

Psalms 56-59 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "trusting God through tough situations". In this lesson we cover four psalms that were all written by David. These four all fit a common theme that says in effect, "When the going gets tough, how do we ask for God's help and what should we be doing to get ourselves through those situations?"
 - a) Hopefully, that should scare you enough to read further. ☺
2. It might help if I explain these four psalms in this lesson a little better:
 - a) David wrote Psalm 56, after an enemy of the Israelites captured him. (The Philistines.)
 - b) David wrote Psalm 57 while hiding in a cave when King Saul was trying to capture him.
 - c) David does not give any time reference to Psalm 58, but apparently it wasn't good. This psalm focuses on wicked rulers, whoever they were. David is quite literal in describing how he wants their lives to come to a horrible end right there on the spot.
 - d) David wrote Psalm 59 when Saul sent soldiers to David's house to go kill him.
 - e) In each of these psalms David feared for his life and prayed for God's help to get him through each of those situations. That is why these psalms are grouped together.
3. OK John, David lived about 3,000 years ago. What is the point for us here?
 - a) First of all, praying for God's protection does not mean we won't deal with problems or go through tough times more than once in our life. David is a man who regularly trusted in God yet David regularly found himself in tough situations.
 - b) What we find David doing in these situations is telling God, "All the stuff going on all around me is now Your problem. I don't know what to do next and I'm trusting You to help me. If it is Your will for me to live through this mess, let it be so. If it is Your will for me to die here, that is Your decision to make. I'll praise You no matter what."
 - c) In each of these situations David still had to make the best decision possible given the problems in front of Him. However, David gave the situation and the results to God and therefore, David didn't worry about the outcome. That is the lesson for all of us to apply.
 - d) Notice in each situation David did not say: "I give up, come and get me." In each situation David did his best to live another day and avoid being caught by his enemies. Trusting God is not about giving up. It is about putting the results of whatever happens in God's hands. It is about having the peace of knowing whatever does happen is God's will for that moment in time.
 - e) With that optimistic view of our (not David's, but our) future, let's start the psalms.
4. Psalm 56 title: For the director of music. To the tune of "A Dove on Distant Oaks." Of David. A *miktam*. When the Philistines had seized him in Gath.
 - a) The title of this psalm is a mixture of things we do know and don't know. Let me get the easy parts taken care of first: David wrote this to be sung, which is why, like many of the psalms there is comment that it was written for the Director of Music, whoever that was. It's kind of like David saying, "I wrote this, and I understand that God inspired me to write this and that it serves a greater purpose than just thinking my thoughts out loud."
 - b) The second thing we know is the word "miktam". As I've stated before, this untranslated word that simply means to "contemplate or think about what is being said". It is David's way of reminding us the reader to stop and contemplate what this psalm is saying.
 - c) Now comes the part where the meaning is lost. The title makes reference to the tune of "A Dove of a Distant Oaks". It could just have been some popular tune of David's time and he had that tune in mind when he penned these words. I personally wonder if that song reference about being "distant" refers to the fact that David was taken captive amongst foreign people and he feels distance from God. (It is just speculation. I don't know.)

- d) The final part of the title tells us when this was written: "When the Philistines had seized him (David) in Gath."
 - i) 1st Samuel Chapter 21 describes a time in David's life (long before he was king) when he was running from King Saul. David hid out amongst a foreign people occupying part of Israel called the Philistines. The 1st Samuel text just states that David went there to hid out. In this psalm title, it says David was seized.
 - a) I suspect that means David went to go live there, and some time later, the locals remembered how he used to lead Saul's army against the Philistines in the past. In that sense, David was seized.
 - ii) OK John, why is it important? At this moment David's was really frightened about what was going to happen to him. David took that fear and gave it to God. That is what David wants us to learn from this psalm. It is about taking our fears and saying to God, "I don't know what is going to happen to me. Help."
5. Psalm 56, Verse 1: Be merciful to me, O God, for men hotly pursue me; all day long they press their attack. ²My slanderers pursue me all day long; many are attacking me in their pride.
- a) The psalm opens with a request for mercy. If David was scared about being captured, you would think that David's first request would be for help. So why open this psalm with a prayer for God's mercy?
 - i) David understood that He is approaching a perfect God who cannot tolerate any sin whatsoever. (By the way, this took place many years before David was king and had the marital affair with Bathsheba.)
 - ii) If we are going to approach God for any request, we have to remember that we are sinful (i.e., imperfect) people. Reminding God and ourselves of that fact, is the reminder that before we can ask God for help, we need to seek "forgiveness".
