

## *Psalm 52*

*For the choir director. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul and said to him, 'David has come to the house of Ahimelech.'*

- <sup>1</sup> Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?  
The lovingkindness of God endures all day long.
- <sup>2</sup> Your tongue devises destruction,  
Like a sharp razor, O worker of deceit.
- <sup>3</sup> You love evil more than good,  
Falsehood more than speaking what is right. Selah.
- <sup>4</sup> You love all words that devour,  
O deceitful tongue.
- <sup>5</sup> But God will break you down forever;  
He will snatch you up and tear you away from your tent,  
And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah.
- <sup>6</sup> The righteous will see and fear,  
And will laugh at him, saying,
- <sup>7</sup> 'Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge,  
But trusted in the abundance of his riches  
And was strong in his evil desire.'
- <sup>8</sup> But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;  
I trust in the lovingkindness of God forever and ever.
- <sup>9</sup> I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it,  
And I will wait on Your name,  
For it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones.

*David the Psalmist:* This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king.

*O Mighty Man:* David was anointed to be king (1 Sam.16) while King Saul was on the throne. Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. Doeg was one of them. See below.

*Selah:* a pause

### **Context: 1 Samuel 21 – 22**

<sup>21:7</sup> Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. <sup>8</sup> David said to Ahimelech, 'Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent.' <sup>9</sup> Then the priest said, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here.' And David said, 'There is none like it; give it to me' ...

<sup>22:9</sup> Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing by the servants of Saul, said, 'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. <sup>10</sup> He inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.' <sup>11</sup> Then the king sent someone to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household, the priests who were in Nob; and all of them came to the king... <sup>17</sup> And the king said to the guards who were attending him, 'Turn around and put the priests of the LORD to death, because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not reveal it to me.' But the servants of the king were not willing to put forth their hands to attack the priests of the LORD. <sup>18</sup> Then the king said to Doeg, 'You turn around and attack the priests.' And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. <sup>19</sup> And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword.

## Questions

1. What kind of person is Doeg the Edomite?
  - a. A shepherd employed by Saul, contrasting with David as a shepherd
  - b. Spoke to implicate the priests while Saul was murderously paranoid, making them seem like they were aware of a plot by David against Saul; but David was not making a plot against Saul and he concealed his flight from Saul from them.
  - c. He personally kills 85 priests – that’s a massacre.
  - d. He is out for his own gain.
  - e. Illus: He’s like Peter Pettigrew in the Harry Potter series. He allies himself with the villain, betrays the heroes, and contributes to the murder of innocent people.
2. Can you imagine what David is feeling about Doeg?
  - a. This is the first time anyone has died for David. And it’s a massacre.
  - b. Doeg is a shepherd, which has to strike David as deeply ironic.
3. What does David specifically not like about Doeg?
  - a. Speech-related things
  - b. Motivations
4. David talks a lot about Doeg doing evil and not good (v.1, 3, 7). Is there really good and evil?
  - a. Illus: At the dinner table, my daughter once said that good and evil were made up. I was about to say something when the Spirit made me slow down. Then my son promptly took some food from her plate and put it onto his own. She protested loudly. I asked her, ‘Well, is it wrong for him to do that? Or is it just your opinion?’ She recognized that she had just said something relativistic and then protested a violation.
  - b. Illus: In the first Harry Potter book, the villain Professor Quirrell said, ‘There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.’ Professor Quirrell, speaking about what Lord Voldemort taught him. (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, p.291)
  - c. Illus: Flannery O’Connor said, ‘Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead...and He shouldn’t have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can – by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness.’ (Flannery O’Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*)
  - d. Illus: Consider the man who committed suicide in Harvard Yard in September of 2010, leaving a very sophisticated, one thousand nine hundred and six page suicide note on the web in which he described his act as ‘an experiment in nihilism.’ He wrote: ‘If there is no extant God and no extant gods, no good and no evil, no right and no wrong, no meaning and no purpose; if there are no values that are inherently valuable; no justice that is ultimately justifiable; no reasoning that is fundamentally rational, then there is no sane way to choose between science, religion, racism, philosophy, nationalism, art, conservatism, nihilism, liberalism, surrealism, fascism, asceticism, egalitarianism, subjectivism, elitism, ismism.’<sup>1</sup>
5. What does David ask or want God to do towards Doeg? In v.5: Break him down forever, snatch him up and tear him away from his tent, uproot him from the land of the living. Essentially, to bring a disastrous death upon him.
6. Is this what we pray for nowadays? Not exactly.
  - a. We can be emotionally honest like this, as David was.
  - b. But a more accurate prayer that is in keeping with what he know about Jesus would pray for God to kill the sinful nature and corruption within the other person, while loving the person.
  - c. Illus: Ming and I were once robbed in Barcelona by two young men on a scooter. It was very stressful, losing cash, credit card, and passport. Ming asked me later that day whether I had forgiven them. I said, ‘Well, I prayed that God would kill them in Christ,’ because we do spiritually die and rise with Jesus and he does kill the fundamental corruption in us (Romans 6:1 – 11).
7. In v.8 – 9, what are David’s four ways of responding to human evil like this?
  - a. [Be] like a green olive tree in the house of God: a spiritually alive, responsive to God, fruitbearing tree that is located in the presence of God. This means to know your identity in relation to God

