

The Great Transformation

The Journey of Atheists or Legalists to Jesus Christ

Psalm 14:1 *"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.

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

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

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

⁵ There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.

⁶ You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.

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.

Psalm 15:1 *A Psalm of David.*

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;

³ who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

⁵ who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Psalm 16:1 *A Miktam of David.*

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.

⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

⁷ I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

⁸ I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.

¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Psalm 14-16

A Man Named Saul

“THE SYNAGOGUE IN ANTIOCH was in a state of chaos that day. A mob had formed. Lynching was on its mind. Raised fists, stomping feet and cries of ‘blasphemy’ had kicked up a cloud of dust, fury and deadly intentions.

“In the midst of the mob stood one man — now quiet, almost peaceful, yet determined.

“The first rock hit him from behind. Suddenly, a barrage of boulders flew from the angry rabble. A young man in the back nodded his head ‘in hearty agreement’ (Acts 8:1). He began to gather the clothes of the mob — returning them to their rightful owners. Saul was happy. Joyous. Another heretic had been exterminated. Judaism was being purified. Indeed, as Paul would later write of himself, ‘He was advancing in his faith.’ He believed he was doing right by persecuting a church which he thought to be false, foolish and out of God’s will. He believed that these ‘good deeds’ would guarantee him salvation. That opinion was soon to change. Some time later on a lonely road to Damascus, the One he was persecuting appeared to him — shining a light into Saul’s spiritual darkness.¹

I found this retelling of the early known life of the Apostle Paul while searching to see if anyone else out there had seen what I consider to be a truly amazing relationship

¹ Bryan Cribb, “Grace in the Old Testament: A Meditation on Psalms 14-16,” *The MinistryU Blog* (Sept 14, 2011), <http://auministry.com/grace-in-the-old-testament-a-meditation-on-psalms-14-16/>, last accessed Nov 10, 2016.

between **Psalms 14-16**. Several years ago I saw these Psalms as unit, and back then I had been unable to find anyone else noticing the relationship. But I was convinced these psalms were deliberately placed together.

One of the reasons for this is that Psalm 14 is one of only three full psalms that are replicated elsewhere in the Bible.² One (Ps 18) is found in 2 Samuel 22. The other (Psalm 70) is found at the end of Psalm 40. What makes Psalm 14 unique is that its counterpart (Psalm 53) is basically identical to Psalm 40 with very little added or subtracted from either. The major change is that Psalm 53 uses the word **Elohim** rather than **Yahweh** (Psalm 14) to describe God. This is actually something to take note of, because the Psalter is divided into books. Four of those books are dominated by the covenant name: Yahweh. But the second book, and a

² Psalm 18 = 2 Samuel 22.

Psalm 31:1-3 = Psalm 71:1-3

Psalm 40:13-17 = Psalm 70

Psalm 57:7-11 = Psalm 108:1-5

Psalm 60:5-12 = Psalm 108:6-13.

See **C. Hassell Bullock**, "Psalm 14," in *Psalms Volume 1: Psalm 1-72*, Teach the Text Commentary Series, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015). (Found on Google Books). Hassell also puts these three Psalms together. He writes, "If the progression of Psalms 14-16 in the canonical order reflects the mind of the editor of Book 1—and I think it does ... The journey from the world's foolishness (Ps 14) along the road of righteousness (Ps 15) into the presence of God (Ps 16) has left the world's attractions farther and farther behind, until David can say, 'Apart from you I have no good thing.'"

bleed-over into the third (Psalms 42-83) changes this and uses Elohim instead.³

Since Psalm 14 is replicated later in the Psalter, it must be for a good reason. I believe that this reason is because of its placement with Psalms 15-16 and because of the covenant name for God used in all three. When read together, these three psalms tell us something very important. They tell us a story. They tell us about [a great transformation](#).

Returning to Paul for a moment, what exactly was it that Jesus showed Paul on that Damascus road? Of course, he revealed himself as God incarnate. But he would have given him some kind of proof. The proof would have come from his own Scripture (our Old Testament). For if an angel from heaven had preached to him something he believed was against the Torah, he would never have believed it. And I say this as a Calvinist, because God does not convert people apart from his word. They are saved when he gives them the

³ Nogalski writes, “The ratio of the occurrence of YHWH to Elohim outside the Elohist Psalter is more than 5 to 1 (outside the Elohist Psalter, YHWH appears 650 times, while Elohim appears 120 times). However, the ratio of YHWH to Elohim inside the Elohist Psalter is less than 1 to 5 (YHWH appears only 45 times in comparison to the 245 occurrences of Elohim). Statistics taken from Bible Windows, ver. 4.0 (Silver Mountain Software).” James D. [Nogalski](#), “From Psalm to Psalms to Psalter,” in *An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and the Psalms*: Festschrift Marvin E. Tate, ed. H. Wayne Ballard, Jr. and W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 45, n. 11.

ability to see the truth of the holy word by an effectual revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Until now, the Apostle—by his own admission—believed that his persecution of the heretic Christians was what God wanted, as he lived out a “**blameless**” life of obedience to Torah. Listen to his own testimony. “**I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless**” (**Php 3:4-6**).

