

# Psalm 56

## Psalm 56:1–22

## David Recovers Fellowship with God After Leaving Gath

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**Introduction:** Psalm 56 was first inspired when David was grabbed by the soldiers in the palace of Achish, king of Gath. David had been in Nob and lied to the priest about his reason for being there. He was on the run from Saul, but did not disclose that. Then he went to Gath, under the philosophy, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. However, as David had killed thousands of Philistines, he was seized wither on his way to, or while he was in the palace of Achish, king of Gath. Now, in his mind begins to form this psalm, which is applicable to both David's situation at Gath and with Saul.

I should warn you that the translation, and therefore the interpretation of this psalm will be quite difficult in places. The Septuagint at times barely sounds like the Masoretic text; and the English translations very greatly.

The general theme of the psalm is simple. David is out of fellowship, placing himself and many of those in Israel in danger. In between I Sam. 21 and 22, David rebounds—that is, he confesses his sin to God—and this psalm is a record of that. The result is that he [walks before God in the light of life](#) (Psalm 56:13b).

There are too many times when I try to force a round peg into a square hole. Psalms do not necessarily fall into a nice neat outline form; or, even when they do, this outline fails in terms of organization. There is a much more natural organization to this psalm which takes into account its parallel format (which is often found throughout the psalms).

## Alternate Outline of Psalm 56

**David's Focus is on Man** (vv. 1–2)  
**David Puts his Trust in God and in God's Word** (vv. 3–4)  
**What Man Does Against David** (vv. 5–6)  
**What God Does to Take Care of David** (vv. 7–9)  
**David's Trust is in God and in God's Word** (vv. 10–11)  
**David's Focus is on God** (vv. 12–13)

As you see, the parallel structure of this psalm is striking and undeniable.<sup>1</sup>

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### Psalm 56 Inscription

Slavishly literal:

**To the Preeminent [One]. Upon a dove of silence afar off. To David, a Miktam. In a seizing of him Philistines in Gath.**

Psalm  
56 inscription

Moderately literal:

**To the Preeminent One. According to "A Silent Dove Afar Off." [A psalm] belonging to David, a song, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.**

**To the Preeminent One, according to the song "A Silent Dove Off in the Distance." A song of David, composed when the Philistines seized him in Gath.**

This verse is Psalm 56:1 in the Hebrew. All of the other verses are similarly shifted in the Hebrew.

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Septuagint

For the end, concerning the people that were removed from the sanctuary, by David for a memorial, when the Philistines caught him in Geth.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV *[For the music leader: To the tune "A Silent Dove in the Distance." A special psalm by David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.]*

NJB *For the choirmaster Tune: 'The oppression of distant princes' Of David In a quiet voice When the Philistines seized him in Gath.*

NLT *For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time the Philistines seized him in Gath. To be sung to the tune "Dove on Distant Oaks."*

#### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

<sup>1</sup> I really expected to open up Bullinger's *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* and find the exact same outline (Bullinger does this for several psalms); however, I did not. On the other hand, the NIV Study Bible gives the same structure for this psalm. *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 835.

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	To the Chief Musician. Upon “The Dove of God from the distant Sea.” David’s. A precious Psalm. <sup>2</sup> When the Philistines seized him in Gath.
<i>God’s Word™</i>	For the choir director; according to <i>yonath elem rechokim</i> ; <sup>3</sup> a miktam by David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.
JPS (Tanakh)	For the leader; on <i>jonath elem rehokim</i> . Of David. A <i>michtam</i> ; when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	To the Chief Musician: <i>to the tune</i> , Silent Dove Among Those Far Away. Of David. A record of memorable thoughts, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.
NASB	For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim. A Mikhtam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.
NKJV	To the Chief Musician. Set to “The Silent Dove in Distant Lands.” A Michtam of David when the Philistines captured him in Gath.
NRSV	<i>To the leader: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. Of David. A Miktam, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.</i>
<i>Young’s Updated LT</i>	To the Overseer. “On the Silent Dove afar off.” A secret treasure of David, in the Philistines’ taking hold of him in Gath.

**What is the gist of this verse?** The title or inscription for this psalm establishes the author (David); the situation which inspired the psalm (when the Philistines seized David in Gath); the recipient of the psalm (the Preeminent One); and its melody (probably).

### Psalm 56 inscription a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong’s Numbers
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l’]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition	No Strong’s # BDB #510
nâtsach (נָצַח) [pronounced naw- TZAHKH]	<i>to oversee, to supervise; to be preeminent, to be enduring; the Preeminent One</i>	Piel participle with the definite article	Strong’s #5329 BDB #663

The Piel participle of nâtsach is given a wide variety of renderings: *overseer* (Young), *the music leader* (CEV), *choir director* (NASB, NLT), *choirmaster* (Owens), *leader* (NRSV, NEB, NAB) and *chief musician* (Rotherham).

**Translation: To the Preeminent One.** As you can see, there are a variety of renderings for this Piel participle, including *music leader*, *overseer*, *choirmaster*, and *chief musician*. This psalm could be dedicated to God and it could be for the *Overseer of the Music*. What we have in Psalm 59, if you recall, is that David wrote: **To the Preeminent One: do not destroy [me]!** Although we could interpret this as being dedicated to Saul, who was out to destroy David, or to God, Who has the power to destroy David; this would hardly be applicable to the *Chief Musician* or to the *Choir Director*. Given the use of this word in Psalm 59, which was written prior to Psalm 56, we may reasonably give nâtsach a similar meaning here as found in Psalm 59; hence, the psalm is dedicated or written to God. Now, if we go with this understanding, the first question would be, *why not dedicate this psalm to Elohim or to Jehovah?* In the psalms, there are a number of style differences and word usage tends to be different as well. This does not preclude the use of *Elohim* or *Jehovah*, it simply recognizes that there may be words used in the psalms which also refer to God, but are not used elsewhere in that manner. Again, go back to

<sup>2</sup> So according to some authorities. Meaning unknown. Footnote from Joseph Bryant Rotherham’s *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 557.

<sup>3</sup> Unknown musical term

Psalm 59—there are few traditional interpretations of the word *nâtsach* which make sense. However, as a dedication to God, this makes perfect sense.

### Psalm 56 inscription b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i> ]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over, by, beside</i>	preposition of proximity	Strong's #5921 BDB #752
When not showing a physical relationship between two things, ʿal can take on a whole host of new meanings: <i>on the ground of, according to, on account of, on behalf of, concerning, besides, in addition to, together with, beyond, above, over, by on to, towards, to, against, in the matter of, concerning, as regards to</i> . It is one of the most versatile prepositions in Scripture. This word often follows particular verbs. In the English, we have <i>helping verbs</i> ; in the Hebrew, there are <i>helping prepositions</i> .			
yôneh (יוֹנָה) [pronounced <i>yoh-NAW</i> ]	<i>dove, pigeon</i>	feminine singular construct	Strong's #3123 (& #3128) BDB #401
This could also be the proper noun <i>Jonah</i> (Strong's #3124 BDB #402).			
ʿêlem (עֵלֶם) [pronounced <i>Ā-lehm</i> ]	<i>silence; possibly mute, dumb</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #482 BDB #48
Alternate reading below:			
ʿêlîym (עֵלִיִּם) [pronounced <i>Ā-leem</i> ]	<i>terebinths</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #41 BDB #414
This could also be a proper noun. The confusion here should account for the plethora of English renderings.			
râchôq (רַחֹק) [pronounced <i>raw-KHOHK</i> ]	<i>distant, far; as a noun, it means distance (which can be a reference to time or space)</i>	masculine plural adjective	Strong's #7350 BDB #935

**Translation:** [According to “A Silent Dove Afar Off.”](#) In the inscription or title of this psalm, this is probably the most difficult phrase. At this point, I am not certain that any interpretation could be unquestionably preeminent, nor does one interpretation necessarily open up a flood of knowledge than another does not. Therefore, I am going to interpret this as set to the melody of a known song of that era called “*A Silent Dove Afar Off.*” Although Rotherham seems to stay with the interpretation of this being a song’s melody which is preserved only in the title, he also offers “*Silent dove among those far away*” and “*the dove of distant terebinths.*”<sup>4</sup> The title of Psalm 9:1 also appears to reference the melody of another song *Death to the son* (which, given the text of the psalm, I don’t see as meaning *Death to the Son*).

If we go with the translation that I have given you, the very name is poetic, as a *dove’s call from afar off* probably could not be heard anyway; and given that this dove is silent makes him even more quiet. It’s poetry; sometimes, you just can’t understand it.

The word for *dove* is not disputed, and it is found throughout Scripture: Gen. 8:8–12 Lev. 1:14 5:7, 11, etc). However, this is also the proper name *Jonah*, which interpretation generally results in the following words to be transliterated rather than interpreted. The only problem with this is, often when a person’s name is used, it will be affixed to his *last name* (e.g., *Jonah ben Amittai*), which helps us to better identify him. Therefore, I would suggest that this phrase be translated rather than transliterated.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham’s *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 557.

### Psalm 56 inscription c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l <sup>e</sup> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
Dâvid (דָּוִד); also Dâvîyd (דָּוִיִּד) [pronounced daw-VEED]	<i>beloved and is transliterated David</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #1732 BDB #187
mik <sup>e</sup> tâm (מִכְתָּם) [pronounced mik-TAWM]	<i>possibly: writing; a poem, a song; transliterated Mikhtâm</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #4387 BDB #508

There is a very similar masculine noun, which is mîk<sup>e</sup>ththâ<sup>bv</sup> (כִּתְּבָהּ) [pronounced mik<sup>e</sup>-TAW<sup>BV</sup>], which means *writing, handwriting, that which is written*; which noun is found in titles, e.g., *Writing of Hezekiah*. The difference between the nouns is the final letter. Given their strong similarities, I would reasonably suppose that mik<sup>e</sup>tâm means *writing, a poem, a song*. This word is found only in the inscriptions of 6 psalms (all psalms of David) and giving it such a meaning does no damage to the psalms or the inscription.

Interestingly enough, a word which is also similar to mik<sup>e</sup>tâm is kâtham (כָּתַם) [pronounced kaw-THAHM], which means *to be stained; bloodstained; defiled*. Strong's #3799 BDB #508. Many times, a verb is made into a substantive by affixing a mem to the beginning of the word.

**Translation:** [A psalm] belonging to David, a song,... The lâmed preposition is often used in the psalms to identify the author, although we do not find the sort of usage elsewhere. So this is a psalm which is David's, which would make perfect sense, as the circumstances in the next portion of the inscription fit David to a tee. Given the probably reference to the melody of another song, this is likely a song which David composed, which is consistent with the use of the word mik<sup>e</sup>tâm.

### Psalm 56 inscription d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʾâchaz (אָחַז) [pronounced aw-KHAHZ]	<i>to grasp, to take hold of, to take possession of</i>	Qal infinitive construct	Strong's #270 BDB #28
ʾêth (אֶת) [pronounced ayth]	untranslated mark of a direct object	affixed to a 3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #853 BDB #84

When verbs in the infinitive construct are preceded by the b<sup>e</sup>yth preposition, b<sup>e</sup> acts as a temporal conjunction; that is, *in their being created* = *when they were created* (Gen. 2:4); *in their being in the field* = *when they were in the field* (Gen. 4:8).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*; Hendrickson, ©1979, pp. 90–91.

## Psalm 56 inscription d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
P <sup>h</sup> ilish <sup>tiy</sup> (פִּלִּשְׁתִּי) [pronounced p <sup>h</sup> -lish-TEE]	transliterated <i>Philistines</i>	masculine plural gentilic adjective (acts like a proper noun)	Strong's #6430 BDB #814
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
Gath (גַּת) [pronounced gath]	wine-press and is transliterated <i>Gath</i>	masculine proper noun	Strong's #1661 BDB #387

**Translation:** ...when the Philistines seized him in Gath. This gives us the occasion of this psalm: when the Philistines seized David while he was in Gath. Most exegetes associate this psalm with I Sam. 21:10–15. To place you into this historic context: David, in I Sam. 21, has made two grievous errors (1) he did not come clean with the priest at Nob, which resulted in the deaths of every person who lived in Nob; and (2) David feigned madness before the king of Gath, which allowed the Philistines to attack Israel, as they had nothing to fear from their greatest enemy. David had left Nob with basic provisions and with Goliath's sword and he strolled into Gath, demanding to speak to Achish, the king of Gath. Although David was given audience, at some point, the soldiers seized David—either when he walked into the palace, asking to speak to Achish, or, sometime while David was speaking to Achish. They recognized who David is (probably due to the sword that he wore), and grabbed him, even though David had no intention of making any untoward moves to Achish. David's idea was, if he is an enemy of Saul's, why not seek asylum with Saul's greatest enemy, the king of Gath? None of this was according to God's direction, and David's actions here resulted in tragedy for those who were innocent.<sup>6</sup>

We do not know exactly when David composed this. Did his mind turn to music when he was seized; did, upon his leaving Gath, think back on being seized by these Philistines, and a song begin to percolate in his head? All we know is that David associated this song (of psalm) with the incident of being seized in Gath. Certainly, there was some proximity to the writing of the psalm and the incident mentioned here.

