

## Psalm 53

**Introduction:** In book two of the Psalms, we find psalms referring to the reign of the historical David. In Ps. 53 we find the fool. It reproduces Ps. 14, with some variations. One significant change is the use of God instead of Yahweh, consistent with book two (42-72) of the Psalms.

Ps. 14 comforts the faithful, Ps. 53 warns the wicked. (Allen Ross)

James Hamilton points out that David responds to the atrocities of a war criminal who put priests and their families—man, woman, child, infant—under a wicked ban, murdering them all on the orders of the renegade king. Saul’s reign had become satanic, and he commissioned Doeg to kill and destroy.

This psalm may refer to the time of David’s life close to 1 Sam. 22-25.

**Superscription:** *For the choir director. According to Mahalath (probably a musical term). A Maskil of David.*

### 1) What humanity looks like according to God’s standard—53:1-3

#### a) What the wicked does—53:1 <sup>1</sup> *The wicked fool [nabal]*

- This use of nabal may be an echo of 1 Sam. 25.
  - This refers to the spiritually unprincipled person (Alec Motyer)
- i) **Internally:** *says in his heart, “There is no God,”*
- (1) Perhaps a reference to philosophical or theological atheism.
  - (2) Perhaps a reference to practical atheism, the denial of being accountable to God. The fool thinks that God is not concerned with how people live their daily life.

#### ii) **Externally:**

- (1) **Destructive:** *they act corruptly [shahat],*
- (2) **Deviant:** *and commit abominable [ta’ab] injustice [avel];*

#### iii) **Summary:** *there is no one who does good.*

- (1) Some will argue that atheists do some good things. However, as Allan Ross points out: But in God’s sight they are not good because they are not done to the glory of God. They do nothing to enhance and promote life in a way that pleases God—nothing they do is meritorious.

#### b) God’s sovereign evaluation of sinful humanity—53:2-3

- God does not unfairly judge without a full evaluation.
- i) **God evaluates—53:2 <sup>2</sup> *God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there is ...***
- (1) *anyone who has insight [sakal],*

(2) *anyone who seeks after God.*

(a) Does anyone want a relationship with God marked by obeying and worshiping Him? (NET Bible)

ii) **What is His evaluation?**—53:3

(1) **Disloyal:** <sup>3</sup> *Every one of them has turned back [sug];*

(2) **Degenerate:** *together they have become worthless [alah];*

(a) Like sour milk.

(3) **Summary:** *there is no one who does good, not even one.*

(a) Quoted in Rom. 3:10-12

## 2) The judgment from the all-knowing, holy God 53:4-5

a) **Wicked humanity's ignorance of God's judgment**—53:4 <sup>4</sup> *Do the workers of iniquity not know,*

- The psalmist is amazed at their lack of understanding and their failure to anticipate that God will defend His people. (NET Bible)
- They don't know that they don't know.
- They are marked by two characteristics:

i) **Callous persecution:** *who eat up my people as they eat bread*

ii) **Fierce independence:** *and do not call upon God?*

b) **God's judgment brings fear**—53:5a

i) A location to panic: <sup>5</sup> **There** (emphatic) *they were in great dread (feared a fear) where no dread had been;*

ii) The exposure of defeat: *for God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you;*

(1) The bones are thus unable to be buried with honor.

c) **God's judgment brings shame**—53:5b

i) *You put them to shame, because God had rejected them.*

## 3) There is hope for the establishment of God's kingdom—53:6

a) **Hope for the kingdom:** <sup>6</sup> *Oh, that the salvation (plural) of Israel would come out of Zion! (and it will!)*

i) Cf. Rom. 11:26

b) **Joy in the kingdom:** *When God restores His captive people, may Jacob rejoice, may Israel be glad.*

## 4) Things to remember:

a) When danger threatens the people of God, it is enemy of God that should be afraid.

b) When danger threatens the people of God, the people of God may confidently expect God to address their situation at just the right time and in just the right way.