

PSALMS

Chapter 52

Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.² Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.³ You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. *Selah*⁴ You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.⁵ But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah*⁶ The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying,⁷ “See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!”⁸ But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.⁹ I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly.

Ps 52 Fearless confidence in God when under attack by an arrogant and evil enemy. David stands in the presence of God and from the high tower of that refuge hurls his denunciation (much like the prophetic denunciation in Isa 22:15–19) into the face of his attacker. Though not a wisdom psalm, it has much in common with Ps 49. The extended depiction of David’s enemy forms a sharp contrast with the spirit of Ps 51. See also David’s denunciation of Goliath (1Sa 17:45–47). (CSB)

Deeply personal lament of David as he speaks directly to a vicious enemy (vv 1–7). He fearlessly faces this evil one, who has a twisted moral sense (“you love evil ... and lying” [v 3]). David announces God’s judgment (v 5) and comforts himself in God’s “steadfast love” (v 8 echoes v 1). The tone is similar to that of Is 22:15–19. *Maskil*. Chief of Saul’s herdsmen, Doeg denounced Ahimelech the priest to Saul after he saw the fugitive David receive aid from him (1Sm 21:1–9). Bloodthirsty Saul declared Ahimelech guilty by association with David and ordered Doeg to slaughter Ahimelech, his family, 85 priests, and the whole city of Nob (1Sm 22:6–23). (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–4, deceitful tongue; vv 5–7, end of the deceitful; vv 8–9, life of the godly. (TLSB)

Psalms 52-60 are joined together by the headings that link most of them to historical events in the life of David. All of them have to do with David’s dealings with his enemies. Most of them come from the time when David was fleeing from Saul. (PBC)

52:1–4 The enemy castigated. – Doeg’s tongue was as deadly as his sword, because it was his dishonest report to Saul that led to the death of the priests. Both his deceptive report and his heartless massacre of the priests were motivated by his greedy desire to enrich himself. Doeg was proud of his deceitful scheming. He thought he was a mighty man in the eyes of Saul, but he was a disgrace in the eyes of the Lord. (PBC)

52:1 *Why ... ?* By what right? See 50:16; Isa 3:15. (CSB)

boast – By act as well as by word (see 75:4–5). (CSB)

Saul apparently showed no remorse after the slaughter of the priests of Nob but acted presumptuously as though the wicked deed done deserved applause, as though it had been righteous and absolutely defensible. (Leupold)

mighty man – In his own estimation (see Isa 22:17). (CSB)

Specifically Doeg, but ultimately all who stand as self-satisfied liars against God and “boast of evil.” David employs sarcasm; this is no heroic warrior but only Saul’s shepherd acting big. David likely speaks this psalm against Saul, the chief culprit, since Doeg is only a secondary figure. (TLSB)

52:2 *Your tongue* – The most frequent weapon used against the psalmists is the tongue. (CSB)

like a sharp razor – Like the traitorous tongue whose testimony doomed Ahimelech, or the very sword that Doeg used to strike him down (1Sm 22:18–19). (TLSB)

Since it is a form of wickedness that is calculated to harm and destroy men, the writer likens the tongue to a “whetted razor” and labels the individual who uses it thus as a “worker of treachery.” (Leupold)

52:3 Your whole moral sense is perverted. (CSB)

love – Prefer. (CSB)

He not only does wrong; he loves it. (Leupold)

Selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

52:4 *tongue* – The tongue represents the whole person who is being addressed, but by calling him a “deceitful tongue” the psalmist identifies his most troubling aspect – he is a liar. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

52:5–7 The enemy’s end announced (implicitly a prayer): God will slay you, and the righteous will mock you. (CSB)

David was confident that the Lord would punish Doeg in due time and deprive him of dishonest gain. Then the judgment against Doeg would be a warning to the godly not to follow in Doeg’s treacherous ways. (PBC)

52:5 Note the triple imagery: “bring you down,” “snatch you up,” “uproot you.” The arrogant enemy will meet the same end as the rich fools of Ps 49. (CSB)

from your tent – God will “snatch” and “tear” the evil man from his dwelling. (TLSB)

uproot you – In contrast, the psalmist dwells securely like a deeply rooted “tree” in the “house of God” (v 8). (TLSB)

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52:6 *righteous*. One of several terms in the OT for God’s people; it presents them as justified or declared righteous and hence living rightly. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to bless, not to exploit. (CSB)

This was a case that was bigger than mere personal animosities. In opposing an innocent man of God’s choice Saul had set himself against God, and all such efforts are ridiculous. (Leupold)

fear – Learn from your downfall – To trust and obey—that is “the fear of the LORD.” (CSB)

When the righteous man does see how mightily God acts, the first reaction will be a feeling of reverent awe at what God has done. (Leupold)

laugh – Not simple vengeful glee but the assurance that God frustrates the evil designs of the “worker of deceit” (v 2). (TLSB)

52:7 See Ps 49. – The chief defect that marked him was that he “did not make God his refuge” but substituted two other objects of confidence for him: abundance of riches and his wickedness. (Leupold)

52:8–9 David’s security is God. – David was confident that the Lord would continue to preserve him during his flight from Saul so that he would live to praise God among his people both in time and in eternity. (PBC)

52:8 *like an olive tree* – Which lives for hundreds of years. (CSB)

David finds refuge in God’s steadfast love, even thriving like a firmly rooted, long-living tree. (TLSB)

flourishing – It will not be uprooted (see v. 5). (CSB)

in the house of God – Olive trees were not planted in the temple courts, but David had access to God’s temple as his refuge, where he was kept safe. (CSB)

The temple in Jerusalem was not yet built, but God was accessible in His tabernacle. (TLSB)

This means to enjoy closest fellowship with Him and to be accepted by Him. (Leupold)

steadfast love – Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty. (CSB)

52:9 A vow to praise – A vow to praise. Many prayers in the Psalter include such vows in anticipation of the expected answer to prayer. They reflect Israel’s religious consciousness that praise must follow deliverance as surely as prayer springs from need—if God is to be truly honored. Such praise was usually offered with thank offerings and involved celebrating God’s saving act in the presence of those assembled at the temple.). (CSB)

name – The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. (CSB)

God has not only revealed His name but also locates it, and so Himself and His mercy, for His people. (TLSB)

godly – 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)

Confident prayer remembers God’s promises, and it trusts and waits on God’s justice and love. In an unbelieving world, the wicked attack what is good, boast, and even thrive in their evil. Does God care? Yes! God has overruled the way of the wicked by sending His own Son to suffer and even die at the hand of evil people so that, by His death and resurrection, He might comfort us by His enduring love. • I will thank You forever because You have done it! I will wait upon Your good name. Amen. (TLSB)