My thinking is this: David is almost a different person in I Sam. 22. In fact, the chapter of I Sam. 21 and 22 is brilliant, because David does not seem to have any idea as to his direction in I Sam. 21, and by the next chapter, he is allowing himself to be guided by God. My thinking is that this psalm and Psalm 34 marks David's spiritual turn around since he escaped out of his window back in I Sam. 19. When we are faced with difficulties and problems that seem unsolvable, we often might open up our Bibles and read for comfort, assurance and guidance. David did not have that option. However, he was able to commune with God (i.e., to have fellowship with God) and that included being able to write Scripture himself. So, after leaving Gath, David reviewed this incident in his mind and wrote, as guided by God the Holy Spirit, Psalm 56.

When it comes to interpretation of this psalm, we must keep two things at the forefront of our thinking: obviously, this deals with David's escape from Gath; however, there are also verses which apply to his situation with Saul. Therefore, there will be several verses in this psalm which make more sense when interpreting them in the context of that time period, rather than narrowing our back story to David's entrance into and exit from Gath.

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<sup>6</sup> This was discussed in greater detail in I Sam. 21–22. *Innocent* may not be the accurate word to apply here.



Young's Updated LT

Favor me, O God, for man swallowed me up;  
All the day fighting he oppresses me,...

**What is the gist of this verse?** David asks God for His grace, as man tramples him. David is negatively affected by the constant conflict which he faces.

### Psalm 56:1a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
chânan (חָנַן) [pronounced <i>khaw-NAHN</i> ]	<i>to bend, to stoop over, to show favor, to show grace as a superior would do on behalf of an inferior, to show mercy, to be gracious</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperative with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	#2603, 2589 BDB #335
ʿĕlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced <i>el-o-HEEM</i> ]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43

**Translation:** [Show grace to me, O Elohim...](#) David has been in a state of self-preservation. He has done what he has done in order to save himself. Nowhere in I Sam. 21 does David seek God's guidance. Although Doeg will later say that David went to Nob and received guidance from the High Priest (I Sam. 22:9–10), we know that Doeg was simply embellishing what actually did happen. This psalm marks his turnaround. He has just escaped Gath with his life; he thinks back to these soldiers, officer's of Achish, who grabbed him, who could have easily snuffed out his life right then and there. But David is a believer; he is still alive; he has made some mistakes, but he gets up off the ground, he dusts himself off, and he asks God for grace. It may seem nervy to you, but that is God's grace. David is a believer, he is still alive, he has recognized his mistakes, and he can now look to God for grace.

Human viewpoint would approach this from the stance that, David is being unjustly persecuted by Saul. David hasn't done anything wrong—i.e., to Saul—so why is he asking for God's grace? But divine viewpoint is, David is in fear, therefore he is out of fellowship. Being out of fellowship, not only separates him from God, but leads David into making a lot of bad decisions (in fact, pretty much every decision that David makes out of fellowship is going to be bad). Now that David recognizes this, he asks for God's grace to get him out of the hole that he dug for himself.

**Application:** David is in a hopeless situation; the only One he can turn to is God. God is available at all times and for all circumstances. There is no need for us to wait until we get to a hopeless situation to call upon Him to deliver us. It is impressive to be in a hopeless situation, to pray to God, and then see it resolved; but we don't have to let things get that far out of hand.

### Psalm 56:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced <i>kee</i> ]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
shâ`aph (שָׁאֵף) [pronounced <i>shaw-AHF</i> ]	<i>to gasp, to pant, to breathe heavily; to crush, to trample down</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal perfect with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #7602 BDB #983



## Psalm 56:1b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
<p>One possible understanding of this verb is that David's pursuers are so close behind him, he can hear them breathing heavily. Another understanding is that, his oppressors are so close that he can hear their heavy breathing (which would be keeping with the officers of Gath seizing him).</p>			
<p>ʿēnôwsh (עֲנוֹשׁ) [pronounced <i>en-OHSH</i>]</p>	<p><i>mortal, mortal man, mankind; fallen man, depraved man, feeble man [liable to disease and calamity]; peons, hoi polloi, the great unwashed, rabble</i></p>	<p>masculine singular noun</p>	<p>Strong's #582 BDB #60</p>

**Translation:** ...for fallen man has seized me;... The word for man here is ʿēnôwsh, which is a reference to *mortal man, fallen man, depraved man*. The verb properly means *to gasp, to breath heavily, to pant*. The idea is that these pursuers or these enemies are so close to David that he can feel their breath on the back of his neck. We have the colloquialism today, *breathing down my neck*. This is the idea. David's enemies are so close, as to be breathing down his neck. This refers to the men of Gath who have seized him.

David realizes just how far he has fallen for God to have allowed unbelievers to seize David and genuinely threaten his life. Just as these men seized David—these depraved, Godless men—David without words calls out to God for His grace. Or, even more likely, David escapes Gath, looks back on what happened, and then calls out to God for His grace. There are some frightening things which have happened to me that I give little thought to at the time, but when I look back and relive those moments, they make me shudder. This is what David is going through. He is reliving this moment in Gath, and speaking to God, recognizing that he cannot go through this time of pressure alone.

What we have in v. 1a and 1b is a contrast between God and man. David finds himself being harassed and hounded by man, so he turns to God for deliverance.

**Application:** You are going to find yourself harassed and hounded by other people, often for no reason, and often by fellow believers. This is a fact of life. You can make concerted attempts not to cross anyone, to be fair to all that you come in contact with, to be gracious and kind, and still, you will be harassed and hounded by man. Now, not every minute of everyday or even everyday, but it will happen; and it will happen again. I've found myself in conflict with a lot of people that I have worked with, and generally, without any reason for it (I'm not denying that there have been times where I contributed to the conflict). But my point is, even with faultless behavior, men (and by this, I mean, *men and women*) will cause you problems. Human viewpoint is to react, to get angry, to stand up for yourself, to slap them in the head. Can you imagine what would have happened if David chose to apply human viewpoint against Saul or against the men in Gath? He would be dead. What does he do? David turns to God. When you face conflict, then you turn to God in prayer, and turn to His Word for guidance. Do not react, do not become antagonistic toward those who persecute you—allow God to guide you through the process, and do not worry if you don't see God take them down the moment you pray. Let God function according to His perfect plan according to His perfect timing.

## Psalm 56:1c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kôl (כֹּל) [pronounced kohl]	<i>the whole, all of, the entirety of, all; can also be rendered any of</i>	masculine singular construct followed by a definite article	Strong's #3605 BDB #481
yôwm (יוֹם) [pronounced yohm]	<i>day, today (with a definite article)</i>	masculine singular noun with a definite article	Strong's #3117 BDB #398
lâcham (לָחַם) [pronounced law-KHAHM]	<i>to fight to do battle, to war; to eat [in poetry]</i>	Qal active participle	Strong's #3898 BDB #535
lâchats (לָחַץ) [pronounced law-KHAHTZ]	<i>to squeeze, to press; therefore, figuratively, to oppress, to afflict</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperfect with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #3905 BDB #537

**Translation:** ...all the day, conflict [lit., fighting] afflicts me. David is on the run, and almost everywhere he goes, his life is in danger. He faces conflict and fighting almost anywhere that he goes, and this is beginning to take a toll on him. David is a great warrior, but in the past, he could turn and strike his foes. He can't do that to Saul because Saul is God's anointed. And even if David could, he would be facing the army of Israel.

**Application:** Have you ever had a superior who was a crappy supervisor, so you entered into some office intrigue in order to get rid of that supervisor? Notice David: Saul is pursuing him, Saul is seeking his life; David does not bad mouth Saul nor does David look to overthrow Saul. David will have several opportunities to kill Saul and he will not take these opportunities. This means you do not get to engage in office politics in order to remove a supervisor that you see as unjust. God placed that person there for a reason.

**Have grasped my enemies all the day  
for many are fighting for me, Most High.**

Psalm  
56:2

**My enemies crush [me] all the day,  
for many are fighting with regards to me, O  
Most High.**

**My enemies crush me all day long,  
and many fight against me, O Most High.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Septuagint

My enemies have trodden me down all the day from the dawning of the day; for there are many fighting against me.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV

Many of them are pursuing and attacking me,  
but even when I am afraid, I keep on trusting you.

NAB

My foes treat me harshly all the day;  
yes, many are my attackers.

NLT

My slanderers hound me constantly,  
and many are boldly attacking me.

REB All day long foes beset and oppress me,  
for numerous are those who assail me.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™ All day long my enemies spy on me.  
They harass me.  
There are so many fighting against me.

JPS (Tanakh) My watchful foes persecute me all day long;  
many are my adversaries, O Exalted One.

NIV My slanderers pursue me all day long;  
many are attacking me in their pride.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

The Amplified Bible They that lie in wait for me would swallow me up or trample me all day long, for they are many who fight against me, O Most High!

Updated Emphasized Bible My adversaries have panted all the day,  
For ||many|| are fighting with me |loftily|.

NASB My foes have trampled upon me all the day long,  
For they are many who right proudly against me.

Owen's Translation My enemies trample all the day long for many fight against me proudly.  
Young's Updated LT My enemies have swallowed *me* up all the day,  
For many *are* fighting against me, O Most High.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David's enemies (metaphorically) trample him all day long. This could also be interpreted that, his enemies, the Philistines, have trampled down the ground before them (a reference to their attack on the produce of Keilah). There are a large number of men who are against David.

**Psalm 56:2a**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
shâ`aph (שָׂאֵף) [pronounced shaw-AHF]	to gasp, to pant, to breathe heavily; to crush, to trample down	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural, Qal perfect	Strong's #7602 BDB #983
shârar (שָׂרַר) [pronounced shaw-RAHR]	to twist, to twine; to be firm, hard; to press together; to oppress; in the plural participle, adversaries, enemies; [evil] observers, [insidious] watchers	masculine plural noun, possibly a Qal active participle (possibly a Poel participle)	Strong's #8324 BDB #1004

## Psalm 56:2a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
<p>There are several problems with this word. Owen lists it simply as a masculine plural noun. BDB also lists it as a masculine plural noun, rendering it <i>[insidious] watcher</i>. The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament and Gesenius both consider this to be a masculine plural, Qal (or possibly Poel) active participle which only occurs in this form in Scripture (the Hebrew Concordance lists the passages Psalm 5:8 54:5 56:2 59:10; BDB adds Psalm 27:10 (11) 92:11(12)). The relative plethora and variety of meanings are due to disagreeing Hebrew scholars, rather than because there are many meanings that we could attach to this word. There appears to be a disagreement as to how this word is spelled, which would of course affect how we read it. The verb as listed by Gesenius and the Hebrew Concordance is found nowhere else. The renderings <i>[insidious] watcher, [evil] observer; oppressor, adversary, enemy</i> are all apropos to the passages where <i>shârar</i> occurs.</p>			
<p>The general idea is, twine is twisted together to give it strength; that leads to the definitions <i>firm</i> and <i>hard</i> which leads to the idea of <i>oppression</i>. As a masculine plural, Qal active participle (or as a masculine plural noun), there would therefore mean <i>oppressors, enemies, adversaries</i>.</p>			
kôl (כֹּל) [pronounced kohl]	<i>the whole, all of, the entirety of, all; can also be rendered any of</i>	masculine singular construct followed by a definite article	Strong's #3605 BDB #481
yôwm (יוֹם) [pronounced yohm]	<i>day, today (with a definite article)</i>	masculine singular noun with a definite article	Strong's #3117 BDB #398

**Translation:** [My enemies crush \[me\] all the day...](#) I believe that in this, David reveals an awareness of what his actions have caused. Although I have put here that he writes [My enemies have crushed \[me\]...](#); perhaps I should have instead rendered this [My enemies have trampled \[all that is before them\]...](#) The Philistines will go forth and attack Keilah; they will make another attack after that. Saul's army crushes or tramples down everyone who they see as opposing them (which will include every priest and all of their families). I believe that with David's turn toward God, he would also come to a realization as to what his actions have caused (or will potentially cause, depending upon when he actually wrote these words). He could have even originally written *trampled me* and then later removed the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular suffix, to indicate that his enemies have done more than persecute just him.