 - iii) From the Christians standpoint, it is like praying, "Dear God, I seek Your help only because I trust in Jesus' full payment for my sins before I can ever ask anything else of You. Help me to turn from my sins so I can be pleasing to You."
 - b) OK, with that study of "mercy" all done, we can now focus on David's real prayer.
 - i) David mentions that men pursued him and attacked him. He wrote this psalm after he was captured and now he is recalling the slanderous accusations being made against him. The point is David is afraid for his very life. The text has not come to any discussion yet of what God or David should do about this situation, only that David is under attack at this point.
 - c) David is asking for God's help because he is in trouble. The point for us is that we can and should come to God for help when things are difficult (to put it mildly). We come to God based on His mercy in that despite our faults, He wants to help and guide us and He wants us to trust in Him to guide us through our problems.
6. Verse 3: When I am afraid, I will trust in you.
- a) Verse 3 is a powerful short little verse. It is a reminder that David, through all of his trust in God, still had real fears. If David can admit to God he was afraid, so can we.
 - b) It is not a sin to be afraid. It is a "waste of time" to just stand there and worry about our fears. God is more than willing to take over those fears and that is why it is essential for a believer to constantly and regularly turn those fears over to Him.
7. Verse 4: In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid.
- a) Back in Verse 3, David stated he was afraid. Now here in Verse 4 David is saying that he was not afraid. So what happened between Verses 3 and 4?
 - i) When David focused on his own circumstances, he was very afraid. It is only by trusting in the creator of the world who (by definition) knows all things that we can "throw away" our fears.

- b) Let me explain dealing with fears another way: The bible teaches that the world did not just create itself. There is something greater than the world that created this world. We call that "entity" who created everything God. If we are to escape out of this world and still live, we need to know what that entity (God) expects of us and wants from us.
 - i) That is why David says of God, "whose word I praise". When David is saying he is praising God's word, he means that God has revealed to mankind what He expects of us in order to spend eternity with Him. That requirement is loyalty, trust and obedience to what He demands of us. That is the God we trust in.
 - c) David's related point is because He can trust in that God who created everything and then with that knowledge, we don't need to have fear. We do not need to be afraid because we believe in a God that knows all things and He has a wonderful plan for eternity with us.
 - i) The worse thing that can happen to us in this life is to die. If we die, we trust in God to take care of those we love as well as those who want to hurt those we love. Even if we are tortured for the rest of our lives, how long is that period of time compared to eternity? That is why David could say he was not afraid of what was going to happen to him despite his circumstances.
8. Verse 4b: What can mortal man do to me? ⁵ All day long they twist my words; they are always plotting to harm me. ⁶ They conspire, they lurk, they watch my steps, eager to take my life.
- a) The rest of Verse 4 and the next three verses give the specifics of why David was afraid. He is saying, "Dear God, I know You know all things, but let me get off of my chest the specific's of my problems at this moment."
 - i) So why do we tell God the specific's of our problems if He knows all things? The answer is so that when God does rescue us out of our problems of the moment we can thank Him that much more for what is going to happen.
 - b) At that moment, David was scared for his life and there were people all around him who wanted him dead. Even if David believed he was anointed to be King of Israel one day, (See 1st Samuel 16:13) he still had no idea how he (or how God) was going to get him through this present circumstance. Therefore, all David could do was give the situation to God and say in effect, "This is now Your problem because I don't know how I am going to handle this."
 - c) Now let me personalize this: We don't know what God has planned for us in the future. We just know at times we are in big trouble and we are too scared to see beyond our present circumstances. The important point is about taking that fear and giving it to God. Our circumstances may be too much for us to handle, but it is not too big for God to deal with. That is the effective point here.
9. Verse 7: On no account let them escape; in your anger, O God, bring down the nations.
- a) Remember that the Philistines were holding David captive. This is a group of people, (a nation as the bible calls them) that lived near the Israelites. My question is why did David ask God to bring down the nations (notice the plural) and not just that one group?
 - i) I believe David understood the big picture in that there are whole nations who refuse to do God's will and don't trust in the God of the bible. David in this verse is writing beyond his present problems and is now generalizing to say in effect, may God bring to nothing the plans of all of those who oppose His will.
 - b) OK, so David asked God to stop the plans of evil around the world. It is now about 3,000 years later, and I am still dealing with evil in my life. Did this prayer fail or did it have a time stamp on it? ☹ The answer is that God allows evil not so that innocent people get hurt, but because it is the result of allowing free will to exist in this world.
 - i) The good news is that God will not allow evil plans to go on forever. Yes, even with that 3,000 year time delay, know that there is coming judgment final day. In the meantime, God asks us to pray to help us through whatever tough situation we are dealing with, mainly so that He gets the credit when we are rescued.

