

The apostle Paul articulated the same call to decision. His dual appeal to the Christian congregation in Rome parallels themes in Psalm 50: (1) "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1 NRSV), and (2) "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God" (Rom 12:2 NRSV).

The call to decision presented by Psalm 50, by Jesus, and by Paul is still a crucial one. Hypocrisy is a persistent temptation. Good faith is always in danger of becoming bad religion—a mechanistic system to put God at our disposal and to give us the illusion of merit and self-control. If we think that we are deserving, and if we think that we have things essentially under control, then there will be no need for us to call upon God or to live in dependence upon God. All that is left is to glorify ourselves (see v. 15). The issue, then, is this: Will we live to gratify ourselves? Or will we live in gratitude to God?

## PSALM 51:1-19, ACCORDING TO YOUR STEADFAST LOVE

NIV

### Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup>Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup>For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.

<sup>4</sup>Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge.

<sup>5</sup>Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup>Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;  
you teach<sup>a</sup> me wisdom in the inmost place.

<sup>7</sup>Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup>Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

<sup>9</sup>Hide your face from my sins

<sup>a</sup>The meaning of the Hebrew for this phrase is uncertain  
*you desired . . . ; / you taught*

NRSV

### Psalm 51

To the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.

<sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin.

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you alone, have I sinned,  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are justified in your sentence  
and blameless when you pass judgment.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, I was born guilty,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup> You desire truth in the inward being;<sup>a</sup>  
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret  
heart.

<sup>7</sup> Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than  
snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;

<sup>a</sup>Meaning of Heb uncertain

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and blot out all my iniquity.

<sup>10</sup>Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup>Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

<sup>13</sup>Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will turn back to you.

<sup>14</sup>Save me from bloodguilt, O God,  
the God who saves me,  
and my tongue will sing of your  
righteousness.

<sup>15</sup>O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup>You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would  
bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

<sup>17</sup>The sacrifices of God are<sup>a</sup> a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.

<sup>18</sup>In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem.

<sup>19</sup>Then there will be righteous sacrifices,  
whole burnt offerings to delight you;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

<sup>a</sup>17 Or *My sacrifice, O God, is*

## NRSV

let the bones that you have crushed  
rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right<sup>a</sup> spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing<sup>b</sup> spirit.

<sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your  
deliverance.

<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you  
would not be pleased.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifice acceptable to God<sup>c</sup> is a broken  
spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you  
will not despise.

<sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,

<sup>19</sup> then you will delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt  
offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

<sup>a</sup>Or *steadfast*    <sup>b</sup>Or *generous*    <sup>c</sup>Or *My sacrifice, O God,*

## COMMENTARY

Dominated by petition, Psalm 51 is ordinarily classified as a prayer for help or an individual lament/complaint. What sets it apart is that the psalmist's complaint involves his or her own sinfulness. Thus the church has with good reason included it among the seven penitential psalms (see also Psalms 6; 32; 38; 102; 130; 143). Indeed, with the possible exception of Psalm 130,

Psalm 51 is the most dramatic and familiar of the Penitential Psalms. As Kraus suggests, it "stands out in the Psalter. Its peak statements are unique. And its fullness of insight is incomprehensible."<sup>212</sup>

The superscription is the first clue to what Psalm 51 is about: sin and forgiveness. Although

212. H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. H. C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 507.

it is possible to conclude that the superscription dates the psalm accurately,<sup>213</sup> it is much more likely that it was added later by the editors of the psalter to invite readers to hear Psalm 51 against the background of the story of David's taking of Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11), as well as the subsequent confrontation between Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1-14; cf. Ps 51:4 and 2 Sam 12:13). This story is as much or more about God's character than it is about human sinfulness, both of which are in view in Ps 51:1-6. The series of imperatives in vv. 7-12 petition God for forgiveness and re-creation. The series is broken by v. 13, and vv. 13-15 anticipate the psalmist's transformed existence. Verses 16-17 offer the psalmist's concluding observations about sin and sacrifice, while vv. 18-19 seem to be a second conclusion, perhaps an addition to an original vv. 1-17.

