



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

PSALMS 31-60

Week 4

Troublemakers and Gossipers

Psalm 52

OPENING
up to the Word

Do others trust you to keep a secret? To cut the grapevine to avoid gossip? To expose false rumors? Or can you be “trusted” to pass juicy tidbits on—sometimes dressing them up as requests for prayer?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. For background, read 1 Samuel 22:6-23. What happened when David came to Ahimelech seeking provision and protection for himself and his men? What happened after this was revealed to Saul by Doeg the Edomite?

2. Can you fault David for denouncing Doeg the so-called “mighty man” (vs. 1-4)? How does this psalm describe Doeg’s character? Why was he so detested?

3. What does this harsh psalm have in common with David’s denunciation of Goliath (1Sa 17:45-47)?

4. What parts of this psalm convey wisdom? Lament? Trust? Any Christ-like forgiveness?

5. Was David better, or worse off, for having experienced the attack of an arrogant and evil enemy such as Doeg the Edomite?

LIVING
out the Word

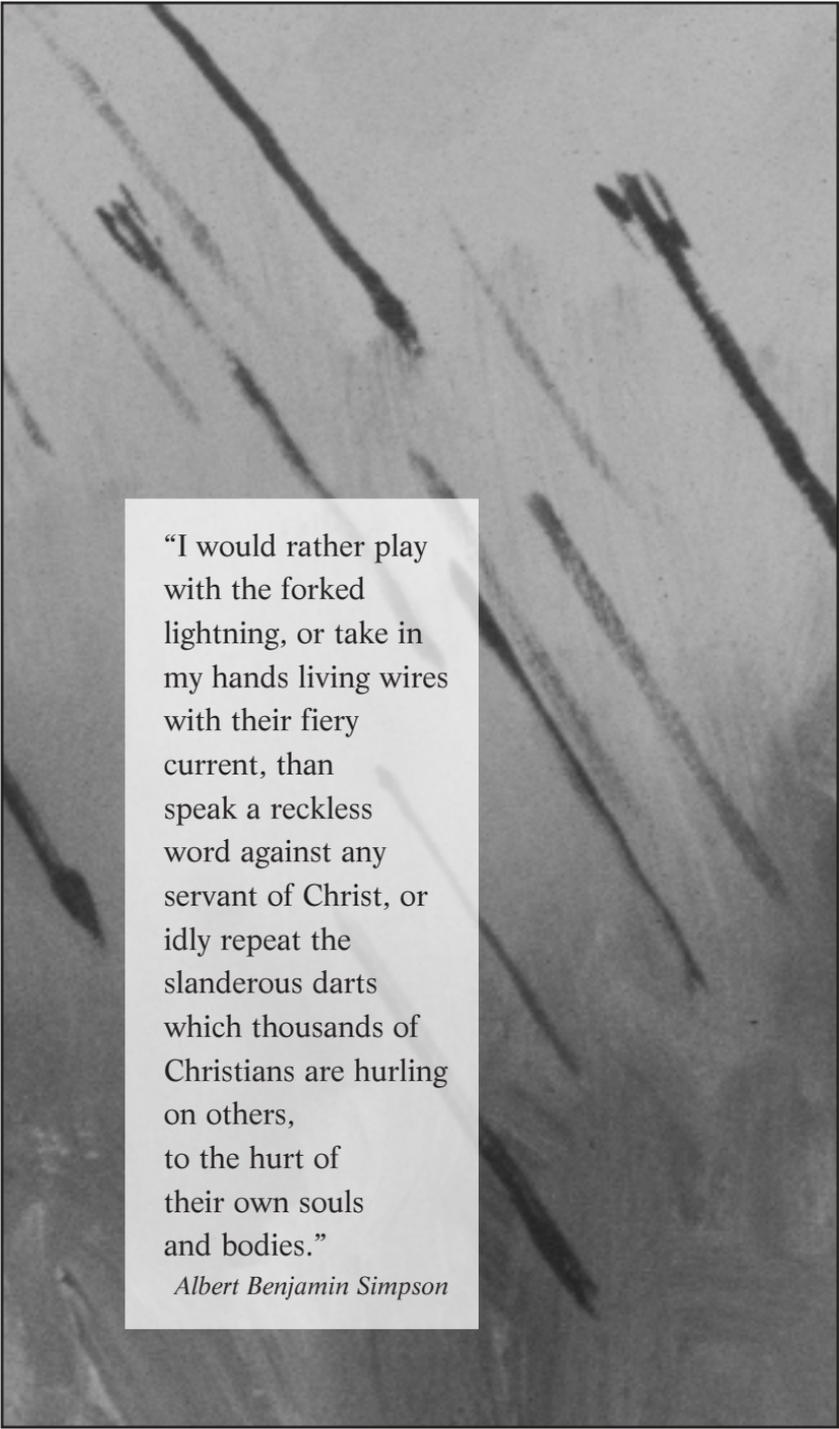
1. In contemporary terms, does this Doeg the traitor and back-stabber remind you of anyone?