10. Verse 8: Record my lament; list my tears on your scroll-- are they not in your record?
- a) If you think David was in a happy mood, thinking that God would somehow rescue him, well, that is not exactly the case. One gets the impression from this verse that David was so scared, he was in tears.
 - b) David asks God here to "record his lament", which in effect means David is asking God to remember how much pain he is in at this time. This is David's way of saying, God, I know You love me and have great plans for my life. You are well aware of the pain and suffering I am dealing with at this time, just as You know all the times in the past where I have cried out to You in fear and sorrow. God I ask for Your help, not because I am a better person than the one trying to hurt me, but just because I trust in You.
11. Verse 9: Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me.
- a) Here's a question to ponder: How will David know if and when God has helped him? The answer for David is when his enemies have left after he asked for God to help here.
 - b) How do we know if and when God has rescued us from our problems and fears? When those fears are disappearing. In between the time I wrote the first few pages of this study and the last page, I was really sick and in a lot of pain. How do I know God got me through that pain? For starters, I feel better now. How do I know if it was just my body getting better on its own? For starters, I had people who just "happened to be there" when I literally fell faint and was about to pass out.
 - i) Just as I trust God got David through his problems, I can have confidence that somehow God will see me (and you) through whatever we are dealing with.
12. Verse 10: In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise-- ¹¹ in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?
- a) David wraps up this prayer (ok, we still two more verses after this), but my point is he is saying in effect, that I no longer have to be afraid of what is all around me. Whatever harm people do to me, can at the worst only last a lifetime and I know that somehow and somehow, God will see me through my present problems.
 - b) Let me also comment a little on David praising God's word. I don't think David kept copies of bible scrolls while he was running for his life. When David is praising "God's word", his point is that he is trusting in God's "word" that He will rescue him (and us) from harm either by leading us into the next life or by somehow seeing us through our present problems. David is thanking in effect that His promises to us are good.
13. Verse 12: I am under vows to you, O God; I will present my thank offerings to you. ¹³ For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.
- a) In the Old Testament, there was a specific ritual of showing thanks to God after He has rescued us out of a tough situation. It was one of the offerings described in Leviticus.
 - i) Does that mean when God does get us through our present problems, we have to go offer a lamb to show our gratitude? Of course not. God does not need animals as food. The Israelites offered animals because they were an animal-herding society and to give one of one's own animals was a way of saying, "Dear God, I thank You for getting me through my problems and just to show that I am grateful for that trust let me offer a part of what I have to show that I am trusting in You."
 - b) So when we get rescued, does this mean we owe God a special thank-you offering at church the next Sunday? No. It does mean is that God wants us to thank Him for seeing us through our problems. To offer something out of gratitude is not about making God happy, but about reminding ourselves that He helped us through our problems.
 - i) The related point is gratitude that doesn't cost us anything won't last very long. Finding some way of showing God our appreciation is a way of showing our appreciation that is greater than just taking a breath and saying thank you.

14. Psalm 57, title: For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A *miktam*. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.
- a) Like Psalm 56, there are things we do know and don't know about this title. We do know it was to be set to music. We do know David wants us to think about the implications of this psalm, which is what "miktam" essentially means.
 - b) We don't know what the tune "Do Not Destroy" means, just like the musical reference from Psalm 56. Since David is in fear of his life, my speculation is that this tune has to do with the idea of David expressing his fear of his life being destroyed at this point.
 - c) Finally we have a reference to David being on the run from King Saul and hiding out in a cave. Most likely, this refers to the first few verses of 1st Samuel Chapter 22, where David was hiding out in caves that exist in southern Israel out in the desert area.
 - i) In the last psalm, David was hiding out amongst the Philistines and David feared for his life. At this time, which is a separate incident from Psalm 56, once again, David feared for his own life and this time he was hiding in a cave.
 - ii) We do learn from David that when he is afraid he likes to take his problems and write them out in a psalm. That is David's way of giving God his problems.
 - d) Having this comment about where David was tells us that just because God rescued him out of his last problem (as described in the last psalm) does not mean our lives will now be problem free. The Christian life has been accurately described as one big test to help us grow in our trust in God. That is what David constantly had to deal with.
 - i) My favorite prayer in difficult situations is always, "Dear God, teach me the things You want me to learn from this situation." If we don't learn what God wants us to learn from a particular situation, then I find that God allows us to keep going through similar situations until we learn what God wants us to learn.