Blameless according to the law? This is really a stunning admission, especially when you read the Gospels and how Jesus was constantly showing the Pharisees that they were in fact utter hypocrites. But the Pharisees did not think themselves that way at all. What hypocrite ever does? Instead, they saw blameless obedience to the law (rightly) required, but (wrongly) possible in themselves. Perhaps this is how they read their Bibles like when Moses said, “**This commandment is not too hard for you**” (**Dt 30:11**). Yet, as Paul would later come to understand when he quoted the

verses that immediately follow (12-14) in **Romans 10:6-8**, **this not mean what he thought it meant** as a Pharisee. We will return to this thought later.

For now, I want you to see that what the Lord Jesus showed the Apostle, and what he has to show all religious hypocrites, and even total unbelievers—if they are to sojourn in the LORD's tent or dwell on his holy hill, is **their complete inability** of the flesh to do this. Being a Pharisee, a person full of good works according to human standards, doing everything you can to get to that tent on that hill, to justify yourself before God, it is a fool's errand. But how could we see this from the OT?

A great place is Psalms 14-16. The professor puts my own thoughts on these three psalms succinctly. He says,

I was struck [in my quiet time] with how they [Psalms 14, 15, and 16] were arranged. Psalm 15 seemed to ask a question. Psalm 14 seemed to pose a problem to that question. And Psalm 16 seemed to solve the question and the problem. I looked in several commentaries and no one talked about how these psalms were arranged. However, a lot of work is being done these days on seeing

connections in the psalms. Some of the psalms are linked by key words. Some by ideas. And some ask questions, only to be answered by others. In a way, they may be expositing one another. I think the latter case is perhaps what we have here. These three psalms, I believe may have been deliberately put together by the ‘inspired compiler,’ if you will, for the purpose of teaching a point and explaining each other.⁴

This was exactly what I had been thinking too. Someone else saw it!

Psalm 14: Depravity

With these things in mind, let us come to our three Psalms. **Psalm 14** is a **Psalm of David**. It is another Psalm, “**To the choirmaster,**” or “**For the End**” (LXX). Beloved, please remember again what our Fathers taught us. For there is no more important thing in all the world than to listen to their teaching on this, especially in these three Psalms. Augustine says of 14:1, “**There is no need to repeat**

⁴ Cribb, *ibid.*

again and again what is meant by ‘to the end,’ ‘for Christ is the end of the law,’ bringing justification to everyone who believes (Rom 10:4), as the apostle Paul says.” (Augustine, EXPOSITIONS OF THE PSALMS 14.1). Do you hear that? Christ is The End of the law *for righteousness* to all who believe. This is what the Apostle Paul came to understand. In fact quite astonishingly, he says this *just two verses*(!) prior to quoting *Deuteronomy 30:12-14*, which I mentioned a moment ago. This will be so very important to tuck away for further reflection later on.

David does not give us an exact situation in his life for this psalm. Instead, he moves immediately and so famously into *chastising “the fool.”* Let’s think about “fools” for a moment. The Bible has a lot to say about fools. The word for a fool is *nabal*, which is curiously the name of one of the great fools in all the Bible. *Nabal* was a wealthy businessman who lived in the district of Carmel. He had a “*beautiful and discerning*” wife named Abigail. But Nabal was “*harsh and badly behaved*” (1Sa 25:3). He was also a *drunkard* (37). Those two words begin to describe this fool.

Samuel had died, and David was again on the run from Saul. But David had been anointed to be king. Word of this

was certainly out by now. But when David's men came to Nabal to get some food from the overabundance of his sheep, the Fool questioned the king-elect. "Who is David? Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" Yes, fool, you should. He has an army of well honed swordsman and archers. That's all they do day and night is fight. He's going to be the king! What kind of a person does this?

David was so upset by this fool that he told his men to strap on the swords. David strapped on his, and four hundred men went after Nabal. But Abigail heard about it and intervened with soothing words and plenty of bread. But she did not tell Nabal what she was doing. When The Fool sobered up, and she told him and he became hardened "as a stone." Ten days later the LORD stuck him dead (38).

