

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
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Psalm 53 — A Twin Psalm

1.0 Introducing Psalm 53

- Psalm 53 (in Book 2 of the Psalms) repeats with some changes Psalm 14 (in Book 1).
- Psalm 14:1-3 // Psalm 53:1-3 is cited in a modified form in the New Testament at Romans 3:10-12.
- Both “fool” and “Maskil” indicate a connection to wisdom literature.
- Psalm 53 addresses evil enemies who besieged Israel, while Psalm 14 addresses Israelite fools.
- Psalm 53:6 (= 14:7) presents a prophetic pronouncement about the restoration of Israel.

2.0 Reading Psalm 53 (NAU)

53:1 A Maskil of David.

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God,”
They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice;
There is no one who does good.

53:2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men
To see if there is anyone who understands,
Who seeks after God.

53:3 Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
There is no one who does good, not even one.

53:4 Have the workers of wickedness no knowledge,

Who eat up My people *as though* they ate bread
And have not called upon God?

53:5 There they were in great fear *where* no fear had been;
For God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you;
You put *them* to shame, because God had rejected them.

53:6 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When God restores His captive people,
Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

For the choir director; on stringed instruments.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 53

3.1 Outline

- I. Depravity (vv. 1-3)
- II. Destruction (vv. 4-5)
- III. Deliverance (v. 6)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “The fool” [Hebrew: *nabal*]
 - This individual is not stupid—he makes a conscious choice to engage in disruptive behavior.
 - This person makes a stubborn and insensitive moral decision for evil that brings harm to others.
- **v. 1** “There is no God”
 - In the ancient Near East philosophical atheism was virtually non-existent. This is a reference to practical atheism.
 - A practical atheist lives as though there is no God or that God does not really care about what happens on earth.
- **v. 2** “God has looked down from heaven”
 - Noah’s Flood – Genesis 6:5, 11, 12
 - Tower of Babel – Genesis 11:5
 - Sodom and Gomorrah – Genesis 18:21
 - The wording indicates the imminency of divine judgment.
- **v. 2** “who understands”
 - The Hebrew word is “*maskil*”—the same word as in the heading of the psalm.
- **vv. 1-3** “There is no one who does good”
 - The sentence is an inclusio that frames the description of the wicked.

A Comparison of Psalms 53 and 14

Psalm 53		Psalm 14
1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, <u>and</u> have committed abominable <u>injustice</u> ; There is no one who does good.		1 The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable <u>deeds</u> ; There is no one who does good.
2 <u>God</u> has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there is anyone who understands, Who seeks after God.		2 <u>The LORD</u> has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God.
3 <u>Every one of them</u> has <u>turned aside</u> ; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.		3 <u>They have all turned aside</u> , together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.
4 Have the workers of wickedness no knowledge, Who eat up My people <i>as</i> <i>though</i> they ate bread And have not called upon <u>God</u> ?		4 Do <u>all</u> the workers of wickedness not know, Who eat up my people <i>as</i> they eat bread, <i>And</i> do not call upon <u>the LORD</u> ?
5 There they were in great fear <u>where no fear had been</u> ; For God <u>scattered the bones of him who encamped against you</u> ; <u>You put them to shame</u> , <u>because God had rejected them</u> .		5 There they are in great dread, For God <u>is with the righteous generation</u> . 6 <u>You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted</u> , <u>But the LORD is his refuge</u> .
6 Oh, that the <u>salvation</u> of Israel would come out of Zion! When <u>God</u> restores His captive people, Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.		7 Oh, that the <u>salvation</u> of Israel would come out of Zion! When <u>the LORD</u> restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.

Key: plain text = no difference in Hebrew text
underlined = difference in Hebrew text is visible in English
wavy underlined = difference in Hebrew text is not visible in English

- Psalm 52 (1 Samuel 22): the story of Doeg the Edomite
- Psalm 53 (1 Samuel 25): suggestive of Nabal
- Psalm 54 (1 Samuel 23; 26): the incident with the Ziphites

- v. 4 “Who eat up My people *as though* they ate bread”
 - Compare Psalm 52:4 (“You love all words that devour”).
- v. 4 “have not called upon God”
 - Commentators normally understand this phrase as a reference to unbelievers.
 - Psalm 53 differs from Psalm 14 by speaking about the unbelieving enemies of Israel.
- v. 5 “*where* no fear had been”
 - Israel’s enemies were over-confident and unaware of what was in store for them.
- v. 5 “God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you”
 - Divine judgment left the bodies of Israel’s besiegers unburied and their bones were bleached by the sun.
 - Compare Jeremiah 8:1-2; 16:4; 25:33; Ezekiel 6:5; and 37:1.
- v. 6 “the salvation of Israel”
 - “Salvation” in Psalm 53:6 is plural, while in Psalm 14:7 it is singular.
 - The plural indicates complete salvation.

4.0 Singing Psalm 53

Are All the Foes of Zion Fools?

(Tune: “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”)

Are all the foes of Zion fools,
Who thus devour her saints?
Do they not know her Savior rules,
And pities her complaints?



They shall be seized with sad surprise;
For God's revenging arm
Scatters the bones of them that rise
To do his children harm.

In vain the sons of Satan boast
Of armies in array;
When God has first despised their host
They fall an easy prey.

O for a word from Zion's King,
Her captives to restore!
Jacob with all his tribes shall sing,
And Judah weep no more.

— Isaac Watts

5.0 Praying Psalm 53

- Lord, don't let me be sinfully foolish. [v. 1]
- Oh, God, I am a sinner – there is nothing good in me that I should deserve salvation. [vv. 1, 3]
- Father, protect Your people from wicked men. [v. 5]
- Oh, Lord, save your people Israel. Deliver Zion. [v. 6]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 53

- Fools behave as though God doesn't care what they do.
- Unbelievers will experience God's rejection, while believers will experience His refuge.
- God can and will save His people completely.

A Note on Mankind's Depravity and God's Judgment of the Wicked

Original sin deals with our depravity. Inability deals with the fact that our own depravity is humanly irremediable. Man is totally unable to change or act in a way that is different from it....

Inability does not mean the loss of natural liberty. This refers to free agency, namely, that man exercises volition according to his character. Inability presupposes liberty....

... inability means that in sin man is not only indisposed and made opposite to all good but that he is totally unable to be otherwise. It is inability to discern, love, or choose the things that are well pleasing to God. He cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned; he cannot love them because his mind is enmity against God; he cannot choose them because those in the flesh cannot please God.

— John Murray, "Inability," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*
(Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:83-84

- ◆ God does not send the sinner's sins to the lake of fire, He sends the sinner there (Revelation 19:20; 20:15).
- ◆ Psalm 5:5, "The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity."
- ◆ Psalm 11:5, "The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates."
- ◆ When we relate to sinners, it is not possible to think of their sin one way and of them in another way. Sinners, not their sins, are the enemies of God.