

Session 8 The Forerunner Message in Psalms 50 and 53

I. INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 50

- A. In Psalm 50, Asaph prophesied that the Lord would come out of heavenly Zion to millennial Zion in context to His end-time judgment of Israel and others “who forget God” (50:3, 7, 22). Asaph lived during the reign of David and Solomon when Israel was at a high point in relating to the Lord.
1. The Lord rebuked Israel for their hypocrisy and wickedness (50:7-13, 16-21).
 2. Israel is urged to worship God with obedience and prayerful dependence (50:14-15, 23).
 3. Asaph prophesied Israel’s corporate deliverance and national salvation (53:14-15, 21, 23).
- B. Psalm 50 is a prophetic oracle that has an application throughout salvation history while its ultimate fulfillment occurs in context to Jesus’ return (50:3) to lead Israel to her national salvation after they experience the discipline of the covenant during Jacob’s trouble in the Tribulation (50:15, 21-23).
- C. This psalm first testifies against those who thought their external religious activities were sufficient (50:7-13). Next it rebukes wicked religious leaders who publicly professed their commitment (50:16-21). He warned both groups to wake up to the reality of His end-time judgments.
- D. The Lord had a national covenant relationship with Israel—it was foundational to Israel’s national identity and culture. Israel had times set aside in the year to renew this covenant with God.
1. Asaph made reference to the Ten Commandments (50:18-20) and alluded to publicly reciting and declaring their commitment to the covenant (50:16), suggesting that the setting for this psalm was a national ceremony to renew their covenant with the Lord.
 2. The renewal ceremony involved offering sacrifices to the Lord and publicly declaring their loyalty to the covenant. This psalm may have been sung during the Feast of Tabernacles.
- E. ***Asaph***: Asaph was one of David’s three chief musicians who led the music when David brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr. 15:16-19; 16:4-7; 2 Chr. 29:30).

F. Outline of Psalm 50

- 50:1-6** God will come as the righteous Judge
50:7-15 God testifies against religious rituals without relationship
50:16-21 God rebukes hypocritical religious leaders in Israel
50:22-23 The Lord presents two choices to Israel

- G. When Jesus returns, heavenly Zion or Jerusalem will descend to millennial Zion. Psalm 50:1-6 describes a court scene in heaven—as well as what happens in heaven just before Jesus returns (Rev. 15:1-6) and what follows on earth (Mt. 25:31-32).

²*I saw...a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast...standing on the sea of glass...³saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty...*

⁴*For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.”*
(Rev. 15:2-4)

II. GOD WILL COME AS THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE (PS. 50:1-6)

- A. Asaph described God coming to earth as the Judge. His arrival is accompanied by a consuming fire and a violent storm from which He speaks, calling the heaven and earth to be witnesses (50:1-6).
¹The Mighty One, God the LORD, has spoken and called the earth from the rising of the sun to its going down. ²Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. ³Our God shall come and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous [like a violent storm] all around Him. ⁴He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: ⁵“Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” ⁶Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge. (Ps. 50:1-6)
- B. **The Mighty One:** Asaph used three glorious names for God— *El, Elohim, YHWH* (Jehovah). *El* speak of the mighty One; *Elohim* the God of creation; and *YHWH* (Jehovah) the merciful One.
- C. **God called the earth:** From the rising of the sun to its going down may mean from the east to west, referring to the Lord calling all the nations to witness and understand His coming day of judgment.
³¹“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.” (Mt. 25:31-32)
- D. **Out of Zion:** The Lord will shine forth in the perfection of beauty from Zion.
- E. **Our God shall come:** A fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous like a violent storm all around Him (50:3). Fire and violent storms will accompany His return in judgment.
⁷...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who...do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thes. 1:7-8)
²²“And I will bring him [the Antichrist] to judgment...I will rain down on him...flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone ²³...and I will be known in the eyes of many nations.” (Ezek. 38:22-23)
- F. **God shall not keep silent:** For 2,000 years, the Lord has kept silent in terms *openly confronting evil across the earth*. He will not remain silent in His judgments but will remove evil from the nations.
³Our God shall come and shall not keep silent... ²¹These things you [Israel] have done, and I kept silent...but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes. (Ps. 50:3, 21)
1. Isaiah prophesied a time when the Lord will release His end-time global judgments (42:14-15; 62:1). He held His peace or was “silent” in terms of His global judgments.
¹⁴“I have held My peace [kept silent] a long time, I have been still and restrained Myself... ¹⁵I will lay waste the mountains...I will make the rivers coastlands...” (Isa. 42:14-15)
¹“For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace [keep silent], and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest [restrain His judgments], until her righteousness goes forth as brightness...” (Isa. 62:1)

