

# Psalm 53 - a Prophetic Reflection on Israel

by Art Katz

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*The sermon reflects on Psalm 53, emphasizing the consequences of rejecting God's providence and the importance of considering God in all matters, particularly in Israel's predicament.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 53:1

**Topics:** "Faith and Atheism", "Compassion for the Vulnerable"

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## Description

Art Katz reflects on Psalm 53, emphasizing the consequences of atheism and the rejection of God in the context of Israel's current struggles. He argues that true wisdom involves seeking God and recognizing His providence, which has sustained Israel through numerous challenges. Katz warns that actions devoid of divine guidance are corrupt and lead to societal decay, urging both Israel and the church to acknowledge their responsibilities towards the vulnerable. He highlights the need for compassion and understanding towards all people, including Palestinians, while affirming Israel's unique covenant with God. Ultimately, Katz calls for a return to God as the only source of hope and deliverance for Israel and the world.

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## Transcript

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A further reflection on the Palestinian crisis.

Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts: there is no one who does good.

So does this Psalm of David commence from its first verse with the same kind of thunderclap introduction as Beethoven's mighty Fifth Symphony! It startles us to the awareness that effectual atheism--the dismissal of God from the affairs of men--has consequence in their acts and deeds: "They commit abominable acts: there is no one who does good."

It is not what one professes outwardly--however sincerely it is thought to be had--but it is the inward truth of the heart of a person, a people or a nation. That is, in their hearts they do not take God into account; do

not consider that He is to be consulted, that He can explain the current predicament of men or nations--let alone offer some solution for them. For that reason, He is not sought, but rather men will take what action their own wisdom commends, which as the unhappy increase of violence in Israel indicates, compounds rather than eases the problems. Has Israel, or even the church in the nation, believed that what is expressed in this Psalm is not the opinion of a man but the very counsel of God?

Indeed, God looks down from heaven on mankind to see if there are any who are wise who seek after God (v.2). All the more, one would suppose, that being the God of Jacob and of Israel, called to testify of Him before all nations, that it is upon this nation that He would look down most urgently and stringently and construe their failure as a falling away--a perversion from a standard given to them, as a nation, above all other nations (v.3).

What makes this 'atheism' so abominable in the eyes of God is not a debate over His hypothetical existence per se, but of His providence, the concrete activity of God. For 60 years, has not God demonstrated His divine providence in sustaining the nation through a number of wars? Yet, the nation's rejection of God, as Spurgeon says in another but comparable context, is not a "harmless error, [but] an offensive putrid sin, and righteous men should look upon it in that light" (p.434, The Treasury of David). Are there still lingering hopes in us for Israel's success through their present predicament?

How many of our well-meaning, acceptable or pragmatic acts are abominable in God's sight? They are corrupt by their very nature for not having their origin or source in God. "Those who talk so abominably as to deny their Maker will act abominably when it serves their turn [purpose]." Will those who willfully reject God be more condescending to men? What then must be the immediate and ultimate consequence but those "who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon God"(v.4)? Indeed, any people, the church not excluded, who will not hunger and thirst after righteousness will assuredly eat each other up as bread!

Ought we not to consider that God views every hostile act against the weak and the defenseless as if it assails Himself; that God's care of the poor is the very issue of the divine character? Could He view Israel's present enemies as "His people" (even in their present unbelief), even as He will one day call an exiled and oppressed Jewry (while yet in their unbelief) "the least of these my brethren"? The church needs a greater sense of the compassionate breadth of God who so loves the world that He will save it from a "good-guys vs. bad-guys" partisan mentality. From the prophetic perspective, the way in which a nation treats the poor, the defenseless and the alien in its midst is a revelation of the truth of its inward condition.

However, this does not deny Israel's elect place as the people chosen of God in their prophetic destiny or unique covenantal inheritance in the Land. Nor should we suggest that any other people can replace or even supplement Israel in its chosenness. Israel needs to consider that the Palestinians are also in the family of mankind.

Does not Isaiah 19:24 inform us of the day that God will say, "Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands...in the day when Israel will be "a blessing in the midst of the earth"? What "that day" will establish and reveal is already in the heart of God who stands above time--but it is unhappily not yet in ours or in Israel's, or it would affect their present conduct! Should not the imminent and millennial future be presently considered? Well does the Lord cry out, "Have they no knowledge, those evildoers..." How shall that knowledge be expected in those who oppose themselves in their ignorance when the church itself

remains silent, and by its silence, or yet its encouragement, affirms the desperate nation in its present militancy?

Therefore, according to the text, and indeed in Israel's increasing and daily tragic experience, "There shall be great terror, a terror such as has not been" even imagined or thinkable! Yet, in verse 5 of the almost identical Psalm 14, "God is with the righteous," that is, those rightly related to God, who as the footnote of the NSRV suggests, who "in seeking after God is found in hating evil, loving good and establishing justice." Is not this the only hope "that deliverance were come out of Zion!" in all that "Zion" mystically represents as a Sermon on the Mount affirming people in the midst of the nation who themselves seek after God and keep not silent in telling Jacob of his transgressions and Israel of her sins! If deliverance does not come out of that Zion, it shall not come at all! How tragic if, in the name of a lesser loyalty to the nation, or in seeking acceptance by affirming and condescending to its conventional political wisdom, the church itself should fail in its obligation toward God in instructing this God-rejecting that unaided mankind must fail, and only when "God brings back the captivity of His people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad" (v.6 emphasis mine).

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