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell Heisman, *Suicide Note*, 2010, p.21, found at <http://www.suicidenote.info>

- first and foremost.
  - b. Trust in God's lovingkindness
  - c. Give Him thanks that He will defeat all evil and be victorious over it, including the evil that is in us
  - d. Wait on His name in spiritual community.
8. What are your thoughts on responding to evil that way?
  9. How does this carry over to life in Christ? Below is an example:

'The setting is the main conference room of the Farnesina Palace, home of the Foreign Ministry of Italy in Rome, in fall 1992. Seated on a dais are Joaquim Chissano, president of Mozambique; Afonso Dhlakama, president of RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana), Mozambique's insurgency movement; Emilio Colombo, Italy's foreign minister; and other African heads of state and foreign officials. The dignitaries have just concluded an agreement to end the civil war in Mozambique, a war that lasted for sixteen years and resulted in over a million deaths.

'Though significant for Mozambicans, the agreement was only one of several that ended civil wars at the close of the Cold War. Far more remarkable was who negotiated the agreement and how it was concluded. Seated prominently with the dignitaries were also four other people: Mario Raffaeli, an Italian member of Parliament; Don Jaime Goncalves, the Catholic archbishop of Beira, Mozambique; Professor Andrew Riccardi, president of the community of Sant'Egidio; and Don Matteo Zuppi, a priest and member of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

'The Community of Sant'Egidio? This group was the key mediator of the peace in Mozambique. But who are they? In 1968, a year of political ferment all across Europe, a handful of students at Rome's Virgil High School decided to put their Catholic faith into practice by gathering regularly to pray together and to befriend the city's poorest inhabitants. During the 1970's, their ranks grew as they expanded their work to include addicts, orphans, the handicapped, and the elderly poor and extended their network into countries like Albania, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Vietnam. The Catholic Church declared them a "public lay association" and gave them an abandoned convent in the Trastevere district in Rome, linked to the Church of Sant'Egidio (St. Giles), from which they took their name. Today the community includes over 50,000 members spread over seventy countries.

'That Sant'Egidio mediated Mozambique's peace agreement defies conventional wisdom. Peace agreements are supposed to be negotiated by states and international organizations that can provide material rewards and enforce the peace through security measures. To be sure, such "realist" factors mattered here: The diplomatic roles of the United States, the United Nations, and Italy were essential, as was the end of the Cold War, which dried up Soviet support for Mozambique's Marxist government. But seasoned diplomats have observed that Sant'Egidio was indispensable. How so?

'Consistent with its *modus operandi*, members of the Community formed a network of friendships in Mozambique during the 1970's, one that included leaders from both sides in the civil war and Catholic Church officials, most important Bishop Jaime Goncalves. From this human infrastructure, Sant'Egidio helped to open up religious freedom for the Catholic Church in Mozambique as well as bring desperately needed economic aid to the country in the 1980s. At the end of the decade, when both sides showed an interest in a settlement, Sant'Egidio, along with leaders of the Catholic Church in Mozambique and the Mozambique Christian Council (a coalition of Protestant churches), brought the parties into nine rounds of peace negotiations, which Sant'Egidio conducted at its Trastevere headquarters between 1990 and 1992. Trastevere was itself symbolic, having been a crossroads and meeting place for members of diverse cultures from the time of the Roman Empire. It was here that the Community brought together what one diplomat has called an "idiosyncratic bouillabaisse" of actors, including the main disputant parties, U.N. officials, representatives of ten different governments, including Italy and the United States, as well as "Tiny" Rowland, a morale-boosting British businessman.

'The General Peace Accord was signed on October 4, 1992 – the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, a medieval saint and a great peacemaker. Unlike many other peace agreements, 43 of which relapse into violence within five years, this peace would last. Sant'Egidio remained committed to Mozambique, carrying out major projects to fight AIDS and to bring relief to victims of massive flooding there in subsequent years. On the reputation of its diplomatic work, Sant'Egidio also undertook mediation efforts in other countries around the world, including Algeria, Burundi, Congo, Guatemala, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Liberia, and Uganda... (Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, p.174 – 7.)