

# Psalm 52

**Introduction** – The events inspiring this Psalm are quite a bit earlier than our previous Psalm. David had fled from Saul who was seeking to kill David. David came to Nob where he received bread and Goliath's sword from Ahimelech the priest who knew nothing of the falling out between David and Saul. Doeg, an Edomite and Saul's chief of the herdsmen, was there and witnessed this. Later, when Saul was bemoaning David's supposed persecutions (1 Sam 22:8), Doeg saw his opportunity to gain the king's favor and told the king he had seen Ahimelech giving help to David. Saul summoned the priest who answered him bravely that he thought David was in the king's service. But Saul ordered the priest and all under him to be slaughtered. But Saul's men refused to kill the priests, so Saul ordered Doeg to do it. Doeg promptly did so, slaying 85 unarmed priests and then sacking the city of Nob. One priest, Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech, escaped, ran back and told David who then put Abiathar under his care. This story is recorded in 1 Sam 21-22.

We have two responses from David. When he first heard this horrible news, he said, *"I knew that day, Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house"* (1 Sam 22:22). The other is this Psalm, this meditation on the kind of man that Doeg is, one who carves out his career by slander and intrigue. In the Psalm, David contrasts the brevity of these types of worldly successes to the eternal goodness and victory of God and our necessary response to trust our care to Him just as Abiathar fled to David and found refuge there. You might even imagine David singing this song to Abiathar, and to all who wonder at the seeming success of the wicked at our expense.

**The Boast of Evil Men** (vv1-4) – There is a great contrast in David's setup here in verse 1: the empty boasting of evil men who think themselves so mighty and the everlasting covenant loyalty (Hebrew: *"hesed"*) and goodness of God. In many parts of life's story, it appears that the wicked are winning. In fact, their murder, rape, and pillage are real and costly. Nevertheless, it and they are but vapor in time and space compared to the enduring goodness of our victorious God.

They boast in their evil because of their evil hearts (Matt 15:19). And out of those hearts flow destructive words like a barber's razor deceitfully turned on your neck (v2). "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me" is not always true. This was the experience of Jesus (Matt 26:59), Stephen (Acts 6:11-13), and Paul (Acts 24:1), and of course Ahimelech.

They not only do evil, they prefer it over good, and lying rather than speaking righteousness (v3) which is the nature of fallen man (Rom 1:25). *"Strikingly at odds with today's popular bias against 'demonizing the enemy,' this psalm presents a simple but stark contrast between good and evil, in which the 'bad guy' really does appear quite bad"* – Reardon. Lying and false accusations are natural to them because they are of their father, the devil (John 8:44, Rev 12:10, 22:15).

And while this is the nature of the fallen man and not the regenerate, we are still warned that the use of our tongue is always powerful, either one way or another, either for evil or for good (James 3:6-9).

**The Destruction of the Destroyers** (vv5-7) – This is how all good stories go because this is how The Story goes. Saul, the source of wickedness behind the murder of the priests, would one day be put down and David would take the throne. Judas the betrayer, along with the false teachers and accusers in Jesus' day would one day be cut off for their murder of Jesus and the Son of David would rise to His eternal throne. And all such stories occur because God promised that the Seed of the woman would crush the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15, Col 1:13-15, Rom 16:20).

There are four verbs in verse 5 that describe what God will do to Doeg, along with all such wicked men. They are translated here as destroy (pull down and break in pieces), take away (to sweep away), pluck out (by twisting), and root out (up out of the land of the living). God shall do this, and it is hard to make their coming desolation any clearer.

When we are delivered and when our enemies are put down by God, we are to "see" and "fear" (v6, cf. Psalm 40:3). It should sober us all to realize how greatly God hates all sin, including our own. At the same time there is a great shout of relief, laughter, at the merciful victory of our God for us (v6-7). Imagine how Mordecai felt as he witnessed Haman hanging on the very gallows that Haman had constructed for Mordecai (Esther 7:7-10).

During Jesus' ministry, He warned unbelieving Israel of just such a judgment to come upon them in that generation for the crucifixion of the Messiah (Matt 24:2, 34), which is why Psalm 2 speaks of such laughter at the betrayal of God's Son (Psalm 2:1-9). The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was the visible sign of the destroying, taking away, plucking out, and rooting out unbelieving Israel from the covenant (Rev 16:5-7, 18:20, 19:1-2). Doeg was a dead man walking. Saul was a dead man walking. And Israel, having put Jesus to death, was a dead people walking. For us, it is solemn laughter, as I said, for we must continue in faith and holiness, lest something worse befall us (Rom 11:19-22).

**Life in the House of God** (vv8-9) – Which is why we must be like David, flourishing in the house of God, trusting in His mercy alone, praising Him forever because of what He has done, and waiting with all of the saints together on God's Name and all that Name promises, because it is good. These lines are much like Psalm 1 where the godly man is contrasted to the ungodly who is like chaff which the wind drives away. *"He was in the house of God, they were in the world; he was as a fruitful olive tree, they were as barren and unprofitable wood; he was to be daily more and more strengthened, established, settled, and increased, they were to be cast down, broken, swept away, and extirpated: and all this, because he had trusted in the mercy of God; they in the abundance of their riches"* – Horne.

This Psalm does not promise that believers will always enjoy outward prosperity or will always succeed against the designs of the Doegs, Sauls, and Judas's of the world. What it does promise is that despite earthly trials, the man who delights in the Lord and in His house receives a life from heaven that enables him to abound in blessing in all seasons. *"This is the blessed life, and any of us may have it – in any circumstance, in clear skies or dark, to the glory of God and in the power of His grace"* – Phillips.

Like David, learn to walk by faith and read the story you are in, the story God is writing.

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