

Psalms 56:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.

Analysis

The Hebrew 'chanan' (be gracious/merciful) opens this psalm of trust amid persecution. 'Man would swallow me up' uses vivid imagery of enemies as beasts of prey, yet directs the appeal to God's character rather than human allies. The superscription's reference to David among the Philistines shows that even among pagans, God's covenant mercy sustains His elect.

Historical Context

The superscription 'when the Philistines took him in Gath' refers to 1 Samuel 21:10-15, when David feigned madness before King Achish. This was one of David's lowest moments, showing that even faith's champions experience desperation.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does crying out for mercy differ from demanding deliverance as a right?

2. What does God's faithfulness to David in pagan Gath reveal about His covenant commitment?

Interlinear Text

בְּרִית בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים פִּי שָׁאֵפָנִי אָנָּוְשׁ כָּל
Be merciful unto me O God H3588 **would swallow me up** H7602 **for man** H582 **daily** H3117

H2603 H430 H3605 H3117

לִחְמָה יְלִפְצֵתִי
he fighting oppresseth H3898 H3905

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 29:4 (Parallel theme): And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men?

Psalms 59:1 (References God): Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me.

Psalms 60:1 (References God): O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again.

Psalms 27:2 (Parallel theme): When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Psalms 16:1 (References God): Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

Psalms 124:3 (Parallel theme): Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

Psalms 35:25 (Parallel theme): Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up.

Psalms 58:1 (Parallel theme): Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?

Psalms 136:15 (Grace): But overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea: for his mercy endureth for ever.

Psalms 21:9 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.

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