## Psalm 56:2b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced kee]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
rab (רַב) [pronounced rahv]	<i>many, much, great (in the sense of large or significant, not acclaimed)</i>	feminine plural adjective	Strong's #7227 BDB #912
<p>Although Owen mistakenly lists this as a masculine plural adjective, it is a feminine in the MT. However, the difference between the masculine and feminine is a vowel point (which was not found in the original manuscripts). There isn't a dime's worth of difference in the masculine or feminine forms.</p>			
lâcham (לָחַם) [pronounced law-KHAHM]	<i>to fight to do battle, to war; to eat [in poetry]</i>	masculine plural, Qal active participle	Strong's #3898 BDB #535

## Psalm 56:2b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l']	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to, with reference to, as to, with regards to, belonging to</i>	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510
mârôwm (מְרוֹם) [pronounced maw-ROHM]	<i>height, that which is high; the Most High; a lofty fortified place; high-mindedness, pride; collectively for leaders, princes</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #4791 BDB #928

Owen says this is a masculine singular noun which acts like an adverb here. Hence his rendering *proudly* (see also Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*). However, we would rather expect this to be preceded by a preposition in order to be used in that fashion (although, it would then be a noun rather than an adverb, which in fact is what it appears to be). As a noun, without a preceding preposition, it appears to be used more as a vocative, which is how I have rendered this word.

**Translation:** *...for many are fighting with regards to me, O Most High.* Although most translations have something along the lines of *...for many are fighting against me...*, we do not have the *bêyth* preposition here. We have the *lâmed* preposition, which means *with regards to, with reference to*. This is more in keeping with my theory in the previous half of this verse. David is not as worried now or as concerned now that he is being pursued; he is just as concerned about others who have been forced to fight because of him. This indicates that David is more aware of the consequences of his actions.

You will note that we have made a jump from *an adversary* (singular) in the first verse, to *many oppressors* in the second. Saul is the adversary alluded to in the first verse (not the king of Gath—it was Saul's persecution which led David into Gath). The plural of the second verse refers to all of the various men who persecuted David, as a result of Saul's vicious hatred. What was even more disconcerting for David is that, these enemies appeared to be everywhere. He could not seem to get away from them. They seemed to close in on him from all sides, even though that was not really the case. This was actually God tapping David on the shoulder, demanding his attention.

While David was facing enemies on every side—both men of Gath and men of Israel, we have no indication that David yet had any followers. After this psalm, David suddenly is surrounded by followers (I Sam. 22:1–3). Here's the key: when that happens, David won't use or exploit these men, as he had the priest of Nob; he will instead take responsibility for them, and lead them and see to their protection as much as to his own. When he went to Abimelech in Nob, David said, "Okay, this is what you can do for me." When men flock to him at the beginning of I Sam. 22, David says, "This is what I can do for you. And here is what we can do for our nation Israel." The difference between these two chapters and these two attitudes is Psalm 56.

The first two verses give us the general circumstances of David (which circumstances are more particularly given in I Sam. 21). The next couple verses record David's recovery from being out of fellowship with God. These verses mark a turning point in David's life, and these verses give us the background for the great change in David between I Sam. 21 and 22.

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## David Trusts in God



David's fear of Saul was not recorded in I Sam. 21, his fear of the king of Gath was: [When David realized what they had said, he was terrified of King Achish of Gath](#) (I Sam. 22:12). He realizes that fear has been his problem and that he knows the solution. The rationale will be given in the next verse.

We throw around words like great courage and fearlessness and bravery. David is not this way inherently. He does not have great courage at this point; he is not fearless right now. He is afraid and he is willing to admit to that. He does not come off like a stoic nor does he come off like some movie star hero; he doesn't just grit his teeth and come out blasting. He is a real man with real fears about real things. The men of Gath could really have killed David; Saul's army may yet hunt David down and kill him or turn him over to Saul. David doesn't have a persecution complex; he is actually persecuted, and his life is in danger. At this point, he is afraid, and he unabashedly admits to this fear.

### Psalm 56:3b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾānîy (אֲנִי) [pronounced aw-NEE]	<i>I, me; in answer to a question, it means I am, it is I</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, personal pronoun	Strong's #589 BDB #58
ʾel (אֶל) [pronounced e/]	<i>unto, in, into, toward, to, regarding, against</i>	directional preposition (respect or deference may be implied; with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #413 BDB #39
bâṭach (בָּטַח) [pronounced baw-TAHKH]	<i>to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in, to be secure in</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #982 BDB #105

**Translation:** ...I [even] I will trust You [lit., ,toward you]. The sentence structure puts great emphasis upon *I* and *You*. David says, *I unto You* or *I toward You* or *I to You*. Then we have the main verb, which means *to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in, to be secure in*. All of these meanings are applicable here. Previously, David had been running around like a chicken with his head cut off, without direction, in great fear and panic. David now makes the choice to, in being afraid, to place his faith and confidence in God. He doesn't choose exactly not to be afraid; he chooses to place his trust in God and to be secure in God. David is not necessarily without fear at this point. However, he has a place to place this fear.

A child might be in a fearful situation; he might have to jump or climb down from a high place; he might be on a scary ride. However, the child can look to his father, in whom he trusts, and he can place his trust in his father. This will not completely remove his fear; but it will give him strength to act. It will give him enough courage to jump down or to climb down, realizing that below are the arms of his protective father. This is David. He is afraid, but he places his trust in God; he puts these fears upon God.

**Application:** We will all go through situations in life when we are afraid. We probably won't be afraid of someone threatening our life, but we might fear that we may lose our job, lose our security, lose our income; we may be afraid of an illness; we may be afraid of something which happens to a member of our family. The proper procedure is, *believe in God; trust in God*. In the day you are afraid, put your trust in God. It may seem trite or trivial or simplistic, but God is glorified when we place our trust in Him and He will do what is right by us.

In this next verse, David does more than place his faith in God; he praises God's Word and his fear subsides. David recognizes that if God is for him, then what can man do to him?

McGee: *A couple heard me make the statement that when I travel by plane I do not enjoy the trip because there is fear in my heart. They thought there was something wrong with my faith in God. My friend, fear will bring out faith in your life. Listen to David, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in you." These people who sit back comfortably and say, "I haven't any fear," may mean that they are insensitive to the circumstances and problems that really exist. Or they may have a foolish sort of faith. David admitted he was afraid, but he trusted the Lord to take care of him.*<sup>7</sup>

**In Elohim I praise His Word;  
In Elohim I have trusted.  
I do not fear,  
what can do flesh to me?**

Psalm  
56:4

**In Elohim, I praise His Word;  
I have trusted in Elohim.  
I am not in fear  
[for] what can flesh do to me?**

**I praise God's Word in Him;  
I have placed my trust in God;  
I cannot fear because what can mere flesh do to me?**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Septuagint                    In God I will praise my words;  
all the day I have hoped in God;  
I will not fear what flesh can do to me.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV                                    I praise your promises I trust you and am not afraid.  
No one can harm me.  
NLT                                    O God, I praise your word.  
I trust in God, so why should I be afraid  
What can mere mortals do to me?

#### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

*God's Word*<sup>TM</sup>                        I praise the word of God.  
I trust God.  
I am not afraid.  
What can mere flesh [and blood] do to me?  
JPS (Tanakh)                        ...in God, whose word I praise,  
in God I trust;  
I am not afraid;  
what can mortals do to me?

#### Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:

*The Amplified Bible*                By [the help of] God I will praise His Word; on God I lean, rely *and* confidently put my trust; I will not fear; what can man *who is* flesh do to me?  
*Updated Emphasized Bible*        <In God> I will praise his cause [or, praise because of him],  
<In God> have I trusted, I will not fear,  
What can flesh do to me?  
NASB                                    In God, whose word I praise,

<sup>7</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Psalms Chapters 42–89*, ©1991 by J. Vernon McGee; Thomas Nelson, Inc.; p. 82.



In God I have put my trust;

I shall not be afraid.

What can mere man [lit., *flesh*] do to me?

*Young's Updated LT*

In God I praise His word, in God I have trusted, I fear not what flesh does to me.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David praises God for His Word and realizes that, if he trusts in God, then there is nothing that man can do to him.

Psalm 56:4a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʿĕlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
hâlal (לָלַל) [pronounced haw-LAHL]	<i>to praise, to sing, to celebrate; to glory</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Piel imperfect	Strong's #1984 BDB #237
dâ <sup>b</sup> vâr (דְּבַר) [pronounced daw <sup>b</sup> -VAWR]	<i>word, saying, doctrine, thing, matter, command</i>	masculine singular noun with a 3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #1697 BDB #182

**Translation:** *In Elohim, I praise His Word;...* Both of the next lines begin with *In Elohim*. This is more than *holy* language. This means that David is filled with God the Holy Spirit (or, empowered by God the Holy Spirit). This is the key to the change in his soul and in his actions.

We do not know how wide spread God's Word was. Copying a book from Scripture was a much more time consuming act during that time period. The king was supposed to have had the Law copied for him, and given Saul and Samuel's once close relationship, it is possible that there were copies of the Law available in Saul's palace. David, at one time, was a frequenter of Saul's palace; therefore, it is possible that David did have a scroll or two of God's Word. We have no Scriptural evidence of this, and physical evidence of an individual having any portion of the Bible before our Lord is difficult (it has been found in libraries, of course). It is possible that David simply had studied God's Word and brought it back to his thinking. David, somehow, even as a shepherd, had to have some understanding of God, even though it would have been very rudimentary. We have come across psalms that appear to have been written while David was a shepherd (Psalm 15 23 59 103). Whether David took comfort in these psalms, recognizing them as divine revelation, or whether he had a manuscript, or whether he had God's Word in his soul—in some way, he was able to focus on God's Word.

Now notice here, the two simple keys to the Christian way of life: (1) being filled with the Spirit and (2) God's Word. This is a theme which is repeated throughout Scripture. It just does not get much simpler than that—you must rebound (name your sins to God) and you must study His Word (and God provides the means for that). David's life, at this point, with take a 180° turn.

## Psalm 56:4b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (ב) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʿĕlōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
bâṭach (בָּטַח) [pronounced baw-TAHKH]	<i>to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in, to be secure in</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #982 BDB #105

**Translation:** ...I have trusted in Elohim. If you have studied any of Bob Thieme Jr.'s tapes, you have heard about the faith-rest technique. This was spirituality in the Old Testament. One trusted in God; one place his faith in God. David had problems, he was being pursued by Saul, and his life was in danger. For God, this is nothing. God knew about these things in eternity past. Saul's next moves are nothing to God. There is no strategy, no action, no series of attacks which Saul can do which God did not know about and for which God had not made provision for in eternity past. David simply needs to put his trust in God.

Trust in God is a theme which we find throughout the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 60:12: *With God we will display great strength. He will trample our enemies.* Psalm 108:13: *With God we will display great strength. He will trample our enemies.* II Chron. 20:20b: "Listen to me, people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. Trust the LORD your God, and believe. Believe his prophets, and you will succeed." Psalm 52:8: *But I am like a large olive tree in God's house. I trust the mercy of God forever and ever.* Psalm 62:8: *Trust him at all times, you people. Pour out your hearts in his presence. God is our refuge.* Psalm 91:2 *I will say to the LORD, "You are my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust."* Isa. 50:10: *Who among you fears the LORD and obeys his servant? Let those who walk in darkness and have no light trust the name of the LORD and depend upon their God.* Rom. 4:24: *Our faith will be regarded as God's approval of us who believe in the one who brought Jesus, our Lord, back to life.* II Cor. 1:9: *In fact, we still feel as if we're under a death sentence. But we suffered so that we would stop trusting ourselves and learn to trust God, who brings the dead back to life.* Eph. 1:15: *I, too, have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.* Apart from this faith, there is no functioning in the plan of God.

## Psalm 56:4c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lô <sup>ʾ</sup> (לֹא or לֹא־) [pronounced low]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
yârê <sup>ʾ</sup> (יָרֵא) [pronounced yaw-RAY]	<i>to fear, to fear-respect, to reverence, to have a reverential respect</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #3372 BDB #431

**Translation:** I am not in fear... With David being empowered by God the Holy Spirit, with his soul being immersed in doctrine (God's Word), and with his trust in God, David cannot fear. He has no reason to fear. We are put into difficult situations for our entire lives. We are placed in situations where our finances, our health, and/or our very lives are endangered; but God knew about these trials. In eternity past, God knew about every test that we would

face and He made provision for each of these tests. Are you being sued? Is your business facing a financial crisis? This is not a surprise to God and He made provision for those things in eternity past. Have you been in an accident? Has some serious health problem surfaced? God knew about these issues in eternity past and He made provision for them. Are you in harm's way as a soldier, a police officer or as a fireman? God knew about this in eternity past and He dealt with every situation that you will face in your life in eternity past. When it is your time to die, there is really nothing that you can do about it. Once that is over, you will be absent from the body and face to face with the Lord. Your fears will seem foolish in the light of eternity. As for the problems which we encounter in life—and many of these, by the way, will come from fellow believers—God has made provision for those problems; God solved those problems already. You might as well sit back and enjoy, and perhaps wonder to yourself, “Okay, how will God get me out of this jam?” It can be entertaining in fact.

