

SBC – Nov 17, 2024

Psalm 53 (NKJV)

“Portrait of the Wicked – Restoration of Israel”

Psalm 53 (NKJV)

To the Chief Musician. Set to “Mahalath.” A Contemplation of David.

Once again, we have a Psalm designated to the Chief Musician, which suggests that it was intended to be used in the worship life of Israel.

When it says “**Set to ‘Mahalath’**” the word “**Mahalath**” is literally the idea of “suffering” or “sickness” and is thought to refer to something like a sad tune or a funeral hymn. Although some think it might refer to the type of instrument used – perhaps that would reflect the mood of sadness.

The word **Maskil** is thought to designate it as either a contemplative or a teaching poem.

Psalm 53 is very similar to Psalm 14 (with only a few differences) leading many to think it was essentially the same Psalm edited for a separate occasion.

The biggest difference between Psalm 14 and 53 is that Psalm 14 uses the name YHWH four times and Elohim three times, and in contrast, Psalm 53 uses the name Elohim seven times. Obviously, there is some overlap as Psalm 14 uses both names. The only other difference is that verse 5 in Psalm 53 has a different ending. David is the author of both.

Slide # 1

Psalm 53

“Portrait of the Wicked – Restoration of Israel”

- v. 1 – The Heart of a Fool
- vv. 2-3 – God’s Examination of Humanity
- vv. 4-5 – The Judgment of God
- v. 6 – A Prayer for the Salvation of Israel

1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good.

The word fool here is the Hebrew word “**nabal**” (cf. 1 Sam. 25:25). A fool denies what is plainly evident.

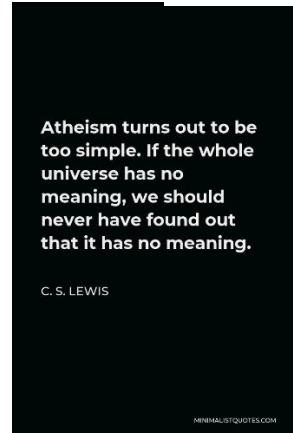
The Bible assumes the existence of God is SELF-EVIDENT. The Bible does not make a prolonged case for the existence of God but rather begins with that assumption by saying, "***In the beginning God...***". (Gen. 1:1).

The Bible emphasizes that evidence in creation and evidence in conscience is sufficient to make mankind accountable to the truth of God. Mankind is hardwired to know the truth of God as revealed in nature and the laws of nature (Rom. 1:18-20). Logic and reasoning interacting with general revelation point to the truth of God.

April 1st is commonly said to be "April Fools' Day". This day is often celebrated by playing practical jokes and spreading hoaxes. Christians often, in jest, say that April 1st is the holiday for atheists because the Bible says, "*The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'*" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1)

There are actually two possible ways to understand this phrase "There is no God." Commonly, it is taken as the idea that the fool says to himself that God does not exist and, therefore, lives accordingly. This is possible, and in this view, "There is no God" is an intellectual position.

Slide # 2



But the idea of a FOOL here in Psalm 53 could also be (and I think preferably so) understood as DEFIANCE, with the nuance being that the fool says "NO" to God – he says "no God". Note the language here that says this is a HEART problem and not merely a HEAD problem. Therefore, a strong argument can be made that this is the better view.

Thus, the fool says NO to God's truth, NO to divine standards, NO to God's authority. The fool assumes the position of DEFIANT REBELLION. And at core this is a "Lordship" issue. The rebel FOOL defies the Lordship's authority of God, thus suppressing the truth of God (Rom. 1:18).

The God-denying man David has in mind is not merely troubled by intellectual objections to the existence of God; **in his heart** he wishes God away, typically for fundamentally moral reasons. – **David Guzik**

“Let the preacher aim at the heart, and preach the all-conquering love of Jesus, and he will by God’s grace win more doubters to the faith of the gospel than any hundred of the best reasoners who only direct their arguments to the head.”

- **Charles Spurgeon**

In view here is fundamentally a HEART issue. Yes, there may be "intellectual fools," but in reality, all fools are DEFIANT of God and the self-evident evidence all around and within.

It is the position of a FOOL to defy God!

In Romans 3:10-12 Paul quotes snippets from verses 1-3 here in Psalm 53 to make his case that the whole of humanity is depraved and under the sentence of sin.

Note David further defines the FOOL as being corrupt, having done abominable iniquity, and that there is none who does good. **Corrupt** here is the idea of destroying or twisting God’s truth. **Abominable iniquity** is perverseness that God passionately hates. What they hold in their heart is then reflected in their conduct. There is a marked difference in moral behavior between those who properly recognize God for Who He is and those who refuse to do so.

As David considers the FOOL, he broadens his scope to take in the whole of humanity – finding there is NONE who does good, as seen definitively in the verse that follows. So David segues from the heart of the fool to the whole of humanity – in effect, showing that everyone is initially in the camp of the fool. Depraved humanity all plays the part of the fool.