 - e) So what is the difference between this psalm and the last one if they are both about the fear of dealing with a bad problem at hand? A good clue is in both titles. Let me explain:
 - i) In the last psalm, David had a fear of being hurt by nonbelievers. The clue was that David was captured by non-Israelites (Philistines), which was part of the title.
 - ii) In this psalm, David is afraid of being captured by King Saul of Israel. This psalm deals with "political fears", or fears of what others who are believers or maybe just rivals for power can do to you. The point is, this psalm deals with political fears.
 - f) With that said, let me break down and actually go to Verse 1 at this point. ☺
15. Verse 1: Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.
- a) Psalm 57 starts off in a very similar fashion to Psalm 56. In both cases David was in trouble and pleads for God's mercy to protect him through the problem of the moment.
 - i) David is asking God for protection from a political rival (King Saul). David does not ask to take Saul's life, but just for His protection from Saul's soldiers.
 - ii) In this verse, David asks for God's mercy. Why can't we just pray for say God's mercy just once in our lives for all times? The point is that we have to deal with problems more than one time in our lives and we need to remind ourselves (not God) that we are dependant upon His mercy toward us.
 - b) Let me remind all of us why we should pray for God's mercy. The idea is to remember that we are imperfect people and we approach God not because we are better people than those who attack us, but simply because we appeal to God based on His goodness.
 - c) If we pray a prayer like Verse 1, does this guarantee God will rescue us? No, but He does promise to see us through our problems, whatever (or wherever) they might be.
 - d) One technical note before I move on: The verse asks for God's protection "under his wings". Obviously, God is not a big bird in which we can hide under his wings. Most people can visualize a baby bird hiding under the protection of its mother's wings and that is the visual picture of the type of protection David is trying to show us.

16. Verse 2: I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me.
- a) Often we forget the fact that if God knows all things, then He knows the outcome of the situation we are in before we ask for it. David can say that God's will is being fulfilled through whatever the outcome is, even though David has no idea what that is.
 - i) Asking God to fulfill His purpose in us, is praying that God's will be done in a specific circumstance. It is about us letting go of control of the outcome of a particular situation and trusting that result of that situation to God.
 - b) Suppose we pray about a certain situation and it still ends badly. In such situations, how can we be praying for God to "fulfill His purpose"?
 - i) At moments like that we need to remind ourselves of Romans 8:28. That verse says in effect that all things happen for good for those who love God. Note that this verse is only for believers and not for all people. We as believers have to accept the fact that it is God's will that some people go through disastrous times.
 - c) There is no way I can explain all the bad things that happen to all people. I just know that in the end, things work out well for those who trust in God. That is my way of saying Romans 8:28 is still in the bible despite whatever happens to us in our lives.
 - d) OK, it is time to stop depressing myself ☺ and get back to the verses.
17. Verse 3: He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; *Selah* God sends his love and his faithfulness.
- a) The first part of the verse says that God "sends" from heaven and saves me. My first question is what is God sending to save David and how can I get some of that?
 - i) What I suspect it means is that God is somehow orchestrating the entire situation to work out the way He wants it work out. It is noticeable to David that he is surviving through this situation based on the fact he knows God is working.
 - b) Have you ever looked back at some part of your life and realized that if it were not for the hand of God working, you or me would have not made it through that situation? I always believe it is easier to see the "hand of God" working in hindsight than in the present. If we know God has worked in our past, why do we have doubts of Him working at the present?
 - c) Finishing the verse, it says, "God sends His love and faithfulness". That is a poetic way of saying God will see us through our problems of the moment. Again, we may come out of that situation differently than how we visualize being rescued. The point of trusting God is about letting go of worrying about a situation and saying in effect, "OK God this is your problem. I don't know how or when I am going to get out of this mess, so I am letting go of the worrying here and trusting You."
18. Verse 4: I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts-- men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.
- a) It may help to remember that David was hiding out in caves. In David's time, a danger of entering a deep cave is that sometimes lions lived in those caves. David is comparing the fear of encountering a lion in his cave with the men who are trying to capture him.
 - i) David saying in effect, "Lord I need your help from whatever could be in this cave just as I need your protection from the men who are trying to find me in this cave. David goes on to say that such men that say bad things about him are not true."
 - b) OK, most likely, you and I reading this are not hiding out in a cave somewhere. Still, there may a time where we too, fear being caught for nothing we have done wrong. That is what David is dealing with at this time. The issue is not blame. The issue is God's protection through times where we truly don't know what to do next.
 - c) Remember that if we are living to make a difference for God, there are evil spiritual forces that want to prevent us from making that difference. As I like to say, if you don't believe the devil is real, try opposing him sometime and watch "things happen" that prevent us from being a good witness for God.

