

Inspired by a particularly vicious example of betrayal, Psalm 52 explores how malicious boasting and lying against God’s anointed king lead to eternal ruin. But patience, trust, and holy laughter as replies of the righteous lead to eternal security. Repent of all idolatrous trust and seek your security in God alone.

Introduction – God gave us both Psalms 51 & 52 to teach us complementary lessons about his steadfast love. Together they’re like a double-edged sword that cuts both ways ([Ecclesiastes 3:1, 3](#)).

Background – Superscription: the story when Doeg the Edomite came and told King Saul that David had come to the house of the priest Ahimelech (1 Samuel 21-22). Remember the context in Book 2 of the Psalter this four-psalm unit of psalms. It’s hard to choose a more evil OT candidate for Israel’s mighty enemy than pompous, murderous Doeg. Whereas David the anointed king represents the righteous and faithful who repent of their sins and trust in God to save, Doeg the Edomite represents the satanic, the evil, the wicked mighty man who refuse to repent and will fall from the highest heights to the lowest depths.

I. The Temporal Security of the Evil One

A. *The haughty power of greedy opportunism (vv. 1-2)*

David is writing a *maskil* (a teaching psalm) that reveals the imaginary conversations he’s been having with Doeg. Verse 1 is dripping with sarcasm. David the mighty warrior mocks how the evil one boasts in the slaughter of an entire town. While Doeg bided his time before pouncing, David says, “your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit” (v. 2). When that time did arrive and Doeg sensed he could seize fortune, glory, and a promotion in King Saul’s service, he opened his mouth and slashed his razor tongue for blood. Oh how the evil one is haughty, boasting, so proud of himself and drunk on the dream of his own power.

B. *The hearty power of deceitful speech (vv. 3-4)*

Jesus said it’s not what goes into a person that defiles, but what comes out of a defiled heart (Matthew 15:17-19). That is certainly true, and Jesus wants us to understand a defiled heart is the source of what makes a person do evil things. In Psalm 52 David adds a complementary truth. When a person speaks evil out of his evil heart, it tends to have a further degrading effect on the heart. The man who lies to hurt someone who he despises will quickly fall in love with his words as he sees his evil desire come to fruition. A violent razor-sharp tongue is super-harmful to others, but deceitful speech is even more destructive to the speaker. How so? It breaks the heart’s ability to function as a moral compass.

II. The Eventual Ruin of the Evil One

A. *God will utterly rout the evil, mighty one (v. 5)*

Verse 5 describes a three-step humiliation God will inflict on the Doegs of this world. First, “God will break you down forever.” God will pull him down forever, break him down, tear him down—the language of judgment descending swiftly to absolutely crush him (cf. Leviticus 14:45; Psalm 147:6; 2 Samuel 22:48). Second, “God will snatch and tear you from your tent.” God will snoop him up in the palm of his hand and rip the man’s clinging hands away from his house (Job 18:14). Third, “God will uproot you from the land of the living.” Like a rotten tree plucked out of the ground, the place of rootedness and life. The distress that will eventually fall on the evil mighty man is increasingly radical in a literal sense—working its way down to the roots. Can you imagine the pathetic picture in your mind? What do you see? How does your heart respond?

B. The righteous shall see, fear, and even laugh! (vv. 6-7)

1. Some people would rather not face the horrors of this world, the evil that resides in the hearts of men, and the violence inflicted on the innocent. But the righteous don't look away. They see! They refuse to ignore, to excuse, to keep a safe and secure emotional distance. And when the righteous see, they don't become puffed up in pride and self-righteousness, as if God would never punish us because we're not THAT bad. No, the righteous are not self-righteous, because they respond in fear. The righteous look at the smoldering pile of ashes where the evil one once stood and are filled with awe and wonder at the justice and power of God Almighty.

2. Lest we gloat, boast, and inadvertently fall into the same trap as the evil, mighty one, we need to consider what it means to see, fear, and laugh. If we won't laugh today when divine judgment falls on the wicked because we see ourselves as more spiritually mature than our forebears, then we are spiritually out of touch from Spurgeon, Calvin, Luther, Augustine, David, and God himself (Psalm 2:4). So rather than feigning a holier-than-thou attitude, listen carefully to verse 7 as it gives us a better response—the holy laughter of the righteous (v. 7). God says, “I see your pomp and arrogance and your trust in abundant wealth, but it won't save you, so repent and turn to me as Savior!” In Psalm 49 God says turn from your sin and in Psalm 52 Doeg gives us a terrible response. Doeg's unrepentance is so foolish, so evil, and so self-destructive it is laughable.

III. The Eternal Security of the Righteous One

A. Like an olive tree nourished by God himself, forever trust in his covenant love (v. 8)

Olive trees are evergreen, hearty, fruitful, and long-lasting, known to live for hundreds of years when cared for, with an average lifespan of 500 years and some living for millennia. Note olive trees were not actually planted in the temple courts. So it makes more sense to take the image in reverse order—the psalmist says he is safe and secure and flourishing in God's presence, somehow like a green olive tree. Unlike the wicked powerful ones, the righteous will not be uprooted out of the land of the living, but instead will be planted and rooted in God's temple, confident and secure forever and ever. For Christians, the language clearly points to eternal life in heaven, to the New Jerusalem that is above, and to the eternal temple which is Christ (John 2:21).

B. Give thanks for what God has done, and let us forever wait patiently for his name (v. 9)

Psalm 52 concludes with 2 vows. “I will thank you forever” and “I will wait for your name.” Notice he vows to thank God *before* he can see the future demise of the evil mighty one. So his vows are essentially a confession of trust in God. David is so confident in God's covenant name, Yahweh (“I AM”), that he believes the evil mighty one, in his case Doeg who occupies a high position in Saul's royal court, is as good as dead. Waiting for God's name in the presence of the godly, trusting and giving thanks in affliction, is good because God is so so good. Our seeing, fearing, laughing, trusting, thanking and waiting cultivates assurance of salvation. How it sweetens the experience of public worship, which is where the psalm ends (cf. Psalm 4:3). Worship is not a means. It is the end. What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever!

Conclusion – Do you understand the main thing Psalm 52 is teaching you to do? David, with his knowledge of the Scriptures and his daily walk with God, is “reading” the story God is writing. David knows he is Israel's anointed one even while he's a fugitive on the run for his life. He knows Doeg is doomed for a terrible fall. He also knows the green olive tree is a symbol for Israel, and as Israel's anointed he can see himself as that blessed tree even in affliction. David discerned his place in God's story. So should you. As you walk by faith in Jesus Christ, who as the Messiah is the greater David and the Israel of God, learn to see yourself in the story that God is writing. Make sure you know the story well enough to see where it's going beforehand. And then by faith enjoy a good holy laugh! Not with pompous unrepentance, but with godly fear, repentance, and trust that in Christ you'll be secure forever and ever.