2. Has a destructive or deceitful tongue (Ps 52:2-4) resulted in ruin for you or a loved one?

3. Suppose you came seeking provision or protection from a friend, who then betrayed you. How would you respond? Anything like David in this psalm? Or would you find some cause for hope—loving and forgiving your enemies, as did Jesus?

WINDOW
on the Word

For the events of David’s life referred to in the superscription, read 1 Samuel 22:6-23. There we learn that Ahimelech was brave enough to risk his life to protect David, and then that Ahimelech was slain by Doeg the Edomite and that this had a devastating effect on David.



“I would rather play
with the forked
lightning, or take in
my hands living wires
with their fiery
current, than
speak a reckless
word against any
servant of Christ, or
idly repeat the
slanderous darts
which thousands of
Christians are hurling
on others,
to the hurt of
their own souls
and bodies.”

Albert Benjamin Simpson

The Fool Says There Is No God

Psalm 53

OPENING
up to the Word

Try thinking like an atheist—someone who is sure God does not exist. Has there been a time in your life when it seemed to you as though “there is no God”? What might drive someone to become an atheist?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Who are the “fools” in this psalm? (a) atheists, (b) uneducated people, (c) evildoers, (d) everyone has forsaken God in some way and at some point. What contemporary examples come to mind?
2. Does the world around you seem as foolish and evil as it did to David? Why or why not?
3. What use of this chapter as well as Psalm 14 did Paul make in Romans 3:10-12?

LIVING
out the Word

1. How has God given you the gift of his faith?
2. Looking around you at the world today, would you agree that “there is no one who does good, not even one” (v. 3; Ps 14:3; Ro 3:12)? Would you include yourself?
3. Do we not effectively deny and reject God when we attempt to earn salvation in some form through our own efforts?
4. How does God’s grace change the world?

WINDOW
on the Word

*This psalm repeats Psalm 14, almost verbatim, with an important difference in verse 5 (compare Ps 14:5-6). The apostle Paul used this psalm (or Ps 14) to make a very strong statement about **the human sinful condition** (see Ro 3:10-12). There is eternal hope for all who have rejected God (which includes every human being) because of the full expression of God’s grace in the Person of Jesus Christ—“salvation...out of Zion” (v. 6).*

Betrayed and Vindicated, Again

DAY 24

Psalms 54

Have you ever been picked on or betrayed? If so, for what?

1. For background, read 1 Samuel 23. What happened when David sought divine guidance and protection for himself and his allies? What happened after his hiding place was revealed to Saul by the Ziphites?

2. How does Psalm 54 fit into the events of 1 Samuel 23?

3. Look for the structure of the psalm. Can you find a cry for vindication, a confession of confidence, a call for a fair settlement and a vow to praise? What does this structure tell you about David's relationship with God?