19. Verse 5: Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.
- a) This verse seems like a strange transition verse. In the last verse, David is saying in effect, "I am stuck in a cave in fear of my life and I need Your help God." Now here in Verse 5 David says in effect, "May God be exalted and let Your glory be all over the world".
 - i) I believe what David is saying in effect is, "Dear God, if it is Your will to rescue me, please do so because I have a lot of fears at the moment. If it is not Your will to rescue me, then I still will praise You as I still believe You rule over the world."
 - b) This verse is a prayer of surrender of the situation at hand. It is saying that God is in charge, God rules over the world, and God also is aware of my situation. I will let Him deal with it the way He wants to and on His timing. I will not worry about whatever happens, because it is now it is His problem to deal with and not mine.
20. Verse 6: They spread a net for my feet-- I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path-- but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah*
- a) After that positive previous verse, David goes back to the fact he is stuck in a cave. David lays out his actual fears before God. David fears that the soldiers who are after him will spread a net to capture him. David fears those soldiers digging a pit for him to fall in. Then David says, "they have fallen into that pit they have dug for me."
 - b) Did the soldiers who are after David actually spread a net or dig a hole to capture David?
 - i) Who knows? I think this is David just laying out his fears before God.
 - ii) A point here is that it is ok to share with God what we fear. God is not going to condemn us because we have specific fears in our life. By the way, this is not a lack of faith on David's part to have these fears. It is David's way of saying I know what Saul's men are capable of doing and I truly fear being caught by them.
 - c) OK John, how do I relate to this? This is about trust during difficult times. This is about telling God in effect, "I am here in this difficult situation and I don't know what to do next. I have all of these fears about (fill in the blank) and I don't know how to overcome those fears. Lord, help me to trust in you when I am in difficult situations and know that you have a plan for my life even (and especially) when people are trying to hurt me."
21. Verse 7: My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. ⁸Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. ⁹I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples.
- a) In the last few verses, David was laying out his fears of being caught to God as he was hiding in a cave. Now here in Verse 7, David is saying he will trust in God and he will sing and make music. To understand this, first I need to explain "steadfast". The idea of that word as it is used here is not that David does not have fears. It means that David is trusting in God no matter what happens in his present situation.
 - i) David's claims of praising God and making music is not about singing out loud in the cave and giving away his location to his enemies.
 - b) These verses are saying that David is confident that he will live another day, not get caught and have a reason to praise God for being victorious.
 - i) Verse 9 then says in effect, "If I end up being away from my people (the idea of "nations" is being away from Israel) I will still praise God wherever I am." David is asking God to rescue him and he will use that fact that he has lived through this trial to stop "wherever he lands" to praise God for the rescue.
 - c) Let me personalize this: When we are afraid, we need to tell God that we are still trusting in Him and His redemption. We know that if we die, in heaven we will praise His name. If we live through our own difficult situation, we will take the opportunity after it is over to praise Him for the rescue.

22. Verse 10: For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
¹¹Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth.
- a) David is ending this psalm by reminding himself that despite the fact he is stuck hiding in a cave, God's love is great and David has confidence that no matter what happens to him in this bad situation, he knows that God is faithful to those who trust in Him.
 - b) So why emphasize the fact that God rules over the whole earth? How is that relevant to the fact David is hiding out from Israelite soldiers (sent from Saul) trying to kill Him?
 - i) David not only has confidence that God will get him out of his present situation but that the same God who watches over his life is the same God that rules over the whole earth.
 - ii) On that positive thought let's move on to Psalm 58.
23. Psalm 58, title: For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A *miktam*.
- a) There is nothing new in the title we have not already covered in this lesson. We know that it was meant to be sung. Like the last psalm, David wants us to think about it, which is what "miktam" means. Also like the last psalm, it written to the tune, "Do Not Destroy".
 - b) The focus of this psalm is still on dealing with fears, but the perspective changes from "us" to "them". The focus is in effect on wicked rulers. The psalm is saying to those in charge, "Why are you (wicked rulers) acting so corruptly. Don't you people realize that you will be judged by God for your actions?"
 - i) In the last psalm, David focused on his fears he had while being on the run from King Saul. Here, David changes the focus from "me" to "them". It is like David saying, "OK, I know what is going to happen to me by trusting in God, but what about those wicked people that I am thinking about. What about their fate?"
24. Verse 1: Do you rulers indeed speak justly? Do you judge uprightly among men? ² No, in your heart you devise injustice, and your hands mete out violence on the earth.
- a) This psalm starts off harshly and focuses on those in position of power. In ancient Israel to "be in charge" and to "be a judge" was the same group or sometimes the same person. In ancient Israel the leaders of each town were also judges in criminal matters. In tougher cases, they were brought to the king to be judged.
