

ספר תהילים נג | Tehillim / Psalms 53

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The Beginning of Wisdom

This week's study is from *Tehillim / Psalms 53:1-6*, the psalm opens saying, א לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל-מִחְלַת מְשָׁפִיל, אֶל לְדָוִד: *For the choir director; according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David. (NASB)* David opens making the statement, ב אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים הַשְׁחִיתוּ וְהִתְעִיבוּ עָוֹל אֵין עֲשֵׂה-טוֹב: *53:1 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. (NASB)* The concept here is that the person who says God does not exist, he is filled with injustice and abominations. Why do you think a person who denies the existence of God would be filled with these things? He continues saying, ג אֱלֹהִים מְשָׁמִים הַשְׁקִיף עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם לְרְאוֹת הַיֵּשׁ מְשָׁפִיל דְרִשׁ אֶת-אֱלֹהִים: *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. (NASB)* Based on David's understanding of the Lord from the Torah, the Lord looks down upon man not for destruction, but to see who upon this earth is seeking Him. The conclusion is that none have what the Lord is looking for. What is the Lord looking for in our lives? David continues saying, ה הֲלֹא יָדְעוּ פְעֻלֵי אָנוֹן אֲכָלֵי עֲמִי: *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? (NASB)* Note the word poaly (פְעֻלֵי) is a reference to those who work iniquity outwardly as opposed to those who work iniquity inwardly. Is there such a thing as working iniquity inwardly? He continues saying, ו שָׁם פָּחַדוּ-פָחַד לֹא-הָיָה פָחַד כִּי-אֱלֹהִים פָּנָר עֲצָמוֹת הַנָּהָד: *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. (NASB)* David gives an example of the unrighteous who encamp to make war against God's people. The Psalm concludes saying, ז מִי-יִתֵּן מִצִּיּוֹן יִשְׁעוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשׁוֹב אֱלֹהִים שְׁבוֹת עִמּוֹ יִגַּל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׂרָאֵל: *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. (NASB)* Note how the Lord is the One who causes the salvation of His people. The Lord is the One who brings salvation by His power and by His Spirit. How does the Lord bring victory and salvation by His Spirit? One possibility may be that the Lord, by His Spirit, has an effect in the hearts of men. Many examples may be given from the Torah, one such example may be taken from how the Lord dealt with Abimelech, Abraham, and Sarah his wife.

עברית Hebrew	ארמי Aramaic	ελληνικός Greek
ספר תהלים פרק נג	סמר טוביה פרק נג	ΨΑΛΜΟΙ 53
א לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל-מִחְלַת מְשָׁפִיל לְדָוִד: ב אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלִבּוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים הַשְׁחִיתוּ וְהִתְעִיבוּ עָוֹל אֵין עֲשֵׂה-טוֹב: ג אֱלֹהִים מְשָׁמִים הַשְׁקִיף עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם לְרְאוֹת הַיֵּשׁ מְשָׁפִיל דְרִשׁ אֶת-אֱלֹהִים: ד פֶּלֹ סָג יַחְדּוֹ נֶאֱלָחוּ אֵין עֲשֵׂה-טוֹב אֵין גַּם אָחַד:	לשבחא על פורענות רשיעיא דיא מפסין שמא דקיריס שכלא טבא על יד דוד: ב אמר נבל בליביה לית אלהא פרע מיניה מטול היכנא חבילו רשיעיא אורחתהון רחיקו מן טבא דאישתכח בהון עילא לית דעביד :טב:	53:1 εις τὸ τέλος ὑπὲρ μαελεθ συνέσεως τῷ Δαυιδ εἶπεν ἄφρων ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς διεφθάρησαν καὶ ἐβδελύχθησαν ἐν ἀνομίαις οὐκ ἔστιν ποιῶν ἀγαθόν 53:2 ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ διέκυψεν ἐπὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῦ ἰδεῖν εἰ ἔστιν συνίων ἢ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν 53:3 πάντες ἐξέκλιναν ἅμα ἠχρεώθησαν οὐκ ἔστιν ποιῶν ἀγαθόν οὐκ ἔστιν ἕως ἐνός