4. What was the outcome for the troubled David? Why was he so confident and hopeful?

1. When others turn against you, or "attack" you, is your response like David's? In what way?

2. Is David's prayer a call that criminals would be brought to justice, or a call for personal vindication?

3. How might David's prayer differ from the appropriate Christ-like response in the New Testament (Lk 23:34)?

*This psalm picks up where Psalm 52 left off (see related footnote). The earlier **betrayal by Doeg the Edomite** was not a surprise, but here (and in 1Sa 23) David reflects on the experience of being betrayed unexpectedly.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

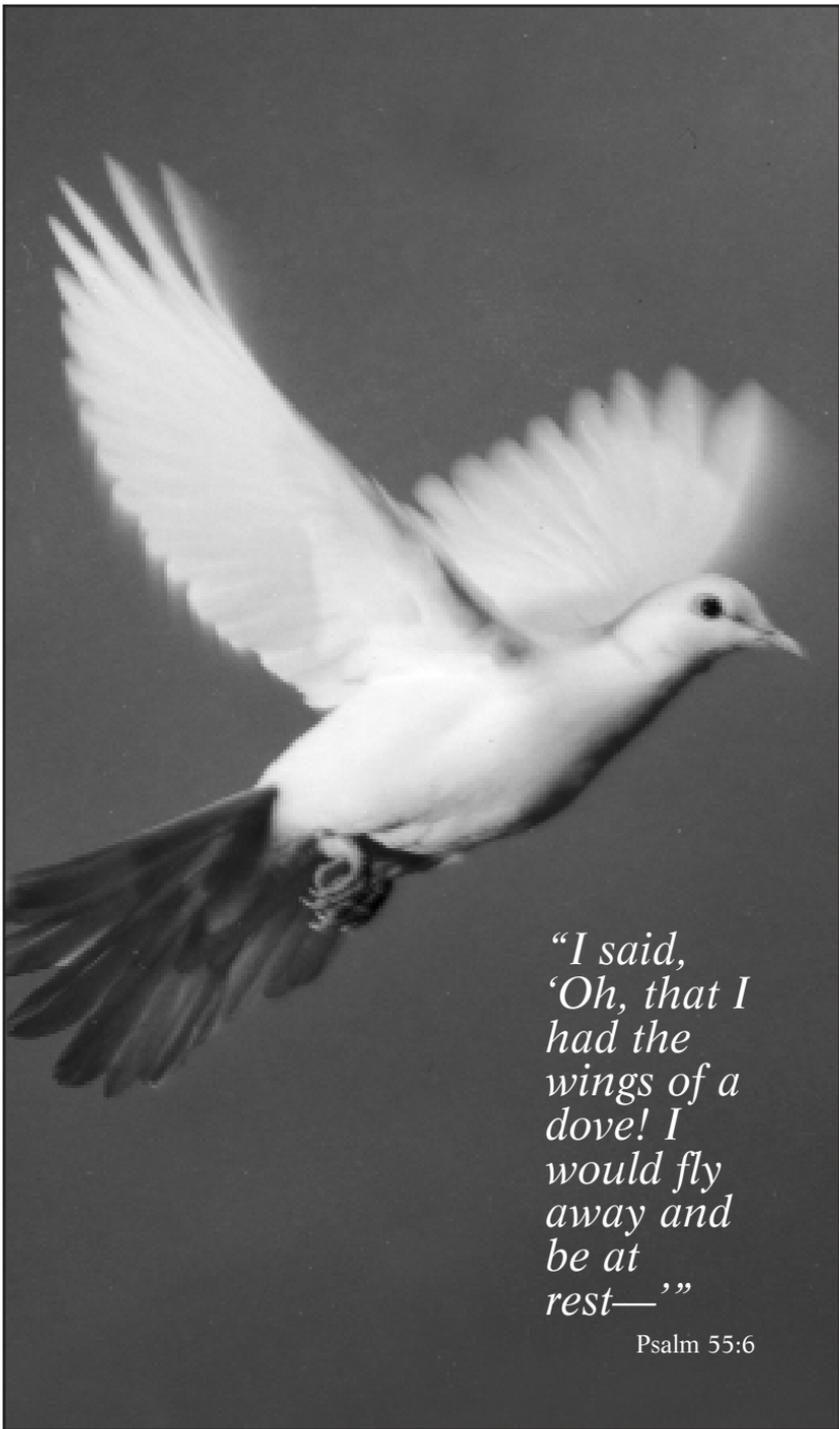
into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word



*“I said,
‘Oh, that I
had the
wings of a
dove! I
would fly
away and
be at
rest—’”*

Psalm 55:6

If I Could Fly Away...

