



Part 2: Chapter 3

The Psalm of Union

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To the chief Musician upon Jonathelemrechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath. (1) *Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me.* (2) *Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.* (3) *What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.* (4) *In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.* (5) *Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil.* (6) *They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.* (7) *Shall they escape by iniquity? In thine anger cast down the people, O God.* (8) *Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?* (9) *When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me.* (10) *In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.* (11) *In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.* (12) *Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.* (13) *For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?* (Psalm 56).

Introduction

Out of all the 150 canonical Psalms, Psalm 56 is the “Psalm of union,” the Psalm that speaks most of our being “in God.” This

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significant phrase, “in God” or “in the LORD,” occurs in this relatively short Psalm not just once or twice or three times or four times but as many as five times. In one place we read “in the LORD” and in the other four “in God.” Both in the Hebrew original and in our English translation, our key phrase is found at the very start of five ringing personal affirmations:

In God I will praise his word, *in God* I have put my trust (v. 4).

In God will I praise his word: *in the LORD* will I praise his word (v. 10).

In God have I put my trust (v. 11).

These five references to being “in God” or “in the LORD” are grouped in two clusters. There is a pair in verse four, and there are three references in verses 10 and 11. These five statements are, essentially, only two, because two statements are repeated for emphasis with only a little variation: “*in God/the LORD* will I praise his word”—three times; “*in God* have I put my trust”—twice.

In calling Psalm 56 the “Psalm of union,” I am not claiming, for example, that Psalm 56 contains developed imagery about the mystical union. It does not. I am not saying that Psalm 56 gives a detailed exposition of the pleasures of union with God. It does not. I am labelling Psalm 56 as the “Psalm of union” because of the frequency and the emphasis of this key phrase with the vital preposition “in:” “in God” or “in the LORD.”

This helps the believer identify another one of the 150 Psalms. For instance, Psalm 117 is the shortest Psalm (2 verses) and Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm (176 verses).¹ Psalm 23 is the shepherd Psalm and *Psalm 56* is the union Psalm. It is hard to remember all of the 150 Psalms, so the more a particular Psalm is linked with a specific idea, the better it is for our weak memories.

¹ These two Psalms, which are only separated by one chapter (Psalm 118), are also the shortest and the longest chapters, respectively, in the whole Bible.

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Many of the commentaries that I consulted on Psalm 56 ignore the phrase “in God” or struggled with its meaning. Regarding “In God will I praise his word” (v. 10), one of them remarked that it is an “unusual form of speech,” for we do not ordinarily speak like that.² So what does it mean? “*In God will I praise his word*” does not mean “*With reference to God, will I praise his word*” or “*Through God will I praise his word*” or “*Of God will I praise His word.*” It simply means what it says: “*In God will I praise his word.*”

Here are three clear reasons for this view. First, “in” is the primary meaning of the Hebrew preposition. Second, there is the context. Consider verse 4: “*In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust.*” The second assertion, “*in God I have put my trust,*” very obviously means, to rearrange some of the words, “I have put my trust *in God.*” It is the same Hebrew preposition in both halves of the verse, just as it is the same Hebrew preposition in verse 11, “*In God have I put my trust,*” and in verse 10, “*In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word.*” Third, this view makes good sense of the Psalm, is in full accord with the analogy of faith and is rich in terms of Old Testament theology, as we shall see.

Old Testament and New Testament

What shall we say from Psalm 56, the Psalm of union, about the nature or the characteristics of union with God, the subject of this book? We should notice, first, what the Psalm of union does not say. Psalm 56 does not specifically state that we are united with the living God only in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that He is the only One through whom anyone can be “in God” but Psalm 56 does not actually say that. David, who penned Psalm 56 by the Spirit, was “a prophet,” who knew “that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according

² J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 251.

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to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30).³ David was the one in Psalm 110 who predicted that his Lord would sit at Jehovah’s right hand in heaven as king (v. 1) and be “a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (v. 4). But Psalm 56 does not state in so many words that union with God is only through the coming Messiah, our great high priest and eternal king.