<p>ה הלא ידעו פְּעֲלֵי אָנוּן אֶכְלֵי עֲמִי אֶכְלוּ לָחֶם אֱלֹהִים לֹא קָרְאוּ: ו שָׁם פָּחַדוּ-פָּחַד לֹא-הָיָה פָּחַד בְּי-אֱלֹהִים פָּנָה עֲצָמוֹת חֲנָה הִבְשָׁתָה בְּי-אֱלֹהִים מֵאָסָם: ז מִי-יִתֵּן מְצִיּוֹן יִשְׁעוֹת יִשְׂ- רָאֵל בְּשׁוּב אֱלֹהִים שְׁבוֹת עִמּוֹ יִגַּל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>	<p>ג ברם אלהא משמיא אודיק על בני אנשא למחמי האית די ישכיל באוריתא תבע אולפן מן קדם יהוה: ד כולהון זרו כחדא לאחורא איטנפו לית דעבד טב לית דעביד טב אפילו חד: ה הלא ידעון כל עבדי שקרא דמן קדמוי מתיהיב מזונא ומה דין אכלי עמי סעדון לחמא שמא דיהוה לא בריכו: ו תמן דלחו דלוחא מן פסיליהון דלית בהון צרוך למדלח למדחל ארום אלהא מבדר תקוף משירית חייביא בהיתתא יתהון ארום מימרא דיהוה רחיקינן: ז מן הוא די יהיב מן ציון פורקניא דישראל אילהין יהוה כד יחזור מימרא דיהוה גלות דעמיה ירנן דבית יעקב יחדי דבית ישראל:</p>	<p>53:4 οὐχὶ γινώσκονται πάντες οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν οἱ ἔσθοντες τὸν λαόν μου βρώσει ἄρτου τὸν θεὸν οὐκ ἐπεκαλέσαντο 53:5 ἐκεῖ φοβηθήσονται φόβον οὐδ' οὐκ ἦν φόβος ὅτι ὁ θεὸς διεσκόρπισεν ὁστᾶ ἀνθρωπαρέσκων κατησχύνθησαν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐξουδένωσεν αὐτούς 53:6 τίς δώσει ἐκ Σιων τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐν τῷ ἐπιστρέψαι κύριον τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀγαλλιάσεται Ἰακώβ καὶ εὐφρανθήσεται Ἰσραὴλ</p>
<p>Tehillim / Psalms 53 For the choir director; according to Ma- halath. A Maskil of David. 53:1 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 Ja- cob rejoice, let Israel be glad. (NASB)</p>	<p>Toviyah / Psalms Chapter 53 53:1 For praise; on the punishment of the wicked who profane the name of the Lord; good teaching composed by David. 53:2 The fool said in his heart, ‘‘There is no God taking retribution’’; because of this the wicked have corrupted their ways; they have become es- tranged from goodness, for iniquity is found in them; there is none that does good. 53:3 Yet God looked down from heaven on the sons of men to see whether there is one who will grow wise in the Torah, seeking instruc- tion from the presence of the Lord. 53:4 All of them alike have turned aside; they have fouled themselves, there is none that does good, not even one. 53:5 Do not all the do- ers of lies know that food is given from his presence? And why then have the eaters of my people dined on bread, [but] not blessed the name of the Lord? 53:6 There they were greatly afraid of their idols, in whom is noth- ing to fear, for God scatters the might of the army of sinners; you put them to shame, be- cause the word of the Lord abhors them. 53:7 Who is it who gives the redemption of Israel from Zion but the Lord? When the word of the Lord brings back the exiles of his people, those of the house of Jacob will be glad, those of the house of Israel will rejoice. (EMC)</p>	<p>Psalmoi / Psalms 53 For the end, a Psalm of David upon Maeleth, of instruction. 53:1 The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They have corrupted themselves, and become abominable in iniquities: there is none that does good. 53:2 God looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there were any that understood, or sought after God. 53:3 They have all gone out of the way, they are together become unprof- itable; there is none that does good, there is not even one. 53:4 Will none of the workers of iniquity know, who devour my people as they would eat bread? they have not called upon God. There were they greatly afraid, where there was no fear: 53:5 or God has scattered the bones of the men-pleasers; they were ashamed, for God despised them. 53:6 Who will bring the salvation of Israel out of Sion? When the Lord turns the captivity of his people, Jacob shall exult, and Israel shall be glad. (LXX)</p>