- G. **He shall call the heavens and earth:** He called those in heaven and on the earth to be witnesses of His end-time judgments. In heaven the angels and saints and on earth the nations will witness it.
⁷He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him...all the tribes of the earth will mourn... (Rev. 1:7)
¹...I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory... belong to the Lord our God! ²For true and righteous are His judgments...” (Rev. 19:1-2)
- H. **Gather My saints together to Me** (50:5): The Lord commissioned His saints who made a covenant with Him by sacrifice to be gathered to Him.
¹⁶The Lord Himself will descend from heaven...and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them... (1 Thes. 4:16-17)
¹¹...many will come...and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 8:11)
³²...time would fail me to tell of...David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness...⁴⁰they should not be made perfect apart from us. ^{12:1}Therefore we also...are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... (Heb. 11:32-12:1)

III. GOD TESTIFIES AGAINST RELIGIOUS RITUALS WITHOUT RELATIONSHIP (PS. 50:7-15)

- A. Psalm 50:7-21 has both historical and eschatological applications for Israel. The Lord will confront formal religion with dead works (50:7-15) and false religion with wickedness (50:16-21). Asaph lived during a time when Israel was at a high point in her relationship with God.
- B. The temple and its sacrifices will be a subject of great controversy and division in the end times. John was told to measure the temple, altar, and its worshipers (Rev. 11:1-2). The paradox and tension in the Tribulation temple is in it being God’s temple (11:1; cf. 2 Thes. 2:4) and yet the Antichrist will use it and defile it.
¹I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.” (Rev. 11:1)
1. To measure something spiritually means to evaluate it carefully and discern its spiritual purpose. God’s people are to measure or carefully weigh the issues related to God’s purpose for allowing the Tribulation temple to be built. The temptation of some will be to criticize *all* activities related to it, while others will be tempted to accept *all* the activities as good.
 2. God’s people are to discern the altar—the worship and prayer that will be offered there. God has a purpose for God-fearing Jews to be involved in various temple activities at the altar. We are not to dismiss all their activities in the temple as worthless. However, the only way of salvation for these God-fearing Jews is *through Jesus*, not through their temple activities.
 3. We are to have discernment about those who worship there. Some will be devout God-fearing Jews who do not believe in Jesus; they must embrace Jesus to receive salvation. Some will be people worshipping the Antichrist. There will be both redemptive and blasphemous activities (abomination of desolation) related to the prayer, worship, or sacrifices offered at the altar.