Second, Psalm 56 does not say that we are united to God only by the Holy Spirit, although that is the reality. David was no stranger to the Holy Spirit. In the first scene in which we meet this son of Jesse (I Sam. 16:1-13), we read that, when the prophet Samuel anointed him with oil, “the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward” (v. 13). David claimed to speak by divine inspiration through the same Spirit: “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (II Sam. 23:2; cf. Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16; Heb. 3:7; 4:7). David knew that God wrought his personal inner renewal only by His gracious Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11-12; 143:10).⁴ Not only did David confess that the Spirit is omnipresent or everywhere present in all created realms (Ps. 139:7) and, therefore, is God, but he also understood that the same Holy Spirit was God’s “presence” with and in him (Ps. 51:11). However, David did not state in Psalm 56 that we are only united with God by the Holy Spirit.

We ought not expect teaching on union with God in Jesus Christ alone and only by the Holy Spirit from Psalm 56. We are not going to find such explicit statements and high doctrine in the

³ See, for example, the oracle that God gave to David through Nathan in II Samuel 7 and I Chronicles 17, and several inspired songs of David (Ps. 2; 16; 22; 24; 69; 110).

⁴ Cf. J. Barton Payne: “David, in his intimate personal communion with God, was the first to reveal the activity of the Holy Spirit as indwelling and guiding the believer. For the King prayed, ‘Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness’ (Ps. 143:10)” (*The Theology of the Older Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962], p. 174).

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Psalms, because they are part of the Old Testament Scriptures, not the New Testament. Among the canonical writings, one has to wait especially for the writings of John and the epistles of Paul for the development of this doctrine. After all, union with God in Christ and by the Spirit can really only be unfolded in the history of redemption after Jesus' incarnation, atoning sacrifice and glorification, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The deeper teaching on union with the living God through Christ and by His Spirit from the New Testament will be found in the chapters in part 3 of this book.

The Old Testament Scriptures, however, do contain the seeds of the full-orbed New Testament teaching on the mystical union. God dwelt in a sanctuary *in* the midst of Israel in the portable Mosaic tabernacle, and then in the temples of Solomon and (later) Zerubbabel in Jerusalem. Of course, even the greatest of these structures could not "contain" the infinitely immense Lord (I Kings 8:27; II Chron. 2:6; 6:18; Isa. 66:1). The Old Testament saints were taught by the prophets and understood by the Spirit that, ultimately, it was not the physical temple that was their holy place but the Lord of hosts Himself! Jehovah declared that "*he shall be for a sanctuary*" for His true, elect people in the promised land (Isa. 8:14).⁵ Regarding the exiles in Babylon, the covenant God promised,

Although I have cast them far off among the heathen,
and although I have scattered them among the countries,
yet will *I* be to them as a *little sanctuary* in the countries
where they shall come (Eze. 11:16).

⁵ To the wicked, God is not a "sanctuary," but "a stone of stumbling ... and a rock of offence." Peter quotes the preceding words from Isaiah 8:14, applying them to peoples' unbelieving response to *Christ*, and tracing their adverse reaction back to God's eternal, unchangeable and most just reprobation. The Lord Jesus (I Pet. 2:3-7) is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: *whereunto also they were appointed*" (v. 8). Then the apostle turns to the gracious antipode, our unconditional and gracious divine election: "But ye are a chosen generation" (v. 9).

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Note the reciprocity: God is *in* the midst of His people in the tabernacle/temple and His people are *in* Him as their holy place. Indeed, not only is God the sanctuary of His people but they are His sanctuary, as Psalm 114:2 explicitly states, “Judah was his sanctuary.” Moreover, Psalm 114 explains that this was the case right from Israel’s exodus from Egypt (v. 1). That “Judah was his sanctuary” is given as the reason why the Red Sea and the Jordan River dried up to give Israel passage, and why Mount Sinai quaked (vv. 3-6).

The God who is *in* His people, thereby making them holy as “his sanctuary,” is *in* us by His Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. It is especially the prophet Ezekiel who proclaims that Jehovah puts His Spirit “within” or “in” His people (36:27; 37:14) and that He does this at our regeneration (11:19; 36:26).

Thus the reciprocity of indwelling is taught in the Old Testament, not only through tabernacle/temple imagery but also apart from it. David confesses that we are in God (Ps. 56:4, 10) and Ezekiel prophesies that, by His Spirit, God is in us (36:27; 37:14).

