

“WHEN THINGS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE”
(BEING A ‘GREEN OLIVE TREE’ IN THE HOUSE OF GOD)
PSALM 52
Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

The title of this psalm gives us the historical background found in I Samuel 21-22:

After David departed from his meeting with Jonathan, and having concluded that it was not safe to return to Saul, he fled to Nob to Ahimelech the priest and asked for some assistance with food (in this case the sacred bread of the presence that had been replaced with fresh bread) and with a weapon—the sword of Goliath was on hand and provided to David. David deceived Ahimelech and told him he was on a secret mission from the king and therefore was alone, having sent his young male soldiers to another safe location. Assuring Ahimelech that he and the supposed young men had not contracted any defilement from having recent relations with women, nor were their vessels unclean but were holy, David then received the consecrated bread from Ahimelech. Unfortunately, there was a servant of Saul present there that day who for some reason had been “detained before the LORD”—Doeg the Edomite. Outside of this account and Psalm 52, we really know nothing else of this man.

Meanwhile Saul was at his hometown of Gibeah with some of his servants and heard about David and accused his servants of disloyalty in not helping him to discover and capture David. It so happened that Doeg was standing there and informed Saul about the incident at Nob with Ahimelech the priest (22:1-9). Saul then sent for Ahimelech and his family of priests who reported to Saul at Gibeah. After Saul accused Ahimelech of disloyalty, Ahimelech denied any knowledge of the falling out between David and Saul, thinking that David was Saul’s most loyal servant. The king would not be persuaded and commanded his guards standing by to execute the priests of the LORD; none of them would dare do so. Therefore, Saul commanded the informer, Doeg, to kill them—who was only too happy to obey and thus hoped to ingratiate himself with King Saul—he killed 85 “men who wore the linen ephod.” Doeg also led the attack against Nob, killing men, women, children, and infants, as well as animals (22:10-19).

Fortunately, one young son of Ahimelech named Abiathar escaped to report to David, who promptly observed that he knew that Doeg the Edomite, being of the wicked character he was, would report to king Saul what had happened at Nob. David was devastated by the news and rightly blamed himself for the death of all of Ahimelech’s household (22:20-23). He then offered to allow Abiathar to stay with him and David would provide for him. Such circumstances help us to understand a little of the frame of mind of David as he penned the words of this psalm. The general time of the composition of the psalm is thus given to us, but not the exact moment. David brings out **three realities** in this psalm:

- 1) The kind of man Doeg is—who carves out his career by slander and intrigue.
- 2) The temporary nature of such success of wicked people.
- 3) The confidence that a child of God can and must have in Him. God will stand with David just as surely as he has agreed to stand with Abiathar.

This psalm is not a prayer or complaint addressed to God against the oppression of the wicked; it is a stern upbraiding addressed to the man who, unscrupulous in the exercise of his power, and proud of his wealth (ver. 7), finds his delight in all the arts of the practiced liar.

This psalm manifests David’s calm courage of faith in every word. There is no fear, no trembling, no doubt, as to the end which will come upon the tyrant.

YOU MUST NOT FEAR THE WICKED DECEIVERS ABOUT YOU. REST IN GOD AND ENJOY HIS PRESENCE.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE WICKED (1-4)

Verse 1 gives a summary of the entire issue:

- Wicked men will boast in their exploits.
- God's loyal love endures all the day.

A. Boasts in Evil [e.g. Donald Trump!]

1. The usual meaning of "boast" is "praise"; note the perversion.
2. Evil becomes praiseworthy in their evaluation—Compare Jer. 9:23.
3. "Mighty man" is a mocking term in relation to Doeg-- a little man of insignificant ability, only a herdsman of Saul—chief of his shepherds who only advanced himself by betrayal and intrigue and deception, and his valiant "warfare" was shown by butchering helpless and unarmed priests! He was a nobody, but he found an opportunity in the nearly insane jealousy of Saul toward David that led Saul to perform incomprehensively wicked deeds through Doeg; Doeg's accusations against Ahimelech were "well-timed to ingratiate Doeg with the king.
4. Far Better to be the object of God's Loyal Love Such is constant—"all day long."