In the Proverbs, fools babble and come to ruin (Pr 10:8). They slander (10). His mouth brings him ruin (14). Doing wrong is a joke to a fool (23). His way is right in his own eyes (12:15). He is angry and everyone knows it immediately (16). Fools flaunt their folly (13:16). He despises his father's instruction (15:5). A hundred blows do

less to change his mind than a simple rebuke of an understanding man (17:10). As then, so now. Many people are foolish and most do not even know what the word describes any longer.

But David says something about the fool to start off his Psalm. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (vs. 1). Since there is no context, we are left to wonder who he may have in mind. Nabal, maybe? Someone else? Since we do not know with certainty, it is easy to move to our own day. David is describing what we would call **atheists**. I think of those men like **Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens**, and others.

But wait. Most people think that the opposite of a fool is a really smart person. So fools would be equivalent to mental pigmies. This is totally incorrect. Dawkins, Hitchens, Russell, Shermer, Harris, Heraclitus, Hume, Marx, Sartre, these are or were in many ways very brilliant men. In the Bible, “The fool is one whose life is lived without the direction or acknowledgment of God ... the precise opposite of *fool* and *folly* is not *wise man* and *wisdom*; the opposite of *folly* in the wisdom literature is

lovingkindness.”⁵

But these men so full of learning are actually puffed up by it. And their atheism untethers them to the morality that Solomon tells us about. Consider the remarks of Dawkins in the *Washington Post*.

Why should you deny your loved one the pleasure of sexual encounters with others, if he or she is that way inclined? ... however much you love your mate, sex with a stranger is almost always more exciting, purely because it is a stranger ... We [should] rise above nature when tempted by the vice of sexual jealousy ... [and] admire — as I increasingly do - - those rare free spirits confident enough to rise above [it], stop fretting about who is ‘cheating on’ whom, and tell the green-eyed monster [jealousy] to go jump in the lake[.]⁶

This he calls “virtuous” and “rising above [Darwinian] nature.” Is it any wonder that the good atheist doctor Dawkins has been married three times, and just got

⁵ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, vol. 19, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 147.

⁶ Richard Dawkins, “Banishing the Green-Eyed Monster,” *Washington Post* Wed 28 Nov (2007). http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/richard_dawkins/2007/11/banishing_the_greeneyed_monste.html

divorced from his third wife this past September 2016? [Atheism is a fool's errand](#). Nothing is more plain than that God exists, for he has written this in the very heavens which declare his glory ([Psalm 19](#), [Rom 1:20](#)), and written the requirements of his law into their very hearts ([Rom 2:15](#)). In a word, atheism is illogical. I love the quote from the relatively unknown [Asterius the Homilist](#) (fourth-fifth cent. AD):

“[There is no God](#).” There is no foundation, then how does the building stand? There is no keel, then how does the ship stabilize? There is no captain, then how is the ship readied? There is no builder, then how is the house built? There is no architect, then who founded the city? There is no farmer, then how do the fields bear their bundles? There is no music, then how can there be the harmony on the lyre of the world? There is no one to foresee, then how does foreknowledge permeate everything? There is no charioteer, then how is the chariot of the four elements driven? There is no sculptor, then how are statues of people in the world crafted? There are no builders of arches, then who has built the arch of heaven for you?

There is no gold worker, then who has placed the golden disc sun in heaven as on a table? There is none who brings a torch, then who gave the moon of the night to you as a silver torch? There is none who brings light, and who has given to you a light with clear splendor? There is none who alone makes great lights, then who has put the ascending lamps of the stars in the sky for you?... Is there no Creator about whom the creature testifies?

(HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS 25.8)

But does the rest of the Psalm rail on the atheist? I love how the Bible works. **Just as we begin to feel smug** because we are not fools, the Psalmist turns the tables on us! “**The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God**” (vs. 2). Notice the “**children of man**” reference. This takes us back to Psalms 11-12.

He answers, “**They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one**” (vs. 3). These verses are placed alongside several verses from Psalms 5, 10 and other references and become a long quote in **Romans 3**, where the Apostle rightly applies

them to everyone, Jews and Gentiles, all human beings without distinction or exception. This includes me, and this includes you. Paul does this to condemn us, for unless you stand condemned, you are in no way properly prepared to receive the good news he is about to tell us. It culminates in how we are to rightly understand the law. “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:19-20). This was said by the same man who believed himself to be blameless according to the law prior to meeting Christ on that fateful road.

If we do not know the bad news, we will have no use for the good news. Psalms 14-16 has the same thing in mind.

The rest of Psalm 14 anticipates this same good news that Paul will speak about, even though it was written 1,000 years earlier. But it only anticipates it. David contrasts evildoers with God’s people (**vs. 4**) and the righteous (**vs. 5**). “They have 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.”