Apart from the GRACE of God we are all in the position of being a fool. In fact, those who are saved by the grace of God are only fools who have been turned. In verse 3, David goes on to say, “*Every one of them has turned aside....*”. This is the natural state of the entire human race (cf. Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:10-12). Apart from the GRACE of God, the whole of humanity is but a bunch of REBEL FOOLS who defy the Lordship of God. This is mankind’s fundamental problem! We are born rebel fools, and apart from conversion, we will die in that state. Only God can turn FOOLS into trophies of GRACE.

2 God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

David here pictures God as looking down from heaven in a thorough inspection of the entire human race. He is looking to see if there are any who understand, who seek God.

While people may wish to forget about God – to even deny His existence – it is really hard to fully get rid of God – yea impossible. He is not going anywhere. And as God He is the judge of all. He observes all. He sees all.

Jesus said the Father is looking for true worshipers (Jn. 4:23). He is looking to see if any understand – are there any who understand the right way – who really get it. Are there any that understand it really is all about Him! Are there any who really seek after God?

The answer is given in verse 3...

3 Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.

There is not a single exception! The entity of humanity – every single one of them has turned aside from God. None of them want God. None seek after God. They “have together become corrupt”. The word “corrupt” (Heb. alah) here means “soured” like we might speak of sour milk (cf. Ps. 14:3; Job 15:16).

And then the finale, “***There is none who does good, no, not one.***” All are sinners! There is not a single exception!

Apart from God’s intervention, all is hopeless! God always makes the first move! He must intervene, or we would never seek God.

Slide # 3

Romans 3:10–12 (NKJV)

10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is **none who seeks after God.**

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is **none who does good, no, not one.**”

Paul in Romans 3:10-18 brings forth a 14-point indictment from the OT showing the whole of humanity is depraved and under the indictment of sin. It is brutal! And then in verses 19-20 he gives the final verdict.

Slide # 4

Romans 3:19–20 (NKJV)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that **every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.**

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is **the knowledge of sin.**

In our depravity there is none who ever even seeks after God. God is ever the seeker. In the garden after Adam and Eve sinned it was God who came after them. Adam and Eve did not go looking for God.

Slide # 5

Luke 19:10 (NKJV)

10 for the **Son of Man has come to seek** and to save that which was lost.”

We do the running – God does the seeking. We do the sinning – God does the saving. But praise God, He does seek, and there is a GRACE remnant that responds.

David here segues into what defines depraved fools who continue on in their position of rebellion.

4 Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call upon God?

Depravity in the raw is shocking! It shouldn't be if we know the Bible but then when we really see it for what it is – it is shocking! We see that here. David, blurts out, “***Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge***”? Don't they have any sense? And of course, the answer is, “No, they don't,” which is why they do what they do.

What characterizes their rebellion against God is two things: 1) They eat up God's people (that is destroy them) as casually as eating bread. They have no fear of God as seen in their destruction of God's people.

It's no big deal to them because God is no big deal to them. They have no fear of God and therefore think nothing of eating up His people. How the lost oppress and persecute God's people is a defining mark of where they are at with God.

And then David says, "***And do not call upon God***". They are the persecutors of God's people and they are prayerless!

"***To call upon God***" in the Bible is a mark of dependence. It looks to God for help. It indicates reliance upon God. It is characteristic of true faith.

Slide # 6

Romans 10:11–13 (NKJV)

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever **believes on Him** will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all **who call upon Him**.

13 For "whoever **calls on** the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Wicked fools who defy God persecute His people and they are prayerless. They think they don't need God. They don't need a Savior! They don't believe and they don't call on God for help!

That is a really scary place to be – sadly they just don't realize it!

5 There they are in great fear Where no fear was, For God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; You have put them to shame, Because God has despised them.

Suddenly there was a GREAT reversal! They were in the position of having no fear – probably bragging about how BOLD they were. But suddenly in that position they are IN GREAT FEAR. "Where no fear was – there are they in great fear!"

Whereas they were not afraid to eat God's people up like bread – just destroying them at will, whereas they were not at all afraid thinking they had no need of God at all, SUDDENLY in that posture of defiant rebellion they find themselves terrorized beyond description.

There is a great lesson here:

I remember the evangelist Sam Dalton would say to people who arrogantly in unbelief would say: “***I am not afraid of God!***” He would then say, “Then don’t die” because once you die you will be terrified beyond measure!

This is exactly what the Psalmist says in Psalm 73.

Slide # 7

Psalm 73:19 (NKJV)

19 Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as **in a moment!** They are **utterly consumed with terrors.**

People can be so cocky – so full of themselves – claiming to be in a position of NO FEAR. And then, just that sudden, the bottom falls out, and there is nothing but them and the eternal God. What then? That is the place of GREAT FEAR, but praise God as true believers, we will never know it!

I love that God repeatedly says to His people “***fear not***”. I love that after His resurrection having conquered death Jesus repeatedly says to His disciples, “***Fear not***”. If we are right with God we have nothing to fear!

But those who abuse God’s people and don’t call upon Him, should be very much afraid. They are about to suddenly be consumed with GREAT FEAR!