 - b) David is accusing such judges of having a double standard. The idea is that those judges were not properly fulfilling their role and are committing injustice as judges.
 - c) OK John, so they had corrupt judges 3,000 years ago. How does that affect me?
 - i) Yes the plea is to those who judge today that they do what is right and that they personally act in a way that is pleasing to God in their role as judges.
 - ii) For the rest of us, the point is that such injustice does exist. While we as a society should do our best to stop such injustice, we have to accept the idea that such injustice exists and our peace only comes from trusting God and not trusting in the judgment of people.
 - d) Let me put it another way: If one goes to court, one always has to accept the possibility that one may lose even if we believe the facts are on our side. We can't always expect our leaders to judge the way we want them to. It is also a reminder that an internal sense of peace only comes through Jesus and not our judges.
25. Verse 3: Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.
- a) Is this verse saying that babies go down the wrong path in life? Of course not. The point is God sees all things and understands that the way we turn out in life is often based on how we grew up and the fact that some refuse to change from their early wicked ways.
 - b) If God knows that some people are corrupt (effectively) from birth, why doesn't God just wipe out such people and prevent the damage that they could do? The short answer is that we would not have the free will to choose to do "good over evil" unless evil is allowed to exist in this world.
 - c) Meanwhile the wicked are still in big trouble in the next few verses. ☺

26. Verse 4: Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears,
⁵that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be.
- a) In these two verses, David is comparing the damage done by wicked rulers to that of deadly snakes. Verse 5 essentially says a "snake charmer" can make a snake dance, but that snake charmer can't prevent them from being deadly snakes in the first place.
 - b) Obviously, the verse is not talking about literal snakes, but evil people. This psalm does not give any clues to any specific people that David knew, so all we can do is apply it to wicked (non God-fearing) people that have given some amount of power.
 - i) If anything is to be learned here, it is that our trust is in God and not in any group that is in power over our nation. Evil rulers can do a lot of damage to our lives and if possible we have to work to stop such people from having power. In the meantime, one has to trust God for comfort when such people are in power.
27. Verse 6: Break the teeth in their mouths, O God; tear out, O LORD, the fangs of the lions!
- a) Does David ever get angry at what wicked people do? The answer is yes and Verse 6 is my proof. David does not say, "You people are doing what is wrong and God is going to send you to hell one day". Instead David asks God to "smash their teeth in". I don't think David is being literal, but just expressing his frustration at dealing with such bad leaders.
 - b) Back in Verse 5 David compares bad rulers to poisonous snakes. Here in Verse 6, he compares such people to having the fangs (teeth) of lions. David truly fears what evil rulers can do. He takes that fear and says to God in effect, "Wipe them out here and now".
 - i) Before I answer the question of why does God allow such people to continue to rule, David has three more verses of venting his frustrations to God.
28. Verse 7: Let them vanish like water that flows away; when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted. ⁸Like a slug melting away as it moves along, like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun. ⁹ Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns-- whether they be green or dry--the wicked will be swept away.
- a) If asking God to "smash their teeth in" wasn't strong enough in terms of letting God know one's frustration in dealing with bad leaders, I present these three verses:
 - i) Verse 7 asks God to make them vanish like water flowing away. That verse then asks that the arrows they shoot be "blunted" so no one is hurt by the arrows.
 - ii) Verse 8 describes a moving snail that literally melts as it walks down the road.
 - iii) Verse 8 then describes a woman giving a miscarriage of a baby.
 - iv) Verse 9 says in effect may this happen before the "heat of the day" comes.
 - v) All of this ends with the request to have the wicked be "swept away".
 - b) The main point is that evil rulers exist, and David is crying out to God to "stop them here and now". So the big question is really, "Why does God allow such people to exist?"
 - i) In effect, the answer comes in the next two verses. In Verse 10 David realizes that God works on his timing and that He does not allow evil to go on forever.
 - c) So if God works on His timing, why did David "waste" four verses asking Him to act now and describe the destruction of evil people? One reason David vented is so that we can relate to his frustration. Most adults know the feeling of "I'm being hurt by others and I want God to wipe out such evil people here and now."
 - i) Let me tell you about my day yesterday: I had a client of mine bounce a large check on me. I talked to an old friend who is in major debt and his oldest son has some pretty bad medical conditions due to hit by a bus.
 - ii) I have no idea how God is going to solve these problems, but this morning in prayer I effectively said, "I don't want to worry about these things. I will take the necessary footsteps to deal with my problems, but whether or not I get the results I want is Your (God's) problem and not my problem."