א לְמִנְצֵחַ עַל-מַחְלַת מְשֻׁכִּיל, א This week’s study is from *Tehillim / Psalms 53:1-6*, the psalm opens saying, *א לְמִנְצֵחַ עַל-מַחְלַת מְשֻׁכִּיל* : *For the choir director; according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David. (NASB)* Here we find the Hebrew word *מַחְלַת* (*Mahalath*) transliterated into English. According to the Strong’s Concordance, this word corresponds to the number H4257 which matches the Hebrew *מַחְלַת* (*machalath*), which occurs 2 times in the Hebrew bible according to the Hebrew concordance (*Tehillim / Psalms 53 and 88*).

Tehillim / Psalms 88:1

A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. For the choir director; according to Mahalath Lean-

א שיר מזמור לבני קרח למנצח על-מחלת משכיל להימן האזרחי:

Note how in *Tehillim / Psalms 88:1*, the word Mahalath is juxtaposed to Leannoth (מחלת לענות) and the word maskil (משכיל) which we have discussed in earlier studies. Most lexicons translate Mahalath as “*harp*” or “*stringed instrument.*” The Septuagint translation of *Tehillim / Psalms 88:1 and 53:1* say the following:

Tehillim / Psalms 53:1

εις το τέλος υπέρ μαελεθ συνέσεως τῷ Δαυιδ εἶπεν ἄφρων ἐν καρδία αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός διεφθάρησαν καὶ ἐβδελύχθησαν ἐν ἀνομίαις οὐκ ἔστιν ποιῶν ἀγαθόν

Tehillim / Psalms 88:1

ὧδὴ ψαλμοῦ τοῖς υἱοῖς Κορε εις το τέλος υπέρ μαελεθ τοῦ ἀποκριθῆναι συνέσεως Αἰμαν τῷ Ἰσραηλίτη κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῆς σωτηρίας μου ἡμέρας ἐκέκραξα καὶ ἐν νυκτὶ ἐναντίον σου

Isn't it interesting in the Septuagint, the word מחלת (*Mahalath*) transliterated is transliterated into Greek (μαελεθ). Is this the reason why this word is also transliterated into the English texts? Is this an indicator of the dependence the English translations have on the Septuagint translation? Based upon the Septuagint translation of *Tehillim / Psalms 53 and 88*, the rabbis who translated the Septuagint on this psalm wrote that this is “*An ode of a psalm for the sons of Korach; for the director, by the harp, to respond for contemplation to Heman the Israelite*” (*Tehillim / Psalms 88*). Based upon the Greek translation, the word Mahalath is transliterated and interpreted to mean “*harp.*” This might be the reason why most Hebrew Lexicons translate this word as “*harp*” or “*stringed instrument.*” The word makhal (מחל) means “*forgive, erase, cancel*” and Leannoth (לענות) is a verb meaning “*to answer, reply, respond, consent, or testify.*” One other place we find this verse is from *Jeremiah 25:29*, כֹּחַ כִּי הִנֵּה בְעִיר אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא-שְׁמִי עָלֶיהָ אֲנֹכִי מַחֵל לְהָרַע וְאַתֶּם הַנִּקְהָה, 25:29 ‘*For behold, I am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth,*’ declares the Lord of hosts.’ (NASB) Note how this word is translated to mean “*beginning*” in *Jeremiah 25:29* suggesting that the root word is actually חל (khal) meaning “*to begin, commence, or start.*” The Septuagint translation of *Jeremiah 25:29* ὅτι ἐν πόλει ἐν ἧ ὀνομάσθη τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ’ αὐτήν ἐγὼ ἄρχομαι κακῶσαι καὶ ὑμεῖς καθάρσει οὐ μὴ καθαρισθῆτε ὅτι μάχαιραν ἐγὼ καλῶ ἐπὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς statates “*I begin to afflict*” (ἐγὼ ἄρχομαι κακῶσαι) the city. Based upon the Septuagint translation, and the words Mahalath Maskil (מחלת משכיל), the title in *Tehillim / Psalm 53:1* may be rendered (translated) as “*a song on the beginning of wisdom*” (למנצח על-מחלת משכיל). This is very significant because David is teaching about wisdom in his psalm and therefore we need to pay careful attention to what he is trying to say regarding the beginning of wisdom. This is not just simply a song to be played with the harp. It is a bit disheartening to think that the translators of the English bible did not do diligence in finding the meaning of this word. However, based upon our analysis, David is speaking of the beginning of wisdom. David opens making the statement, ב 53:1 *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.* (NASB) The title to the Psalm suggests that the beginning of wisdom is to believe that He (God) exists and to fear Him, to keep Him in high regard, including His word (the commandments and all of Scripture). Is this not consistent with what we know to be true regarding the beginning of wisdom? (*Tehillim / Psalms 111:10, Mishley / Proverbs 9:10*)

