

PSALMS

Chapter 12

Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man. ² Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. ³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, ⁴ those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?” ⁵ “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise,” says the LORD; “I will place him in the safety for which he longs.” ⁶ The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. ⁷ You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever. ⁸ On every side the wicked prowl, as vilest is exalted among the children of man.

Ps 12 A prayer for help when it seems that all men are faithless and every tongue false (see Mic 7:1–7). (CSB)

12 title *For the director of music* – Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel’s worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself. (CSB)

According to sheminith. It perhaps refers to an eight-stringed instrument. (CSB)

As a youth, David was repeatedly mistreated by King Saul (e.g., 1Sm 18:6–11). Later, King David was the target of further intrigues, including the famous one involving his son Absalom (2Sm 15–18). *choirmaster. Sheminith.* Lit, “the eighth,” a note about musical setting; meaning uncertain. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–2, everyone lies; vv 3–4, flattery and boasting judged; vv 5–6, the Lord’s words are pure; vv 7–8, the Lord guards us. (TLSB)

12:1–2 Initial appeal, with description of the cause of distress. (CSB)

12:1 *save* – Hbr *yeshu‘ah*, “deliverance.” Sometimes translated as “victory” because of military imagery. God defeated Pharaoh and his army during the exodus, and subsequently conquered all enemies that would separate His people from Him. His righteousness is victorious over wickedness, and thus salvation comes to His people solely because of Him. (TLSB P. 843)

“Save” is an imperative. It is the common word with the sense of deliver, set free, liberate. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

godly. Hebrew *hasid*, which occurs 26 times in the Psalms (once of God: 145:17, “loving”; cf. 18:25) and is usually rendered (in the plural) in the NIV as “the godly” or “saints.” It is one of several Hebrew words for God’s people, referring to them as people who are or should be devoted to God and faithful to him. (CSB)

The intent of the wicked was to rid themselves of “the upright in heart” (11:2; cf. v.7). The psalmist observes the godly have vanished (Is. 57:1 Jer. 5:1-2; Hos. 4:1; Micah 7:2). The godly are characterized by their faithfulness to the Lord, and they are beloved by him (cf. 4:3). One is

reminded of Elijah's complaint (1 Kings 19:10). But even then the Lord responded that seven thousand were left (1 Kings 19:18). (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

the faithful. Those who maintain moral integrity. (CSB)

The use of the word “faithful” is instructive, for it has the clear idea of being reliable or trustworthy; the word is related to the word “truth (s.v. Ps. 15:2). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Living in a land where faithfulness and godliness have all but vanished and duplicity and fraud are rampant would have been oppressive and dangerous. No wonder the psalmist cried out to God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

12:2 The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword (see 57:4; 64:3–4). Perhaps appeals to God against those who maliciously wield the tongue are frequent in the Psalms because only in God's courtroom can a person experience redress for such attacks. (CSB)

The second verse is the other side of the lament in verse one: the faithful may have vanished, but liars and frauds have not – they seem to have taken over. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Lies – “Lies” is a word often translated “vain” or “vanity” (as in the ten commandments [Ex.20]), but it also has the sense of a false purpose, or deception (as evidenced by its uses to describe false gods; Jonah 2:9; s.v. Ps. 127:1). Conversations were at best worthless, and at worst dishonest. In short, conversation had no purpose. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Flattering lips – Literally, this means they speak with smoothness. They say the right things that people want to hear. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Double heart – The expression means two different intentions (a double – dealing heart). What they said sounded flattering, but they were of another heart, intending something totally different, and so their words were deceptive. The false flattery might have been well-intentioned, or it might have been malicious. In David's case it might have been court flattery, but even such flattery is dishonest. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

The human heart is often the source of duplicity and deceit (Mk 7:21–23). (TLSB)

Matthew 15:19 “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*”

12:3–4 The prayer. (CSB)

12:3 *cut off.* Put an end to (physical mutilation is not in view). (CSB)

David's proposed solution to the treachery surrounding him is drastic. The expression often means to execute someone. (TLSB)

They are arrogant boasters who deflect any challenge to their hubris. They are a threat to society, and David asks God to destroy them. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

boastful. Accusation lodged against the oppressors. In the Hebrew the interchange of singular and plural indicates that these accusations are being lodged against wicked oppressors in general. Their deeds betray the arrogance so long as they prosper with which they defy God. They greedily seek to glut their unrestrained appetites by victimizing others, taking account of neither God nor his law. (CSB)

They were boasting of their own ambitions and plans, while at the same time smoothing things over for people to hear. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

12:4 The psalmists frequently quote their wicked oppressors in order to portray how they mock. The arrogance with which the wicked speak especially their easy dismissal of God’s knowledge of their evil acts and his unfailing prosecution of their malicious deeds. (CSB)

The evil express their confidence to one another. In stark contrast is the boast of the righteous, “God is with us.” (TLSB)

