

Psalm 52: A Boastful Evil Man 09-01-19

Many of the Psalms contain notes by the author or arranger that describe certain aspects of the Psalm. They may tell you what tune the Psalm is sung to, or they may provide a background on the meaning of the Psalm. The notes on Psalm 52 tell us that it is when Doeg the Edomite informed Saul of David's presence at Nod.

The story begins in 1 Samuel 21:1-7. There we see David, on the run from Saul, fleeing to the tabernacle in Nod and meeting with the priests. David lies about his presence, and the priests provide him with food. Saul's chief shepherd Doeg the Edomite was there at the time. In 1 Samuel 22:7-18 Saul is furious with his men because they have not found David. Doeg then reveals that he saw David at Nod. The priests are brought before Saul. Although they knew nothing of the rift between David and Saul, and were misinformed by David, Saul accuses them of conspiracy and orders their death.

Yet the men of Saul refused. It was at this moment Doeg offers to slay them, and he does so proficiently, and then wipes out every living thing in the city of Nod. Doeg the Edomite is seen as one of the most evil men of Scripture. He is evil for following the orders of Saul (ironically more accurately than Saul did with the Amalekites). Yet we know very little about him; 1 Samuel 21-22 and Psalm 52 are the only testimony of his life. There are traditions among the Jews of other aspects of his life, but all we know is this evil deed, and the mindset revealed in Psalm 52.

What Doeg did was likely a fulfillment of the prophecy against the House of Eli that God made back in 1 Samuel 3. There God cursed Eli's house for the tolerance of Eli in regards to the sins of his sons. It may be that this is why Doeg was detained before the Lord (a mysterious statement in 1 Samuel 21). God promised Eli that what He would do would be "*something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle*" (1 Sam. 3:11).

David's Psalm rails against the boastful evil of Doeg. We don't know what the boast was, but presume it was either what he told Saul when he informed on David, or that he boasted of the evil deeds he committed after doing them. There are many boastful evil men in Scripture. One of the best is Lamech in Genesis 4:23-24, who boasted that none would get vengeance on him, as he had killed men and boys just for offending him. Paul accuses the Christians in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 of being boastful and puffed up in tolerating sin among them.

David laments the idea in general of living in a world where evil men can boast. Jesus said that we would live in a world where the evil boast; they would hate us and be pleased to hate us. But David said that while we would see evil men boast, he also says we will see evil men fail. It would serve as a warning to all that God rules, and God would bring evil men to their knees. Then David contrasts this with the righteous. They are like a tender, fragile tree that could be easily damaged, except that when they are planted in the House of the Lord, they are safe.