ב אָמַר נָבֵל בְּלָבוֹ אֵין אֱלֹהִים הַשְׁחִיתוּ וְהִתְעִיבוּ עוֹל אֵין עֲשֵׂה-טוֹב:

53:1 *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. (NASB)* The concept here is that the person who says God does not exist, he is filled with injustice and abominations. Why do you think a person who denies the existence of God would be filled with these things? Note how David says that the one who says in his heart, “ein Elohim” (אין אֱלֹהִים) “there is no God” is הַשְׁחִיתוּ “to spoil, destroy, or behave immorally.” This word “heshkhitu” (הַשְׁחִיתוּ) reminds us of the Torah’s use of the word HaMashkhit (הַמְשַׁחֵת) from the Torah in Parashat Bo (*Shemot / Exodus 10:1-13:16*). According to *Shemot / Exodus 12:23*, we find the word הַמְשַׁחֵת that translates to mean “destroyer” according to the NASB. According to the Hebrew Scriptures we read, פֶּרַשְׁתָּ בְּאֵי סֵפֶר שְׁמוֹת פֶּרַק יב פְּסוּק כג וְעָבַר יְהוָה לְגִגַּף אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְרָאָה אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת: 12:23 *‘For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. (NASB)* Based upon the Hebrew text, the Lord God Almighty is the one who sees the blood on the lintel (הַמַּשְׁקוּף) and on the doorposts (הַמְּזוּזוֹת) and having seen the blood would not allow the destroyer (הַמְשַׁחֵת) to enter into the house and strike down the first born. The following English translations from the NIV, OJB, KJV, and CJB bibles agree with the NASB translation.

- **NIV:** 12:23 *When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.*
- **OJB:** 12:23 *For Hashem will pass through to strike the Mitzrayim; and when He seeth the dahm upon the mashkof, and on the two mezuzot, Hashem will pasach (pass over, spare, skip) the entrance, and will not permit the Mashkhit (Destroyer, i.e., Hashem’s emissary of judgment, [see Num 22:31 on the Malach Hashem]) to enter unto your batim to strike.*
- **KJV:** 12:23 *For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.*
- **CJB:** 12:23 *For ADONAI will pass through to kill the Egyptians; but when he sees the blood on the top and on the two sides, ADONAI will pass over the door and will not allow the Slaughterer to enter your houses and kill you.*

In addition to this, according to the Aramaic translations on *Shemot / Exodus 12:23* we find the Targum Onkelos translates הַמְשַׁחֵת as מְחַבְּלָא "לחבלא" meaning “destroyer” or “messenger of injury” according to Marcus Jastrow’s *Lexicon (A dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic literature)*. Targum Pseudo Jonathan states מְחַבְּלָא מְלַאכָא meaning “angel messenger of injury, or destroyer.” The Targum Neofiti translates like the Targum Onkelos using the word "למחבלא" and the marginal notes in the Targum Neofiti (*Neofiti Marginalia*) provide the translation מְחַבְּלָא מְלַאכָא “destroying angel” similar to Targum Pseudo Jonathan. Thus, according to the Aramaic translations, the word הַמְשַׁחֵת is understood to be the “angelic destroyer” or as we more commonly know him as the “angel of death.” Brown Driver and Briggs (BDB) *Lexicon* states that הַמְשַׁחֵת means “ruin, destruction” as it is used in *Shemot / Exodus 12:13* וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֵת עַל הַבְּתִיִּם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׂם וְרָאִיתִי אֶת-הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי יְגִי: 12:13 *‘The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (NASB)* The Septuagint (LXX) does not provide any additional insights