DAY 25

Psalm 55

If you could fly like a bird and get away from it all, what kind of bird would you be, and where would you go?

1. Familiarize yourself with the story of Absalom's rebellion (see 2Sa 15–18). Note the social unrest, urban violence, palace intrigue, conspiracy theories, false rumors and slanderous gossip. Note how this psalm responds to that situation.
2. What is most difficult about the situation David is facing? (a) verbal insults, (b) death threats, (c) culture of violence, (d) betrayal by a close companion, (e) rumors.
3. Where would this king like to fly away to and find rest (vs. 6-8)? Where does he finally find shelter (vs. 16, 22)?
4. What vengeance for evil deeds does David cry out for (vs. 9, 15, 19, 23)?
5. Can you imagine Jesus praying this psalm following his betrayal by Judas and the desertion of his disciples? Or would Jesus' prayer have been different? How so?

1. Is there a situation that is troubling you, such that you yearn to "fly away and be at rest"?
2. Are there any troubling thoughts, concerns about evil, even unanswered prayers that God's grace does not cover?

Absalom's rebellion against the king (see 2Sa 15–17) may be the background for this psalm. Assuming this is true, note that David, in Ps 55, calls for the swift death of his enemy, who is also his own son. Yet in 2Sa 18:33 when Absalom dies, David's attitude has changed radically. His Christ-like wish is that he could have died in his son's place.

OPENING
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What Can Anyone Do to Me?

Psalm 56

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever imagined a “worst-case scenario” of bodily harm that someone might do to you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. For background, read 1 Samuel 21:10–22:1. How does Psalm 56 fit into the life-threatening events of 1 Samuel 21?

2. Why repeat “I will not be afraid” and “What can mortal man do to me?” (vs. 4, 11)? (a) this is a pep talk, (b) David was in denial, (c) as a sign of confidence.

3. What aspect of God’s character did David appeal to in such a fearful “worst case”?

LIVING
out the Word

1. Are there any “enemies” that seem to threaten your life? (a) health problems, (b) someone with a grudge against you, (c) creatures of your imagination, (d) a business rival, (e) annoying neighbors. If your life really were in danger how might you react?

2. Recall the “worst-case scenario” from the *Opening Up to the Word* section for today (see top of page). Did your fears prove groundless? Or, if realized or realistic, did anyone or anything help you overcome those fears?

3. Some fears lose their force when held up to the power of Jesus Christ, while other fears seem to persist. Why do you think that is?

WINDOW
on the Word

*David not only escaped dangerous men by feigning mental illness, but he lived to write a psalm about it (see 1Sa 21:10–22:1). The NT further affirms that God’s power transcends man’s feebleness, which is the point of David’s rhetorical question, “**what can mortal man do to me?**” (Ps 56:4, 11; Heb 13:6). The affirmation, “**that God is for me**” (Ps 56:9), is also expanded further by the NT (see Ro 8:28-39).*

Begging for Mercy

DAY 27

Psalms 57

Ever find yourself “begging for mercy”? Under what circumstances?

1. With what images does David describe his plight? His enemies? His rescuer?
2. What “disaster,” “lions,” “beasts” or “pit” is David talking about (vs. 1, 4, 6; for possibilities, see 1Sa 21:10–22:2 or 1Sa 24)?
3. What divine purpose or calling for David would God fulfill (v. 2; see 1Sa 16:1-13; 2Sa 7)?
4. What mood swing do you sense in this psalm? What contributed to this change for the better?
5. What qualities of God does David focus on here?

1. In your own life, what images would you use to describe the circumstances that you wish would soon be over?
2. Who are the “enemies” you wish would be rebuked? From whom do you seek a rescue?
3. Ask God to bring you into a closer walk with Jesus—the one who can and will save you out of your troubles, no matter how serious they may seem.

