

# STEP PARALLELISM OF PSALM 56

- A** Many Enemies Trample and Fight against David (1–2)  
**B** Fear, Trust, Praise, and Not Be Afraid (3–4)  
**C** Prayer Request for Judgment of and Deliverance from His Enemies (5–7)
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- A'** Suffering from Enemies Recorded by God and Confidence of Deliverance (8–9)  
**B'** Praise, Trust, and Not Be Afraid (10–11)  
**C'** Thanksgiving for Deliverance from His Enemies (12–13)

Emphasis on  
Persecution

Point of  
Turning

Emphasis on  
Deliverance

## HISTORICAL REFERENCE

Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. 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?'"

David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. 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. Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?" (1 Sam 21:10–15).

## COMPARISON WITH PSALM 34—THE ABC'S OF FACING A CRISIS

This psalm is a broken alphabetic acrostic: one verse is missing (*waw* between 6 and 7) and an extra verse is added at the end. *Outline*: call to public praise and worship (1–3); David's prayer and deliverance in Gath (4–7); exhortation to seek and trust God for deliverance as David did (8–14); God hears and delivers the righteous but not the wicked (15–18, 19–22). His exhortation consists of ten imperatives of request: taste and see that the LORD is good (8), fear the LORD (9), come, listen to me (11), keep your tongue from evil (13), turn aside from evil and do good (14a), seek and pursue peace (14b). Note the promises of happiness (5), deliverance (7, 17, 18, 19, 22), blessing (8), protection (9, 20), provision (10), long life and seeing good (12). The prerequisites for deliverance are to fear the LORD (9), seek the LORD (10), do good and not evil (13, 14, 16, 21), seek and pursue peace (14), and being righteous (15, 19). Deliverance is not from his feigned madness but God's faithfulness.

## EXCURSUS ON THANK-OFFERINGS

A thank-offering consisted of an animal, bread, wafers, and cakes (Lev 7:12–13, 15) and was offered to God for deliverance from distress (Psa 50:23), sickness, death (Psa 56:12–13; 116:17), and revival (2 Chr 29:31; 33:15–16). The priest received and ate his portion (Lev 7:29–34; 10:14) and the offerer, his family, and friends ate the rest at a thanksgiving meal (Lev 7:15–17). Josephus, from a family of priests, says: "There are two kinds of sacrifice—one offered by individuals, the other by the community—taking two distinct forms. In the first, the whole of the sacrificial victim is burnt entire, whence the sacrifice derives its corresponding name; the other is of the nature of a thank-offering (*charisterion*) and performed with the intention of providing a feast for those who have offered it... the breast and the right leg are offered to the priests, and for two days they feast upon the remainder of the flesh, all that is left over being burnt up" (*Ant.* 3.225). Sin offerings (*korban chatat*) and guilt offerings (*korban asham*) were mandatory for fellowship with God; fellowship offerings (*korban shelamim*), which included thank-offerings (*korban todot*) were voluntary and given in fellowship with God.

## PARALLELISM NOTES

- (1) Both halves of this psalm move from serious problem (persecution and suffering in **A** and **A'**) to right spiritual response (prayer and faith in God's Word in **B** and **B'**) to perfect solution (God's intervention and deliverance in **C** and **C'**).
- (2) *David's focus shifts from fear to God through prayer and faith in God promises*: one brief cry to God amid a focus on surrounding dangers (**A–C**) changes to one brief reference to danger amid a focus on God (**A'–C'**). This is the same prayer technique used by Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:1–12), Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:15–19), Daniel (9:2–19), and Nehemiah (1:4–11). Jehoshaphat reminds God of a promise that applies to his desperate situation (2 Chr 20:9; cf. the promise in 6:28–30). God's promise to regather Israel underlies Daniel's prayer (9:2; cf. the promise in Jer 29:10). Nehemiah reminds God of a promise that applies to his present situation (1:8–9; cf. the promise in Deut 30:2–3). Learn this lesson from these great prayer warriors: when you have a problem so big that it fills the room with its presence and is about to crush you with its weight, take time to build up a big God in your mind *before* making your prayer requests. Focus on (1) God's attributes, essence, and character, (2) the times God has helped you in the past, and (3) applicable promises first before mentioning your problem and asking for help. This technique mentally reduces the size of seemingly insurmountable problems and at the same time increases your faith to believe God can solve them (cf. Matt 21:22; Mark 11:24). This prayer technique is repeated in part and in full many times in the Bible.
- (3) The mechanics of replacing fear with peace of mind through faith in God's Word is repeated twice for emphasis (**B** and **B'**).