V. 56:4b–c may appear to be a poetic repetition of v. 3 ([When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You](#)). However, that is not the case. V. 3 was the first step. Now that David has placed his faith in God, his fear of man subsides. Imagine, if you will, that you are a child, walking through a playground filled with bullies, most of whom have threatened you at one time or another. Certainly, you're going to be afraid. Now imagine yourself walking next to the biggest, toughest kid in the playground and this kid is your friend. You can put your faith in this kid, and your fear subsides. What can these other kids do, if you are protected as you are? This gives you an idea as to the meaning of this verse. David is walking with God; there is nothing man can do to David. God has foreseen all that will happen and He has made provision for it.

### Psalm 56:4d

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
mâh (ה מ) [pronounced <i>maw</i> ]	<i>what, how, why</i>	interrogative; exclamatory particle	Strong's #4100 BDB #552
ʿâsâh (ה ע ש) [pronounced <i>gaw-SAWH</i> ]	<i>to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #6213 BDB #793
bâsâr (ר ע ש) [pronounced <i>baw-SAWR</i> ]	<i>flesh; body; animal meat</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #1320 BDB #142
lâmed (ל) [pronounced <i>l'</i> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510

**Translation:** ...[for] [what can flesh do to me?](#) David could not have used a weaker word for man than the term *flesh*, which is used much more often to refer to animal meat. We find the same word used in Psalm 78:39: [He remembered that they were only flesh and blood, a breeze that blows and does not return.](#) Also in Isa. 31:3: [The Egyptians are humans, not gods. Their horses are flesh and blood, not spirit. When the LORD uses his powerful hand, the one who gives help will stumble, and the one who receives help will fall. Both will die together.](#) David's resources are not his own strength and intelligence, but they are with God; and what is man to God? How can man hope to do anything to get around God? If God has anointed David king and has already made provision for David to become king, then what can Saul do about it? Nothing. Saul is but an ant. He is a slab of meat. Before God, he has no power, no influence, no strength. There is nothing that man can do to David.

Gill: *Men may contrive schemes, form weapons, and attempt many things against the saints, but can execute nothing, except permitted by the Lord; and the utmost they can do, when suffered, is to kill the body.*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Dr. John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:4.



**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

- The Amplified Bible*                    All day long they twist my words *and* trouble my affairs; all their thoughts are against me for evil *and* my hurt.
- NASB*                                     All day long they distort my words;  
All their thoughts are against me for evil.
- Young's Updated LT*                All the day they grab my words,  
Concerning me all their thoughts *are* for evil.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David's enemies (particularly Saul), took David's actions and words and distorted them to mean something entirely different. All of their thoughts and intentions concerning David are evil.

<b>Psalm 56:5a</b>			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kôl (כֹּל) [pronounced kohl]	<i>the whole, all of, the entirety of, all; can also be rendered any of</i>	masculine singular construct followed by a definite article	Strong's #3605 BDB #481
yôwm (יוֹם) [pronounced yohm]	<i>day, today (with a definite article)</i>	masculine singular noun with a definite article	Strong's #3117 BDB #398
dâ <sup>b</sup> vâr (דְּבָרִים) [pronounced daw <sup>b</sup> -VAWR]	<i>words, sayings, doctrines, commands; things, matters, reports</i>	masculine plural noun with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #1697 BDB #182
ʿâtsa <sup>b</sup> v (עָצַב) [pronounced gaw-TSAH <sup>b</sup> V]	<i>to form; to put to grief, to afflict</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Piel imperfect, pausal form	Strong's #6087 BDB #780 (see #781)

Barnes helps us with the meaning of ʿâtsa<sup>b</sup>v: *The word here rendered “wrest,” means literally to give pain, to grieve, to afflict; and it is used here in the sense of “wresting,” as if force were applied to words; that is, they are “tortured,” twisted, perverted. We have the same use of the word “torture” in our language. This they did by affixing a meaning to his words which he never intended, so as to injure him.*<sup>10</sup>

**Translation:** *They distort* [more literally, *afflict*] *my words all the day [long];...* David's enemies are Saul and the men who have aligned themselves with Saul. They continually distort (or, *to give pain, to grieve, to afflict*) David's words (that is, the words are *tortured, twisted, perverted*).<sup>11</sup> This actually is more applicable to all of David's actions; they have a spin doctor—generally Saul—who sees to it that everything that David says or does is misinterpreted to mean that he is rebelling against Saul's dynasty and is attempting in every way possible to bring Saul's dynasty down, from within and from without. My less than literal translation is apropos here: *They continually distort my words (and my actions)*. Everything that David does and everything that David says is afflicted, distorted, and twisted so that it appears as though he is an enemy of the state. Let me give you a simple example: David and Jonathan, Saul's son, formed a tremendous bond of friendship, to the point that they made a pact of friendship and allegiance to one another. What Saul did, was take this great bond of friendship and allege that David had turned Saul's own son against him (I Sam. 22:8b: *“No one informed me when my son entered into a loyalty pledge with Jesse's son. No one felt sorry for me and informed me that my son has encouraged my servant David to ambush me, as he's doing now”*). Saul also asserted that David was lying in wait to ambush him (also I Sam. 22:8). David was simply hiding out from Saul. David's every action and word was misinterpreted to put him in a bad light.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

We saw this with our Lord and the Pharisees. Jesus said, “**Destroy this temple [referring to His body] and in three days, I will raise it up.**” (John 2:19). The Pharisees misrepresented this to the Roman authorities that Jesus had threatened to destroy the holy temple which Herod had built (Matt. 26:61). Let’s see if you can understand this: Jesus Christ never did any wrong to any person; he never committed a sin; he never broke a Law of God or a Roman law. Still, the Jewish religious hierarchy conspired to kill Him. They twisted His words and His actions to mean what they did not. The end result was, they had Jesus put to death. Now, even apart from this being God’s plan, everything that took Jesus to the cross was a matter of the volition of evil men. So, if you find yourself in a situation where your words and actions are distorted by evil men, don’t be overly concerned. God will not allow anything to happen to you which is outside of His plan. All you need to do is remain in fellowship and faithful to His Word.

**Application:** With some people, it will not matter what you do. You can go out of your way to avoid them, you can say only the kindest of things to their face and to others, and they will find some way to twist your lack of guile around to something ugly. This sort of ugliness is in their soul and it is manifested against you. Furthermore, there is generally nothing that you can do about it, apart from, perhaps, moving to an adjacent state. However, that is not even a solution, as there will be some other malcontent in that state who will behave in the same manner.

**Application:** Now I know with some of you, there are people at your job who don’t particularly like you because you’re a jerk. However, there are some of you who function without guile, malice, and envy in the workplace and there will still be those who cannot stand you and who will speak lies about you. Listen carefully: the solution is not to change departments or to change jobs. The solution is never to seek revenge against these sorts of people. The solution is simple: you stay in fellowship, you continue to take in doctrine, and you continue to do your job as unto the Lord. Will these people continue to disparage your performance, your words and your person? Probably. Will they eventually get you fired or demoted? It could happen. Bear in mind that God knows all of this. He knows the end from the beginning. As we just studied in v. 4: **I have trusted in Elohim; I am not in fear, [for] what can flesh do to me?** I have been on the receiving end of this type of behavior for years; in fact, for decades. Did I react? Sometimes. Did I become upset? Sometimes. For every moment that I reacted, became upset, and did or said that which was untoward concerning my tormentors, I was out of line. Satan wants to see us out of fellowship. Being upset, reacting to bad behavior, gossiping, pouting, etc., is simply not of faith and either puts us out of fellowship or indicates that we are out of fellowship. That is where Satan wants us. You cannot perform even one iota of divine good when out of fellowship. Satan can also point his boney figure toward us and say, “See, he claims to be a Christian, and look at how badly he is behaving!” The solution is simple: you stay in fellowship, you continue to take in doctrine, and you continue to do your job as unto the Lord. Anything less is an embarrassment to our Lord. Don’t ever stoop to their level; don’t ever respond in kind; do not bother to run around and justify yourself to anyone who will listen. As to my situation? God knew of these actions in eternity past and He took care of everything. I didn’t have to lift a finger in order to deal with these situations.

These same sorts of people do the same thing to God’s Word: they distort and bend and twist His words to mean what they were not intended to mean: **In which [Paul’s letters] are some things hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures** (II Peter 3:16b).

Psalm 56:5b			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong’s Numbers
ʿal (אָל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i> ]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over, by, beside</i>	preposition of proximity with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong’s #5921 BDB #752
kôl (כֹּל) [pronounced <i>kohl</i> ]	with a plural noun, it is rendered <i>all of; any of</i>	masculine singular construct with a masculine plural noun	Strong’s #3605 BDB #481



hoping to kill me.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

- God's Word™ They attack, and then they hide.  
They watch my every step as they wait to take my life.
- JPS (Tanakh) They plot, they lie in ambush;  
they plan only evil against me.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

- The Amplified Bible They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they watch my steps, even as they have (expectantly) waited for my life.
- Updated Emphasized Bible They stir up strife—they lie hid  
||They || mark my steps,—  
Seeing they have waited for my life [sou].
- NASB They attack [or, stir up], they lurk,  
They watch my steps,  
As they have waited to take my life.
- NRSV They stir up strife, they lurk,  
they watch my steps.  
As they hoped to have my life,...
- Young's Updated LT They assemble, they hide, they watch my heels,  
When they have expected my soul.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David's enemies gather together, hidden from him, and look for his every movement. They are lying in wait to kill him.

Psalm 56:6a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
gûwr (גור) [pronounced goor]	(1) to temporarily reside, to sojourn, to stay temporarily; (2) to stir up, to strive with, to quarrel with; and, (3) to dread, to be afraid of, to stand in awe of	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect (this verb is a homonym; all basic meanings are given)	Strong's #1481 BDB #158
The first set of meanings, which are by far the most used (and which use can also be found in other Davidic psalms) also include to gather together with, band together with.			
tsâphan (צפן) [pronounced tsaw-FAHN]	to lay up [in storage]; to hide, to conceal, to store (as treasure), to treasure up	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect	Strong's #6845 BDB #860
hëmmâh (הֵמָּה) [pronounced haym-mawh]	they, those; themselves; these [with the definite article]	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural personal pronoun	Strong's #1992 BDB #241

**Translation:** They gather together, they hide themselves;... Given the basic meanings of the first verb, one can see why there are so many different translations. David may have used this verb intentionally to contain two of the meanings: they gather together; they stir up strife. David does not even speak to Saul alone—he does not come down on Saul as an individual, who is the one who pushes this evil against David. However, David groups all of



his Jewish enemies together. These men have gathered themselves together; they have stirred up strife against David; and they hide themselves. The latter verb means that they hide themselves to lie in ambush for David. David does not know where they might be.

These words can also be applied to the Philistines, as they certainly have gathered themselves together and they have certainly stirred up strife against David. Recall that David had walked into Gath carrying Goliath's sword that he brought from Nob. It is possible as he walked into town demanded to speak to the king, that some Philistines hid themselves in fear; or hid themselves with the idea of making a surprise attack upon David.

There is more to this than these enemies hiding themselves from David. The idea is, he does not know who his actual enemies are. David may walk through a crowd of people and he may not know which of these men seeks his life. David was in Nob and he recognized Doeg the Edomite. David did not necessarily know that Doeg would betray him to Saul (I Sam. 22:9).

**Application:** Your enemies may be hiding in plain sight. I had problems at two schools, and the two women who betrayed me were women who smiled to my face and were cordial as can be, but did all of their dirty work behind my back. They were my enemies hidden in plain sight. One I suspected and one, had I not been told, I would have never known. However, more importantly than this, I never took steps against either of these women. This is where it is a blessing to be protected by God—God can take care of your enemies, both the ones that you see and the ones that you don't see. You may or may not get to watch; although there are varying degrees of satisfaction here, obviously, you can trust that God has taken care of it. Certainly, there are times when I would like to personally observe God take down an enemy; however, God's timing and method are perfect, and most of the time, will never involve even my witness to it.