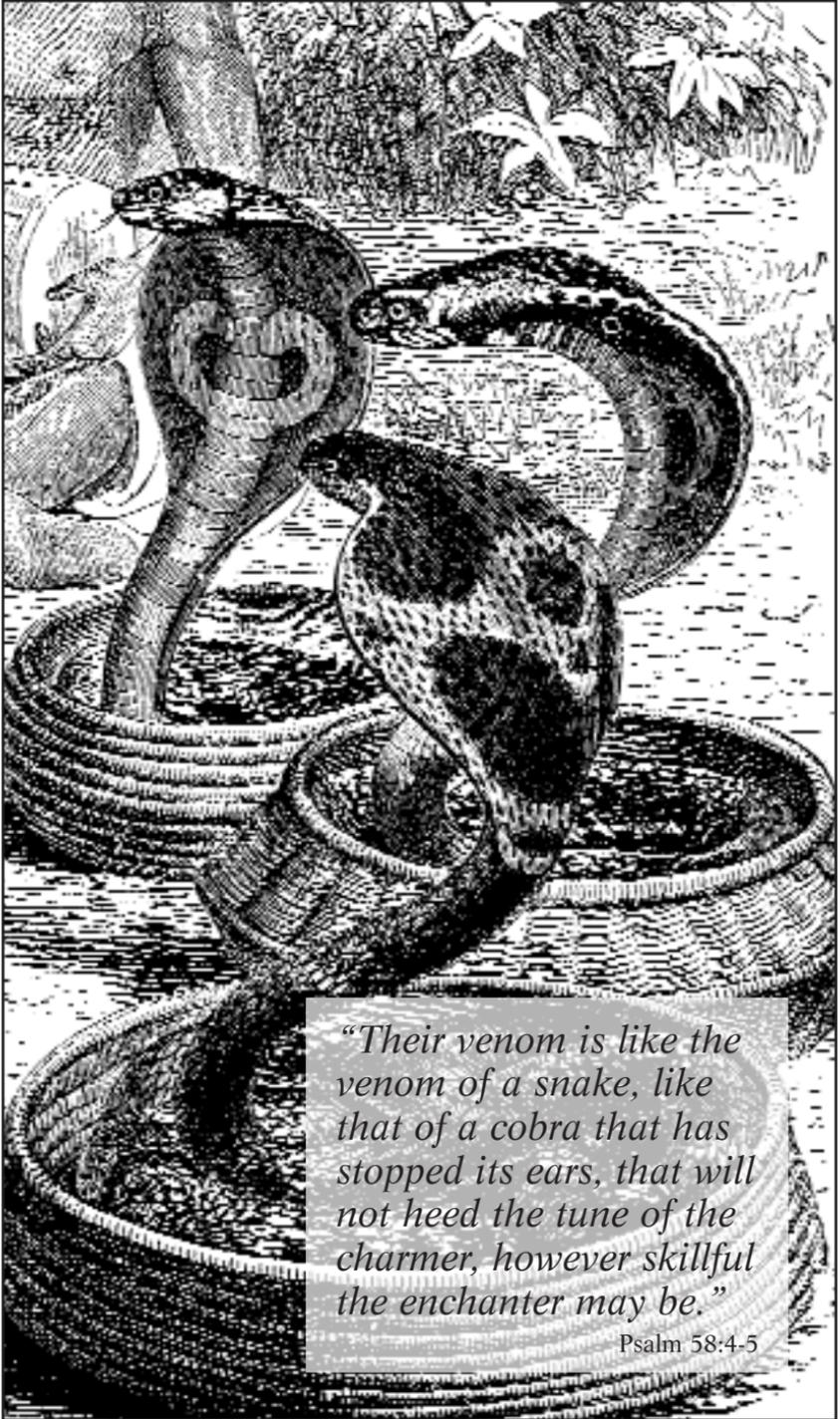
*David hid in a **cave** while fleeing Saul on two occasions (see either 1Sa 21:10–22:2 or 1Sa 24). This psalm’s heading does not tell us which of these occasions is being referred to here.*

OPENING
up to the Word

DIGGING
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on the Word



“Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears, that will not heed the tune of the charmer, however skillful the enchanter may be.”

