



## Psalm 52 - Judgement on the Deceitful

To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

### Introduction

This psalm enables the faithful to develop confidence in God's care and protection, particularly when surrounded by ruthless enemies. The title sets the psalm during David's flight from King Saul (1 Samuel 21:1-7), which led to the slaughter at Nob of the priests who had helped David (1 Samuel 22:9-19). Doeg's report put the priests' hospitality to David in the worst light; when none of Saul's Israelite men would strike the priests down, Doeg willingly did so. He is thus an example of the enemies that the faithful might face.

The terrible events that prompted this chapter are recorded in 1 Samuel Chapters 21 and 22. Doeg informed Saul regarding David's presence at the tabernacle of God and regarding the help he had received from the priest there. In an evil and paranoid response, Saul sent Doeg to kill the priests and others at the tabernacle, and Doeg did, 85 people in total (1 Samuel 22:18-19).

Although the condemnation of Doeg in this psalm is strong, it can be sensed it would be stronger in light of the mass-murder he committed. Yet this is David's contemplation upon the incident, a careful examination of the root and end of Doeg's evil.

### Psalm 52:1-4 - The Gloating Evildoer

This section has the speech of the enemy in view, as can be seen from boast (v.1), tongue (v.2), lying (v.3), and words (v.4). However, the speech of this enemy is not only false in itself, it is using falsehood to plot the destruction of the faithful. The most important answer to such evil is the confidence that the steadfast love of God endures all day long.

- <sup>1</sup> Why do you boast, O mighty one,  
of mischief done against the godly?  
All day long <sup>2</sup> you are plotting destruction.  
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,  
you worker of treachery.
- <sup>3</sup> You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking the truth. Selah
- <sup>4</sup> You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.

### Psalm 52:1-4

Why do you boast, O mighty one. David thought of Doeg the Edomite and the evil report he brought to King Saul. He thought not only of the report itself, but also in the boast and joy Doeg took in delivering the message.

Your tongue is like a sharp razor. Since this psalm concerns the evil report of Doeg, David mentions the destruction that came from what Doeg said. There was an evil heart, mind, and life directing that tongue to work like a sharp razor, working deceitfully but it was all evident by what Doeg said. The destruction brought by Doeg's evil report was real and terrible. 1 Samuel 22:18-19 reveals that he murdered 85 people, many of them priests, at the tabernacle of God at the city of Nob.

**James describes the destructive nature of the tongue:** <<*So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison*>> (James 3:5-8).

You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking the truth. David here addressed Doeg's wicked heart and mind. The destruction of these razor-sharp words were not an accident or out of character. Some people love evil, and some people love to lie. Doeg fulfilled both aspects. He loved the destruction his devouring words brought: <<*For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed*>> (John 3:20). David had done some wrong at the tabernacle of God at the city of Nob; he did lie to the priest Ahimelech. David did own up to his aspect of the responsibility in the matter: <<*David said to Abiathar, 'I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite*

*was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I am responsible for the lives of all your father's house'>> (1 Samuel 22:22). Yet in this psalm he wisely and properly did not blame himself for the massacre of the priests there. This was the work of a man who loved evil. There remain such men in the world.*

**This is contrary to the will of God who calls for people to do good rather than evil: <<Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph>> (Amos 5:14-15).**

Selah, used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in Habakkuk, has never been fully understood because the Hebrew root word is undefined. Many take it to be an instruction related to either the music, such as an interlude, or the cadence of the song, e.g. stop and reflect.

### Psalm 52:5-7 - But God Will Deal with You in the Sight of All

The faithful person, the righteous of v.6, who will trust in God unlike the enemy (v.7), is confident that he is always safe. On the other hand, the enemy is clearly presented as an enemy of both God's covenant and his faithful people (v.7), and this is the reason he plots such evil; it is only a matter of time until this enemy falls into disaster at God's own hands.

- <sup>5</sup> But God will break you down for ever;  
he will snatch and tear you from your tent;  
he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

### Psalm 52:5

God will break you down for ever. Because the goodness of God endures forever (v.1), Doeg and his kind would be destroyed forever. He will not always allow this kind of destructive lie to rule the day.

