

# PSALMS

## Chapter 53

**The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. <sup>2</sup> God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. <sup>3</sup> They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. <sup>4</sup> Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God? <sup>5</sup> There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them. <sup>6</sup> Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.**

**Ps 53** A testimony concerning the folly of evil men, a somewhat revised duplicate of Ps 14. (The main difference between the two psalms is that here the word “God” is used instead of “the LORD.” The original psalm may have been revised in the light of an event such as is narrated in 2Ch 20. Here it also serves as a further commentary on the kind of arrogant fool denounced in Ps 52. (CSB)

Almost identical to Ps 14. In vv 2, 4, 5, and 6, the divine name *LORD (Yahweh)* is replaced, as one would expect in Book Two of the Psalter, by the term *God (Elohim)*. In v 5, the content of 14:5–6 is recast. The superscription of Ps 53 is more elaborate than that of Ps 14. The order of the stories about men in 1Sm (ch 22 for Doeg; ch 25 for Nabal; and ch 26 for the Ziphites) is duplicated in three psalms: Ps 52 for Doeg; Ps 53 for the “fool” (Hbr *nabal*); and Ps 54 for the Ziphites. *Mahalath*. May mean a musical setting or a melody about sorrow. Appears also in Ps 88. *Maskil*. See p 841. (TLSB)

Format: Each verse is a separate stanza. (TLSB)

**53:1–4** The folly of the wicked exposed. Renewed characterization of the wicked: They live by the violence of their own hands and do not rely on the Lord. (CSB)

(also 14:1–3) Cited by Paul in Rm 3:10–12 to make his case about the universal corruption of all people and thus their universal need for Christ’s salvation. (TLSB)

**53:1** *There is no God* – By nature, all people act as if there were no God. (TLSB)

*none who does good* – David and the other psalmists also count themselves as unrighteous (e.g., 130:3; 143:2). (TLSB)

**53:2** *seek after God* – Translates two terms: Hbr *baqash*, “look for”; Hbr *darash*, “care about, examine, inquire.” The Lord is sought in three ways: (1) through calling on His name in prayer, (2) by consulting Him through Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest, and (3) through the study of His Word. A visit to the tabernacle or temple is frequently implied. Unbelievers do not seek God. Believers seek Him in an attitude of repentance, not selfishness. (TLSB p. 843)

**53:3** *none who do good...even one* – The point being made here was reiterated by Paul in Romans 3:10-19; i.e., the human race apart from God is universally corrupted and depraved. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

**53:4** *work evil no knowledge* – They are so spiritually blind that they do not know what they do. (A Commentary of the Psalms - Ross)

*eat up my people* – Evildoers satisfy their voracious appetites at the expense of others without any qualms or inhibitions. (TLSB)

**53:5** Differs considerably from 14:5–6, though the basic thought remains the same: God overwhelms the godless who attack his people. Here the verbs are in the past tense (perhaps to express the certainty of their downfall). (CSB)

*where there was nothing to dread* – They fell victim to fear when, humanly speaking, they were not even threatened. God’s curse fell on them rather than on Israel (see Lev 26:36–37; see also Jdg 7:21; 2Ki 3:22–23; 7:6–7; Pr 28:1). (CSB)

These words begin the chief difference between this and the nearly identical Ps 14, which may have been recast for this specific situation. God addresses His people by saying that there is no real cause for terror, for He will destroy the enemy “who encamps against” them. (TLSB)

*scattered the bones* – Over the battlefield of their defeat, their bodies left un-buried like something loathsome. (CSB)

God is already scattering their bones! They will not have the dignity of burial. (TLSB)

*God rejected them* – As they had despised him. (CSB)

**53:6** The psalmist longs for Israel’s complete deliverance from her enemies—which will come when God deals with the wicked in defense of their victims. (CSB)

*fortunes* – God’s deliverance from the present evil, pointing to that ultimate restoration by His messianic rule. (TLSB)

*Jacob* – It is a synonym, “Israel,” Jacob designates not only God’s people of the OT but the Church of all times. (TLSB)

**Ps 53** When evil fools encamp against God’s people, He saves and restores them. We are all foolishly corrupt, doing iniquity and not good. We do not understand or seek after God where He gives Himself. We all fall away from Him. The salvation that comes for us out of Zion is Jesus, who took our foolishness—our iniquity and corruption, our sin and death—and saved us by the seeming foolishness of His cross (1Co 1:18–25). • Though we have all alike become corrupt, O God, send Your salvation and restore our fortunes in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)