

# Out of Zion

## Psalm 14

Series: Psalms

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Open your Bibles this evening to Psalm 14. As we prepare for a time of prayer tonight, I want to take a few moments to look at this psalm and especially take note of the contrast in how it begins and how it ends.

David is concerned with those around him who are living as if there is no God. They fail to acknowledge God. They ignore God. Some are even antagonistic toward those who trust in God. David's description of the dilemma facing God's people is very much reflective of our own day. And his prayer at the close of this psalm is very instructive—as we think through how best to respond to and engage the world around us.

Let's begin by reading the psalm together.

**Hear the Word of God** from Psalm 14.

To the choirmaster. Of David.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;  
there is none who does good.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,  
to see if there are any who understand,  
who seek after God.

They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;  
there is none who does good,  
not even one.

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers  
who eat up my people as they eat bread  
and do not call upon the LORD?

There they are in great terror,  
for God is with the generation of the righteous.

You would shame the plans of the poor,  
but the LORD is his refuge.

Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!  
When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,  
let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.  
(Psalm 14:1–7)

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Here in Psalm 14 David confronts the sin he finds all around him—he sees God’s people facing persecution and temptations that come from a world entrenched in evil and in rebellion against God. As he ponders the deplorable state of our fallen world, his heart is drawn toward the solution. Where in the midst of all this darkness can the godly find hope and point others to hope?

## The Psalm Title

Psalms 14            To the choirmaster. Of David

The psalm includes an inscription with two titles of designation. The inscription informs us that the psalm was composed by David. It is an individual lament concerning the great spiritual darkness and depravity that has enveloped mankind.

The designation “to the Choirmaster” or “Chief Musician” indicates that it was to be used for corporate worship. In the book of Psalms, 53 psalms have this designation.

Many of these psalms were personal expressions—expressions of grief and lament, or joy and praise. But though they began as private devotion and personal outpouring of worship, they expressed the thoughts and longings common to all of God’s people and were considered appropriate expressions for public worship.

Psalms like this offer valuable insight. They serve not only to praise and glorify God, they also teach and instruct us. The psalms give us a window into the hearts of others. We hear the words of Old Testament saints as they came to God in prayer and praise. And the psalms teach us how to express our own prayer and praise to God—how to pour out our hearts before Him—how to worship Him both in times of joy and in times of sorrow. They can encourage us as we identify with the feelings and situations expressed within them.

This particular psalm has a unique distinction in the book of Psalms; it appears twice—once here and again as Psalm 53. The only difference between the two is in different names used for God. Psalm 14 uses יהוה (*Yaweh*) four times; Psalm 53 uses אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*) through the entire psalm. Scholars are not sure why the psalm appears twice, except to say, that it is likely the psalm was sung frequently in Israel’s worship—known and sung in many regions—so that when it was included in the Psalter for the Temple, both versions were used.

## STATE OF THE WICKED

The psalm begins with an indicting description of the wicked.

Psalms 14:1      The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."  
                         They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds,  
                         there is none who does good.

Paul quotes the first three verses of this psalm in Romans chapter 3:9–18 where he teaches on the terrible impact sin has had on humanity.

Romans 3:9–18      What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written:  
                         "None is righteous, no, not one;  
                         no one understands;  
                         no one seeks for God.  
                         All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
                         no one does good,  
                         not even one."  
                         "Their throat is an open grave;  
                         they use their tongues to deceive."  
                         "The venom of asps is under their lips."  
                         "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."  
                         "Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
                         in their paths are ruin and misery,  
                         and the way of peace they have not known."  
                         "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

He concludes in verse 23 of Romans 3: ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

Both Jews and Gentiles (those who learned God's law as well as those ignorant of God's law) have all rebelled against God and stand in need of salvation. David uses the term "fool" in verse 1 of Psalm 14 to describe the wicked. What does he mean here by the word "fool"?

### ***(The) fool***

David is not speaking of someone lacking in mental powers. A fool, as described in this context may be quite intelligent. Here a *fool* is defined as one who lives his life with no concern for, fear of, or even acknowledgement of God.