to the translation for this text where the key word here in the Septuagint (LXX) is ὀλεθρεύοντα meaning “annihilating” having a consistent meaning with our psalm as “ruin and destruction.” The point is the one who says “ein Elohim” (אֵין אֱלֹהִים) “there is no God” may be compared to the Mashkhit (הַמְשַׁחֵת, the destroyer) by David’s use of the word הַשְׁחִיתוּ “to spoil, destroy, or behave immorally.” The one who believes that God does not exist, does not have an authority whereby he is accountable to. Where there is the belief that God does not exist, there is no law, there is no rule of living, there is no justice, no mercy, and no love. Remember that these are the things that are taught in the Torah, love for one another, justice, mercy, peace, and a trusting seeking life in the Lord God Almighty. The behavior of the person who says “ein Elohim” is for lustful ambition since such a person is not living for the Lord. The word הַשְׁחִיתוּ also has the meaning “to behave immorally.” David says because of this, there is none that do good. As a result of this, the Apostle Paul picked up on David’s understanding of the Psalm when he was writing to the Romans saying the following from *Romans 2:18-3:18*.

Romans 2:18-3:18

2:18 and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, 2:19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 2:20 a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, 2:21 you, therefore, who teach another; do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 2:22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 2:23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? 2:24 For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,’ just as it is written. 2:25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 2:26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 2:27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 3:2 Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3:3 What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? 3:4 May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, ‘That You may be justified in Your words, And prevail when You are judged.’ 3:5 But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) 3:6 May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? 3:7 But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? 3:8 And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just. 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 3:10 as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; 3:11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 3:12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.’ 3:13 ‘Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,’ ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; 3:14 ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness’; 3:15 ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood, 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 3:17 And the path of peace they have not known.’ 3:18 ‘There is no

fear of God before their eyes.’ (NASB)

Paul speaks of something that is essential that comes from being instructed in the Torah (Law), these essentials are approved by the will of God. These essentials lead the blind out of the darkness into the light (*remember light represents truth, righteousness, holiness, etc*). The concept he is putting forward here is that one is given the essentials of the faith by the instruction of the Torah (2:18-19), having these essentials we are to teach others. However, according to the narrative in Romans, something is not right because those who are instructed in the Torah are not instructing themselves, or living a disciplined life based on what is being taught to others. Paul makes a comparison to those who steal, practice adultery, idol worship, the people who boast in the Torah are themselves not observing the essentials that are supposed to be a light to the gentiles (or the lost). He then compares circumcision to obeying the Torah, to uncircumcision and not obeying the Torah, and then to the uncircumcision who obey the Torah. Paul is drawing in the idea of the flesh and the spirit, the connection to disobedience in the flesh, to the deeper uncleanness in the heart. According to *Romans 2:28-29*, circumcision is an outward sign of being Jewish. In the first century, to be known as Jewish, and to be in the covenant of God, one was to be circumcised of the flesh. The picture that Paul is putting together here is with respect to the chosen people of God. They are given the oracles of God, the essentials that come from being instructed in the Torah. Paul continues and asks the question of what advantage does circumcision have? He says there is great benefit in circumcision (3:2). The point being that the chosen people have been entrusted with the oracles of God (the essentials). Some people believed the word, and others did not believe (*e.g. in the wilderness*). Their unbelief did not nullify the faithfulness of God (3:3-4). Paul is directing the reader to understand that our Father in Heaven is faithful even in the midst of our unfaithfulness. He then argues that we are not to be unfaithful for the purpose of increasing the grace of God (3:8). Based upon Paul’s letter to the Romans, there appears to be people who were claiming to do evil so that blessing would come when they turned from their evil works (*maasei hara*). The comparisons that Paul is making appears to be that between the Jew and Gentile (non-Jew), one group being better as compared to the other. He clarifies his statement by calling upon the Psalm of David saying:

3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 3:10 as it is written, ‘There is none righteous, not even one; 3:11 There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; 3:12 All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one.’ 3:13 ‘Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving,’ ‘The poison of asps is under their lips’; 3:14 ‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness’; 3:15 ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood, 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their paths, 3:17 And the path of peace they have not known.’ 3:18 ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’ (NASB)

Notice the Torah concepts that he is drawing into the conversation with regard to those who are classified as the unrighteous according to David’s statement of none doing good and all having turned aside. The essentials of the Torah is that God’s people are to be a light to the nations, are to do righteousness, to speak blessings over others, to be innocent and truthful, to have feet that are quick to help, to take care of the poor and sick, to help your brother, to create justice and lead the nations to truth and life in the Messiah. (*This is the joy of the Torah!*) Notice how these things are antithetical to the unrighteous (the wicked). Note also that these things are taught in the Torah. This is the joy and the delight of being instructed in the essentials of the Law, and then living our lives according to those essentials. The Lord our Father in heaven is pleased (*1 Thessalonians 4:1*) with this as Paul says “*know His will and approve the things that are essential*” (*Romans 2:18*).

David’s Psalm states, *ג אלהים משמים השקיף על-בני אדם לראות היש משכיל דרש את-אלהים: ד כלו סג 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. (NASB) Based on these words, from a Torah perspective, the Lord looks down upon this earth and upon man not for destruction, but to see who is seeking Him. What is the Lord looking for in our lives? He is looking for the very thing that Paul is making is argument concerning righteousness, truth, innocence, justice, mercy, and love. The Lord sent His Messiah to deliver us from sin, and to empower us by His Spirit to live our lives for Him and to be a light to the nations.

David continues in his psalm saying, ה' הֲלֹא יִדְעוּ פְעֻלֵי אֲוֶן אֲכָלִי עַמִּי אֲכָלוּ לֶחֶם אֱלֹהִים לֹא קָרְאוּ: 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? (NASB)* Note the word “poaly” (פְעֻלֵי) is a reference to those who work iniquity outwardly as opposed to those who work iniquity inwardly. Is there such a thing as working iniquity inwardly? Based upon what we know thus far, there are physical and spiritual counterparts to everything we do. We are created to serve God, to be pleasing to Him, and by consequence everything we do has a spiritual counterpart. With this in mind, and based upon what David says here in *Tehillim / Psalms 53:4*, from the Hebrew text, regarding the differences between working iniquity externally verses working iniquity inwardly? According to the Apostolic Writings, Yeshua had a few things to say regarding this topic in *Matthew 23:11-39*.

Matthew 23:11-39

23:11 'But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 23:12 'Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. 23:13 'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 23:14 ['Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.] 23:15 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. 23:16 'Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 23:17 'You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 23:18 'And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 23:19 'You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? 23:20 'Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 23:21 'And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 23:22 'And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. 23:23 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 23:24 'You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 23:25 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 23:26 'You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. 23:27 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 23:28 'So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 23:29 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 23:30 and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 23:31 'So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 23:32 'Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 23:33 'You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? 23:34 'Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets

and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 23:35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 23:36 'Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 23:37 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 23:38 'Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 23:39 'For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' (NASB)