**51:1-6.** In the story of David and Bathsheba, what is finally determinative is not David's sinfulness but God's grace. To be sure, David's sin had grave consequences; the first child born to Bathsheba died (see 2 Sam 12:16-19), and David's family nearly fell apart (see 2 Samuel 13-1 Kings 1). Nevertheless, David's sin was forgiven; he was allowed to live and to remain king (2 Sam 12:13), despite having broken at least half of the Ten Commandments, including the ones prohibiting adultery and murder! Because God's amazing grace is the most outstanding feature of the story of David and Bathsheba, it is appropriate in view of its superscription that Psalm 51 begin with a focus on God. Before any mention of the vocabulary of sin that dominates vv. 1-5, the psalmist appeals to God's character using three key Hebrew words that communicate God's grace. The NIV and the NRSV usually translate the first, "mercy," as "gracious" (חַנּוּן *ḥānān*; see the frequent plea "be gracious" in Pss 4:1; 6:2). The second word, "steadfast love" (חֶסֶד *ḥesed*), is virtually a one-word summary of God's gracious, self-giving character (cf. Pss 5:7; 6:4; 13:5; 25:6-7; 10; 33:5, 18, 22; Introduction). The third, "compassion" (רַחֲמִים *raḥāmīm*), which might more accurately be translated "motherly compassion" (see Commentary on Ps 25:6; Introduction), often ap-

pears in conjunction with "steadfast love." Indeed, because all three key words appear in Exod 34:6-7, along with three of the four terms for sin found in Ps 51:1-5 ("iniquity," "transgression," and "sin"), it is appropriate to read Psalm 51 against the narrative background of the golden calf episode of Exodus 32-34 as well as against the background of the story of David and Bathsheba. Both stories are about God's forgiveness of grievous sin. Just as in 2 Samuel 11-12, so also in Exodus 32-34, God's character is determinative and keeps relationship intact. Both Israel and David are justified, made right with God, by God's grace. So it is with the psalmist, who quite rightly admits that God is "proved right" in God's judgment (v. 4) but later affirms also that "my tongue will sing of your righteousness" (v. 14). The psalmist has been or anticipates being set right, being justified by God's grace.

After appealing to God's character, the psalmist turns to his or her own sinfulness. Israel's basic vocabulary of sin pervades vv. 1-5 (cf. Ps 32:1-5). In these verses, the most general Hebrew word for "sin" (חַטָּא *ḥāṭā'*, vv. 2-4) appears with one of three more specialized words: "iniquity"/"guilty" (עוֹן *ʾawōn*, vv. 2, 5; see also v. 9) involves the personal guilt or culpability of the sinner; "transgressions" (פְּשָׁע *peša'*, v. 3; see also v. 1) suggests willful rebellion; and "evil" (רָע *ra'*) conveys the injurious effects of sinful behavior. The repetition drives home the point. Sin and its consequences are pervasive. The emphatic "you, you only" in v. 4 is not meant to indicate that the psalmist's sinful behavior did not have destructive consequences for other people; rather, it suggests that sin has its origin in the failure to honor God. The climactic v. 5 has traditionally been cited in discussions of "original sin," and rightfully so. It is not intended to suggest that sin is transmitted biologically or that sexuality is sinful by definition. Rather, it conveys the inevitability of human fallibility. In each human life, in the human situation, sin is pervasive. We are born into it, and we cannot escape it. While sin is a matter of individual decision, it also has a corporate dimension that affects us, despite our best intentions and decisions.

Three of the four terms for sin in vv. 1-5 also occur in Exod 34:7, recalling again the narrative context of Exodus 32-34. Furthermore, David's

213. See Michael Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51-72): Studies in the Psalter II*, JSOTSup 102 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990) 24-30, 51-69.

behavior is characterized in 2 Sam 12:9 as "evil" (cf. Ps 51:4; "evil" is the one term that does not appear in Exod 34:7), and David admits in 2 Sam 12:13, "I have sinned against the LORD" (NRSV). Again, the recalling of these narrative contexts suggests that the reality of God's steadfast love (see Exod 34:6-7; 2 Sam 7:15) is more fundamental than the reality of human sinfulness. In short, God forgives sinners. Appropriately, each of the repeated words for sin in vv. 1-5 appears as the object of an imperative addressed to God in vv. 1-2—"blot out" (v. 1*d*; see also v. 11; Isa 43:25; 44:22), "wash" (v. 2*a*; see also v. 7; Jer 2:22; 4:14), "cleanse" (v. 2*b*; see also vv. 7*a*, 10*a*; Lev 16:30; Jer 33:8; Ezek 36:25, 33; 37:23). Verse 6 also suggests that sin is not the final word about humanity. God desires not sinfulness but faithfulness (אֱמֶת *ēmet*; NIV and NRSV, "truth"; see Pss 26:3; 45:4). The wisdom that the psalmist requests consists of openness to God and dependence upon God (see Pss 37:30; 49:3; 90:12; Prov 1:7; 9:10). While sin is inevitable and pervasive in the human situation, it is not ultimately the determining reality.

