

PSALM 56

THE SONG OF THE SILENT DOVE

This is a fervent prayer in which David complains of Saul and his attendants because he was obliged to flee out of the land of the Philistines. From the historical narrative in 1 Samuel 21, we find that he had fled to the Philistine city of Gath after stopping at Nob, where he received food and weaponry from the Lord's priest there. However, when he came to Gath, the remembrance of his slaying of Goliath did not put him in a favorable light among the people of that place. By feigning that he was a crazy insane man, he narrowly escaped being captured. Hence he was obliged to leave the land of the Philistines. But alas! So bitterly and hostilely did Saul and his men conspire against David and plot against his life, that it seemed as if he could be in safety nowhere! Nevertheless, he encouraged and supported himself with a constant and undaunted faith. "I will glory," says he, "in the word of God!" (verse 10) And why? Because he had a command, a declaration, and a promise of God in his favor. The Lord had decreed that Saul would be dethroned, and that David would become the next king. "I will not be afraid what man can do unto me!" he resolved (verse 11). It did not matter to him that Saul and the Saulites were opposing and fighting against him. They might say over and over again that he would not be king; but since his God was on his side, David knew that no man could do anything against him.

After the manner of this Psalm, we also ought to pray against tyrants who unceasingly persecute the Word of God and the people of God. And we have

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

Within the title of this Psalm, we find the inscription, "Upon Jonath-elem-rechokim"; and this long word has been translated, "the silent dove in distant places." Here we have the song of God's servant, who rejoices once more to return from banishment, and to leave those dangerous places where he was compelled to hold his peace - even from good. There is such deep spiritual knowledge in this Psalm that we might say of it, "Blessed art thou, David Bar-jonas, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee!" When David plays the Jonah (the name Jonah means "dove"), he is not like the prophet of that name - for in David, the love of the dove predominates; but in Jonah, its moaning and complaining are most notable.

The title also says, "Michtam of David." Michtam means "golden," and this is the second Golden Psalm in the Book; we had the first in Psalm 16, to which this Psalm has a great similarity - especially in its close, for it ends in the joyful presence of God. A golden mystery - namely, the gracious secret of the life of faith - is most sweetly unveiled in both these Psalms, and a pillar is set up because of God's truth.

In the first two verses, David pours out his complaint; in verses 3 and 4, he declares his confidence in God; in verses 5 and 6, he returns to his complaining; but he pleads with earnest hope in verses 7-9, and he sings a grateful song from verses 10-13.

that same strong consolation that David enjoyed – namely, that the Word of God is on our side!

“Be merciful unto me, O God!” the Psalmist exclaims in the first verse. This petition includes all the blessings for which we come and bow before the throne of grace. If we obtain mercy there, we need nothing more to make us happy! Moreover, this prayer also contains our best plea; for it is not our merit that wins anything in our favor, but only God’s free and rich mercy. We may flee to and trust the mercy of the Lord when we are surrounded, on all sides, by



difficulties and dangers. David’s enemies would have been too hard for him if his God had not helped him. He resolved to make Jehovah’s promises the subject of his praises, and we ought to do the same. Just as we must not trust an arm of flesh when it is lifted up in our support; so also, we must not be afraid of an arm of flesh when stretched out against us. Let us take the Psalmist’s words into our own mouths: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee... I will not fear what flesh can do unto me!” (verses 3-4)

The heavy and continued trials through which many of the Lord’s people have passed should teach us to be silent and patient under lighter crosses. Yet we are often tempted to repine and despond under small sorrows. Against this, we must be on our guard. In his distress and fear, David comforted himself with the assurance that God noticed all his grievances and all his griefs (verse 8). The Lord has a bottle and a book for His people’s tears – both the tears for their sins, and also those for their afflictions. He observes them with tender concern!

Every true believer may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper, and so I will not fear what man can do to me” (verse 11); for no man has any power at all, except that which is given him from above. Whenever God delivers us from sin and its wicked servants, He has delivered our souls from death – which is the wages of sin. And it is very proper, then, for us to offer vows of thankfulness to the Lord when we have been recipients of His mercy! Where the Lord has begun a good work, He will surely carry it on and perfect it. Since His grace has delivered our souls from the death of sin, He will assuredly bring us to heaven, to walk before Him forever in light! (verse 13)

Lord, we praise You for the immense happiness that it brings to our hearts when we consider that You – the King of kings – are on our side, and that You undertake to be our Protector and Advocate! Thank You for the assurance that even though men may oppose, devils may rage, and all our spiritual enemies may threaten; yet You are still our strength and our shield, and we are helped by You! Amen.