I have mentioned before that the Hebrew language is very picturesque. The Hebrew word for fool נָבָל (*nabal*) comes from a root meaning dying, fading, withering. It is related to the verb Isaiah uses in 40:8 where he says: "The grass withers and the flower *fades*, but the Word of the Lord endures forever." The fool denies the existence of God—but it is the existence of the fool that is fleeting. His life and accomplishments will fade away (like the grass and flower of the field). In the end it is God's Word that will endure.

The fool is one who is spiritually faded, dead, and without life.

Think of a leaf or a branch. When it is connected to the tree it has life and growth—vitality. When it falls or when it is broken off from the source of life—what happens? It withers and decays. You pick it up and it crumbles in your hand. You touch a spark to it and it readily burns up.

As a leaf that has fallen from a tree decays and withers, so fallen man has decayed morally and become worthless. It is senseless and foolish to think that we can live and exist apart from the One who made us for Himself.

This is the contrast we see at the beginning of the Psalms—in Psalm 1.

How does Psalm 1 describe the **righteous**—those believing and trusting in God?

Psalms 1:3            He is like a tree  
                              planted by streams of water  
                              that yields its fruit in its season,  
                              and its leaf does not wither.  
                              In all that he does, he prospers.

And what about the **wicked**?

Psalm 1:4            The wicked are not so,  
                              but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

This is how Scripture portrays those who would live as if there is no God.

### ***In his heart***

Notice the fool says *in his heart*, “There is no God.” One may make an outward profession to believe in God, but it is **the heart** that truly concerns God.

Jeremiah 17:9–10    The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

It is the heart that condemns us if we live life in such a way as to ignore and deny God—in a way that is foolish.

The description in Psalm 14:1 continues—

### ***They are corrupt.***

Notice what a denial of God produces: the fruit of turning away from God is corruption. When we live apart from God, as if there is no God, our actions, our direction is *corrupt*.

This implies a sense of uselessness. Again the imagery goes back to the dried, withered leaf that has fallen from its branch. It has no life; no stability.

### ***They do abominable deeds.***

Their works are vile. The depth of their crime is measured against the One offended.

They deny and sin against the very One who has made them, the very One who sustains them and give them life and breath each day.

***There is none who does good.***

The scope of this foolishness is complete and total. *None* does good in the sight of God. *None* seek after Him.

All people are fools without the quickening work of God’s Spirit bringing faith and repentance, shining light upon the heart so that sin is exposed and we see our need to turn and flee to Christ. Apart from God’s mercy and grace man is bound to his sin, bent toward evil, dead, and completely unable to comprehend spiritual things.

This describes the world around—a world pressing on as if there is no God—a world in need of hearing the truth. And if we are honest, this describes us in our sin—certainly it was us outside of Christ, but we can fall into patterns of living this way as well. We can spend our time so focused on ourselves and other things that we *live as fools*—acting and thinking and choosing, as if God were not part of the equation.

There is a solution coming in this psalm that we need as much as the world around us.

## **A DIVINE INVESTIGATION**

Psalms 14:2            The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man,  
                                 to see if there are any who understand,  
                                 who seek after God.

This statement can be taken from two perspectives:

From the **view of the wicked** this search is terrifying. God sees and knows all things, even every secret thing. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” God misses nothing in His search. On the Day of Judgment everything will be brought into the open. The wicked may deny its coming, but they will not escape its reality.

From the **view of the saved**, however, this search brings great hope and comfort.

2 Chronicles 16:9b    For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.

Although man has rebelled and sinned against God; God has not abandoned His creation. He takes notice of man. The Psalmist asked: “What is man that You are mindful of him? (Psalm 8:4) God’s penetrating search is one of care and condescension, a precursor to His benevolence.

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. It would be to His great delight if He indeed found one searching for Him. But given man left to himself, without the grace of God, ***there is none.***

David continues then with his—

## CONCLUSION

What is the result of God's investigation?

Psalms 14:3      They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;  
   there is none who does good,  
   not even one.

Man is both blind in his understanding of spiritual things and dead in his willingness to seek and pursue the knowledge of spiritual things. He cannot appreciate divine beauty, so he does not pursue it. He in fact has an aversion to truth and hates it.

***They have all turned aside;***

***They have become corrupt;***

***There is none who does good, not even one.***

All have sinned and fall short of God's glory. The depravity of man is total, effecting all mankind.