- C. Psalm 53:7-15 is directed to those who professed to serve God in Israel, yet it is equally applicable to the Church in every age. It declares the emptiness of rituals in worship when real faith is absent.
- 7“Hear, O My people, and I will speak, O Israel, and I will testify against you; I am God, your God! 8I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices or your burnt offerings, which are continually before Me. 9I will not take a bull from your house, nor goats out of your folds. 10For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. 11I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. 12“If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. 13Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? 14Offer to God thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High. 15Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Ps. 50:7-15)***
- D. ***Hear, O My people:*** “and I will speak, O Israel.” The exhortation to “hear” or “listen” implies obedience. Seen often in prophetic passages (Hos. 5:1; Joel 1:2; Mic. 6:9; Isa. 44:1; 48:12), this command recalls Israel’s national covenant renewal ceremony under Moses (Deut. 5:1; 6:4).
- E. ***I will not rebuke you for your sacrifices:*** The Lord was not correcting them for neglecting to offer sacrifices but for external religious rituals done without pursuing relationship with the Lord. This refers to a time when Israel thought they were doing God a service by offering sacrifices to Him.
- F. ***I will not take a bull from your house*** (53:9): Here, the Lord refuses to accept their sacrifices.
- G. ***The world is Mine*** (53:10): The Lord told them that He did not need their offerings. He already owned everything that they offered Him! With sarcasm He said: “If I were hungry, I would not tell you!” In other words, He found no pleasure in those sacrifices. They were an insult to Him.
- H. ***Gratitude, vows, and prayer*** (50:14-15): This applies to individual believers, but in this context Asaph was prophesying to national Israel. It is a corporate promise that extends beyond individuals.
- 14Offer to God thanksgiving [gratitude], and pay your vows to the Most High. 15Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” (Ps. 50:14-15)***
1. Israel will call on the Lord in their ultimate day of trouble (53:15). Jesus will deliver them, and all Israel shall glorify Him which indicates the time of their national salvation.
 2. Jesus is the deliverer of Israel, leading to their national salvation (Zech. 12:3, 9; 13:8-9).
- 3...all nations of the earth are gathered against it [Jerusalem]...9“I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 10And I will pour on...Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced.” (Zech. 12:3, 9-10)***
- 8...in all the land [the earth]...that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die... 9I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined...They [Israel] will call on My name, and I will answer them...and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’” (Zech. 13:8-9)***

IV. REBUKES HYPOCRITICAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN ISRAEL (PS. 50:16-21)

- A. God rebuked wicked religious leaders who profess allegiance to Him while hating His leadership (50:16-21). These religious leaders recite the creeds but do not take God's words seriously. This refers to the public reading of the law as commanded in Deuteronomy 31:10ff (2 Kgs. 23:1-3).

¹⁶*To the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, ¹⁷Seeing you hate instruction [God's leadership] ...and cast My words behind you?*

¹⁸*When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers.*

¹⁹*You give your mouth to evil... ²¹These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes.*

(Ps. 50:16-21)

- B. *To the wicked:* The wicked here do not present themselves as unbelievers but are religious leaders.

- C. *Thieves, adulterers, and evil speech:* Rejection of the seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments.

- D. *I kept silent:* They concluded that, because God did not judge them quickly, He did not care.

²¹*These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes. (Ps. 50:21)*

1. They greatly misinterpreted God's silence as approval or indifference (Ecc. 8:11)

¹¹*Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Ecc. 8:11)*

2. The Lord will set the nation of Israel in order before the eyes of the remnant of Israel (50:21). This will only occur on a national level in context to the return of Jesus (Mal. 3:2-3).

²*Who can endure the day of His coming?...He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers' soap... ³He will purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer...offering in righteousness. (Mal. 3:2-3)*

V. THE LORD PRESENTS TWO CHOICES TO ISRAEL (PS. 50:22-23)

- A. The Lord gives Israel two choices (50:22-23)—one with a warning and one with a promise.

²²*"Consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces...²³Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God." (Ps. 50:22-23)*

- B. *Forget God and be torn to in pieces:* He warns those who refuse Him that He will tear them apart as a lion tears up a lamb (Hos. 5:14; Amos 3:4, 8, 12).

- C. *Whoever offers praise glorifies Me:* This is a restatement the exhortation in 50:14 to show gratitude to God.

- D. *I will show the salvation of God:* To the one who walks in the right path, God will reveal salvation. Psalm 50 prophesies about Israel's corporate deliverance and national salvation (53:14-15, 21, 23).