**51:7-12.** Thus in these verses the psalmist prays for forgiveness and re-creation. The imperative "purge" (v. 7) is from the same Hebrew root as the word "sin" in vv. 2-5, 9. It occurs elsewhere in this particular verbal form in conjunction with purifying rituals involving hyssop (see Lev 14:49, 52; Num 19:18-19). While it is clear that the psalmist alludes to ritual practices in vv. 1*d*-2, 7-9, the language is figurative. The real point is that by God's action, the psalmist has been or will be forgiven and transformed. Sin and guilt will not be the final words; they will give way to joy (vv. 8, 12).

The psalmist's faith in God's transforming power is particularly evident in vv. 10-12. The verb "create" (בָּרָא *bārā'*) is used in the OT only of God's activity. It is particularly prominent in the opening chapters of Genesis (1:1, 21, 27; 2:3, 4) and in Isaiah 40-55, where God's creative activity involves the doing of a "new thing" (Isa 43:15-19; 48:6-7; see also Isa 41:20; 45:7-8). It is significant, too, that "create" is used in the context of God's self-revelation in Exodus 34. Immediately following God's words to Moses in Exod 34:6-7, Moses appeals to God that "the LORD go with us" and "pardon our iniquity and our sin"

(34:9 NRSV). God responds by making a covenant and by promising to "perform marvels, such as have not been performed [lit., "been created"] in all the earth or in any nation" (34:10 NRSV). In short, it is God's fundamental character to restore, rehabilitate, re-create sinners. In the context of Exodus 32-34, Israel's life depended on it; in the context of 2 Samuel 11-12, David's life depended on it; and in Psalm 51, the psalmist affirms that his or her life also depends on God's willingness to forgive and God's ability to re-create sinners.

The association of the terms "clean," "heart," "new," and "spirit" calls to mind Ezek 36:25-27, which also testifies to God's willingness to forgive and ability to re-create. The repetition of the word "spirit" (רוּחַ *rūah*) in vv. 10-12 reinforces this message. The mention of God's "holy spirit" is unusual (see elsewhere only Isa 63:10-11), but God's Spirit elsewhere is also suggestive of God's creative activity. In Gen 1:2, God's Spirit moves over the deep; God's Spirit is responsible for all life and its sustenance (Job 34:14-15). For the psalmist to receive a new spirit (v. 10) and to live in the presence of God's Spirit (v. 11) means nothing short of new life. In biblical terms, to be saved means to be restored to conditions that make life possible, and for the psalmist, forgiveness means salvation (v. 12; see also v. 14). What precisely is meant by "a willing spirit" is unclear, but it may connote generosity (see Exod 35:5, 22). In Isa 32:5, 8, the Hebrew word for "noble" (נָדִיב *nādīb*) is the opposite of "fool" (נָבִל *nābāl*, recall "wisdom" in Ps 51:6), and the noble are those who attend to the needs of others (see Isa 32:6).

**51:13-17.** The psalmist directs his or her thoughts to others in v. 13. Having been made new, the psalmist promises to share this experience with others. The vocabulary that dominates vv. 1-5 recurs in v. 13, but with a twist. The chief among transgressors and sinners will be the *teacher* of transgressors and sinners. The reconciled will bear the message of reconciliation (see Ps 32:8). Because sheer grace is always a scandal, those who faithfully witness to God's grace will always need to pray, "Deliver me from bloodshed" (v. 14). This may especially be the case for one who has been known previously as a notorious sinner. As a comparison of the NRSV with the NIV suggests, v. 14*a* can be interpreted dif-

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erently. The Hebrew word in question (דָּמָא *damā*) can mean "bloodshed" or "violence," but it can also mean the guilt incurred from shedding blood. This meaning would also be suitable for one who has presented oneself as chief among sinners, especially if Psalm 51 is heard in the context of David's murder of Uriah. In this case, v. 14a continues the appeal for forgiveness in vv. 1-12, 6-12. Perhaps the ambiguity is intentional, but even if not, it is quite appropriate.