### Psalm 56:6b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿâqêb (אָקֵב) [pronounced aw-KA <sup>B</sup> V]	<i>heel, footprint, hinderpart, and therefore figuratively for a rear guard, troops in the rear</i>	masculine plural noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #6119 (and #6120) BDB #784
shâmar (שָׁמַר) [pronounced shaw-MAR]	<i>to keep, to guard, to watch, to preserve</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect; pausal form	Strong's #8104 BDB #1036

**Translation: ...they watch my steps...** These men look for every sign of David; where has he been; where is he now? What is he up to? They check out David's every move (that they are able to uncover). Actually, David gives these men more credit than they deserve. As we will see in the narrative of I Sam. 21–23, Saul is mostly 2 or 3 locations behind David (with a couple notable exceptions). However, as time went on, Saul got closer and closer to David. Furthermore, it was Saul who really depended upon the information of others, and the men of Keilah (coming up in I Sam. 23 were willing to betray him) and the officials of Ziph did betray him (also I Sam. 23).

This is also applied to the Philistines. David walked into town, carrying Goliath's sword; as he walked, the people of Gath watched his every step. Enough of them knew who he was and they told the others. When he managed to fake insanity, there were Philistines who, despite the ruling of the king of Gath, kept their eyes on David as he exited Gath, looking for any wrong move or misstep.

Psalm 56:6c			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kaph or k <sup>e</sup> (כּ) [pronounced k <sup>e</sup> ]	<i>like, as, according to; about, approximately; combined with an infinitive, it can also take on the meaning as, often, when, as soon as</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #453
ʾăsher (אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced ash-ER]	<i>that, which, when, who</i>	relative pronoun	Strong's #834 BDB #81
Together, kaʾăsher (כּ אֲשֶׁר) [pronounced kah-uh-SHER] means <i>as which, as one who, as, like as, just as; according to what manner; because.</i>			
qâvâh (קָוָה) [pronounced kaw-VAW]	<i>to wait for, to wait expectantly for, to look for, to lie in wait for</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural, Piel perfect	Strong's #6960 BDB #876
nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ) [pronounced NEH-fesh]	<i>soul, life, living being, desire</i>	feminine singular noun with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5315 BDB #659

**Translation:** ...because they lie in wait for my life [or, soul]. Again, this can be applied to both sets of David's enemies. Saul and his soldiers are looking for David, willing to take his life. The soldiers who have grabbed David in the palace of Achish are also willing to take his life. They await the orders of Achish, king of Gath. As David exited Gath, they watched him carefully, looking for any misstep to report back to Achish, so that they might be given permission to kill David.

Most of us do not face the same level of enmity that David does. The principles are the same; however, in David's case, the stakes were higher.

**Upon iniquity deliverance to them in a nostril; peoples bring down O Elohim!** Psalm 56:7 **Cast them forth in anger, according to [their] iniquity; Bring down [these] Gentile nations, O Elohim!**

**Cast them forth in anger, according to their iniquity; Bring down these Gentile nations, O God!**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

**Early translations:**

The Septuagint You will on no account save them; You will bring down the people in wrath.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

- CEV They won't get away with these crimes, God, because when you get angry, you destroy people.
- NAB They are evil; watch them, God!  
Cast the nations down in your anger!
- NJB Because of this crime reject them, in your anger, God strike down the nations.

NLT	Don't let them get away with their wickedness; in your anger, O God, throw them to the ground.
TEV	Punish them, O God, for their evil; defeat those people in your anger!

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™	With the wrong they do, can they escape? O God, angrily make the nations fall.
Modern KJV	Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God.
JPS (Tanakh)	Cast them out for their evil; subdue peoples in Your anger, O God.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

<i>The Amplified Bible</i>	They think to escape with iniquity, <i>and</i> shall they? In Your indignation bring down the peoples, O God.
<i>Updated Emphasized Bible</i>	<Because of iniquity recompense them [meaning doubtful; alternate reading: <i>there is no deliverance for them</i> ],— <In anger bring down   the peoples  , O God.
NASB	Because of wickedness, cast them forth, In anger put down the peoples, O God!
NKJV	Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God!
NRSV	...so repay them for their crime; in wrath cast down the peoples, O God!
<i>Young's Updated LT</i>	By iniquity, they escape, In anger, put down the peoples, O God.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David asks God to take revenge out on these groups of men—which were both Jews and Gentiles—according as they deserve.

**Psalm 56:7a**

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i> ]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over; on the ground of, according to, on account of, on behalf of, concerning, besides, in addition to, together with, beyond, above, over, by on to, towards, to, against, in the matter of, concerning, as regards to</i>	preposition of proximity	Strong's #5921 BDB #752
ʾāven (אָוֵן) [pronounced <i>AW-ven</i> ]	<i>iniquity, misfortune which results from iniquity</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #205 BDB #19
pallêṭ (פַּלֵּט) [pronounced <i>pahl-LAYT</i> ]	<i>a deliverance, an escape; a casting forth</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #6405 BDB #812

## Psalm 56:7a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
Zodhiates has this as the Piel imperative verb: pālaṭ (פֹּלֵט) [pronounced paw-LAHT], which means <i>to be smooth and sleek, and therefore to slip away or to escape</i> . In the Piel, it means <i>to slip away altogether, to cause to escape; to cast forth</i> [as in a cow calving]. Strong's #6403 BDB #812. Owen and the New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament have this as a masculine noun. Gesenius says that this is the infinitive of the Piel used as a masculine noun (at least for Psalm 32:7).			
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l <sup>o</sup> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510
b <sup>e</sup> (ב) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʾaph (אפ) [pronounced ahf]	<i>nose, nostril, but is also translated face, brow, anger</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #639 BDB #60

**Translation:** *Cast them forth in anger, according to [their] iniquity;...* This is a tough translation. According to Barnes, the literal rendering of v. 7a would be: *By iniquity (there is) escape to them;...*<sup>12</sup> Young renders this: *By iniquity, they escape...* Therefore, the discussion of this half of the verse will be lengthy, with several theories proposed but with very little resultant satisfaction. I could not decide where to place *in anger*, whether with this half of the verse or the next. Obviously, each translation requires a much different explanation. The first rendering appeals to me, as David takes himself out of the seat of judgment. He asks God to deal with them, according to their own wrongdoing. He doesn't decide that Charley Brown needs 5 lashes and Lucy needs 10; David simply asks for God to take care of them according to what they have done wrong, and he will step aside.

If we go with Young and Barnes' rendering, then the idea is that these men escape anything that David could do to him personally; however, David will ask God to bring them down *according to [His] anger* (which would therefore be placed with the next phrase). David, in the next half of this verse asks God to *bring down the Gentile nations*, so we would expect a similar imperative in this half of the verse (or an explanation as to why David so asks God).

Going with Young's interpretation, David has said that his enemies have escaped by their iniquity, or by their wrongdoing. He will therefore ask God to get them in the next half of this verse.

Also notice the rendering of the Septuagint, which bears only a slight resemblance to the Masoretic text: *You will on no account save them*. It is also an imperative, with a negative, and David asks God not to save or deliver these people.

You will note yet another spin on this verse; the KJV, the Modern KJV and the NKJV treat this as a question: *Shall they escape by iniquity?* Although there is nothing in this portion of v. 7 which suggests a question, this was the only way to render this literally, without making it sound like, *They will escape because of their iniquity*. Given the difficulties of translating and interpreting this verse, I wouldn't be surprised if it words have been lost (e.g., a negative or the mark of an interrogative) or miscopied over the years.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:7.

<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, I have not covered every theory presented on this verse. Mendelssohn suggests: "In vain be their escape," as per Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword; Psalm 56:7. K&D give this more discussion, rejecting for a number of reasons.

Although this may not necessarily help, here is a summary list of the various renderings, and comments as to their probable accuracy:

Various Translation of Psalm 56:7		
Translation	Pros	Cons
Cast them forth in anger, according to [their] iniquity;... (Kukis, NASB)	Easy to explain. <i>In anger</i> may or may not be placed with v. 7b. This interpretation/translation is more in keeping with the tenor of this context.	Involves a violent rearrangement of the sentence, and an unusual understanding of the verb (if it is a verb). There is really no justification for the word <i>them</i> as I have used it. I have used it more like a suffix to the verb, whereas it is a prepositional phrase.
By iniquity, they escape [or, more literally, <i>escape (is) to them</i> ]... (Young; the most literal rendering)	The most literal rendering ( <i>according to anger</i> is placed with the next portion of the verse).	Most difficult translation to interpret. On the short term, David's enemies did escape wrath; however, in the long term, they did not. Does not really fit with the context.
You will on no account save them... (LXX)	Easy to explain.	There is no justification in the MT for the negative.
Shall they escape by iniquity? (Various KJV's, <i>God's Word™</i> )	Also easy to explain ( <i>according to anger</i> is placed with the next portion of the verse).	There is no justification for this to be a question.
In vain be their escape,... (Mendelssohn)	Moderately easy to explain.	There is no real justification to render <i>iniquity</i> as <i>vain</i> .

Conclusion: The first two suggestions are the most reasonable. Note that most interpretations place *in anger* with the second half of this verse.

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### Psalm 56:7b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ָam (אָם) [pronounced <i>gahm</i> ]	<i>people</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #5971 BDB #766
<p>This word can stand for Israel and for Gentiles in the very same context (Deut. 28:9–10). In general, when ָam is in the singular, it tends to stand for Israel (Isa. 62:12 63:18 Dan. 8:24 12:7) or for a particular non-Israeli people (Ex. 21:8 Deut. 28:32 Ezek. 3:5). In the plural, 99% of the time it stands for Gentile nations (Deut. 4:19, 27 6:14 13:7) or for all nations of the earth (Deut. 7:6 32:8). Once and awhile it stands for Israel (Gen. 28:3 48:4 Judges 5:14 Hos. 10:14). In fact, the last two usages could refer to believers and unbelievers of Israel. It is pretty much equivalent to a <i>race of men</i>.</p>			
yārad (יָרַד) [pronounced <i>yaw-RAHD</i> ]	<i>to cause to go down, to cause to come down, to bring down</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative	Strong's #3381 BDB #432

## Psalm 56:7b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾēlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced <i>el-o-HEEM</i> ]	<i>gods</i> or <i>God</i> ; transliterated <i>Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43

**Translation:** [Bring down \[these\] Gentile nations, O Elohim!](#) It is possible that we should include *in anger* (or, *wrath*) with this portion of v. 7. *Peoples* here probably is a reference to the two sets of David's enemies—the Philistines and Saul's army, hence the plural (it is a collective noun, like our word *people*). David groups his two diverse sets of enemies together. He went to Gath to escape Saul's persecution, and, in so doing, went from the frying pan into the fire.

You will note that the Septuagint places *O God* with the next verse.

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### God Is Cognizant of David's Tribulations

**My wandering You inscribe;  
You, [even] You place my tears in Your skin  
[container].  
[Are they] not in Your scroll?**

Psalm  
56:8

**You have kept a record of my wanderings;  
You have put my tears in Your wineskin.  
[Are they] not in Your book?**

**You keep track of all my wanderings;  
My tears You have placed in Your wineskin.  
Have you not recorded them in Your book?**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Septuagint            O God, I have declared my life to You;  
You have set my tears before You,  
even according to Your promise.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV                            You have kept record of my days of wandering.  
You have stored my tears in your bottle  
and counted each of them.

NAB                            My wanderings you have noted;  
are my tears not stored in your vial,  
recorded in your book?

NJB                            You yourself have counted up my sorrows,  
collect my tears in your wineskin.

NLT                            You keep track of all my sorrows.  
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.  
You have recorded each one in your book.

TEV                            You know how troubled I am;  
you have kept a record of my tears.

Aren't they listed in your book?

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

Updated Emphasized Bible  
*God's Word™* (You have kept a record of my wanderings.  
 Put my tears in your bottle.  
 They are already in your book.)

JPS (Tanakh) You keep count of my wanderings;  
 put my tears into Your flask,  
 into Your record.

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

*The Amplified Bible* You number *and* record my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? NASB You have taken account of my wanderings;  
 Put my tears in Your bottle;  
*Are they not in Your Book.*

*Young's Updated LT* My wandering You have counted,  
 You—place my tear in Your bottle;  
 Are they not in Your book?

**What is the gist of this verse?** God has kept track of where David has gone and He knows the tears David has shed over his situation. This information has been recorded eternally.

