

Psalm 56

Prayer during the Day Thursday Week 2

This is a prayer of trust in God accompanied by a request for God's protective justice against human cruelty and violence. The title reads: 'To the leader: according to The Dove on far-off Terebinths. Of David. A Miktam*, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.' The musicians are directed to the song 'The Dove on far-off Terebinths' for the tune to be used in chanting the psalm. The scene to which the title refers is found in 1Samuel 11:21ff.

**¹Be gracious* to me, O God,
for they are crushing me. With
no respite they attack me and
trample me down.**

**²My enemies are pursuing me,
with no respite a host of them
bear down upon me.**

**³When I am afraid, I put my
trust* in you.**

**⁴*Thanks be to God. I praise
God and his promise. I trust*
in God and am not afraid.
What can flesh* do to me?***

The psalm opens with a cry to God for help. 'They' in verse one translates the Hebrew 'nôš [אֲנָשִׁים].

Verse four functions as a refrain (see verses ten to eleven). The psalmist is encouraging himself to trust and not be afraid. 'Flesh' translates the Hebrew bāšār [בָּשָׂר]. They are only mortal. He asks himself why he is so afraid of them?

I, I am he who comforts you; why then are you
afraid of a mere mortal who must die,
a human being who fades like grass?

– Isaiah 51:12

The Egyptians are human, and not God; their
horses are flesh, and not spirit.

– Isaiah 31:3

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortal human
beings and make mere flesh their strength, whose
hearts turn away from YHWH.

– Jeremiah 17:5

He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath
of air that passes and does not come again.

– Psalm 78:39

We recall Paul's powerful declaration of faith:

If God is for us, who is against us?

– Romans 8:31

The psalmist praises God for God's word. By contrast, his enemies discredit his word.

After recording his suffering, the psalmist calls on God to punish his oppressors.

He knows in faith that God is aware of his sufferings. They are not forgotten. We think of Jesus who has walked the desert with us and whose tears are mingled with ours. The last sentence in verse 8 is a gloss*.

This is an expanded version of the refrain found in verse four. 'A mere mortal' translates Hebrew 'ādām [אָדָם].

Either the psalmist has already experienced deliverance and has now come to offer God a thanksgiving offering, or he is so sure of God's answer that he knows his request is as good as answered.

'Soul' in verse 13 translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article 'Being' in the Introduction. The psalmist has just spoken of his 'wanderings'(verse 8). Held up by God he now walks steadily in the light of God's presence, gracing him with life.

⁵With no respite they discredit my words. Their only thought is to harm me.

⁶They band together in ambush; they track me down and seek my life.

⁷Repay them for their crimes; in wrath* cast down the peoples, O God!

⁸You have kept count of my wanderings; you have stored my tears in your goatskin.

[Are they not in your record?]

⁹My enemies will have to retreat when I call on you. This I know, that God is for me.

¹⁰Thanks be to God. I praise God and his promise. Thanks be to YHWH. I praise him for his promise.

¹¹I trust* in God and am not afraid. What can a mere mortal do to me?

¹²I have made my vows to you; I will carry them out, O God, as I offer you thanks.

¹³You have delivered my soul* from death, and my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk in the presence of God and enjoy the light of the living.