VI. INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 53

- A. Psalms 14 and 53 are nearly identical. One was an edited version of the original, by the same author. David rewrote it with a few changes necessary to bring out important truths, especially in 53:5 which describes Israel as being under a siege by hostile nations until God saves them.
- B. Some scholars propose that Psalm 53 is a prophetic message that promised victory over Israel's enemies and their destruction, affirming Israel's future salvation and restoration.

C. Outline of Psalm 53

- 53:1-3 A foolish generation: abominable iniquity
- 53:4-5 Judgment on Israel's persecutors
- 53:6 Longing for Israel's national salvation

VII. A FOOLISH GENERATION: ABOMINABLE INIQUITY (PS. 53:1-3)

- A. The description of the fool in this psalm is not a simple-minded person, but a wicked person who does abominable deeds (53:1) including eating up or persecuting God's people (53:4) and encamping against Israel (53:5) in the time when salvation comes to Israel (53:6).

¹The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt and have done abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. ²God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. ³Every one of them has turned aside; they have together become corrupt...⁴[they] who eat up my people...⁵God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you... ⁶Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! (Ps. 53:1-6)

- B. **The fool:** The fool here is not one who lacks raw intelligence, but one who acts on the assumption that God is neither watching them nor will hold them accountable.

- C. **They have done abominable iniquity:** They are corrupt.

- 1. Paul prophesied that at the end of the age "evil men will grow worse and worse" (2 Tim. 3:13).

¹³But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Tim. 3:13)

- 2. Jesus prophesied the abomination of desolation (Mt. 24:15).

¹⁵"...when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel...¹⁶then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains...²¹For then there will be great tribulation...²²Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [physically]..." (Mt. 24:15-22)

- 3. The angel Gabriel prophesied a time when sinners will reach their fullness (Dan. 8:23).

²³"In the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king [the Antichrist] shall arise, having fierce features..." (Dan. 8:23)

- D. ***There is none who does good:*** I agree with the proposal that this be understood in context to the fool who persecutes Israel without fear of being judged instead of speaking of every human being.
- E. ***The children of men:*** God looks down from heaven upon the children of men. The redeemed are referred in Scripture as sons of God or children of God as partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).
⁸***That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God... (Rom 9:8)***
⁹***But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit...¹⁴As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God....¹⁹creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom 8:9, 14, 19)***
- F. ***There is none who does good:*** (53:3). Psalm 14:3 also states this, and Paul quotes this in presenting his argument that in God's court no one is good enough to deserve salvation.
³***They have all turned aside...there is none who does good, no, not one. (Ps. 14:3)***
¹⁰***As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God...¹⁹The law says [this]...to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore, by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified...²¹The righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... (Rom. 3:10-21)***

VIII. JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL'S PERSECUTORS (PS. 53:4-5)

- A. David warns the fools of 53:1 who persecute and lay siege to Israel that God will judge them. He prophesies both a threat of judgment on the fools and a promise of deliverance to Israel.
⁴***Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God? ⁵There they are in great fear where no fear was, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you; you have put them to shame, because God has despised them. (Ps. 53:4-5)***
- B. ***The workers of iniquity:*** Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge of the reality of God and His zeal for His people, for righteousness, and for the promises in His Word?
- C. ***They eat up my people as they eat bread:*** These wicked fools will seek to destroy Israel.
- D. ***Encamps against Israel:*** This verse can apply to the time the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem in 701 BC and to the end of the age when Israel is attacked and surrounded by hostile nations.
- E. ***God has scattered the bones of him:*** God will destroy the nations that attack Israel in the end times.
⁹***...in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. (Zech. 12:9)***
- F. ***There they are in great fear:*** The armies of the Antichrist will be terrified by the power of Jesus.
- G. David ends this psalm proclaiming his longing and joy over Israel's certain salvation (53:6).
⁶***Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back the captivity of His people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad. (Ps. 53:6)***