 - iii) A related point is often we don't listen to God until after we vent our frustrations. Such venting is often necessary before we can say to God, "This is your problem."

29. Verse 10: The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. ¹¹ Then men will say, "Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth."
- David ends this prayer of "venting out his frustration about the wicked" by saying in effect that those who trust in God will win one day.
 - The next part of Verse 10 says that those who trust in God will bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. I have no idea how literally to take that verse or whether or not there is any historical truth to the notion in ancient battles of washing one's feet in the blood of those who were defeated. However, here is what I do know: There is coming a day of victory for those who trust in God.
 - OK, let me squeeze in one more psalm as it fits well into the theme of this lesson.
30. Psalm 59, title: For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy." Of David. A *miktam*. When Saul had sent men to watch David's house in order to kill him.
- By this time I no longer have to discuss the usual title stuff, so I won't. I do want you to notice that the tune of this psalm "Do Not Destroy" is the same tune as Psalm 57 and 58. Either David really liked that tune, or there is some message to that title. As I have stated, I suspect that phrase means, "Help me God, I'm in trouble and don't let those who want to do me harm destroy me." This is David's way of saying "Do not destroy me" (i.e., let me die) here during my time of great difficulty."
 - This psalm also ties another story in David's life. This refers to 1st Samuel, Chapter 19, Verses 11-17. This is another time that King Saul wanted to kill David and he had to run for his life from the king. As we should know by now, the scope of the psalm is bigger than this one incident and it teaches us about trusting God in tough times.
31. Verse 1: Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me.
- Remember David is writing this verse about other Israelite soldiers sent by the king to kill him. David is pleading in effect, "I am not a better person (less sinful) than my enemies, but I just ask that it be God's will that I live through this event."
 - Prayer is about getting God's will done. It is ok to ask for anything in prayer, but one must remember that to accept whatever happens at that point is accepting His will.
 - David in this story still ran for his life. This is another example that giving situations to God does not mean we just "sit there and take it". If we can, we should escape trouble.
32. Verse 2: Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men.
- So were the soldiers sent from King Saul evildoers and bloodthirsty men? I don't know. The soldiers were following orders to kill David, so in that sense they were after blood. However, those soldiers are just following orders.
 - Does this mean that David was just "blowing off steam" about how bad the situation is?
 - It could be. The text in 1st Samuel also said that an evil spirit overcome Saul when he gave the order to kill David. I don't know if David was aware of that fact, just of the fact he had to run for his life at this point.
 - The point is David had to run for no particular crime he committed. Therefore, whatever forces are trying to kill him can be called "bloodthirsty".
33. Verse 3: See how they lie in wait for me! Fierce men conspire against me for no offense or sin of mine, O LORD. ⁴ I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Arise to help me; look on my plight!
- These verses continue the theme of "I have done no wrong, yet people want me dead."
 - It is as if David is thinking, "Later I can stop and analyze what I could have done differently. Right now, I just need God's help as people want me dead."
 - This reminds me a lot of Paul in the book of Acts. There were a number of occasions when Paul had to literally run for his life as opposed to being a witness to others. There is a time for both actions in our lives and we need God's discernment and help when those times come when we just have to flee from a situation.

34. Verse 5: O LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, rouse yourself to punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked traitors. *Selah*
- a) All of a sudden, David "increases the scope" of this psalm and is no longer just talking about himself being on the run. Now David says in effect, "Dear God, punish all of those nations that show no mercy to wicked traitors."
 - b) So if David is trying to escape from Saul, why have this reference to the nations and to traitors (to God's people)?
 - i) Commentators speculate that David believes King Saul is at that moment is acting no better than the nations that oppose Israel. In that sense, David saw Saul as a traitor for wanting him dead.
 - c) OK John, no one is trying to kill me at this moment, how do I relate to this?
 - i) Of course we can always pray for other believers who are fearing for their lives. There are always Christians around the world facing persecution at this time.
 - ii) The important thing is to know that God does care for us and at those moments in time when we need to run away from a situation, know that God is with us.
35. Verse 6: They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ⁷ See what they spew from their mouths-- they spew out swords from their lips, and they say, "Who can hear us?"
- a) So if David was on the run for his life, how did he know the soldiers looking for him were "snarling like dogs, prowling around the city"? I suspect it was just David's logic. If soldiers are looking for someone who is not home, they would be checking around town.
 - i) Verse 7 refers to the speech of those who want to harm David. When the text says "swords from their lips", I'm sure David was thinking these soldiers who's order it was to kill David, were saying mean things about him.