Faith and Assurance

While not dealing with the Trinitarian or redemptive-historical aspects of our saving union, Psalm 56 does speak about union with God by faith. In fact, Psalm 56, the Psalm of union, insists upon the truth that the mystical union is only through faith. It stresses the intimate and inseparable relationship between union with God (5 references) and believing in Him (3 references), for “trust” is one of the main biblical words for faith.

What time I am afraid, I will *trust* in thee (v. 3).

In God I will praise his word, *in God* I have put my *trust* (v. 4).

In God will I praise his word: *in the LORD* will I praise his word (v. 10).

In God have I put my *trust* (v. 11).

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This, of course, helps us to understand that, even in the terms of Psalm 56 in the Old Testament, this union is not merely a spatial one. When Psalm 56 speaks of David's being "in God," it is not simply saying that, since the infinite, immaterial, invisible God is omnipresent, David was "in God." After all, where else could he be? In that spatial sense, even unbelievers are "in God," as Paul told his philosophically inclined audience on Mars Hill: "For in him we [i.e., Paul, those Athenians and mankind generally] live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Since God is everywhere, all human beings, even the ungodly, are in God spatially (for want of a better term).

Our non-spatial faith-union with God in Psalm 56 must have a legal (and righteous) basis, for it can hardly be illegal (and unrighteous). The legal foundation for our union with the Holy One of Israel lies in the "plenteous redemption" (Ps. 130:7) and complete atonement made by the Son of God who paid the price for all the sins of His elect people (John 10:11, 15). Thus the child of God exults, "If I am in Jehovah, as a believer, I possess a legal right and an invincible claim, by God's mercy and through Jesus Christ crucified, to the forgiveness of all my sins and the imputation of the righteousness of God in justification (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:6-8; *Belgic Confession* 23), to the status and privilege of a son or daughter of God in adoption, and to an eternal inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth. As one united to God by faith, I have the right in Christ to all the blessings of salvation—graciously and legally."

Our faith-union with God is not only a legal union but also living or organic union. This union is a sharing in the infinitely blessed life of the Trinity through the risen Lord Jesus and by the indwelling Spirit. These wonderful things are treated more fully, of course, in the later chapters of this book which treat (mostly) the New Testament Scriptures but something ought to be said here from an Old Testament perspective.

David declares that his living communion with Jehovah is above all things precious to him,

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One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple (Ps. 27:4).

In I Samuel 25, Abigail, “a woman of good understanding” (v. 3) who was soon to become David’s wife, penetrates more deeply, going beneath fellowship or communion to its underlying basis: union. In beautiful figurative language, she roots the physical and eternal security of Jesse’s son in his union with the most High: “the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God,” whereas “the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling” (v. 29).

In speaking of Jehovah as our “refuge” and “habitation,” in whom we “abide” and “dwell,” Psalm 91 moves in the thought world of union and communion with our covenant God:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust ... He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler ... Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation (vv. 1-2, 4, 9).

Further Old Testament teaching on the mystical union as organic or living is found in the book of Isaiah. The eternal, “holy,” “high” and “lofty” God inhabits and dwells in “the high and holy place” with His “humble” people (union with God), such that He quickens and invigorates us inwardly and spiritually (communion with God):

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (57:15).

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Since our legal and organic union with God is a faith-union, it is also a *conscious* union.⁶ In Psalm 56, David writes of the mystical union (vv. 4, 10, 11) in intimate connection with trust or faith (vv. 3, 4, 11). Trusting is the spiritual activity of the heart in relying, leaning and reposing upon Jehovah for His merciful deliverance (vv. 1, 13). In Psalm 56, David states regarding himself that he is “in God,” indicating that he knew, and was conscious and assured of, his union with Jehovah, just as the New Testament believer truly confesses,

[I have] a certain knowledge ... [and] also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits (*Heidelberg Catechism*, A. 21).

Who? and Where?

