

NCAC Adult Sunday School
August 7, 2022

Learning to Love the Psalms
W. Robert Godfrey
Week 3

Review

In our first 2 weeks together, we have had an introduction to the Psalms and our first look at an individual psalm, Psalm 11. In our introduction we were reminded how the Psalms have been a great source of comfort to the believer over the years as well as a place where we see it is okay to be honest with God about what we are feeling and thinking about the life circumstances in which we find ourselves. Some other benefits of the Psalms are:

The poetic nature of the Psalms continually unveil things previously unseen when we read them.

The Godward direction of the Psalms make them uniquely helpful; they are God's inspired words to us to give back to Him.

The Psalms help us remember who God is and his great promises toward his people.

The Psalms help us worship our great God.

The Psalms often point us to Jesus and the gospel.

Last week we looked at Psalm 11 and saw how this psalm reminded us powerfully of God's sovereign rule and care for his people. The heart of Psalm 11 helps us to look beyond the difficulties of our present reality and understand God's goodness, righteousness, and love.

This Week

Psalm 52; The Psalms & History

Psalm 52 refers to a specific historic event in the life of David and serves as an indictment against Doeg the Edomite. In this lesson, Dr. Godfrey explores the context of Psalm 52 to showcase the importance of history in interpretation.

Lecture Outline

A. The title of Psalm 52 references a specific historical event found in 1 Samuel 20-22.

1. David was anointed king over Israel while Saul was still reigning as king, so Saul was embittered against him and was determined to kill him.
 - a. In 1 Samuel 20-21, David flees Saul and comes to the tabernacle of God at Nob, where Ahimelech the priest gives him the holy bread and the sword of Goliath.
 - b. Doeg the Edomite, a herdsman attempting to win Saul's favor, reports David's location and Ahimelech's actions to Saul.
2. In 1 Samuel 22, the narrative records that Saul was in Gibeah when Doeg the Edomite supplied him with the necessary information to find David.
 - a. Gibeah was a notorious town in the tribe of Benjamin involved in the rape and murder of a young woman (Judges 19).
 - b. The husband of the woman divided her body into twelve pieces and sent them to the twelve tribes in order to demand justice, an act that led to civil war.
3. The narrative of 1 Samuel is foreshadowing Saul's ruthlessness by calling to mind the treacherous history of Gibeah.
 - a. Saul sees Ahimelech's actions as treasonous and orders his soldiers to kill him and all the other priests in the town of Nob.
 - b. Saul's soldiers refuse to lift their swords against the Lord's anointed, but Doeg willingly kills Ahimelech and the other priests.
4. 1 Samuel 20-22 recounts a critical moment in the history of Israel as the right to the throne and fate of the priesthood hang in the balance.
 - a. 1 Samuel 20-22 and Psalm 52 remind us that none of the stories of the Bible are trivial.
 - b. As Christians, we are connected to David's and Israel's history, David commemorated this portion of our history with a psalm.

B. Psalm 52 demonstrates the basic truth that the more history we know about a psalm the more the language of a psalm will be unveiled by its history.

1. The historical context of Psalm 52 reveals that David's reference to a "mighty man" in verse 1 is steeped with irony.
 - a. Doeg the Edomite wasn't a mighty man; David stood in the company of mighty men who fought for him; Doeg was Saul's chief herdsman.
 - b. Doeg was a coward who killed 85 unarmed priests and the men, women, children, and livestock of Nob (1 Sam 22:18-19).
2. David uses artful variation to contrast the fleeting evil of Doeg with the steadfast love of the Lord which "endures all the day" (Psalm 52:1).
3. Psalm 52 depicts the destructive power of the tongue through the tragic consequences of Doeg's lie about the priest's conspiracy against Saul.

C. Psalm 52 centers on the theme of God's judgment and justice and raises questions about the nature and place of the imprecatory psalms in the lives of Christians.

