snatches of Davidic autobiography thus preserved, which become increasingly precious when dovetailed into each other so as to furnish an inner history, illuminative of the outer facts with which we are already familiar in the study of David's life.

It has been assumed by critics, with good reason, that David's first sojourn with the King of Gath, as narrated in 1 Sam. 21, 22, though half voluntary in the impulse to risk it as a method of escaping from Saul, was nevertheless in the experience of it a species of "durance vile," which sufficiently answers to the circumstances assumed by the psalm to be existent. But, in truth, there need be no feverish anxiety on our part to reach absolute certainty in our attempts to fix on the particular seizure of David by the men of Gath, presupposed by this psalm. After the slaying of Goliath by the young Bethlehemite, it must always have been a tempting thing to the Gittites to get that famous but yet perhaps personally unknown stripling into their hands,

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and to wreak on him some of the vengeance, the chief volume of which nevertheless was pent up for bursting on the more formidable head of King Saul. We cannot therefore be sure that David individually did not find himself more than once a captive in Gath.

It is more to the point to open our eyes to perceive the realistic fitness of the language of this psalm to apply to such a captivity. We no sooner do this, than we see the whole thing set vividly before our eyes. With his living faith in Jehovah, these stalwart Gittites are, in David's sight, no more than *mere men*. Nevertheless, for the time, they *have crushed him*. *All the day long a warrior-guard annoys and vexes him, needlessly making him feel how irksome are his chains. Outside are watchers, taking good care he shall not escape. Multitudes of warlike men, carrying, loftily their heads, are ready to slay him. Is he afraid? He takes up his harp, and directing his trust to Jehovah, improvises thus: In God will I boast, as my theme.* How much of his language his warders understand at its full value, we know not, but he holds on: *All the day my words do they wrest; and so on, gathering strength, he proceeds. If they do attend, and can decipher his words; one while, they may well tremble as he alludes to their iniquity, or laugh him to scorn as he foretells their turning back before his face in the yet coming days when he shall proclaim war against them; another while, they may almost relent, as they catch him confessing his tears.* Again, he rings out his Refrain, made more strong and more bold; nor forgets to promise how in happier times he will make good his *vows*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Twice David was in Gath—but neither time seems to fit this psalm. How shall we explain the circumstances here described?
2. "But when I am afraid, I will put my confidence in you." If we had our confidence in the Lord, would we be afraid? Discuss.
3. There are three natural divisions to this psalm—review the *Analysis* and show how these divisions are progressive and accumulative.
4. ". . . You have collected all my tears and preserved them in Your bottle! You have recorded everyone in Your book"

PSALM FIFTY-SIX AND FIFTY-SEVEN

(vs. 8). This verse offers tremendous insight into the nature of God. Discuss.

5. Supposing God does *not* deliver us from our enemies? Does this mean our enemies are in the right? That we are wrong? That there is no God? Discuss.

PSALM 57

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Reminiscence of David's Early Troubles when Pursued by Saul,
Subsequently Adapted to Brighter Times.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I, vers. 1-5, Prayer for Deliverance from Outward Trouble, marked by Resignation during its Continuance. Stanza II, vers. 6-11, Further Reference to the Trouble speedily gives place to Joyful Praise. A *Refrain*, vers. 5, 11, of Comprehensive Beauty Lights up the Whole Psalm.

(Lm.) By David—A Tablet—

When he fled from the face of Saul into a cave.

- 1 Be gracious unto me O God be gracious unto me,
for in thee hath my soul taken refuge:
yea in the shadow of thy wings do I take refuge,
until the storm of ruin shall pass.
- 2 I will cry unto God Most High—
unto GOD who is carrying through my cause for me.
- 3 He will send out of the heavens to save me,
he hath given to reproach¹ one who would trample upon me.
God will send forth his kindness and his truth.
- 4 My soul is in the midst of lions,
I must lie down amidst such as consume the sons of men:
their teeth are spears and arrows,
and their tongue is a sharp sword.
- 5 Be exalted above the heavens O God!
above all the earth be thy glory!
- 6 A net made they ready for my steps
bowed down was my soul:

1. So Sep.