Psalm 56:8a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
nōwd (נֹד) [pronounced <i>nohd</i> ]	<i>wandering</i>	masculine singular noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5112 BDB #627
This word is only found in one other place: Gen. 4:16, where it is often transliterated as <i>Nod</i> , the place where Cain was sent to wander. <i>Nod</i> is Strong's #5113 BDB #627.			
çâphar (חָפַר) [pronounced <i>saw-FAHR</i> ]	<i>to scratch, to scrape; to polish; to inscribe [letters in a stone]; to number; to take account of, to consider</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #5608 BDB #707
Note how different the Septuagint is: <i>O God, I have declared my life to You!</i>			

**Translation:** *You have kept a record of my wanderings;...* God knows everywhere that David has been; in fact, God knows everywhere that David will be. This is recorded. We'll do a quick exam of David's movements in the next chapter of I Samuel (22). Then we'll go back and revisit them at the end of that book. In some places, it is very clear where David has been; in other sections, it is not so clear. For instance, when he takes his parents to Moab (I Sam. 22:1–3), we don't know his exact route, which has some minor impact on the narrative. In any case, God has kept a record of David's wanderings and we are given them in the book of Samuel.

## Psalm 56:8b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾattâh (אַתָּה) [pronounced <i>ahT-TAW</i> ]	<i>you</i> (often, the verb <i>to be</i> is implied)	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, personal pronoun; pausal form	Strong's #859 BDB #61
sîym (שׂוּם) [pronounced <i>seem</i> ]; also spelled sûwm (שׁוּם) [pronounced <i>soom</i> ]	<i>to put, to place, to set, to make</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperative with a voluntative hê	Strong's #7760 BDB #962
dim <sup>er</sup> âh (דִּמְעָה) [pronounced <i>dim<sup>e</sup>-ĠAW</i> ]	<i>tears, weeping</i>	feminine singular collective noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #1832 BDB #199
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b<sup>eh</sup></i> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
nô`d (נֹד) [pronounced <i>nohd</i> ]	<i>a skin container, a wine skin</i> generally made from the skin of a goat	masculine singular noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #4997 BDB #609

This is actually a poetic parallelism here; we began this verse with the *nôd* and end with the word *nô`d*; *my wandering... Your wineskin*.

In the LXX, instead of *...in Your wineskin*, this reads *...before You*.

**Translation:** *You have put my tears in Your wineskin.* David is frustrated and hurt. He has done nothing but give King Saul and the people of Israel his best service; there is no one who is as faithful in his service or as courageous in war against Israel's enemies (except, perhaps, Jonathan). And for all of this faithful service, David is hunted like an animal.

**Application:** There are going to be some of you who put in years of faithful service, only to be cast aside as worthless. Your company which has employed you for 5, 10 or 30 years may not pursue you as Saul did David; but the end result may be as though your service was worthless. Do not be concerned or grieved; sometimes that is simply a part of your testing.

Clarke offers a slightly different spin here: *Here is an allusion to a very ancient custom, which we know long obtained among the Greeks and Romans, of putting the tears which were shed for the death of any person into small phials, called lacrymatories or urns lacrymales and offering them on the tomb of the deceased. Some of these were of glass, some of pottery, and some of agate, sardonyx, etc. A small one in my own collection is of hard baked clay.*<sup>14</sup> I don't know just how accurate this is, simply because (1) just who is going to gather up their tears into a container of any sort; and (2) the word used here appears to be a wineskin and not some sort of pottery.

And just when I was going to blow off this whole notion, I read the following in Barnes: *Let them be remembered by thee as if they were gathered up and placed in a bottle - "a lachrymatory" - that they may be brought to remembrance hereafter. The word here rendered "bottle" means properly a bottle made of*

<sup>14</sup> Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:8.



skin, such as was used in the East; but it may be employed to denote a bottle of any kind. It is possible, and, indeed, it seems probable, that there is an allusion here to the custom of collecting tears shed in a time of calamity and sorrow, and preserving them in a small bottle or “lachrymatory,” as a memorial of the grief. The Romans had a custom, that in a time of mourning - on a funeral occasion - a friend went to one in sorrow, and wiped away the tears from the eyes with a piece of cloth, and squeezed the tears into a small bottle of glass or earth, which was carefully preserved as a memorial of friendship and sorrow.

Many of these lachrymatories have been found in the ancient Roman tombs. I myself saw a large quantity of them in the “Columbaria” at Rome, and in the Capitol, among the relics and curiosities of the place. The above engraving will illustrate the form of these lachrymatories. The annexed remarks of Dr. Thomson (“*Land and the Book*,” vol. i. p. 147), will show that the same custom prevailed in the East, and will describe the forms of the “tear-bottles” that were used there. “These lachrymatories are still found in great numbers on opening ancient tombs. A sepulchre lately discovered in one of the gardens of our city had scores of them in it. They are made of thin glass, or more generally of simple pottery, often not even baked or glazed, with a slender body, a broad bottom, and a funnel-shaped top. They have nothing in them but “dust” at present. If the friends were expected to contribute their share of tears for these bottles, they would very much need cunning women to cause their eyelids to gush out with water. These forms of ostentatious sorrow have ever been offensive to sensible people. Thus Tacitus says, ‘At my funeral let no tokens of sorrow be seen, no pompous mockery of woe. Crown me with chaplets, strew flowers on my grave, and let my friends erect no vain memorial to tell where my remains are lodged.’”<sup>15</sup> in other words, even though this is a poetic notion, it had some basis in fact.

Freeman also makes mention of these lachrymatories or tear bottles, where the tears of mourners were collected and saved (a piece of cotton or some such was used to collect the tears, which were then squeezed out into the jar). However, Freeman adds: *Some commentators, however, deny that there is any reference in this text to the ancient lachrymatories, or that there is any evidence of their use among the Hebrews. Such affirm that the allusion here is to the custom of putting into bags, or small leathern bottles, articles of value for safe keeping...The idea would then be, “Treasure up these tears as something of great value.”*<sup>16</sup>

### Psalm 56:8c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
hă (הַ) [pronounced <i>heh</i> ]		interrogative particle which acts almost like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence. The verb <i>to be</i> may be implied.	Strong's #none BDB #209
lô' (לֹא or לֹא־) [pronounced <i>low</i> ]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced <i>b<sup>eh</sup></i> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88

<sup>15</sup> Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:8.

<sup>16</sup> *Manners and Customs of the Bible*; James M. Freeman; reprinted in 1972 by Logos International; p. 224.



**What is the gist of this verse?** David knows that God will turn back his enemies on the day that David asks, because he knows that God is with him and on his side.

Psalm 56:9a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʾāz (אָז) [pronounced awz]	<i>then, at that time, in that case (when following an if or though), now, as things are; that being so</i>	adverb	Strong's #227 BDB #23
shûw <sup>b</sup> v (שׁוּב) [pronounced shoo <sup>b</sup> v]	<i>to return, to turn, to turn back, to reminisce, to restore something, to bring back something, to revive, to recover something, to make restitution</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Qal imperfect	Strong's #7725 BDB #996
ʾāya <sup>b</sup> v (אֹיְבֹ) [pronounced aw-YA <sup>B</sup> V]	<i>enemy, the one being at enmity with you; enmity, hostility</i>	masculine plural, Qal active participle with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #340 BDB #33
ʾāchôwr (אָחֹר) [pronounced aw-KHOHR]	<i>the hinder side, the back part; back, backwards (in poetry)</i>	masculine singular substantive; adverb	Strong's #268 BDB #30
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
yôwm (יוֹם) [pronounced yohm]	<i>day; today (with a definite article)</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #3117 BDB #398
qârâ <sup>ʾ</sup> (קָרָא) [pronounced kaw-RAW]	<i>to call, to proclaim, to read, to call to, to call out to, to assemble, to summon</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #7121 BDB #894

**Translation:** *The day I call out, my enemies are turned back.* David now applies some logical thinking, or some theological rationales. When we calls out to God for help, his enemies are turned back. David has been on the run for awhile. We are told of two of his destinations: Nob and Gath. Suddenly, upon leaving Gath, he realizes that he can bring out the artillery. He's got a weapon that no enemy can stand up to. That weapon is prayer. I must admit to being initially confused by Joshua's battle against Amalek, when Moses would raise his hands, and Joshua would prevail, but when he dropped his arms, Israel would begin to lose. This verse handily explains that situation. As long as Moses appealed to God; as long as Moses was in prayer to God; as long as Moses lifted up his hands toward God in petition, his army, led by Joshua, would prevail. God's response to the prayer of Moses was the deciding factor. The might of Amalek was not an issue—as long as God fought for Israel. The key was the constant petition of Moses to God, symbolized by the raising of his hands toward heaven (see Ex. 17:8–15).

**Application:** You may or may not ever find yourself at war or pursued by an enemy; however, there will always be conflict in your life. If you know one other person, then there will be conflict in your life. If you work at a business where there is at least one other employee besides yourself, there will be conflict. As a believer, you will find yourself under the attack of Satan periodically in the form of other people (and they just might initiate this on their own). You do not need to strike back, you do not need to seek revenge, and you do not need to run around and justify your position and/or innocence to whomever will listen. When a counter attack is required; when it is

necessary that you defend yourself, then your first action is to get into fellowship and pray to God. There is no more important weapon; there is no more potent weapon than God.

Let me make an analogy: if you stand facing an army of terrorists, your personal arsenal amounts to having a slingshot. When you appeal to God, your personal arsenal suddenly includes a 100,000 hydrogen bombs. Don't be an idiot and rely on the slingshot.

Psalm 56:9b			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
zeh (זֶה) [pronounced zeh]	here, this, thus	demonstrative adjective	Strong's #2088, 2090 (& 2063) BDB #260
yâda' (יָדָעַ) [pronounced yaw-DAHG]	to see; to know, to perceive, to acquire knowledge, to become acquainted, to know by experience, to have a knowledge of something	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #3045 BDB #393
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced kee]	for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
ʿĕlôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	gods or God; transliterated Elohim	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l]	to, for, towards, in regards to	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510

**Translation:** *This I know: Elohim [is] for me.* David makes the logical conclusion that God is for him; or on his side. Psalm 118:6: *The LORD is on my side. I am not afraid. What can mortals do to me?* And again, *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rom. 8:31b).

Spurgeon comments: *The machinery of prayer is not always visible, but it is most efficient. God inclines us to pray, we cry in anguish of heart, he hears, he acts, the enemy is turned back. What irresistible artillery is this which wins the battle as soon as its report is heard! What a God is this who hearkens to the cry of his children, and in a moment delivers them from the mightiest adversaries! "This I know." This is one of the believer's certainties, his axioms, his infallible, indisputable verities. "For God is for me." This we know, and we know, therefore, that none can be against us who are worth a moment's fear. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who will restrain prayer when it is so potent? Who will seek any other ally than God, who is instantly present so soon as we give the ordained signal, by which we testify both our need and our confidence?*<sup>17</sup>

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## Old Testament Spirituality

**In Elohim, I praise a word;  
in Y<sup>h</sup>owah, I praise a word.**

Psalm  
56:10

**In Elohim, I praise doctrine;  
in Y<sup>h</sup>owah, I praise doctrine.**

<sup>17</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David*; e-Sword, Psalm 56:9.

**I praise the doctrine in God  
and I praise the doctrine in Jehovah.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

**Early translations:**

The Septuagint                      In God, will I praise [his] word; in the Lord will I praise [his] saying.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

CEV                                      I praise your promises.  
REB                                      In God, whose promise is my boast,  
in the LORD, whose promise is my boast.

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

God's Word™                        I praise the word of God.  
I praise the word of the LORD.  
JPS (Tanakh)                        In God, whose word I praise,  
in the LORD, whose word I praise,...

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

Updated Emphasized Bible      <In God> will I praise with good cause:  
<In Yahweh> will I praise with good cause.  
NASB                                    In God, whose word I praise,  
in the LORD, whose word I praise.  
Young's Updated LT                In God I praise the word,  
in Jehovah I praise the word.

**What is the gist of this verse?** David praises God because of His Word.

<b>Psalm 56:10a</b>			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʾēlōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
hâlal (הָלַל) [pronounced haw-LAHL]	<i>to praise, to sing, to celebrate; to glory</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Piel imperfect	Strong's #1984 BDB #237
dâ <sup>b</sup> vâr (דָּבָר) [pronounced daw <sup>b</sup> -VAWR]	<i>word, saying, doctrine, thing, matter, command</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #1697 BDB #182

**Translation:** *In Elohim, I praise doctrine;...* *In Elohim* (as well as *in Jehovah* found later in this verse), as Old Testament references to being in fellowship with God. Although David did not enjoy the same sorts of things that we do—being in Christ positionally, so that when God looks at us, He sees His Son; or being filled with the Holy Spirit—he still had similar, yet less powerful, assets. David did enjoy fellowship with God and he did enjoy the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (which could be taken away). The latter asset was apparently not available to all Old Testament believers.