It is so certain to come to pass that David speaks of it as having already happened -which is often referred to as the “***prophetic perfect***”.

At this point verse 5 in Psalm 53 diverts from what we have in Psalm 14. Many think the language here depicts some SUDDEN military setback on the battlefield (cf. Ps. 141:7; Jer. 8:1-2; Ezek. 6:5; 37:1-6), which SUDDENLY proved deadly disastrous, but exactly what the occasion was is uncertain (cf. 2 Kg. 7:6-7; 2 Chron. 20; Isa. 37).

Clearly, humiliating death at the hand of a military foe is pictured, and clearly, it is a God-thing that God brings about because He has despised them. They had no regard for God – so they reap what they have sown in that God has no regard for them. Some translate “despised” as “rejected”.

The picture here is one of God bringing about their death in a very ignominious manner where they are not even afforded an honorable burial.

For a body to remain unburied was a great disgrace in the ancient Near East; even an executed criminal was supposed to have a decent burial (Deut. 21:23; see 2 Kin. 23:14; Ezek. 6:5).

– **Warren Wiersbe**

Too late, they discover God really is in charge, and it is eternally serious to defy Him!

David then concludes this Psalm with this prayer:

6 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.

Again, we are not certain what the occasion was but it would seem that God's people were being oppressed by the wicked.

David here prays a prayer for God to restore the fortunes of His people. The request "that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion" clearly has Messianic overtones as seen in other Scriptures.

We know that the prophetic Scriptures tell us that when Messiah comes at the Second Coming the epicenter of the deliverance will be at Zion.

Slide # 8

Joel 3:16–17 (NKJV)

16 The LORD also will **roar from Zion**, And utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But the LORD will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel.

17 "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, **Dwelling in Zion** My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, And no aliens shall ever pass through her again."

This is clearly a Second Coming context and note the emphasis on Zion! Indeed, the salvation of Israel will emanate forth from Zion.

The word Zion literally means "**fortification**". It is synonymous with the "**city of God**" as seen in Ps. 87:2-3. It is sometimes called the "poetic" name for Jerusalem. This is the FORTRESS – the safe place for God's people and ultimately will be an eternal safe place.

Slide # 9**Isaiah 59:20 (NKJV)**

20 “The **Redeemer will come to Zion**, And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” Says the LORD.

Zechariah 8:3 (NKJV)

3 “Thus says the LORD: ‘**I will return to Zion**, And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, The Mountain of the LORD of hosts, The Holy Mountain.’”

The Jews longed for the time Messiah would come out of Zion and deliver them from their enemies who had no fear of God. Paul quotes from the OT showing this will yet have a future fulfillment at the Second Coming.

Slide # 10**Romans 11:26–27 (NKJV)**

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “**The Deliverer will come out of Zion**, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.”

When David prays, “***Oh that the salvation would come out of Zion!***” it is like when we pray, “***Even so, come Lord Jesus!***” This is our great hope!

And finally, David then defines what this will mean for Israel. It will be the time when “***God brings back the captivity of His people.***” Captivity speaks of the oppression of God’s people.

Turning back the captivity of Israel is the idea of delivering her from her misfortune. This will be the time when God turns things around. God will then reverse the fortunes of His people, where “captivity” will in no way ever define them again.

This will be a time of great rejoicing and celebration in Israel. Indeed, as David says in anticipation: “***Let Jacob rejoice and be glad.***”

Commentaries note that the major difference between Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 is the focus on YHWH – the covenant keeping God of Israel in Psalm 14 versus the emphasis on Him as ELOHIM - the sovereign God in Psalm 53.

Slide # 11

YHWH – the Eternal, Unchanging, Covenant God of Israel

ELOHIM – Supreme Being, Almighty Sovereign God of the Universe

As I say, there is overlap here, but perhaps a pronounced distinct emphasis is made for a reason in each Psalm.

On the one hand as emphasized in Psalm 14, fools defy, the God of the Bible, Who as **YHWH** has so very clearly and permanently identified Himself with His people, Israel.

This is inexcusable. To this very day, what is happening in Israel has God's fingerprints all over it. They are His prophetic people! Prophecy swirls around them. Last day's prophecy swirls around them. Fools refuse to acknowledge this! The FOOL says in his heart "There is no YHWH" – there is no special God of Israel. That is a fatal position!

On the other hand, as seen in Psalm 53 the name **ELOHIM** emphasizes God as the supreme being to whom all are accountable. It emphasizes His sovereign authority! Fools refuse to acknowledge the One true sovereign God as He has intervened in history. But in this position of folly, the FOOL will suddenly find himself in total HORROR and TERROR, and there will be no escape.

We live in a wicked world where God's people are consistently abused. The wicked are so sure of themselves, thinking they don't need God! But Psalm 53 shows their time is coming – a time where they will be in great FEAR! Indeed it is the FOOL who says in his heart, "There is no God!"

But for the people of God – the BEST is yet to be! God is one day going to turn the tables. It will be a time of tremendous rejoicing and gladness.

"Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!"

Even so, come Lord Jesus!