He then asks:

Psalms 14:4      Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers  
   who eat up my people as they eat bread  
   and do not call upon the LORD?

***Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers?***

The world would deny the existence of God, even with the people of God bearing witness to the truth and reality that there indeed is a God.

***They eat up My people as they eat bread.***

The world persecutes God's people as naturally as they eat their bread. The world is corrupt, and at enmity with God.

Those who would be salt and light in the world, reflecting the character of God will be hated, persecuted, and scorned by the world.

***They do not call upon the LORD.***

And here is the great tragedy of so many in this world. In sin we are so corrupt and blinded, that we do not even seek a way of escape or salvation. We don't even know that we are in grave danger.

## CONTRAST

Psalms 14:5–6      There they are in great terror,  
   for God is with the generation of the righteous.  
   You would shame the plans of the poor,  
   but the LORD is his refuge.

With the advantage of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, comparing and contrasting is a favorite means of conveying truth. We saw this a moment ago in Psalm 1.

But here is *why* the world scorns and avoids and persecutes Christians. The presence of believers is a reminder of the reality of God and a coming Day of Judgment. Our hope, when it is rejected, is their condemnation and a cause for them to fear and tremble. They may resist showing their fear outwardly, but at times when they are alone with themselves, when the reality of death and their own mortality rushes in upon them, they are terrified.

Here the world seeks to shame the poor and cast doubt on any hope in God. The *poor* in verse 6 are the suffering, those who identify with God and His people—and the world would taunt them.

Here is the contrast—The **wicked** live in fear. They do not fear God and as a result they end up fearing everything else. They live in confusion and darkness with no real satisfaction or fulfillment. The **righteous**, however, have a place of refuge. They live in peace and security.

Jeremiah makes this contrast:

Jeremiah 17:5–8     Thus says the LORD:  
“**Cursed** is the man who trusts in man  
And makes flesh his strength,  
Whose heart departs from the LORD.  
For he shall be like a shrub in the desert,  
And shall not see when good comes,  
But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,  
In a salt land which is not inhabited.  
“**Blessed** is the man who trusts in the LORD,  
And whose hope is the LORD.  
For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,  
Which spreads out its roots by the river,  
And will not fear when heat comes;  
But its leaf will be green,  
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,  
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Finally the psalm ends with a—

## PETITION OF HOPE

We have seen a vivid display of our desperate state outside of Christ. Notice here what David prays.

Psalms 14:7     Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!  
                         When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,  
                         let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

Verse 7 represents a crucial turning point in the psalm. It began as a **meditation**, that quickly turned to a **lament**, but now is a **petition**, looking forward to a time of **praise** and rejoicing.

David considers the hopeless of man left to himself. He meditates on the depravity and corruption of man, and realizes that if anyone can be saved, it **must** be through God's grace and life-giving power.

But notice from where God's salvation is to come: **out of Zion!**

### **What is Zion?**

David could have prayed that salvation would come from hand of God. He could have said that salvation would come from the promised Messiah. And this would be true. But he expands his statement at the end of the psalm, praying that salvation will come **out of Zion**.

This is more than a reference to the physical city of Jerusalem, where Christ would be crucified and accomplish in time and space the salvation of God's people. Zion is also used in Scripture as reference to the people of God.

Psalms 65:1      Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion

God's purpose in salvation includes its being fulfilled and accomplished by Christ—but also its application and proclamation in us! God is the One who saves. Notice—

Verse 7 continues: "When the LORD restores..."

Psalms 14:7      Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!  
                         **When the LORD restores** the fortunes of his people,  
                         let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.

It is the Lord who restores! But God uses means to accomplish His salvation. As God saves, we respond with joy and gladness—joy and gladness that compel us to share the good news of salvation with others. It is our joy and responsibility to spread the Gospel—**out of Zion**, knowing with confidence that God will work—His Word will go out and will not return void.

He has established us here as a church in this community for a purpose. I encourage you to think from this mindset—**out of Zion**. God has put us here to make Him known. Every friend, every acquaintance, every relationship—is in your life for you to magnify Jesus Christ.

Let's go now to a time of prayer.

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