For emphasis and for the sake of good poetry, David used four vivid images of judgement against wicked men like Doeg. The wicked will:

- Be demolished (break you down).
- Be snatched up like a coal from a fire (he will snatch), <<*I overthrew some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a brand snatched from the fire; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord*>> (Amos 4:11), <<*And have mercy on some who are wavering; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies*>> (Jude 22-23).
- Have their abode taken away (tear you from your tent).

- Be uprooted like a tree (uproot you), <<*The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case*>> (Deuteronomy 29:28).

He will snatch and tear you from your tent. David prophesied the judgement of God against Doeg. Not only would he be cast out of his house (tear you from your tent), but also from the land of the living. Doeg was destined for death.

<sup>6</sup> The righteous will see, and fear,  
and will laugh at the evildoer, saying,  
<sup>7</sup> ‘See the one who would not take  
refuge in God,  
but trusted in abundant riches,  
and sought refuge in wealth!’

### Psalm 52:6-7

The righteous will see, and fear, and will laugh at the evildoer. When the coming judgement against Doeg happens, the people of God will notice it and it will cause them to honour and reverence God. It will also make them laugh in satisfaction at the destruction of such an evil man: <<*The righteous see it and are glad; the innocent laugh them to scorn, saying, “Surely our adversaries are cut off, and what they left, the fire has consumed”*>> (Job 22:19-20).

See the one who would not take refuge in God. Previously David speaks about Doeg’s sins of destructive and deceitful words and of loving evil and lying. Here he exposed an associated sin, a failure to trust God and the trust of great riches instead. People are often drawn to evil and lying because they fail to trust that God can and will work through goodness and truth. They lie to themselves, saying that they must cut these corners, work this evil, or promote this lie because it is the only way to get things done. The true advice is: <<*Agree with God, and be at peace; in this way good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth, and lay up his words in your heart*>> (Job 22:21-22).

In writing trusted in abundant riches, David may point to something only implied in the 1 Samuel Chapters 21-22 account: that Doeg did this for the sake of riches, either immediate or eventual. For the sake of money or influence with the king he murdered 85 people. 1 Samuel Chapter 22 indicates that Doeg did this to gain the favour of Saul and the favour of a king could be a path to significant riches.

### Psalm 52:8-9 - I Am Safe in Your Keeping, O God

This section develops more fully the confidence that v.1 hinted at. In contrast to the wicked who are ‘uprooted’ (v.5), the faithful (v.9) will be a green olive tree,

an image of vitality and fruitfulness: <<*The Lord once called you, 'A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit'; but with the roar of a great tempest he will set fire to it, and its branches will be consumed*>> (Jeremiah 11:16), and: <<*His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon*>> (Hosea 14:6).

In contrast to the enemy who trusts in the abundance of his riches (v.7), the faithful trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever (v.8). The prospect that God will bring judgement upon the enemies enables the faithful to wait for God's name, i.e. for God to vindicate his name by protecting those who trust in him: <<*'Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'*>> (John 12:12). Thus they need not be consumed with thoughts of vengeance.

- <sup>8</sup> But I am like a green olive tree  
in the house of God.  
I trust in the steadfast love of God  
for ever and ever.
- <sup>9</sup> I will thank you for ever,  
because of what you have done.  
In the presence of the faithful  
I will proclaim your name, for it is good.

#### Psalm 52:8-9

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God. David's run-in with Doeg happened at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 21:1-7). Perhaps there he saw a healthy green olive tree that was even more blessed because of where it was planted in the house of God. This blessedness came to David because he could honestly say I trust in the steadfast love of God for ever and ever. Psalm 92:12-13 may indicate that there were trees at or near the house of God and likens them to the faithful: <<*The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God*>>. This may have been particularly true for some of the places where the tabernacle was set up.

I will thank you for ever, because of what you have done. Doeg's evil had not yet gone away but David could praise God in the confidence of faith that can say, "you have done it". The evil of man had not made him lose confidence in God and in the truth that God's name is good, his character and entire being: <<*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever*>> (1 Chronicles 16:34).