Psalm 58:4-5

Brood of Vipers

DAY 28

Psalm 58

Know any “snakes in the grass”? Would you like to take revenge on the last snake that “bit” you?

1. What situation(s) made David angry? (a) corrupt rulers, (b) scheming enemies, (e) disloyal friends.

2. If you experience a lack of justice in your physical life, how does your faith in God’s absolute forgiveness and incredible mercy help you cope with your physical predicament? How does it inform your attitude toward those who have committed the injustice?

1. When faced with painful injustice, which are you more likely to do? (a) shrug your shoulders and do nothing, (b) use diplomacy to bring change, (c) take political action to help bring about justice, (d) write letters to the your local newspaper or congressperson, (e) blog about it (f) pray.

2. For any lack of justice you may receive in this physical world—not receiving what you feel you deserve—isn’t it more than overwhelmed by the fact that God’s grace ensures you don’t receive what you deserve, spiritually?

*Beginning with Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin (see Mt 26:57-67), the church has applied this **imprecatory psalm** to many unjust affairs of this world. Wherever justice is corrupted, the church should champion the cause of the righteous with calls for wrongs to be righted, as does this psalm of David. These bloodthirsty curses (vs. 6-8) borrow violent rhetoric from curses of the ancient Near East. David is fiercely concerned for the poor and the powerless, and realizes that God will avenge the wicked judges for victimizing the innocent (vs. 1-2).*

OPENING

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*“They return
at evening,
snarling like
dogs, and
prowl about
the city.”*

Psalm 59:6



Don't Get Mad —Get Even

DAY 29

Psalm 59

Did you have a bully in your school? Did the bully ever pick on you? What was the result? Were you ever a bully?

1. Where was David in this psalm? What had he done to bring trouble on himself? (a) he wanted to take Saul's place as king, (b) he called Saul's men "dogs," (c) he escaped Saul's dragnet again, (d) nothing.
2. What is the primary weapon wielded against the psalmist by the evildoers?
3. How did David wiggle out of this problem? What revenge did David seek?
4. Who of us can honestly say, "I have done no wrong" (v. 4)? On what basis could David have said this?
5. How is God addressed or described in this psalm? Why did David put so much confidence in God?

1. Are you as confident as David that God will take care of you?
2. What "enemies" do you fear? How might their tongue hurt you?
3. Does the example of Jesus and the unconditional grace of God melt your fiery desire for vengeance?

*The original event referred to here was **when Saul had David's house under a stake-out**, but to no avail (1Sa 19:11-18). The psalmists modified this psalm for their later congregational use when Israel was surrounded and under siege by other nations (vs. 5, 8), as when Hezekiah was besieged by the Assyrians (2Ki 18, 19) and Nehemiah was under attack by Sanballat and company (Neh 4).*

OPENING
up to the Word

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“Shaken, Staggering and Stirred”

Psalm 60

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever felt rejected? What were the circumstances?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How do the opening (vs. 1-3) and closing (vs. 10-12) sections of this psalm compare?
2. How can David blame God in one breath and ask for his help in the next? (a) he's confused (b) he believes God is fickle, (c) he's confident that the outcome is always in God's hands.
3. Find the places identified by this psalmist on a Bible map (vs. 6-9).
4. Which elements do you find in the psalmist's relationship with God? (a) love, (b) fear, (c) neglect, (d) lament, (e) triumph, (f) ambivalence, (g) rejection.
5. What prompts David to pray a “different tune”?