Pride and arrogance plus full confidence in their evil use of the tongue are earmarks of these men. (Leupold)

God’s pure word is the antidote to the poisonous words of false teacher and promoters of immorality. (PBC)

Delitzsch says that if any authority were to assert itself over them, their mouth would put it down and their tongue would thrash it into submission. They firmly believed that their lips belonged to them, that they had the right to say what they wanted, and answer to no one. When such arrogance is joined with deception, there is no limit to the destruction that can follow. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

12:5–6 A reassuring word from the Lord. Such words of assurance following prayer in the Psalms were perhaps spoken by a priest (see 1Sa 1:17) or a prophet (see 51:8). It may be that abrupt transitions from prayer to confidence in the Psalms presuppose such priestly or prophetic words, even when they are not contained in the psalm. Here it is possible that David merely recalls this appropriate word from the Lord; notice that it is a general reassurance concerning the righteous rule of God. (CSB)

12:5 *I will now arise*. See Isa 33:10. (CSB)

God’s people who suffer for the sake of righteousness (cf Mt 5:3). (TLSB)

This phrase expresses the beginning of the divine action (s.v. Ps. 3:1). And that intervention was to set the people in safety who “long for it.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The Lord answers the cry of the needy, even as he has promised. He hears their groaning (Ex. 2:24; Pss. 79:11; 102:20) and prepares himself to act in their behalf. The language here resembles God’s promise in Isaiah 33:10: “‘Now will I arise’ says the Lord. ‘Now will I be exalted; now will I be lifted up.’” The exaltation of God must bring the abasement and removal of the wicked (Is. 33:11-12). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

12:6 *pure* – “Pure” is a term that is more at home in the ceremonial law as of Israel; it conveys the idea of being ceremonially clean, without flaws or defects of any sort (s.v. Ps. 51:10)

words of the LORD. Set in sharp contrast with the boastful words of the adversaries; they are as flawless as thoroughly refined silver. (CSB)

God's Word is the opposite of what the wicked utter. Whereas the evil use words to deceive and destroy, God's Holy Word delivers life and salvation. (TLSB)

The OT is full of his promises, which have been confirmed by our Lord (2 Cor. 1:20). (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

furnace of clay. Suggests that the period in Egypt was a time of affliction, testing and refinement for the Israelites. (CSB)

God's word is clear, direct, true and reliable. To make his point David uses the image of refining ore in a furnace in the earth. In the process impurities would be removed from the metal being refined. It might take several attempts before all the impurities were removed. David is making a comparison with that process here: it is as if the word of God had been put through such a process to remove all impurities, such as misleading or deceptive statements, and that process was done to perfection – hence, seven times, the number of completion and perfection. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

seven. Signifies fullness or completeness—here thoroughness of refining. (CSB)

Thoroughly. Chemnitz: “[God] purges and separates the opinions of reason and the Law that have intruded themselves into the doctrine of justification” (*LTh* 2:464). (TLSB)

The word of God was never at a stage where there were impurities in it. David is simply emphasizing how perfect the word of God is. It can be trusted completely in everything it says. It is the only word that can be trusted. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

12:7–8 Concluding expression of confidence – A common feature in the prayers of the Psalter is a concluding expression of confidence that the prayer will be or has been heard. Here David's confidence becomes a testimony to God's people.). (CSB)

12:7 *will guard us* – At times, the wicked prevail, but they shall not prevail in eternity. Jesus also spoke against “this generation” in Mt 11:16; 12:41. (TLSB)

How long will God preserve his people? Forever. He does not say that God will immediately remove the problem, but God will preserve his people. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Generation – This signifies a group of people who live at the same time. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

12:8 David is confident, even though at the present time the wicked think they have the upper hand (see vv. 1–4). (CSB)

God's guarding of his people is a reality even when the wicked walk around like kings. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

This verse is a stark reminder that the ungodly are everywhere. This is only to be expected when a society exalts worthlessness. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

This psalm was especially meaningful to Luther at the time of the Reformation when he was battling the false teachings of Rome and the slanders Rome directed against him. This text was the basis for Luther's Reformation hymn, "O Lord, Look Down from Heaven, Behold." This psalm can also give us courage to oppose the false teachings, the false philosophies, and the false moral values prevalent in the world. (PBC)

The psalm contains no resolution to the problem of evil, but it recognizes that evil is under the full sovereignty of the Lord. He will care for his children, because "the words of the Lord are flawless" (v. 6). (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Ps 12 A cry for help in the face of treachery and deceit. Unchecked wickedness sometimes leads us to doubt that God is watching out for us. Such despair is a great evil and can ruin our souls, but it can also help us to appreciate our complete dependence on God and His unfailing promises to save and defend us. • Lord, use the surrounding evil and the threats they pose to drive us once again to a lively hope in our promised salvation; through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)