

Israel's Songs of Hope
The Book of Psalms

You Have Put My Tears in Your Bottle
Psalm 56

For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim. A Mikhtam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

¹ Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me;
Fighting all day long he oppresses me.

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

³ When I am afraid,
I will put my trust in You.

⁴ In God, whose word I praise,
In God I have put my trust;
I shall not be afraid.

What can mere man do to me?

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

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

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

⁸ You have taken account of my wanderings;
Put my tears in Your bottle.

Are they not in Your book?

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

¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise,
In the LORD, whose word I praise,

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

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

¹³ For You have delivered my soul from death,
Indeed my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God
In the light of the living.

Context: 1 Samuel 21:10 – 15

¹⁰ Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹ But the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'' ¹² David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. ¹³ So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanely in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. ¹⁴ Then Achish said to his servants, 'Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me?' ¹⁵ Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?'

Questions

1. How does David intensify his portrayal of his enemies in the first four lines? Note: biblical poetry rhymed concepts and not sounds. And usually, there is some kind of intensification or clarification that happens between the first line of a verse and its parallel second line. So, for example:

¹ Be gracious to me, O God, for man has trampled upon me;
Fighting all day long he oppresses me.

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

Notice that line 1b amplifies, clarifies, and intensifies line 1a. Whereas David made no duration reference to how long the battles go on in line 1a, 'fighting all day long' in 1b intensifies the sense of tiring conflict as dragging on and on. Whereas David said in line 1a that man 'has trampled upon' him in the past, 'oppresses' in 1b indicates ongoing trauma.

In lines 2a and 2b, David speaks of his enemies in the plural rather than the singular, as he did in lines 1a and 1b. The sequence goes: man (1a), he (1b), my foes (2a), they are many (2b). The sense we get is that in the first four lines is that David is taking a camera and panning back to see more and more of his enemies. Also, David once again moves from the past perfect to the present tense from lines 2a to 2b: His 'foes have trampled upon me' speaks of past injury, but 'they are many who fight proudly against me' speaks of a host of warriors arrayed against him in the present.

2. How does David feel here?
 - a. What does it feel like to be stepped on?
 - b. Tired, exhausted: 'all day long' in v.1b and 2a.
 - c. Afraid at times in v.3a
3. What do David's enemies do to him?
 - a. How did Saul and others distort his words in v.5?
4. Why does David trust God to preserve his life? What does that even mean for him?
 - a. God's words of promise in v.4, 10a, 10b, 12. God promised that David would become the king, so David is clinging to that promise since it hasn't happened yet.
 - b. Could anyone else but King David have prayed this and said this, then? I think
 - c. God has stored up David's tears and suffering, remembers them, values them, in v.8
5. How will God protect David from his enemies?
 - a. Cast them forth in v.7a
 - b. Put them down in v.7b
 - c. Turn them back in v.9
6. How has God delivered David before?
7. How has God promised us to deliver us, now that Jesus has come? There has been a shift.
 - a. He doesn't promise to help us escape death necessarily, but emerge out from it on the other side, in resurrection glory.
 - b. Illus: Polycarp. If you ever study church history, you'll find that the early Christians were aflame with the life of Christ in them, empowering them. Let me give you an example of this. In the first few centuries of the church, believers faced heavy persecution at times from the Roman government. They were commanded to burn a token offering to Caesar to publicly pledge their loyalty to the Emperor and say that the Emperor was divine. If they didn't, they'd be executed. During this time, there was a man named Polycarp. Polycarp lived in the region now known as Turkey, in a city called Smyrna, and he was an elder of the church there. One day in approximately 156 AD, when Polycarp was an old man, Roman authorities trooped in, looking for dissidents. The non-believing multitudes shouted 'Find Polycarp!' with the intent of cornering him. They found Polycarp in a farm house praying with friends. The Roman guard lumbered in, decked out with weapons to apprehend a feeble old man. But rather than running, Polycarp had the table set for them, because even with his enemies he wanted to glorify and reveal Christ. He finished praying and was led to a stadium, where he wanted even his death to reveal Christ. A Roman proconsul tried to persuade him to recant, saying, 'Have respect for your age,' and, 'Swear

by the [Spirit] of Caesar.' Polycarp wouldn't have it. Because Christians didn't worship the pagan gods, they were called atheists. The magistrate said to Polycarp, 'Denounce your own kind. Just say, 'Away with the atheists.' Polycarp looked at him and chuckled. He turned to the masses of people who were assembled to watch his death, he waved his hand at THEM and said, 'Away with the atheists.' The magistrate tried again. 'Revile Christ,' he said. But Polycarp revealed Christ. He stood there calmly and graciously and said this: 'For eighty six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?' He was then bound and burned at the stake, and he went home to his final glory. Polycarp's martyrdom was then put into story form and circulated as a letter of encouragement to other early Christians, to encourage them to reveal Christ even in their sufferings.