

## Psalm 53

**Title:** The Folly and Wickedness of Men

**Author and Date:** David

**Key Verse:** Psalm 53:1

**Type:** Didactic (Instruction)

### **Outline**

- A. Depravity: the corruption of the wicked (verses 1-3).
- B. Destruction: the conflict with the righteous (verses 4-5).
- C. Deliverance: the consolation of the psalmist (verse 6).

### **Notes**

Title: “For the Chief Musician: set to Mahalath. Maschil of David.” For the meaning of “the Chief Musician”, see the notes on Psalm 3. The meaning of the term “Mahalath” is uncertain. It may be a reference to a particular hymn tune of the day or a musical instrument (lute or lyre). This term occurs one other time in the title of Psalm 88. For “Maschil”, see the notes on Psalm 32.

Summary: Psalm 53 is similar in wording to Psalm 14. Both psalms are didactic (instruction) dealing with the corrupt character and conduct of one who says, “There is no God”. It is foolish to live without God and to live without seeking God. Why? Because it leads to a corrupt and wicked lifestyle (verses 1-3). When the ungodly wicked attack God’s people (verse 4), they will be judged by God (verse 5). In contrast, God will save his people Israel (verse 6).

Verses 1-6: The words of this psalm are nearly identical to Psalm 14. Verses five and six in Psalm 14 are combined into one verse in Psalm 53 (see 53:5). We have no information as to why there are two copies of the same psalm.

Verses 1-3: The words in these verses are paraphrased by Paul from the LXX and used in Romans 3:10-12. He quotes from this psalm (or Psalm 14) to demonstrate that all have sinned, both Jew and Gentile.

Verse 1: The “fool” (Heb. *nabal*) is a class of people, not a particular individual. These people are not simpletons, but those who refuse to acknowledge God and live accordingly (see also Psa. 10:4, 11, 13 and Isa. 32:6). They are wicked, evil, immoral, and “corrupt” (see Gen. 6:12). Moral absolutes and divine accountability do not matter to them. “There is no God” are the words of the practical atheist; one who lives as if there is no God. God is not in his heart.

Verse 2: For the words, “God looked down”, see Genesis 11:5 and 18:21. The moral climate of the day had deteriorated (see Psa. 12:1). Those who “understand” (the wise) and “seek God” (KJV) are set in contrast to the “fool” of verse 1. “Lord” (“Jehovah”, ASV) is used four times in Psalm 14 (verses 2, 4, 6, and 7). Here in Psalm 53, “God” (*Elohim*) is substituted for “Lord” (*Yahweh*) each time.

Verse 3: “Gone back” is “gone aside” in Psalm 14:3. Filthy” (KJV) is from the Heb. *alach* meaning “stinking”; like milk turned sour.

Verse 4: The wicked “eat up my people” (the righteous) when they attack the righteous and persecute them (Psa. 27:2; Jer. 10:25; Amos 8:4; Mic. 3:3). The wicked “have not called upon God” (KJV) meaning they do not obey, worship, or pray to the Lord (see Gen. 4:26).

Verse 5: “There were they in great fear” (KJV) refers to the wicked who refuse God, but still fear him. “God hath scattered the bones” and “Thou hast put them to shame” refers to God’s judgment upon the wicked (Israel’s enemies) who attack the righteous. The major difference in wording between Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 is found at this point in the psalm. Psalm 14:5 adds: “for God is in the generation of the righteous” (see the notes on Psalm 14). Psalm 14:6 adds: “Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge” (KJV). Psalm 14:5 stresses that God is with the righteous, while Psalm 53:5 stresses that God is against the wicked. Apparently, some of the psalms were adapted to fit different circumstances or uses in the temple worship.

Verse 6: Zion is a reference to Jerusalem (see Psa. 2:6; 9:11,14; etc). “The captivity of his people” (KJV) may not be a reference to the literal Babylonian captivity. It may simply be a reference to the figurative “captivity” of oppression caused by the corruption in David’s day. For “captivity” used in a figurative sense, see Job 42:10; Zephaniah 2:7; Amos 9:14; and Hosea 6:11.

## **Questions**

1. What does the fool say and what kind of person is he who says it (verse 1)?
2. What does God look down from heaven to see (verse 2)?
3. What does God find when he looks down from heaven (verse 3)?
4. What do the workers of iniquity do (verse 4)?

5. How do the workers of iniquity react to God and what does God do to them (verse 5)?
6. What does the psalmist cry out for and what will Jacob (Israel) do when the Lord saves them (verse 6)?

### **Applications for Today**

1. We live in an age where many people are “fools” and live as if “there is no God”. However, it is foolish to deny God and act as if he does not exist (verse 1). There is no good where there is no God! What one thinks about God will determine his character and conduct. What happens when people refuse God (Rom. 1:24-32; Lk. 12:20; Eph. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:1-5)?
2. Corrupt people think and do corrupt things (verse 1). According to Jesus, where does corrupt fruit come from (Mt. 7:17-18; Lk. 6:43)? According to Paul, what is a corrupt mind lacking (1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8)?
3. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (verses 1-3). What solution to sin does sinful man have (Rom. 3:23-24)?
4. A few good people “understand” and “seek after God” (verse 2). What does Paul say God wants (Acts 17:27)? What does God do to those who seek him (Heb. 11:6)?
5. We are not born in sin, but we go astray into sin after we are born (verse 3). What does Solomon say about this (Eccl. 7:29)?
6. Sin is filthy (verse 3). How does Isaiah describe Israel’s sin (Isa. 64:6)? How does Peter describe the sin of Simon (Acts 8:23)?
7. Salvation brings rejoicing (verse 6). What did the Eunuch and the Jailor’s household do after they were baptized (Acts 8:39; 16:34)?