

## The Book of Psalms

### Psalm 14

#### Opening Prayer

#### ***Read Psalm 14***

#### Overview

This psalm is difficult to characterize into one of the categories we laid out in the introduction lessons. It has elements of a lament as the psalmist decries the actions of the “fools” and the “wicked”. Yet it lacks the “personal-ness” of most laments. There is no direct appeal for God to act on behalf of the psalmist. The psalm also has some characteristics of wisdom psalms; most notably, the comparison of the “fool” with the “righteous”. As a whole, however, the psalm doesn’t fit neatly into the wisdom psalm category.

An interesting feature of Psalm 14 is that it is virtually duplicated in Psalm 53 with one notable exception. Where Psalm 14 uses the personal identification of the true God, *Yahweh*, Psalm 53 uses the more generic “God(s)”, *Elohim*. The reasons for this will be discussed when we get to Psalm 53.

The main focus of Psalm 14 is the lack of faith among fools and the outcome thereof. This is actually highlighted by the contrariness of the final verse. The picture of life in Zion is a beacon compared to the darkness of what happens in verses 1-6 where there is a lack of faith.

#### Outline

The psalm can be divided into four parts:

1. The fool’s perspective – 14:1
2. God’s perspective – 14:2-4
3. God’s presence among the righteous – 14:4-6
4. Hope for Israel’s salvation – 14:7

#### The Fool’s Perspective – 14:1

:1 - “there is no God” – Our modern notion of *atheism*, that God does not exist, would have been unknown at all in the Ancient Near East. Pantheism ruled the area and the idea that no god existed at all wouldn’t have even crossed the minds of people. The denial of God’s existence at all may be called *philosophical atheism*. It is an actual belief that God does not exist and as stated previously, this is a modern invention, or at least its acceptance is a

very modern notion. What the psalmist refers to here in Psalm 14 is what might be called *practical atheism*. What that means is that people genuinely believed that God existed and even confessed His existence, but acted as if He did not. Thus the one saying, “there is no God” is called a fool! There are other places in the Scriptures where we see *practical atheism* at work. **Read Jeremiah 5:1-2; Amos 8:4-6**

*How do these passages demonstrate the notion of practical atheism?*

*How prevalent is practical atheism in our day?*

*How can we approach one who is a true philosophical atheist?*

*How are we all at times “practical atheists”?*

- There are real effects of this practical atheism laid out in the psalm:
  - a. A denial of God’s existence – 14:1
  - b. Corruption of behavior – 14:1
  - c. No one does good things – 14:1,3
  - d. A distinct lack of prayer – 14:4

*How is practical atheism then a slippery slope which may indeed lead to philosophical atheism?*

#### God’s Perspective – 14:2-4

:2 - The idea of what God is looking for here seems to be faith. He is looking among the sons of men to see if there are any who “understand” or who “seek God”. It reminds one of the question of Jesus in **Luke 18:8**.

:3-4 - These verses tell us what the Lord sees when He looks intently. What He sees is that there is no one that was seeking after the Lord. Men are as a whole corrupt! We are reminded here that we are all born sinful and *cannot* find God on our own but that He must seek us out.

#### **Read Psalm 51:5**

*What primary doctrine of Christianity is found in this verse?*

#### **Read Romans 3:23**

*What does this verse tell us about our ongoing condition?*

*How do these verses together fly in the face of the so-called “decision theology” prevalent in the Christian church in America?*

- “eat up my people” – This vivid description is meant to show the extent to which the wicked persecute the righteous and faithful. We see a similar imagery used in **Micah 3:1-3**.

*How does this imagery fit our own day and the way the church feels within our culture?*

## God's Presence Among the Righteous – 14:5-6

- :5 - “There they are in great dread” – This sentence comes as a declaration of the state of these “God-deniers” when they stop lying to themselves and realize the truth.
- The second half of verse 5 states succinctly the point of the whole plan of salvation – we are able to be in God’s presence!  
God desires to be present among us – ***Exodus 25:8***  
The prophesied Messiah will bring this about – ***Isaiah 7:14***  
Jesus promises that it will continue – ***Matthew 28:20***  
We are brought into God’s presence eternally – ***Revelation 7:15***
- :6 - “the afflicted” or “the poor” is probably parallel to the righteous from earlier. The implication is that the wicked would attempt to shame the “plans” or faith lives of the righteous.
- How are Christians “shamed” by society for our faith lives?*

## Hope for Israel’s Salvation – 14:7

- :7 - “restores His captive people” – Some have taken this line to be indicative of the return from Babylon. We see a similar line in ***Psalms 126:1***, which is most certainly a post-exilic song. This verse in Psalm 14 may be prophetic of that return. The other possibility is that it is to be taken more generally. So that it does not refer to a specific captivity, but rather the captivity of God’s people to sin, wickedness, etc. There is simply not enough historical evidence in the psalm to isolate it more specifically.
- The general tone of verse 7 is to be a celebratory ending for the righteous who have been oppressed by the wicked and who have wondered where their deliverance would come from.  
*How does the picture of heaven and even of Christ’s return comfort the Christian in the midst of persecution?*

## Summary

Psalm 14 presents a contrast between the state of emotions and end for the righteous and for the wicked. For the wicked there is “dread” and the absence of God. For the righteous there is celebration and the presence of God!

## Closing Prayer