This should make us ask a question, for it poses an **unstated problem**. If everyone is evil, if everyone has turned aside, **how then are there suddenly righteous people in the Psalm?** This is a very real problem that I believe became the reason this Psalm was placed here. Somehow the Psalm has introduced a distinction between those who turn aside and those who are God’s people, even though God’s people were clearly among those who at one time turned aside! This Psalm does not answer that problem.

It hints at how this comes about in the last verse as it anticipates, “**Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion**” (vs. 7). Do you hear the longing? Like the longing of Psalm 13. **When Salvation comes, then the LORD will restore the fortunes of his people.** Somehow the answer has to do with the coming of the LORD. But he hasn’t come yet, not in David’s time. It also hints at this in the name it gives to God’s people. “**Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.**” **Jacob** is the old name that means “deceiver.” **Israel** is Jacob’s new name, changed by God in an act of grace. The names themselves show this movement from wicked to righteous.

But that's how the Psalm ends. It leaves you with a very real problem. Everyone is evil, and yet some are called righteous. How can this possibly be?

Psalm 15: Perfection

Psalm 15 simply begins, “A Psalm of David.” It is tempting to read Psalm 15 in isolation from Psalm 14. In fact, I think this is exactly what Saul of Tarsus may have done. It is even more tempting to soften the language of this Psalm to **make it palatable** and possible to perform. In fact, almost every commentary—even Reformed commentaries—read Psalm 15 as implying that God wants us to try our best and live good moral lives, even though those lives will not be perfect. This Psalm is a classic example of how we can **moralize** and destroy the language of the text just like Pharisees did, because we don't have the ability to see the forest for the trees, even when we may have a theological system that is perfectly capable of accepting the word as-is. Here is what I mean.

David asks God, “O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?” “Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” (vs. 1). This

actually picks up on the problem just raised by the previous Psalm. **If everyone is wicked, how can anyone come near to you?** If it asks the same question that naturally arises from the end of the last Psalm, perhaps they are related!

Beloved, **everyone is on a journey**. In fact, everyone is on *the same* journey. We are all moving from life on this earth to death and what lies beyond. David is asking us how we can stop and find a home in God's tent and on God's hill before it is too late for us. To reside here is to have eternal life. But how?

The answer, **“He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved”** (vv. 2-5). Then the Psalm ends.

Who is the person being described? Be honest with your answer. Is it a fool? Of course not. It is someone who is **corrupt**, who does **abominable deeds**, who understands and

seeks after God? Of course not. Those are the fools!

But is it a person who “*tries hard?*” Is it a person who has the *good outweigh the bad* on a cosmic scale of justice? It is a person in whom *some deceit*, *some* disobedience, *some* evil is found? That certainly is not what the Psalm says. But it is how we often read it, because we cannot think of how the David could imply that he is able to dwell on the holy hill as a perfect man, when we and he both know he was anything but perfect! I mean, that’s what he has just said in Psalm 14. And this is David—the adulterer and murderer—that we are talking about here. This is David who was so immediately angered by Nabal that he immediately took 400 people to go and murder the man for not giving them a meal!

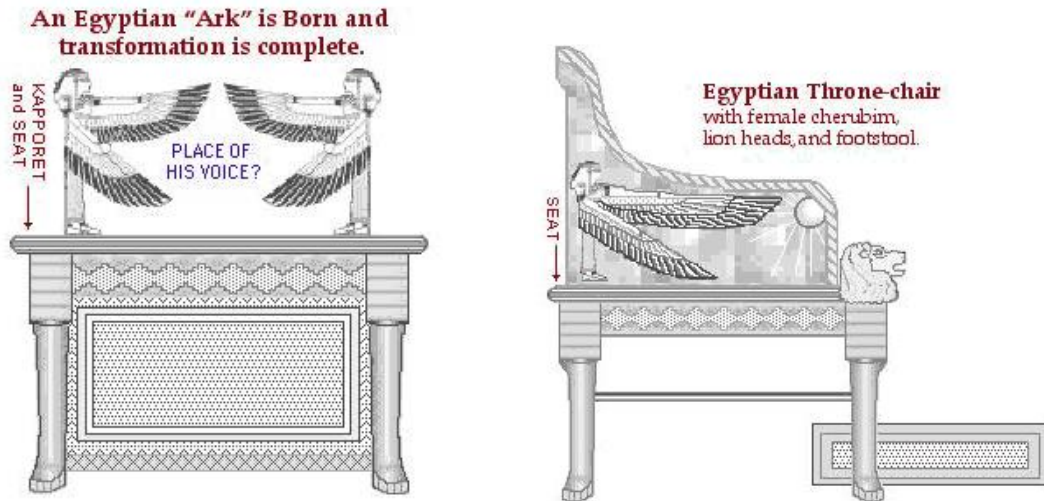
This becomes all the more self-deceptive and destructive when we insert ourselves into this Psalm of David and read it in this light. But we ought to know better than anyone that our hearts are wicked and we often fall into sin. Were you seeking after God? Or were you a fool when he called you to himself? Do you see how easy it is to bring our presuppositions to the text, rather than letting the text say what it has to say? Let me give you some

background to this Psalm and ask a couple of important questions.