## EXEGETICAL NOTES:

- this is an individual lament psalm with the usual motifs of (1) address and introductory petition, (2) lament, (3) confession of trust, (4) petition, (5) vow of praise, and (6) thanksgiving in anticipation (cf. Psa 13).
- *tune*: this psalm was apparently sung 'to (the tune of) A Silent Dove from Far Away Places' (DCH).
- *miktam*: meaning uncertain, perhaps "secret prayer" or "song sung to the capped reed pipe" (DCH): "It always stands in the superscription of Davidic prayers occasioned by great danger [see Ps 56–60]" (*NIV Study Bible*).
- *occasion*: David's flight to Achish, king of Gath (1 Sam 21:10–15). The same occasion inspired Psalm 34.
- *be gracious to me (1a)*: prayer for grace in the midst of persecution and danger from many enemies in Philistia.
- *trampled upon me (1a, 2a)*: they were panting or gasping for air (*sha'aph* DCH) in their efforts to crush David.
- *all day long (1b, 2a, 5a)*: while under house-arrest David experienced constant persecution and danger.
- *many (are) fighting against me haughtily (2b)*: overconfident and swaggering but one-on-one they are no match for David.
- *When I am afraid (3) . . . I will not be afraid (4)*: a paradox accomplished by faith ("I will put my trust in You") in God's promises ("whose word I praise"). This important principle of replacing fear with peace of mind through faith in God's Word is repeated again for emphasis in the balancing couplet (10–11). His fear is noted in 1 Sam 21:12: "David took these words to heart and greatly feared (*wayira' me'od*) Achish king of Gath". Also in Psalm 34:4: "I sought Yahweh and he answered me, and from all my terrors (*megurot*) he delivered me" (LEB). *Megurot* is used of things feared in Prov 10:24 and Isa 66:4 (DCH).
- *what can flesh/man do to me (4, 11)?* nothing, unless permitted by God (cf. hedge of protection, Job 1:9–12; also Psa 34:7). Faith and hope provide peace of mind, but if God permits the worst, mental peace may continue with persistent prayer and submission to God's will (Matt 26:38–39, 42, 44) and the knowledge that God is for you (Psa 56:9), with you (23:4), it is his will (Job 1:12; 1 Pet 4:19), it requires contentment (2 Cor 12:10; Phil 4:11; 1 Tim 6:8), thanksgiving (1 Thess 5:18), and 'looking at/to the reward' (1 Pet 2:20; Heb 11:26; Rev 2:10). He knows he can't die before he is enthroned (1 Sam 16:12–13).
- *they hurt my words (5a)*: his enemies continually distort (NASB) or twist (NKJV) his words to slander him before King Achish.
- *all their thoughts are against me for evil (5b)*: David's enemies are continually plotting ways to hurt him.
- *they show hostility, lie hidden, watch . . . waited for my life (6)*: non-stop effort to find evidence to persuade the king to rescind asylum and execute David. Apparently David offered his military services to the king on this occasion in exchange for protection as he does later (1 Sam 27:1–28:2; 29:1–11). Achish trusted David but many leaders were hostile (28:11; 29:4–7).
- *because of evil deliver them (7a)*: a facetious (not serious), sarcastic (mocking overstatement) prayer request that obviously means the opposite: 'because of evil do not deliver them' (not *erotesis* of affirmative negation as Bullinger, NKJV, ESV, HCSB).
- *my wandering you made a written record . . . put my tears in Your skin-bottle . . . in Your book (8)*: David's wandering as a fugitive and tears (metonymy for sorrows) are written down in a book of remembrances from which eternal rewards are issued (Neh 5:19; 13:14, 22, 31; Mal 3:16; cf. book of remembrances Esth 6:1; Dan 7:10; Rev 20:12). "Archaeologists have unearthed small 'tear bottles' in which mourners collected their tears and then deposited the bottle at the grave site" (Wiersbe).
- *this I know because God is for me (9)*: David is confident his prayers for deliverance will be answered because God is for him.
- *word I praise. In God I put my trust, I will not fear (10–11)*: mechanics of replacing fear with peace repeated to balance **B**.
- *vows (12a)*: synonymous parallelism suggests this is a votive offering: "The vow offering (*neder*) is closely related to the praise offering, if not even identical" (TLOT). David vowed to give thank-offerings in the Tabernacle when restored to Jerusalem (cf. Psa 66:13–14). "A vow of praise is evident in twenty-three of the roughly thirty-nine individual laments" (*Dict. of OT: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*).
- *thank-offerings (12b)*: a thank-offering is one of three kinds of fellowship offerings (Lev 7:15): (1) thanksgiving/praise (*todah*), (2) vow/votive (*neder*), and (3) voluntary/freewill (*nedevah*). Fellowship or peace offerings (*shelem*) were given to fulfill vows, give thanks, or voluntarily express love to God (Ezra 1:4–6; 7:16).
- *delivered my soul from death (13a)*: his enemies were trying to kill him but he anticipates deliverance from God.