Despite opposition or anticipated opposition, the psalmist is committed to making a public witness. An inward transformation is not sufficient. The clean heart and new spirit will be accompanied by outwardly visible and audible proclamation. God's "new thing" must be declared (see Isa 48:6). Every organ of speech will participate—"my tongue," "my lips," "my mouth" (vv. 14-15). This outpouring of praise is apparently intended to replace what may customarily have been offered as a public witness—namely, a ritual sacrifice (v. 16). At this point, Psalm 51 recalls Ps 50:14, 23, where the proper sacrifice is identified as "thanksgiving"—that is, humble gratitude accompanied by faithful words and deeds (see Ps 50:17-21). Verse 16 also recalls the prophetic critiques of sacrifice that communicate God's desire that ritual actions be accompanied by personal commitment and transformation (see 1 Sam 15:22; Isa 1:12-17; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mic 6:6-8); in short, God desires the whole self.

And this is exactly what the forgiven, transformed psalmist affirms in v. 17 and, at least implicitly, offers to God (see NIV and NRSV notes). What God desires is "a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart." The two occurrences of "broken" (נִשְׁבָּר *nišbār*) translate the Hebrew root very literally; and that translation may be misleading. Contemporary persons tend to hear "broken," when used in regard to people, as something like "dysfunctional." Even elsewhere in the OT, brokenheartedness is not a desirable condition but something from which God delivers

(see Ps 34:18, Isa 61:1). What brokenheartedness means in Ps 51:17, however, is captured by the word "contrite," which is a more interpretive translation of a word that literally means "crushed" (see v. 8). God does not want "broken" or "crushed" persons in the sense of "oppressed" or "dysfunctional." Rather, God desires humble, contrite persons who are willing to offer God their whole selves. If pride is the fundamental sin that leads to idolatry, then the transformed psalmist now evidences a humility that inevitably leads to praise. The psalmist's offering to God is the whole self. The psalmist has much to proclaim, but it is not about self. It is about God (vv. 14-15). The psalmist's public witness is directed in precisely the same direction as was the urgent appeal: at the character of God.

**51:18-19.** These verses may be a later addition to clarify the perspective on sacrifice in vv. 16-17. In any case, the effect of the final form is to give the intensely personal testimony of vv. 1-17 a corporate dimension, one that perhaps has been prepared for by the similarity in terminology between vv. 10-12 and prophetic texts like Ezek 36:16-36, which envisions the restoration of Israel after the exile. Because of the prayer for Zion and Jerusalem in v. 18, several scholars suggest that vv. 18-19 were added in the post-exilic period to make Psalm 51 more suited for corporate use in that era. (See the Introduction for a description of evidence that the psalter as a whole was shaped in response to the crisis of exile.) In any case, these verses are an apt reminder that sin is never simply a matter of individual decision; it is also a matter of corporate, institutionalized evil. They suggest also that the justification of the individual sinner does not obviate the need for participation in the worship of the community but enables proper participation. "Right sacrifices" will be offered by those who have first offered their whole selves to God. By the mercies of God, even the traditional rituals, the same old order of worship, will be transformed.

## REFLECTIONS

1. Psalm 51 calls to our attention a perennial feature of the human situation: sin (see Commentary on Psalm 32). As A. Whitney Brown has said of human history, "Any good history book is mainly just a long list of mistakes, complete with names and dates. It's very

embarrassing."<sup>214</sup> This characterization is preeminently true of the Bible. Israel's story is indeed a long list of mistakes. Claus Westermann pointed out that Exodus 32-34 proves to be paradigmatic of the whole history of Israel.<sup>215</sup> David's story and the history of the subsequent monarchy are indeed very embarrassing. So is the psalmist's story in Psalm 51. So is the behavior of the disciples in the Gospels (see Matt 26:56). So is the situation of the early church, revealed in the letters of Paul (see esp. 1 Corinthians). So is the history of the Christian church throughout the centuries. So are the denominational and congregational lives of the contemporary church. So are the details of our life stories, if we are honest enough to admit it. In short, Psalm 51 is not just about Israel or David or some unknown ancient psalmist; it is also about us! It is about who we are and how we are as individuals, families, churches—situations that pervades our lives. It's very embarrassing.

That is the bad news. But the good news of Psalm 51 is even more prominent. Psalm 51 is not just about human nature; it is also about God's nature. And the good news is that God is willing to forgive sinners and is able to re-create people. Israel's corporate life is an example (see Ezek 36:16-36). David's life is an example. And the psalmist here offers his or her own life as an example as well. To be sure, sin is a powerful and persistent reality, but God's grace is a more powerful and enduring reality. By the grace of God, a persistently disobedient people become partners with God in "an everlasting covenant" (Isa 55:3 NRSV). By the grace of God, dull and disobedient disciples of Jesus become known as those "who have been turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6 NRSV). By the grace of God, Saul, the former murderer, becomes Paul, ambassador for Christ. Grace is fundamental. That is the good news.

