



Psalm 57 - Praise and Assurance under Persecution

To the leader: Do Not Destroy. Of David. A Miktam, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

Introduction

This is another individual lament, based on an event in David's life, probably his time at Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1), but possibly the time David could have taken Saul's life in a cave (1 Samuel 24:3); Psalm 142 is likewise from one of these passages. Like Psalms 34, 52, 54, 56, 59, 63 and 142, Psalm 57 arose from Saul's persecution of David.

The psalm has two sections, each ended by the refrain (v.5 and v.11), and each mentioning God's 'steadfast love and faithfulness' (v.3 and v.10), drawing on Exodus 34:6. In the first section (vv.1-5), the dominant strain is cheerful confidence amid danger, while in the second (vv.6-11), the accent is on the expectation of victory, and thus of God's vindication.

The faithful who sing this hymn can identify with David's confidence in the presence of serious dangers, and can look through those dangers to seek God's honour. Psalm 108:1-5, also by David, uses vv.7-11. 'Do not destroy' in the title of Psalms 57, 58, 59 and 75 may be some kind of tune or chant pattern, perhaps influenced by the phrase: <<*I prayed to the Lord and said, 'Lord God, do not destroy the people who are your very own possession, whom you redeemed in your greatness, whom you brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand'*>> (Deuteronomy 9:26), and: <<*But David said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?'*>> (1 Samuel 26:9).

Derek Kidner says of 'Do not Destroy': "This may well be a tune-indication: confirmed in Isaiah 65:8, where the phrase is identified as a popular saying

(perhaps a snatch of vintage song), and borrowed to become a reassuring word from God. Yet notice also David's instructions about Saul, 'Destroy him not' (1 Samuel 26:9)." Charles Spurgeon noted, "There are four of these 'Destroy not' Psalms, namely, the 57th, 58th, 59th, and 75th. In all them there is a distinct declaration of the destruction of the wicked and the preservation of the righteous."

This is another Miktam, or Golden Psalm. The cave was probably Adullam cave, mentioned in 1 Samuel 22:1, although the caves of En Gedi (1 Samuel 24:1) are also a possibility. Adullam seems to be the best fit; therefore it could be said that Psalm 34 is also associated with this period of David's life.

Psalm 57:1-5 - Confident Request for Mercy

The circumstances are dire with storms of destruction (v.1), David feeling trampled underfoot (v.3); and surrounded by lions (v.4), and yet the faithful person will cry out to God in confidence that he hears and that he fulfils his purpose for his children (v.2).

- 1 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge;
in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge,
until the destroying storms pass by.
- 2 I cry to God Most High,
to God who fulfils his purpose for me.
- 3 He will send from heaven and save me,
he will put to shame those who trample on me. Selah
God will send forth his steadfast love and his faithfulness.

Psalm 57:1-3

Be merciful to me is a humble request for God to show kindness and grant relief, recognising that God cannot be compelled to do this; the word can also be rendered 'be gracious'. The need was so great that David repeated the request. When he fled from Saul into the Adullam cave, the most likely event this psalm represents, David had been through several near-death terrors (Psalm 56). David came to Adullam cave (1 Samuel Chapter 26) alone, discouraged, and in continual danger.

For in you my soul takes refuge. David did not say this to earn the mercy of God; mercy cannot be earned. He said it to tell God that he was David's only hope. His soul trusted in God and nothing else; there was nothing else to trust in.

In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge. Using a familiar image David expressed his trust and hope in God for defence. The idea is similar to the way a mother bird shields her young chicks from predators, from the elements, and from dangers by gathering them under her wings. This figure of speech is also used in three other Psalms (17:8, 36:7 and 63:7). Boaz used a similar phrase to acknowledge Ruth's situation: <<*May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!*>> (Ruth 2:12). Jesus used this same word picture to show his love and desired care for Jerusalem: <<*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*>> (Matthew 23:37).

I cry to God Most High; he will send from heaven and save me. David came to the cave alone, and God was his only help. Yet he was confident, knowing as a military man the strategic value of high ground in battle. He looked to help from the Most High who occupied the greatest high ground of all - heaven. Refer to the comment made on Psalm 3:2.