Yeshua speaks of being great by being a servant. Self exaltation is not what the Lord is looking for. He singles out the Scribes and the Pharisees because they know that something is true but because of their greed they make rulings that cause themselves to be prosperous. He provides examples by swearing on the temple verses the altar. They nullify what they swore by considering the weightiness of the temple verses the altar. He states that they neglect the weightier things of the Torah, which he says are *“justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”* Notice here how the Torah is considered by Yeshua to teach justice, mercy, and faithfulness to God in heaven and to the people around us (*to serve, take care of, and provision e.g. for the poor*). Does this sound contrary to what is taught today regarding the Law of God? Yeshua goes on to say that they are like white washed tombs, beautiful on the outside but death is on the inside. He says in *Matthew 23:28* *‘So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (NASB)* Yeshua says that there is such a thing as an inward form of iniquity, lawlessness, and hypocrisy. The point is that there does appear to be a form of inward attitude, that is as significant as the outward actions of sin. What appears to be drawn out here is that the Lord wants outward actions, but He also wants us to have the right motivations, attitudes, and purpose for our actions. Or in other words, *“Why do you do what you do?”* We had discussed in a previous psalm study on the rabbinic midrash with regard to having the right motivation. The rabbis say that our motivation is as significant before God as our having actually performed the deed (*e.g. the sacrifices, charity, etc*). The Lord does appear to be very concerned with our motivations, according to the rabbis, just like Yeshua is saying here in *Matthew 23*. What is the meaning, the significance, and the purpose of our actions? If you are a believer in the Messiah, you know that there are many commands of the Lord, from the Torah, and the apostles teachings on the Torah that require overt action, physical activity, or some outward behavior or obedience. This is the very nature of listening and obeying the commandment. We also know that the ways of a faithful servant to walk in the footsteps of the Messiah, everything that we do is to be deeply meaningful and spiritual. We are to examine our ways, to walk in righteousness, all of these things involve the heart and the spirit. God doesn't want merely outward conformity to His commands. He also wants an inward obedience, a heart that responds and a mind that understands those commands. This is the meaning behind what I believe is called the *“spirit of the command.”* Having the right intentions, with an innocent heart, in purity, and truth, is the most important as compared to rigid adherence to a set procedure or tradition. Today though there are some who feel tradition is as important or even more important than Scripture. Is the Lord more concerned with tradition, than with faithful obedience with the right intention? What do you think about that?

ו שָׁם פָּחַדוּ-פָּחַד לֹא-הָיָה פָּחַד בִּי-אֱלֹהִים פָּזַר עֲצָמוֹת הַנָּהָר הַבְּשֹׁתָהּ בִּי-אֱלֹהִים 53:5 מְאֹסָם :
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. (NASB) David gives an example of the unrighteous who encamp to make war against God's people. The rabbis translate this to say the following in the Aramaic Targum, תַּמְן דְּלַחוּ דְּלוּחָא מִן פְּסִילִיהוֹן דְּלִית בְּהוֹן צְרוּךְ לְמַדְלַח לְמַדְחַל,
 53:6 אַרוּם אֱלֹהָא מְבַדֵּר תְּקוּף מְשִׁירִית חֵיבִיא בְּהִיתָא יִתְהוֹן אַרוּם מִימְרָא דִּיהוּהּ רַחֲיקִינוּן :
There they were greatly afraid of their idols, in whom is nothing to fear, for God scatters the might of the army of sinners;

you put them to shame, because the word of the Lord abhors them. (EMC) The idea on what David is saying, according to the rabbis, David is saying there is great fear in something where no fear should have been. The rabbis translate this to mean that the gentiles are afraid of their idols where there is nothing to fear since these are only wood and stone (see *Jeremiah 10*). It is interesting that the Septuagint leaves this part of the verse out saying, 53:5 ἐκεῖ φοβηθήσονται φόβον οὐ οὐκ ἦν φόβος ὅτι ὁ θεὸς διεσκόρπισεν ὀστᾶ ἀνθρωπαρέσκων κατησχύνθησαν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐξουδένωσεν αὐτοὺς 53:5 or *God has scattered the bones of the men-pleasers; they were ashamed, for God despised them. (LXX)* As a result, commentators who rely upon the Greek translation of the Tanach make comments about this line being added at a later time (see *the Pulpit commentary, biblehub.com*). However, looking at the Septuagint, the phrase is included in the previous verse, 53:4 *Will none of the workers of iniquity know, who devour my people as they would eat bread? they have not called upon God. There were they greatly afraid, where there was no fear. (LXX)* The Christian commentators may be having difficulty understanding the connection between being afraid where there is no fear to not calling upon the Lord, and the Lord scattering the bones of him who encamps against you. This might be why the verse is segregated from 53:5 and attached to 53:4 instead. In the Targum, the rabbis say that the Lord scatters the might of the army of sinners and puts them to shame. The idea may be that the worker of iniquity places his fear where he shouldn't, the fear of the Lord is what keeps one from sin, and the one who sins has no fear of the Lord. This draws back to the context of *Matthew 23*, the Scribes and Pharisees did not have the fear of the Lord in the proper way. This much is obvious by the nullifying of one's having sworn by the temple verses the altar examples and not taking care of the poor, to greed, and the many ways they developed to circumvent having to obey the command, etc. These things show a greater spiritual problem that begins with not having the proper fear of the Lord. How do we today generate the proper fear of the Lord in our lives? One way is to study God's Word and take the Scriptures seriously as applying for our lives. If we honestly consider Yeshua's words in *Matthew 7*, and the concept of the intent of the heart, there are very serious consequences if we take our faith with an "off the cuff" type of attitude. (i.e. once saved always saved type of theologies, etc)