David is speaking from a position of strength; he is in God, and he praises God for His Word, for His doctrine, for the information which allows David to see past his petty problems (*petty* in the eyes of God and therefore, these problems should be petty in David's eyes as well). Let me give you an analogy. A child may be overly affected by a relatively meaningless crisis. As a very young child, it could be the shadows in his room; it could be tremendous apprehension at going to school the first day. As a parent, you realize that his concern, although real, is about nothing. These are problems which are easily solved. You, as the parent, realize that the child's concern and apprehension are the biggest problem. For God, our concern and apprehension about our own problems is the biggest problem. He can solve any problem. He can bring any dramatic episode in your life to a good conclusion. Our fear and apprehension only get in the way.

Psalm 56:10b			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
YHWH (יהוה) [pronunciation is possibly y <sup>h</sup> oh-WAH]	transliterated variously as <i>Jehovah, Yahweh, Y<sup>e</sup>howah</i>	proper noun	Strong's #3068 BDB #217
hâlal (לָלַח) [pronounced haw-LAHL]	<i>to praise, to sing, to celebrate; to glory</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Piel imperfect	Strong's #1984 BDB #237
dâ <sup>b</sup> vâr (דְּבַר) [pronounced daw <sup>b</sup> -VAWR]	<i>word, saying, doctrine, thing, matter, command</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #1697 BDB #182

**Translation:** *...in Y<sup>e</sup>howah, I praise doctrine.* *Elohim* refer to the Godhead, or the Trinity. It is plural, and despite what you may have heard, it is plural because God is a plurality of three persons with the Same essence. *Jehovah* refers to the revealed member of the Godhead, which is Jesus Christ in the New Testament and Jehovah Elohim or the Angel of God in the Old.

There is an interesting traditional Jewish differentiation between Jehovah and Elohim: Jehovah represents God's mercy and Elohim represents God's justice. *Accordingly the Targum paraphrases the words, "in the attribute of the justice of God will I praise his word; in the attribute of the mercies of Jehovah will I praise his word."*<sup>18</sup> Jesus Christ in the New Testament is Jehovah of the Old, and in Him we do find mercy and grace.

<b>In Elohim I have trusted; I am not afraid of what does man to me.</b>	Psalm 56:11	<b>I have trusted in Elohim; [therefore], I am not afraid of what man can do to me.</b>
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<sup>18</sup> Dr. John Gill, *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*; from e-Sword, Psalm 56:10.

**Because I have trust in God, I am not afraid of what man can do to me.**

Here is how others have translated this verse:

**Early translations:**

The Septuagint I have hoped in God; I will not be afraid of what man will do to me.

**Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:**

CEV I trust you and am not afraid. No one can harm me.  
 NLT I trust in God, so why should I be afraid  
 What can mere mortals do to me?

**Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):**

JPS (Tanakh) in God I trust;  
 I am not afraid;  
 what can man do to me?

**Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:**

NASB In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid.  
 What can man do to me?  
 Young's Updated LT In God I trusted, I fear not what man does to me.

**What is the gist of this verse?** We have a repetition of the theme of v. 3, with the additional thought: *I do not fear what man can do to me.*

Psalm 56:11a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʾēlohîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced el-o-HEEM]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
bâṭach (בָּטַח) [pronounced baw-TAHKH]	<i>to trust, to rely upon, to have confidence in, to be secure in</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal perfect	Strong's #982 BDB #105

**Translation:** *I have trusted in Elohim;...* Throughout this psalm, we have the key to the Christian way of life, as well as to the life of the believer before the Incarnation of our Lord. David places his trust in God. He picks up his troubles and he places them on God to deal with.

## Psalm 56:11b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lô' (לוֹ' or לֹא') [pronounced low]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
yârê' (יָרַע) [pronounced yaw-RAY]	<i>to fear, to fear-respect, to reverence, to have a reverential respect</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #3372 BDB #431
mâh (מַה) [pronounced maw]	<i>what, how, why</i>	interrogative; exclamatory particle	Strong's #4100 BDB #552
'âsâh (עָשָׂה) [pronounced 'gaw-SAWH]	<i>to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare</i>	3 <sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Qal imperfect	Strong's #6213 BDB #793
'âdâm (אָדָם) [pronounced aw-DAWM]	<i>a man, a human being, mankind, Adam</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #120 BDB #9
lâmed (ל) [pronounced l']	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510

**Translation:** ...[therefore], I am not afraid of what man can do to me. In all of I Sam. 21, David was running from Saul, afraid, and since he gave only thought to his own preservation, David's fear affected the safety and well-being of hundreds of lives. Now that he stops for a moment, and thinks this through, David realizes that he can place his trust in God, and that God, Who is omniscient and omnipotent, can handle any sort of problem that David has. Given this, David has no reason to be afraid of Saul.

**Application:** We have the same God looking out for us as well. Now, careful here: this does not mean that we can simply walk out into the midst of traffic or that we can handle snakes. David doesn't come to this realization, and then go and build a house next door to Saul. "After all, what can man do to me?" David still lives with care and circumspection; however; but he lives without fear. That's what is important.

**Application:** I was the victim of a lawsuit, and I will admit that there were many times when I panicked, when I became depressed and despondent. Many times, I failed this test. However, God wanted me to function normally, not to do anything rash, and allow Him to take care of everything (which He did). We all face trials and tribulations which at times, seem unsolvable. God is able to take these problems on His shoulders and bear them for us. He is able to solve these problems.

At this point in your study, you are certainly thinking, *didn't we just cover a verse like this?* And we did, back in vv. 3–4. In fact, a portion of v. 4 is almost identical: ...*what can flesh do to me?* The difference is, in v. 11, we have the word *man* instead. Therefore, there is a parallelism which is essential to the psalm. Given the way which I examine these verses, a phrase at a time, it is easy to lose the big picture. Therefore, at the end of this psalm, I will put all of these verses together, and show you how carefully this psalm was crafted. David did not simply write down a few poetic thoughts and then stop when he ran out of steam. The structure and pattern is much more intricate than that.





The second problem with accepting the existing translations of this verse is something that I didn't catch at first: notice in these translations, almost everyone of them reads *my vows*. There is no *my vows* in this verse! It reads *Your vows* or *Your promises*. Man always wants to get into the act and pretend that he has this essential role in God's plan. So translator after translator wants to see this as David having made vows to God, rather than God having made promises to David.

Psalm 56:12a			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
ʿal (עַל) [pronounced <i>gahl</i> ]	<i>upon, beyond, on, against, above, over, by, beside</i>	preposition of proximity with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5921 BDB #752
ʾēlōhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced <i>el-o-HEEM</i> ]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
nêder (נֶדֶר) [pronounced <i>NAY-der</i> ]	<i>a vow, a promise, a personal guarantee, the giving of one's word of assurance, a commitment</i>	masculine plural noun with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	Strong's #5088 BDB #623

**Translation:** O God, Your promises [or, vows] [are now] upon me;... David hot-footed it out of Gath, running for his life (once he got far enough away to where he could run. He has stopped, confessed his sins to God, and has focused upon God's Word.

If you are to believe most translations, then the picture is, as David makes his escape, that he makes several vows to God—I will such and such, if You get me out of this jam. Now, I have, in fact, made one vow to God, and I kept it. It was an expensive vow, but it was right. Just don't promise to do something directly to God and then pass on that responsibility. And it is human nature here to think that David sees the light and makes some vows to God. But these are *not* vows that David has made. Therefore, although making vows to God is an interesting topic, it does not belong here. This means that 80% of the translations out there mistranslate this verse and the exegete cannot help but misinterpret and misapply it.

God made promises to David, not the other way around. This therefore invalidates the comments of almost every commentary which I have<sup>19</sup> Here is what has happened: David has met Samuel at least twice and Samuel promised David the first time that they met that he would be king (I Sam. 16:1–13). That is a promise from God through Samuel. That was God's Word. If David clings to that promise alone, he knows that Saul cannot hurt him. In fact, as long as he is *not* king, David knows that no man can take him out of this world, because God has promised that he would be king over Israel. We all have a purpose in this life, and as long as God keeps us here, we can fulfill that purpose. For their second meeting, David went to Samuel and Samuel took him to audit a couple classes at the School of Prophets. Although David was there for a very short time, we can reasonably theorize that David (1) was given a certain amount of theology, which would have included promises from God and (2) David may have even been given portions of Scripture to take with him. We are given very few details as to what transpired spiritually when David went with Samuel to audit a few classes, but we may reasonably suppose that David is now applying some of that knowledge now. David will, by the way, enumerate some of God's promises to him in the next verse.

<sup>19</sup> Examples of this: Gill, the Geneva Bible translation notes, Clarke, Barnes, Spurgeon, Keil and Delitzsch, and Jamison, Fausset and Brown. And all of these focused on David making vows to God, even though they used an accurate translation.

## Psalm 56:12b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
shâlêm (שָׁלַם) [pronounced shaw-LAHM]	<i>to make secure, to keep safe, to complete, to finish, to restore, to requite, to recompense</i>	1 <sup>st</sup> person singular, Piel imperfect	Strong's #7999 BDB #1022
tôwdâh (תוֹדָה) [pronounced toe-DAW]	<i>confession; admission, acknowledgment; thanksgiving; praise, a giving of praise to; a thanksgiving choir; a procession, a line</i>	feminine plural noun	Strong's #8426 BDB #392

This is a very difficult word, because as soon as you allow for the two basic meanings—a *confession* or *thanksgiving*—you allow for certain passages to be interpreted in two very different ways. For instance, is Lev. 7:12–15 (or II Chron. 29:31 33:16 Psalm 56:12) about offering thanks, or is it a confession of sin? One of the nice things about the 1997 edition of *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament* is that in the back it has the English words and how many different Hebrew words match them. What I was expecting to find was several different Hebrew words for *thanksgiving* or for *confession*, but I did not. In fact, this is the word used for both of them and there are no other Hebrew words given (which surprised me). The cognate verb allows for both meanings, which, in term, allows for both meanings here. In the Septuagint, the corresponding Greek word means *to confess* in Joshua 7:19, but it is translated *praise, thanksgiving* in this passage. Our understanding of this verb right here determines the thrust of this psalm.

You may think, *that's a lot of time in the exegesis spend on just that one word*. However, this one word is going to be the key to the understanding of this passage, and that understanding is the missing segue between I Sam. 21 and 22. Without this psalm, I can hypothesize that David confessed his sins to God and then moved on; but right here, this psalm tells us that David confessed his sins to God and then moved on.

lâmed (ל) [pronounced l']	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular suffix	No Strong's # BDB #510
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**Translation:** I will complete confessions [or, thanksgivings] to You. David has either confessed his sins to God or he is giving thanks to God. In either case, a sacrifice or sacrifices are due God. In the Old Testament, when man approaches God, it is generally through a sacrificial animal. The idea is, of course, that he is approaching God through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. David has found a place where he can stop. He recognizes what he has done wrong—his lies to Abimelech, the priest; his going to the Philistines to ally himself. With confession of sin we also have an animal sacrifice, and that is what David undoubtedly did after he left Gath and as he wrote this psalm.

These final three verses give us the essentials: faith in God's Word; trust in God and His protection, guidance and promises; and the confession of our sins to him (in order to remain in fellowship).

The other interpretation is, David now stops and gives thanks to God via sacrifices to Him. That this can mean both things—David offers sacrifices for confession of sin and then to give thanksgiving (for forgiveness of sin), is a reasonable understanding of this verse.

For You have delivered my soul from death;  
 [yea], not my feet from falling?  
 To walk to faces of Elohim  
 in a light of the life.

Psalm  
 56:13

For You have delivered my soul from death;  
 [have you] not [delivered] my feet from  
 stumbling?  
 [So that] I may walk before Elohim  
 in the light of life.

For You have delivered my soul from death and my feet from stumbling so that I may walk before God  
 in the light of life.

Here is how others have translated this verse:

#### Early translations:

The Septuagint                      For You have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from sliding, that I should  
 be well-pleasing before God in the land of the living.

#### Thought-for-thought translations; paraphrases:

CEV                                      You protected me from death  
 and kept me from stumbling, so that I would please you  
 and follow the light that leads to life.

#### Mostly literal renderings (with some occasional paraphrasing):

*God's Word™*                          You have rescued me from death.  
 You have kept my feet from stumbling  
 so that I could walk in your presence, in the light of life.

Slightly updated  
 JPS (Tanakh)                          For You have saved me from death,  
 my foot from stumbling,  
 that I may walk before God in the light of life.