Let us draw on some of the information in the heading of Psalm 56 in order to answer two important questions. The first question is, “Who?” Who is the one who speaks of being “in God” in the Psalm of union? The answer is David, a glorious type of our Lord Jesus Christ as king: the righteous king, the suffering king, the warrior king, the exalted king. Though not a priest, at certain moments David was quite priestly. For instance, he wore a “linen ephod” when the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:14; I Chron. 15:27). As a prophet, David was “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1), the penman of more than half of the 150 inspired Psalms. David was the man after God's own heart (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) and, like Noah and Abraham, for example, he was one of the covenant heads spoken of in the Old Testament.

⁶ The *Westminster Confession* mentions exceptions: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word” (10:3).

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It is this David, an extremely godly man in very high office in Israel, the Old Testament church, who wrote the Psalm of union. At this, the believer can only exclaim, “How very fitting! This is only right and proper.” Scanning Old Testament history from the fall of Adam to the prophet Malachi, one could hardly pick a better man for the task of writing about the mystical union. If anyone is equipped, even in the relatively darker days of the Old Testament, to speak about union with God through the conscious activity of faith, it has to be David, the one who went through so much in his eventful pilgrimage through this world (I Chron. 29:15; Ps. 39:12), as recorded in his extensive outer history (I Sam. 16–I Kings 2; I Chron. 11–29) and his heart-felt Psalms which reveal the inner life of his soul.

The second question is, “Where?” Where was David when he penned the Psalm of union? For an Old Testament figure, David got around a lot, especially when he was chased from pillar to post over all sorts of terrain in the promised land: in forests and in wildernesses, in valleys and on hills, in fields and by rivers, in caves and around rocks. We see David in various towns in Israel, such as, Bethlehem, Gibeah, Ephesdammim, Ramah, Nob, Keilah, Carmel, Ziklag, Hebron, Jerusalem, Kirjathjearim, Bahurim, Mahanaim and Gilgal; as well as in other locations: his bedrooms, Saul’s and David’s palaces, God’s tabernacle and Araunah’s threshing floor. We behold David following his father’s sheep, Abner’s bier and Jehovah’s ark. He also visited Mizpeh of Moab and Rabbah of Ammon, besides many other places in connection with his foreign wars (II Sam. 8; I Chron. 18).

So where was David when he wrote Psalm 56? The answer is that David penned the Psalm of union in the land of the uncircumcised Philistines—of all places! He spoke about being united to the Lord of hosts in conscious faith while in enemy territory, not in the land then occupied by the 12 tribes. He wrote about being united to the Holy One of Israel in the land of Dagon, the Philistine fish god.

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David is teaching us that union with the Most High is our comfort over against all the oppressions of idolatry, even as our society is becoming more and more openly and aggressively pagan. For in our days, sadly, the Western world is degenerating to what it was before the gospel came to Europe and North America (and worse!), especially in its rebelliousness and its perverse views of sexuality.

The consolation for us is that we are united to God not only when we are having a wonderful time at a BRF conference, growing in our knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus and surrounded by fellow saints, or when we are reading an edifying Reformed book like this one. But we are also united to God in our daily activities in society and in the midst of the Babylon of this world, as David was in the land of the Philistines when he penned Psalm 56.

To go further, where in Philistia was David in Psalm 56? He was in one of the five cities of the Philistine Pentapolis. It was not Ashdod or Ashkelon or Ekron or Gaza. David was in Gath. The biblical book of I Samuel reveals that David stayed in Gath on two occasions: the former was a shorter visit (21:10-15) and the latter occupied a longer spell of 16 months (27:1-7). According to its heading, Psalm 34 is another Psalm which is set in Gath, and it was penned during David's first and ignominious time there.⁷ Psalm 56 does not specify to which period it belongs.

What is the most striking piece of biblical data about Gath? Gath was the hometown of the giant Goliath (I Sam. 17:4, 23)! Scripture mentions four other pagan giants who were Gittites (II Sam. 21:15-22; I Chron. 20:4-8).⁸ Gath must have provided a hostile and intimidating environment for a child of God like David!⁹

⁷ Psalm 34 speaks of Christ ("The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" v. 7) and His cross ("He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken;" v. 20; John 19:33-36) and the enjoyment of communion (which depends upon union) with God through faith ("O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him;" Ps. 34:8).

⁸ These five massive foes were defeated by heroic Israelite warriors.