ז מי-יתן מציון ישׁעות ישׂראל בשוב אלהים שבות עמו יגל יעקב ישׁמה ישׁ׃
 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. (NASB) The rabbis translate this according to the Aramaic Targum, ז מן הוא די יהיב מן ציון פורקניא דישראל אילהין יהוה כד יחזור מימרא דיהוה גלות דעמיה ירנן דבית יעקב יחדי
 53:7 Who is it who gives the redemption of Israel from Zion but the Lord? When the word of the Lord brings back the exiles of his people, those of the house of Jacob will be glad, those of the house of Israel will rejoice. (EMC) and the Septuagint, 53:6 τίς δώσει ἐκ Σιων τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ Ἰσραηλ ἐν τῷ ἐπιστρέψαι κύριον τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀγαλλιάσεται Ἰακωβ καὶ εὐφρανθήσεται Ἰσραηλ 53:6
 Who will bring the salvation of Israel out of Zion? When the Lord turns the captivity of his people, Jacob shall exult, and Israel shall be glad. (LXX) It is interesting how the rabbis translate David's words to say when the "Word of the Lord brings back the exiles of His people." How does the word of the Lord bring the people back to the land? Is this a reference to the word of prophecy? Is this a reference to the word convicting one's heart to return? Note how it is the "Word" (Memora, מימרא) of God that causes the salvation of His people. The word convicts, the word calls, the word moves in a person's heart. The "Word" (Memora, מימרא) of God is active and takes action in the life of a believer and in the lives of the unsaved to produce faith for salvation. The Lord accomplishes this by the power of His Spirit. This appears to be the understanding on the "beginning of wisdom" that David is proclaiming in the introduction to his psalm. This is also the understand on God's word, like we read in *John 1:1-14* that the Word goes forth, the Lord brought His Messiah into this world by the Word. The Word of God proceeds forward and is planted in our hearts, and the Spirit of the Lord causes the seed of the word to grow into faith and faithfulness. Note also that faith and faithfulness are the same root word "emet." Faith and faithfulness are not inseparable. The person who has "faith," his faith is believed in the heart, and that faith is turned into "faithfulness" which is the action that one takes following his or her faith. Actions follow through by faith, this is known as faithfulness. Has the Word been effectual in your faith that has led to action? Let's Pray!

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for your mercies and the grace you show us each day. We know that the tongue is full of all kinds of evil, please have mercy on us for the words that we say that do not bring glory to Your name. Lord we know that our own righteousness is nothing but filthy rags and that we desire for Your righteousness, the righteousness that you credit to us because of our faith in the Messiah Yeshua. We ask Lord that you would increase our faith, and help us to bring glory to Your name! You have demonstrated the greatness of Your love for us in Your Son Yeshua the Messiah. Thank You Lord for sending Your son Yeshua that we may enter into the covenant of peace that You have promised to Your people. Help us to grow in our faith, to walk in the spirit, and apply these truths to our lives. We praise Your Holy Name and give You all of the honor, and the glory, and the praise forever and ever.

In Yeshua's (Jesus') Name we pray! Amen!

Be Blessed in Yeshua, Christ our Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:
Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
"Yeshua" King Messiah forever and ever

Notes