#### Literal, almost word-for-word, renderings:

*Updated Emphasized Bible*      For You have rescued my soul from death,  
 Will You not [rescue] my feet from stumbling?  
 That I may walk to and fro, before God,  
     Into the light of life. NASB              For You have delivered my soul from death,  
 Indeed my feet from stumbling,  
 So that I may walk before Go  
 In the light of the living.

*Young's Updated LT*                For You have delivered my soul from death,  
 Do You not [keep] my feet from falling?  
 To walk habitually before God in the light of the living!

**What is the gist of this verse?** Jesus Christ has both delivered David temporarily from physical death (and ultimately from the second death) and He allows David to remain in fellowship (or to get back into fellowship). The result is that David can walk before God in the light of life, which means to function in fellowship.

## Psalm 56:13a

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
kîy (כִּי) [pronounced <i>kee</i> ]	<i>for, that, because; when, at that time, which, what time</i>	conjunction; preposition	Strong's #3588 BDB #471
nâtsal (נָצַל) [pronounced <i>naw-TSAHL</i> ]	<i>to snatch away, to deliver, to rescue, to snatch out of danger, to preserve</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil perfect	Strong's #5337 BDB #664
nephesh (נֶפֶשׁ) [pronounced <i>NEH-fesh</i> ]	<i>soul, life, living being, desire</i>	feminine singular noun with a 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #5315 BDB #659
min (מִן) [pronounced <i>min</i> ]	<i>from, off, out from, out of from, on account of, since, than, more than, greater than</i>	preposition of separation	Strong's #4480 BDB #577
mâveth (מָוֶת) [pronounced <i>MAW-veth</i> ]	<i>death, death [as opposed to life], death by violence, a state of death, a place of death</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #4194 BDB #560

**Translation:** For You have delivered my soul from death;... David recognizes that Jesus Christ, or Jehovah Elohim, has delivered him from death. This is first a reference to temporal death. David has been running from Saul and suddenly found himself being held by Philistine soldiers. God delivered him out of their clutches, even though David was out of fellowship. Not only did David not deserve to be delivered, but he really did not deserve to be delivered in those two instances. He was in fear for his life, he was out of fellowship, he did not trust God, he lied. And God still delivered him. That's grace. When I am objective, I look around me and realize, *I don't deserve any of this—not by a long shot.* That's grace.

This portion of v. 13 may also be taken to indicate that David has been delivered from the second death by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether he meant that here or not is debatable; however, this is certainly a meaning that God the Holy Spirit would convey.

## Psalm 56:13b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
hă (הֲ) [pronounced <i>heh</i> ]		interrogative particle which acts almost like a piece of punctuation, like the upside-down question mark which begins a Spanish sentence. The verb <i>to be</i> may be implied.	Strong's #none BDB #209
lô' (לֹא) [pronounced <i>low</i> ]	<i>not, no</i>	negates the word or action that follows; the absolute negation	Strong's #3808 BDB #518
regel (רֶגֶל) [pronounced <i>REH-geI</i> ]	<i>foot, feet</i>	feminine dual noun with the 1 <sup>st</sup> person singular suffix	Strong's #7272 BDB #919

## Psalm 56:13b

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
min (מִן) [pronounced <i>min</i> ]	<i>from, off, out from, out of from, on account of, since, than, more than, greater than</i>	preposition of separation	Strong's #4480 BDB #577
d°chal (חָלַף) [pronounced <i>d°khahf</i> ]	<i>falling, stumbling</i>	masculine singular noun	Strong's #1762 BDB #191

**Translation:** ...[have you] not [delivered] my feet from stumbling? This sort of question is known as a positive affirmation<sup>20</sup> where the person to whom this is spoken (God) is to respond with “Yes, I will.” David here refers to his escape from Gath and the soldiers who held him. He managed to get out of there without a mark. However, this also refers to his ability to get back into fellowship. This is a phrase which means that David is in fellowship and he has not fallen out of fellowship.

## Psalm 56:13c

Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
lâmed (ל) [pronounced <i>l°</i> ]	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
hâlak° (חָלַק) [pronounced <i>haw-LAHK°</i> ]	properly: <i>to go, to come, to depart, to walk; to go for oneself, to walk up and down, to go about, to walk about; to live [walk] [in truth]; to flow</i>	Hithpael infinitive construct	Strong's #1980 (and #3212) BDB #229

The infinitive construct with a preposition can introduce a purpose clause, a result clause or a temporal clause.

lâmed (ל) (pronounced <i>l°</i> )	<i>to, for, towards, in regards to</i>	preposition	No Strong's # BDB #510
pânîym (פָּנִים) [pronounced <i>paw-NEEM</i> ]	<i>face, faces; presence</i>	masculine plural construct (plural acts like English singular)	Strong's #6440 BDB #815

Together, they mean *upon the face of, before, before the face of, in the presence of, in the sight of, in front of*. When used with God, it can take on the more figurative meaning *in the judgment of*.

°elôhîym (אֱלֹהִים) [pronounced <i>el-o-HEEM</i> ]	<i>gods or God; transliterated Elohim</i>	masculine plural noun	Strong's #430 BDB #43
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**Translation:** [So that] I may walk before God... Since David is back in fellowship, the result is, he walks before God. This means that he is involved in divine production. Thieme used to teach this as the top and bottom circles. We are always in the top circle, which is eternal life. Once you have believed in Jesus Christ, you are guaranteed eternal fellowship with God. However, the bottom circle represents temporal fellowship with God. This circle we enter and exit, enter and exit continually. When we sin, we fall out of fellowship, and everything that we do is our

<sup>20</sup> *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*; E. W. Bullinger; ©originally 1898; reprinted 1968 Baker Books; p 947.

own effort. When we name our sins to God, we are back in fellowship and we receive the enabling of God the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 56:13d			
Hebrew/Pronunciation	Common English Meanings	Notes/Morphology	BDB and Strong's Numbers
b <sup>e</sup> (בְּ) [pronounced b <sup>eh</sup> ]	<i>in, into, at, by, near, on, with, before, in the presence of, upon, against, by means of, among, within</i>	a preposition of proximity	Strong's# none BDB #88
ʾōwr (אֹר) [pronounced ohr]	<i>light</i>	masculine singular construct	Strong's #216 BDB #21
chayyîym (חַיִּים) [pronounced khay-YEEM]	<i>being alive, being vigorous, having life, sustaining life, living prosperously—it is life as opposed to death</i>	Masculine substantive plural abstract with the definite article	Strong's #2416 BDB #313

**Translation: ...in the light of life.** This is an Old Testament designation of walking in fellowship and producing divine good. Because of a series of stupid decisions, David not only endangers himself with each move but he also endangers many people in Israel. However, in this psalm, he rebounds; he confesses his sin to God, and the result is that he is in fellowship, walking before God, in the light of life, producing divine good.

There are various themes throughout Scripture which deal with light or with the issue of light vs. darkness. Since there are so many of these contrasts, it might be easier to see them in a table.

The Concept of Light and Light Vs. Darkness in Scripture	
Which Aspect of Light or Light vs. Darkness	Corresponding Scripture
Jesus has come as Light into this world, to help us to see the truth of Him and His salvation for us, which is hidden in darkness.	For You will light my candle; Jehovah my God will make my darkness light (Psalm 18:28). The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; they who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined (Isa. 9:2). Then Jesus spoke again to them, saying, I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life (John 8:12). I have come as a Light into the world, so that whoever believes on Me should not remain in darkness (John 12:46). But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession, so that you might speak of the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

## The Concept of Light and Light Vs. Darkness in Scripture

Which Aspect of Light or Light vs. Darkness	Corresponding Scripture
Eternal life distinguished from eternal death.	Those who sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death, being chained in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the Words of God, and despised the advice of the Most High (Psalm 107:10–11). <b>But you, brothers, are not in darkness, that the Day should overtake you like a thief. You are all the sons of light and the sons of the day. We are not of the night, or of darkness</b> (I Thess. 5:4–5).
God is Light, as God is Truth and Perfection.	For You are my lamp, O Jehovah. And Jehovah will lighten my darkness (II Sam. 22:29). <b>And this is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all</b> (I John 1:5).
God's Light reveals the darkness of the deeds of evil.	There is no darkness, nor shadow of death to hide there the workers of iniquity (Job 34:22).
Being a believer as versus being an unbeliever (or the just versus the unjust).	When wisdom enters into your heart, and knowledge is pleasing to your soul; judgment shall keep you, understanding shall keep you, to deliver you from the way of the evil man, from the man who speaks wicked things; those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice to do evil and delight in the perversities of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and are devious in their paths (Prov. 2:10–15). <b>But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more to the perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble</b> (Prov. 4:18–19). <b>Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship does righteousness have with lawlessness? And what partnership does light have with darkness?</b> (II Cor. 6:14). <b>For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light</b> (Eph. 5:8). <b>These are wells without water, clouds driven with a tempest, for whom the blackness of darkness is reserved forever</b> (II Peter 2:17).
The struggle of the angelic conflict.	<b>Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!</b> (Isa. 5:20). <b>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the world's rulers, of the darkness of this age, against spiritual wickedness in high places</b> (Eph. 6:12). <b>For He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son</b> (Col. 1:13).



## The Concept of Light and Light Vs. Darkness in Scripture

Which Aspect of Light or Light vs. Darkness	Corresponding Scripture
Being a believer in fellowship and walking in light, as versus being a believer out of fellowship and walking in darkness.	If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth (I John 1:6). But he who hates his brother is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because darkness has blinded his eyes (I John 2:11).
This are certainly not an exhaustive study of all the meanings of light vs. darkness, or the nuances of these points, nor of a majority of the pertinent verses. This is simply to give you a running start at this subject.	

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One of the things which we miss when exegeting a psalm as I have is its structure and cohesiveness. There is more to a psalm thematically than “I like God a lot” and there is more to a psalm structurally than simply a few lines which seem to sound poetic. The psalmist doesn’t write until he runs out of gas, and then stops. Therefore, in concluding this psalm, I will give you the entire psalm, along with a few comments on its structure.

I thought it best that you see the structure of the psalm after we have exegeting the psalm. That way, you know what each line is about, what each theme is, and the structure will make complete sense in the light of what you have learned.

### The Structure of Psalm 56

To the Preeminent One. According to “A Silent Dove Afar Off.” [A psalm] belonging to David, a song, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

Show grace to me, O Elohim  
for fallen man has seized me;  
all the day, conflict [lit., *fighting*] afflicts me.  
My enemies crush [me] all the day,  
for many are fighting with regards to me, O Most High.

The day I am afraid,  
I [even] I will trust You [lit., *toward You*].

In Elohim, I praise His Word;  
I have trusted in Elohim.  
I am not in fear  
[for] what can flesh do to me?

They distort [more literally, *afflict*] my words all the day [long];  
All of their evil plans [are] against me.  
They gather together, they hide themselves;  
they watch my steps  
just as they lie in wait for my life [or, *soul*].

Cast them forth in anger, according to [their] iniquity;  
Bring down [these] Gentile nations, O Elohim  
You have kept a record of my wanderings;

### The Structure of Psalm 56

You have put my tears in Your wineskin.  
 [Are they] not in Your book?  
 The day I call out, my enemies turn back.  
 This I know: Elohim [is] for me.

In Elohim, I praise doctrine;  
 in Y<sup>h</sup>owah, I praise doctrine.

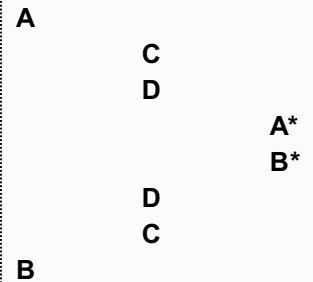
I have trusted in Elohim;  
 [therefore], I am not afraid of what man can do to me.

O God, Your promises [or, vows] [are now] upon me;  
 I will complete confessions [or, thanksgivings] to You.  
 For You have delivered my soul from death;  
 [have you] not [delivered] my feet from stumbling?  
 [So that] I may walk before Elohim  
 in the light of life.

You will note that I put the structure of the stanzas\* on the right. In **A**, David states the crisis to God. He tells what man is doing to him. The final response to that is **B**, where David recognizes what God has done for him and how God has protected and delivered him.

**C** and **D** are related and repeated themes in this psalm. **C** is David's trust in God, so that he is not afraid of what man can do. **D** is David's trust in God's Word.

**A\***, like **A**, refers to what man is doing to David, and **B\***, like **B**, is what God does to David's enemies.



\* I quite frankly don't know if the proper term here is *strophe* or *stanza*. Keil and Delitzsch use the former when discussing the strophe of Psalm 56:8–11 (courtesy of e-Sword).