⁹ Later King David's forces conquered Gath (I Chron. 18:1). God's gracious sal-

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Buzzwords in the world today include “safe places” or “safe spaces.” Of course, civility and decency should obtain in society, and public places ought to be free of violence and abusive language. However, the origin and much of the push for “safe spaces” comes from people who are promoting vile sexual sins, and who seek to exclude any criticism or even the presence of those who disapprove.¹⁰ The more that the world creates “safe places” for such wicked behaviour, the more spaces there are where Christians are not welcome and/or are silenced, and the more places we will avoid (cf. Eph. 5:11), for such locations are “safe” for sin and dangerous for believers.

But if we remove the anti-Christian and nasty political overtones or undertones from the terminology, the believer’s “safe space,” the place where God’s children feel secure, is being “in” or united to Jehovah. Psalm 91:1 identifies the most High as our “*secret place*.” Moses declared, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27)!

In Psalm 56, David is in an ungodly city that includes pagan giants, like New Testament believers in an aggressively secular university in the twenty-first century. The Spirit of God worked upon the soul of Jesse’s youngest son to write about union with God, because that is the bond and truth that he needed to draw upon in that dangerous environment. “*In God* have I put my trust,” David cries (v. 11). United to Him in the midst of his Philistine enemies, the Lord is his “safe space.” Our covenant God is that for us too, beloved!

vation even came to some people who were from Gath! In II Samuel, we meet Ittai the Gittite, David’s loyal friend and military captain, first, as he leads 600 men of Gath out of Jerusalem into exile with the king (15:18-22) and, second, as one of David’s three commanders in the battle against the usurper Absalom’s forces (18:1-12). Ittai appears to be a genuine servant of the Lord (not to mention at least some of his 600 Gittites). Did Jehovah use David in Ittai’s conversion? If so, what period is more likely than one of David’s spells in Gath?

¹⁰ The terminology of “safe places” or “safe spaces” is also used in a positive sense, for example, in providing help to those who have been raped or abused.

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Will Not and Will

In this Psalm of union, David tells us that there is something that he will not do and that there is something that he will do. He declares that he *will not* fear and that he will praise.

Often in the Psalms we read of David's battling against sinful fear through faith in God, as in Psalm 27:1: "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"¹¹ But Psalm 56 is distinctive in that here David calls to mind the mystical union, the truth that he is "in God." In this Psalm, David tells us that he faces "daily" attacks (vv. 1, 2, 5) from his "enemies" (vv. 2, 9).¹² However, he is not going to give way to terror, for he is in conscious union with his God (vv. 4, 10, 11) and is relying upon Him:

What time I am *afraid*, I will *trust* in thee (v. 3).

... *in God* I have put my *trust*; I will not *fear* what flesh can do unto me (v. 4).

In God have I put my *trust*: I will not *be afraid* what man can do unto me (v. 11).

This is David's believing reasoning: "I know that I am united to my God, so I will not be scared. Whenever I am aware of fear rising within me, I will trust in Jehovah, even in Philistia and in Gath, the city of giants. I will rely upon God. Therefore, I will not fear what man or mere flesh can do unto me. I will believe in Him and I will not be afraid." The sweet psalmist of Israel is an example to us all!

Besides telling us what he will not do, David also tells us what

¹¹ There are many other such references in the Davidic Psalms (e.g., Ps. 3:6; 18:4-6; 23:4; 27:3; 34:4; 64:1).

¹² The AV/KJV translation of Psalm 56:5 is, "Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil." Some claim that "every day" should be rendered "all the day." According to this reading, every time that David's enemies thought of him, it was with hatred, so that all day long they were seeking to come up with ways to twist what he said.

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he *will* do. As one united to the true and living God, David will praise His Word. Here David is not exulting in the work that the Lord has done but in the Word that He has spoken. By “his word” (vv. 4, 10), the son of Jesse refers to the inspired oracles of God, especially as they centre upon the promise to David himself of his deliverance and coronation, which is, essentially, the divine oath of his and our salvation in the Messiah. Regarding God’s sure and certain Word, David declares not merely that he is going to believe it or cling to it or obey it or speak of it. As one living out of his union with God and depending upon Him, David says, “I will *praise* his word” (v. 4). David is proclaiming, “I am going to extol, exalt and magnify God’s Word as a word of truth and mercy, a word that brings salvation and consolation to me from ‘my redeemer’ (Ps. 19:14).”