He will put to shame those who trample on me. God would speak against David's enemies, either the Philistines or the servants of Saul. For God to speak against them would be enough to protect David and defeat them.

The Selah at the end of the clause is unusual in the middle of a verse; but it may be intended to underscore, as it were, the impiety of the enemy, and so corresponds with the other Selah in v.6, which is also in an unusual place, and points attention to the enemy's ruin, as this does to his wickedness.

His steadfast love and his faithfulness alludes to Exodus 34:6.

⁴ I lie down among lions
that greedily devour human prey;
their teeth are spears and arrows,
their tongues sharp swords.

Psalm 57:4

I lie down among lions. David had many reasons to believe his enemies were much more powerful than he. In describing his great disadvantage he hoped to appeal to the mercy of God. Peter thought that the enemy of the soul was something like a

ravaging lion: <<*Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour*>> (1 Peter 5:8). There is a lion that is worth lying beside: <<*Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals'*>> (Revelation 5:5).

Their tongues sharp swords. David knew the damage that words could do to his reputation. The tongue can be used for both good and evil: <<*With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so*>> (James 3:9-10), and: <<*Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth*>> (Revelation 2:16).

⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 57:5

Since God is already high and exalted: <<*The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens*>> (Psalm 113:4), and: <<*For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away*>> (Psalm 138:6), this is a prayer that people would acknowledge his greatness.

For his glory to be over all the earth is for people to honour God for his splendour and high position.

Psalm 57:6-11 - Confident Expectation of Victory

This section mentions the danger, i.e. net and pit, only to exult in its reversal, that is, they have fallen into it themselves (v.6). The singer moves on to urge himself to praise, and to look forward to bringing testimony of God's goodness beyond the present people of Israel to the whole world, i.e. peoples and nations (v.9); this is confirmed by Genesis 12:1-3 and Exodus 19:5-6.

⁶ They set a net for my steps;

my soul was bowed down.

They dug a pit in my path,

but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah

Psalm 57:6

My soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my path. In the previous verses David's soul soared above the heavens. Now he is back down, in danger of going into the pit his enemies prepared to trap him in.

They have fallen into it themselves. The pit prepared by enemies has instead trapped those who dug it: <<*The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid has their own foot been caught*>> (Psalm 9:15), <<*Those who mislead the upright into evil ways will fall into pits of their own making, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance*>> (Proverbs 28:10), and: <<*Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake*>> (Ecclesiastes 10:8). From his circumstances as he came to the cave, it can be sensed that David said this with the anticipation of faith. It had not yet happened, but he knew that it would.

7 My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast.

I will sing and make melody.

8 Awake, my soul!

Awake, O harp and lyre!

I will awake the dawn.

9 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing praises to you among the nations.

10 For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens;

your faithfulness extends to the clouds.

Psalm 57:7-10

My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast. The psalm began with David twice appealing for mercy; now David twice expressed his steadfast confidence in God. Although alone in the cave with troubles behind and ahead he could allow his heart to be steadfast in God.

Awake, my soul! A term for the whole person, probably focusing on its most noble faculties: <<*You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you for ever*>> (Psalm 30:11-12); here the singer's soul gives the right response to God's glory.

I will give thanks, I will sing praises. The steadfast heart led to a singing heart. Perhaps David wished he had a lute and harp with him in the cave to accompany his singing of praise.

I will sing praises to you among the nations. Even from the cave, David could envision his song of praise extending to the nations and among the peoples.

For your steadfast love is as high as the heavens; your faithfulness extends to the clouds. A cave narrows and darkens the vision of most people, but David's heart and song soared up to the clouds. He exalted the mercy and truth of God even from difficult circumstances.

¹¹ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.
Let your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 57:11

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. The refrain is repeated because of its goodness and for emphasis. It is important to remember that David's circumstances were not much better when he sang this song. He was delivered from the immediate danger at Gath, but a cave was a long way from the throne of Israel God had promised him. David did not wait for his circumstances to change before he praised God above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth. The freedom in David's spirit can be sensed. Although in a cave, his soul glorified God above all the earth: <<***But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea***>> (Habakkuk 2:14).