LIVING
out the Word

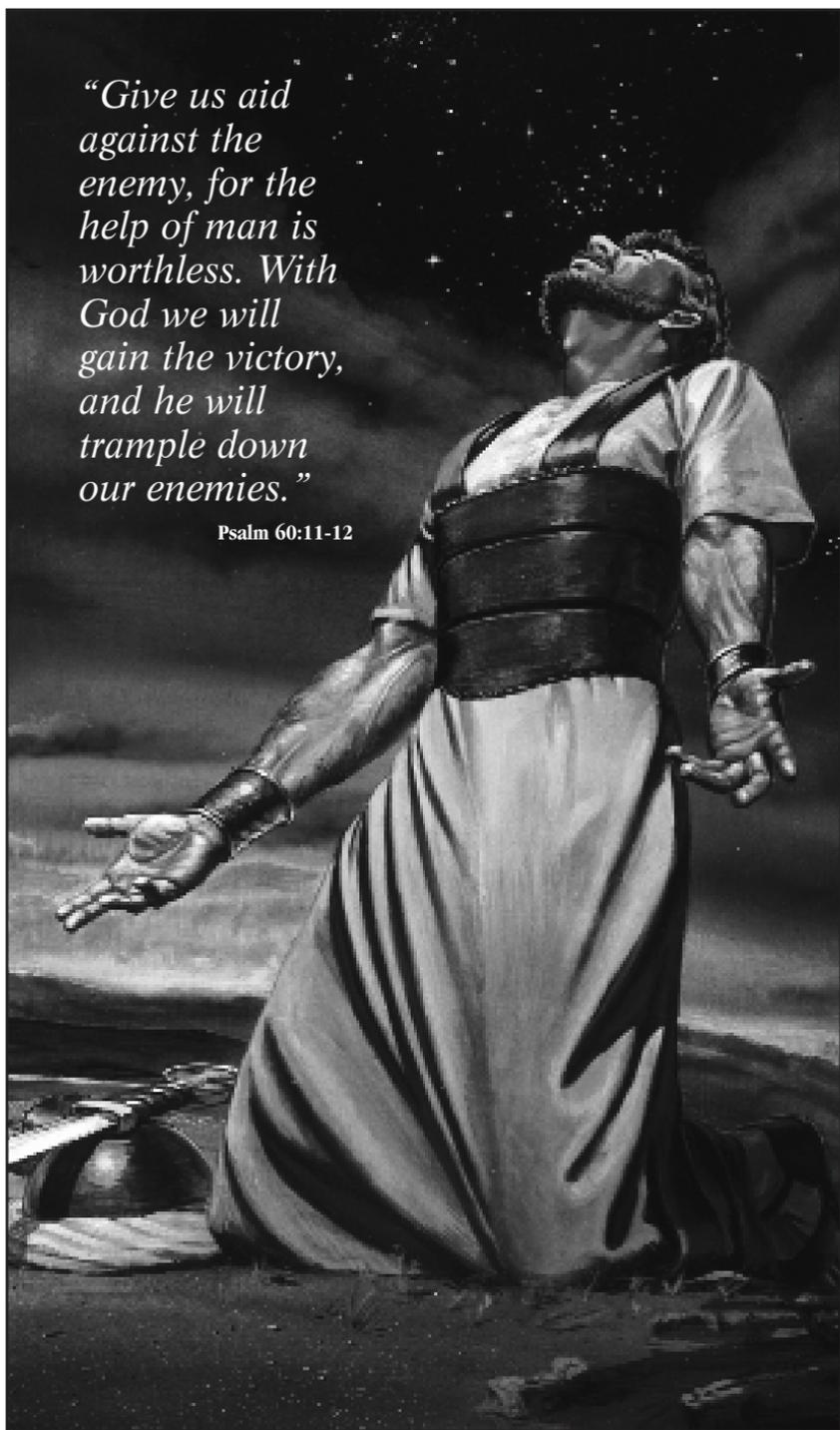
1. Is there a “battle front” in your life? How might this psalm apply to that situation?
2. Where do you find help for your battles? (a) from family members, (b) from friends, (c) from Jesus, the captain of your salvation, (d) you fight your own battles.
3. Meditate on the loving relationship God has with you, by his grace, because of the Cross of Christ.

WINDOW
on the Word

*The original events that occasioned this psalm, according to Israelite tradition, are **when David fought the Arameans** on the northern front and Edomites on the southern front (see 2Sa 8:5; 1Ch 18:5; 2Sa 10). The impact of these events left God's people “shaken, staggering, and stirred” as from drinking strong wine (v. 3), but also more dependent on divine help.*

*“Give us aid
against the
enemy, for the
help of man is
worthless. With
God we will
gain the victory,
and he will
trample down
our enemies.”*

Psalm 60:11-12



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