B. Tongue devises "engulfing ruin" (2)

1. "Like a sharpened razor--think of the butchery of the priests.
2. One who works deceit—David likely thinks of how Doeg was probably acting very piously and friendly when with Ahimelech, and was also behaving very cordially in relation to David when he visited the priest; of course, it was all a charade.

C. Loves what is wrong (3-4)

1. Evil rather than good (3)
2. Falsehood rather than speaking what is righteous and true. (3)
3. Words that devour—swallow up and don't leave a trace. (4)
4. Personified as a deceitful tongue. (4)

II. THE RUIN OF THE WICKED (5-7)

A. God's Judgment (5) [Violent words jostle one another in v. 5 with increasingly radical effect.]

1. He will "tear you down" like a fortified tower, city, or house—forever.
2. He will snatch you away like coals from a hearth.
3. He will pull you out of your dwelling place. [David at this point in his life knew what it was like to be homeless!]
4. He will root you out of the land of the living—both Israel and life itself; see **Ps. 49:13-14**.

B. The Righteous' Response (6-7)

1. Toward God: they will see and fear—in awe and reverence (6a).
 - They observe God's acts of judgment and justice.
 - They respond in holy reverence, for as "righteous" they know He follows His righteous standards.
2. Toward the wicked: they "laugh" at the ruin of the wicked (6b-7)
 - Amusement at the ridiculous behavior of the boasters.
 - Rejoicing at the justice of God who rewards the foolishness of men.
 - Cf. God's "laughter" at the silly rebellion of men against Him—Ps. 2:4; Ps. 37:13.
 - Cf. wisdom's similar laughter in Pr. 1:26.
3. Toward Ridiculous Choices—"Behold" (7)
 - a. He did not make God his refuge or shelter.
 - "Man" here is man in his strength—even the strongest men are weak and insecure and need God.
 - Wicked men are in the habit of doing such.

- b. He trusted in his abundant riches.
- c. He strengthened himself in his evil desires.

And now look what he has gained from all such!

III. THE SECURITY AND CONFIDENT HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS (8-9)

As noted earlier, David may have observed a parallel between the protection he gave to Abiathar and the protection he personally receives from Yahweh. The man who makes the following statements is a hunted refugee, a man with a price on his head. However, he makes no complaints but rises to bold confidence in his God. **Notice the strong contrast with the preceding in the words: “But as for me.”**

A. Security in God’s Presence (8)

1. A Green Olive Tree

- The wicked would be uprooted (v. 5); David is securely planted.
- Green—living, healthy, flexible—See **Ps. 92:13-14**.
- Olive—durable, long living, native to Nob where the tabernacle was then—located at the “Mount of Olives

2. In the “house of God”

- Not merely that he had access to the tabernacle where God’s presence was.
- He also daily experienced divine fellowship and blessing.
- Cf. Zech. 4:1-4—Zerubbabel and Joshua flourishing as olive trees in tabernacle, united to lampstand, having oil of Holy Spirit flowing through them; “not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.”

B. Trusting in Divine Loyal Love—which endures forever and ever, never failing (8b)

C. Giving Thanks (9a)

- His thanks will be given forever.
- His thanks is based on the fact that “God **has done it**”—judging the wicked; blessing the righteous.

D. Waiting in Confident hope (9b)

1. On God’s “name”—the manifestation of His righteous character

- His name is “good.”

2. In the presence of those experiencing His loyal love—His godly ones.

- Giving thanks in their presence
- Evidencing confident hope—waiting on God—in their presence.

CONCLUSION

David was a fugitive; the fulfillment of all this in his case was still future!

Yet he waits on Yahweh’s name to manifest itself and bless him.

In the meantime he enjoys God’s holy presence in his house—even though he is a fugitive and on the run!

In the Lord he is as secure as a green olive tree in the house of God.

God’s loyal love will never fail him—it is “forever and ever.”

Therefore, he gives God thanks forever—he has done it! He will share his confident hope with God’s godly ones—those who also are objects of God’s loyal love.

See God’s mighty hand at work against the wickedness of the peoples; fear God; laugh at the folly of sin and sinners.

YOU MUST NOT FEAR THE WICKED DECEIVERS ABOUT YOU. REST IN GOD AND ENJOY HIS PRESENCE.