1. "But God will break you down forever" is the center of Psalm 52, and David is righteous to pray in anticipation that God will justly avenge Himself.

a. Doeg was a vile man fully aware of his evil; even Saul's soldiers bear witness against him in their unwillingness to kill the priests.

b. Doeg was not concerned with the law or the priesthood of God; he was only concerned with his material advancement through Saul.

2. Psalm 52 raises questions about the place of the imprecatory psalms that call down God's judgment upon his enemies—in the Christian life.

a. As Christians, we are not to pray for judgment against our enemies, for Jesus has called us to love our enemies.

b. However, the call to love our enemies does not mean it is wrong to pray for God to judge **His** enemies.

c. Paul maps out the Christian life in Romans 12 and places emphasis on our peaceable lives with the fact that vengeance belongs to God.

d. Paul teaches that to love for our enemies is not an absolute ethical principle because it does not extend into eternity; God will repay.

3. Imprecatory psalms must be understood in the greater context of the Psalms, in which a call to repentance comes before judgment (Pss. 9:10; 10:4-15).

a. The imprecatory psalms are for those who refuse to repent.

b. God would have been merciful to Doeg if he would have repented, but Doeg rejoiced in his evil and refused refuge in God (Ps. 52:7).

D. David responded to Doeg the Edomite's wickedness and the reality of God's coming final judgment by reflecting on God's preserving hand in his life.

1. David understood that God has preserved him: "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God" (v. 8).

2. God's steadfast love extends to the priests of Nob, who though slaughtered by Doeg will dwell in the house of God forever.

3. Psalm 52 contrasts those who will be destroyed by the Lord with those who will dwell with Him in his house forever.

Questions

1. What do we learn about God in this Psalm?

- He is a God of steadfast love v. 1
- His steadfast love endures all the day

The term and concept of God's steadfast love is found 127 times in the Psalms, most notably in Psalm 136.

It is a love that remains constant regardless of the circumstances. It is a covenant love. Jehovah is the God who remembers and keeps His covenants in spite of the treachery of people. His faithfulness in keeping his promises proves His love for Israel..."pg 1054, 1056 Holman Bible Dictionary

- God opposes the proud and will exercise judgment upon them v.4 cf James 4:6
- God is a refuge for his people. vv. 7-8
- God is good. v. 9

2. How has God shown you steadfast love?

3. What are some of the key characteristics about David that stand in contrast to Doeg in Psalm 52?

- David loved the truth while Doeg loved to use deceit to destroy. vv. 2-3
- David made God his refuge and trusted in God's steadfast love while Doeg sought refuge in his own destruction and trusted in his riches. vv7-8
- David feared God while Doeg had no fear of God. v. 1, 6
- David knew God was good while Doeg had no regard for God's goodness v.9

4. Why is the history of Psalm 52 important to the history of Israel? Why is the history of Psalm 52 important to Christians?

- Psalm 52 is based on the events that are recorded in 1 Samuel 20-22. These passages recount a critical moment in the history of Israel as the right to the throne and the fate of the priesthood hang in the balance.
- This Psalm is important to us as well because we are connected to David's history and Israel's history. David is a type of Christ and Israel is the nation through whom the Messiah would come. True Israel is our family in Jesus by faith in Jesus.

5. What are some factors that indicate the extent of Doeg the Edomite's sin and justify David's prayer of indictment against him?

- Doeg was present when the soldiers of Saul refused to kill Ahimelech and the other priests.
- Doeg was boasting about his heinous sin v. 1
- He thought riches were more trustworthy than righteousness and loving God. v.7

6. Is it right for Christians to pray the imprecatory psalms? Why or why not?

7. What important distinctions must be made to understand the place of imprecatory psalms in the Christian life? (Romans 12:18-19)

8. What truths about the character of God and the free offer of the gospel should balance someone's perspective of the imprecatory psalms?

- God is gracious and merciful. The fact that he offers salvation to anyone is a most merciful act. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)
- God rejoices in saving people. see Luke 15, parables of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son
- He established the Church to be a witness to all nations of Jesus's work of redemption.
- His certain plan includes the salvation of people from every tongue, tribe and nation. Rev. 5:9

Next Week Psalm 81, The Word at the Center