 - ii) When the text says, "Who can hear us"? I suspect it was about the effort the soldiers made to talk to possible friends of David to ask his whereabouts.
 - b) OK John, so soldiers were making an effort to find David. They were just doing what they were ordered to do. What makes this so bad?
 - i) The sin is not following orders. The sin is trying to condemn an innocent man.
 - ii) A point for us is to think when we are following orders is to consider whether or not such orders are pleasing to God. David is begging God for the soldiers to consider what they are being ordered to do.
36. Verse 8: But you, O LORD, laugh at them; you scoff at all those nations.
- a) Is God literally laughing at those soldiers? No. I think David's point is those who are doing evil acts will be held accountable to them.
 - b) I suspect that David is not increasing the scope to those nations that hate Israel, but is just comparing the actions of these soldiers to being "like" Israel's enemies in going after him.
 - c) OK John, once again, I am not on the run. How does this affect me? It is to remember that God looks at the efforts of those who are trying to harm "one of His" and that such people will be held accountable for their actions.
37. Verse 9: O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, ¹⁰ my loving God. God will go before me and will let me gloat over those who slander me.
- a) First let me comment on the verse numbers. Where Verse 10 begins seems strange. Remember the verse numbers and the chapter numbers are not part of the original text.
 - i) Whoever put the number "10" here, associated the last phrase with the next sentence. It is saying, "The God who loves me will not allow the "evil" to gloat."
 - b) The point is David is not trusting in his ability to outrun the soldiers. David is trusting in God to protect him while the soldiers are after him.
 - c) David is counting on God to be victorious and David knows that he will one day (either on earth or in heaven) "gloat over" the fact that David won through God's help.
 - d) How do I know it is God's will for me to live through what I am dealing with right now? We don't. We just trust in God through our problems and the results are up to Him.

38. Verse 11: But do not kill them, O Lord our shield, or my people will forget. In your might make them wander about, and bring them down. ¹² For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, ¹³ consume them in wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob. *Selah*
- a) Notice in Verse 11, David does not ask for the untimely death of those soldiers. Yet by Verse 13, he asks God to "consume them until they are no more." So what is he saying?
 - i) David is angry about those soldiers trying to catch him and he considers it a sinful act because he has done nothing to deserve this death sentence. (King Saul wanted David dead only because he understood that God had called David to be the next king and somehow an evil spirit haunted him. See 1st Samuel 19:9.)
 - b) So what is David saying in effect in these verses? First of all, it is plea for help for David's life. I suspect the idea of being "consumed" is for the soldiers to be aware of what they are doing wrong. I don't know if the word "consume" in Verse 13 refers to the soldier's death (that would be a contradiction to Verse 11), but I suspect what David desires is not only his life to continue, but that God's will be done through those who are trying to kill him.
 - c) Praying for God's will is more than praying for our own safety. It is praying for God's will to rule over where we live. It is similar to the idea of praying for peace for our country or just our city. It is never God's will for innocent people to get hurt and it is possible we can prevent such actions by praying for our area.
 - i) Time for a quick story before I wrap up this lesson. I remember reading about a priest in Central America (I believe that is where it was) in a town that was having a high number of murders. That priest started praying daily and publicly for peace in that town. Soon others joined him. Before he knew it, the murder rate dropped dramatically with no explanation other than the prayers offered up.
 - ii) Does that mean God will cut down the murder rate in our town if we pray like that? I don't know God's will. I just know that in this case, it did make a difference when someone who did want peace in his town to cry out to God for help.
39. Verse 14: They return at evening, snarling like dogs, and prowl about the city. ¹⁵ They wander about for food and howl if not satisfied. ¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.
- a) These last few verses compare and contrast the difference between the soldiers trying to find David and what he was actually doing at this time. The point is while the soldiers desperately searching for David and they were "howling in effect" as they can't find him.
 - i) Meanwhile David is praising God for his protection during this time.
 - b) OK John, so David was winning and the soldiers were losing this battle. How does any of that ancient history affect me and my life?
 - i) The point of this story and of this lesson is that when we are in trouble, God can and does (if it His will) rescue us out of problems no matter how impossible the situation may look to you and me. It is about having trust in God through tough times and remembering that He does have a wonderful plan for our lives.
40. On that happy thought, I'll end in prayer. Father, there are times in our lives where we face real danger and bad problems. Help us to remember that we don't get through those problems by trusting in our own strength and abilities, but by trusting in You to see us through them. Help us to remember in tough times to approach You, ask for Your mercy (for our own sins) and ask for Your help as it is Your desire to be glorified through our lives. Help us to make a difference for You in all that we do and ask for Your protection from those who wish to harm us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.