2. It should not surprise us that the apostle Paul knew Psalm 51. He quoted it in Rom 3:4 as part of his argument for the universality of human sinfulness. But this argument is the prelude to Paul's proclamation of justification of the sinful by God's grace (see Rom 3:21-31). Paul, of course, saw this reality revealed in Jesus Christ. What Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:17-20) is reminiscent of Ps 51:10-13:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (NRSV)

Psalm 51 is also an invitation to "be reconciled to God." As Paul knew, reconciliation happens as a result of God's willingness to forgive; the result is a new creation (see Ps 51:10-12), and the reconciled are entrusted with the message of reconciliation (see Ps 51:13). Like the psalmist, too, Paul must have found it necessary to pray often, "Deliver me from bloodshed" (Ps 51:14; see 2 Cor 6:4-5). Jesus also, of course, experienced the violence of persons who opposed what they perceived to be the scandalous proclamation of God's grace.

In the final analysis, Psalm 51 is a proclamation of the good news of the justification of sinners by God's grace. As suggested above, Paul's fullest exposition of this good news is his letter to the Romans. Following the exposition in Romans 1-11, Paul laid out the implications for response in 12:1-2. His appeal is reminiscent of the point at which the psalmist arrives in 51:17 and the direction taken to get there (see Reflections on Psalm 50):

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (NRSV)

214. A. Whitney Brown, *The Big Picture: An American Commentary* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991) 12.

215. See Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 50, 54.



# PSALM 51:1-19 REFLECTIONS

The psalmist has anticipated Paul's advice. By the mercies of God (v. 1), the psalmist presents his or her whole self as a living sacrifice (51:17). The transformed psalmist (vv. 10-12) then is able to discern the will of God (v. 13a) and begins to participate with God in transforming the world (v. 13b). By the grace of God, amid the persistent reality of human sinfulness, there is a new creation.

3. As testimony to the pervasiveness of sin and as a call to be reconciled to God, Psalm 51 is clearly appropriate for its assigned use on Ash Wednesday and during the season of Lent. As a powerful proclamation of God's grace, this psalm is clearly also a psalm for all seasons, and it is appropriate that it is used often in worship. Paraphrases of Psalm 51, especially of vv. 1-5 and 10-12, are frequently used as confessions of sin. Many persons would recognize v. 15 as a call to worship, and perhaps they would appreciate it even more if they knew its source and context.

## PSALM 52:1-9, I TRUST IN GOD'S UNFAILING LOVE

NIV

### Psalm 52

For the director of music. A *maskil*<sup>a</sup> of David.  
When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech."

<sup>1</sup>Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man?  
Why do you boast all day long,  
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?

<sup>2</sup>Your tongue plots destruction;  
it is like a sharpened razor,  
you who practice deceit.

<sup>3</sup>You love evil rather than good,  
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.

*Selah*

<sup>4</sup>You love every harmful word,  
O you deceitful tongue!

<sup>5</sup>Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin:  
He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent;

he will uproot you from the land of the living.

*Selah*

<sup>6</sup>The righteous will see and fear;  
they will laugh at him, saying,

<sup>7</sup>"Here now is the man  
who did not make God his stronghold

NRSV

### Psalm 52

To the leader. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came to Saul and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

<sup>1</sup> Why do you boast, O mighty one,  
of mischief done against the godly?<sup>a</sup>  
All day long <sup>2</sup>you are plotting destruction.  
Your tongue is like a sharp razor,  
you worker of treachery.

<sup>3</sup> You love evil more than good,  
and lying more than speaking the truth.

*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 and tear you from your tent;  
he will uproot you from the land of the living.

*Selah*

<sup>6</sup> The righteous will see, and fear,  
and will laugh at the evildoer,<sup>b</sup> saying,

<sup>7</sup> "See the one who would not take  
refuge in God,  
but trusted in abundant riches,  
and sought refuge in wealth!"<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Cn Compare Syr. Heb. the kindness of God    <sup>b</sup>Heb. him  
<sup>c</sup>Syr. Tg. Heb. in his destruction

<sup>a</sup> Title. Probably a literary or musical term