We need to see now that, in Psalm 56, David presents this in the form of a confession, even a promise or vow, three times:

In God *I will praise* his word (v. 4).

In God *will I praise* his word: in the LORD *will I praise* his word (v. 10).

Conscious of this union, David here is promising that he is going to praise the inspired Word of the Lord who delivered him from all his fears and misery. This is a good resolution for us, beloved!

For us too this is the way, the sole way, in which we worship *God*. We can only truly adore Jehovah knowing that we are united to Him. For our worship to be genuine, we must understand ourselves to be in union with the God whose praises we are singing. Otherwise, He is only a God afar off, not the One who comes to meet us in the gospel of free grace and who fellowships with us in Jesus Christ. Like David, we dedicate ourselves to Jehovah’s worship: “Thy vows are [binding] upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee” (v. 12).

Likewise, conscious union with the Triune God of heaven and earth is the only way in which we can praise *God’s Word*. If we do

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not understand that we are united and joined to the Lord, when we hear the Scriptures being expounded for us it is only sounds, just sentences, mere information. Without the mystical union, reading the Bible for oneself or hearing the preaching by a minister or sitting at the dinner table for family devotions is simply a matter of little black squiggles on a page or reverberations in our ears.

But indwelt by the Holy Spirit and joined to the Lord by a true faith, we know that the Word of God is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is alive to us for we are united to its Author. We are in Him and He is in us. Like holy David, the Christian promises, “In the LORD will I praise his word” (Ps. 56:10), except that today, unlike Jesse’s son, we possess and magnify the New Testament and *all* the 39 books of the Old Testament.

“In” and “For”

Apart from “in,” there is another preposition in Psalm 56 that is significant theologically. It is the word “for:” “God is *for* me” (v. 9). The statement that God is “for” us comes between the two clusters on union with Him, for it is sandwiched betwixt verse 4 and verses 10-11. David’s proclamation, “God is *for* me,” comes immediately before the second cluster, the three statements about union with Him in verses 10-11.¹³

If being *in* God means we are united to Him, God’s being *for* us tells us whose side we are on. “God is for me. He is on my side,” David asserts. By His almighty and irresistible grace, Jehovah has placed all His elect and redeemed people on *His* side, so that He is on *our* side and *for* us. Therefore, He will succour, support, defend and deliver all of His regenerated people who, by His Spirit, are fighting for His cause.

More and more people in Israel came to recognize that, even though David had been forced to flee from Saul, God was for

¹³ Similarly, in Romans 8, God is “for us” (v. 31), as those inseparably joined and united to our heavenly Father who loves us in Christ Jesus (vv. 35-39).

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him and on his side. Thus they increasingly supported the royal claims of Jesse's youngest son and sided with him. For example, at a key moment in David's rise to the throne, we read of Amasai's inspired proclamation that he and his forces are *for* David as those "on [his] side:"

Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and *on thy side*, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee (I Chron. 12:18).

Here is the connection in Psalm 56: I am "in" God *and* He is "for" me. We can even conclude, *since* I am "in God," God is "for" me; and *since* God is "for" me, I am "in God," because God is not "for" anyone who is not "in" Him. In the context of Psalm 56, David is confessing that he depends upon his union with Jehovah for he must have God "for" him. He needs God to be *for* him, because he has "many" "enemies" who "fight *against*" him (v. 2) and "all their thoughts are *against* [him] for evil" (v. 5). Especially at certain times, this is the Christian's experience: "The Lord of hosts must be for me and help me, because I have a lot of enemies and they are against me."

Since the merciful God is *for* David and he is *in* Him, all of his "wanderings" in Israel, Moab (I Sam. 22:3-4), Philistia and elsewhere are lovingly recorded by the Lord, and each and every one of David's many "tears" are stored in God's "bottle" and chronicled in His "book." Many of God's children have taken the Psalmist's words for their own: "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" (Ps. 56:8). The Psalm of union assures us that our "wanderings" are in Jehovah's "book" and our "tears" are in his "bottle," for He is for us and we are "in God!"