What is going on in the first verse? The “tent” and “holy hill” refer, for David, to the dwelling place of God. He probably has in mind the tabernacle built by Moses that was placed inside of a tent that surrounded it (Ex 26:7). It was still in service in his own day.

The tabernacle had a three-tiered structure: A courtyard, a holy place, and the most holy place. Inside the curtain, in the most holy place, was placed the ark of the covenant, a box covered by a top with two cherubim called the mercy seat. The ark contained was built to look like an ancient near eastern throne chair:

Since the ark is a model of a throne (see below), the Scripture can say that God dwells enthroned above the cherubim (1 Sam 4:4 etc.). Therefore, God dwelled in the tent, in the most holy place (“God” is more specifically, “Christ”).



The same is true of the holy hill. Throughout the ancient world, the holy hill was the dwelling place of the gods (Zeus on Olympus, Baal on Saphon, etc). In the Bible, the same is true. God was worshiped by Noah on Ararat. Abraham almost made his son a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. God dwelt on Mt. Sinai. God had Solomon build the temple, patterned after the tabernacle, on Mt. Zion, God's holy hill. The very first holy hill was Eden. The prophet Ezekiel calls Eden, "the mountain of God" (Ezek 28:14, 16). On this mountain God placed the first man: Adam. Here, he would commune with Adam and they would have meetings.

Now let us ask a question. What was the state of the first man? He was created innocent and upright. He was without

sin. In other words, he was to be the man of Psalm 15! The Psalm says, “He who does these things shall never be moved” (vs. 5). What happened to Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God? They were moved. They were moved off the holy hill, cast out of the dwelling place of God, and he placed two cherubim to guard the gate so that they could not reenter.

Let us return to the tabernacle. Who could enter the most holy place? Only the High Priest. Why did he enter there? It was not because he was sinless or because he tried to obey God, albeit imperfectly. Nadab and Abihu are a classic example of presumptuously entering the tent with sin. Rather, it was to make atonement for sin (Lev 16:2, 34), the exact opposite of the way many people interpret Psalm 15, as we think that just trying hard is good enough to be on that hill. The priest went in and then he had to leave again for another year.

What the Psalm teaches us, therefore, is that the perfect person will be allowed to live and stay in the close presence of God. But anyone not meeting such a requirement will be moved away, because God is utterly pure and holy and cannot dwell in the midst of sin.

Read by itself, Psalm 15 might seem like a doable moralistic lesson. When we read Psalm 15 together with Psalm 14, the picture becomes bleak indeed! A perfect person can dwell with God, but all have turned aside and together become corrupt. This means trouble. Yet, like Psalm 14 which shows that somehow some totally depraved people become righteous, Psalm 15 implies that **some people do in fact sojourn in God's tent** and dwell on the holy hill in the presence of God! But how can this be? It is the difficulty of the answer which is totally foreign to the way we think in the flesh that causes us to moralize Psalm 15. Since people are obviously there, and since people are obviously sinful, the Psalm cannot be talking about the need for perfection. "blamelessness" must mean something less. Just as Saul the Pharisee.

Such a move is unfaithful to the language of the Psalm, but also completely unnecessary. Why? There were hints of an answer in the means by which a priest could enter the tent. But it is only a hint. We need more than hints from God's word. We need him to be blunt with us, for we are foolish people. Tell us already Lord, how can we become blameless?

Psalm 16: Imputation and Resurrection

Thus, we come to **Psalm 16**. It begins, “**A Miktam of David.**” Yet another word that we don’t know what it means with certainty. The Targum translates it as, “**An honest inscription.**” The LXX has, “**A writing.**” The NET, “**A prayer.**” The YLT has the evocative, “**A Secret Treasure of David.**”

David begins, “**Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge**” (**vs. 1**). **Psalm 15** asks who will live in the tent where God is or on the mountain where God lives. In Psalm 16, David says that he must not be found in the tent or on the hill, but *in God*. “**In you I take refuge.**” This is New Testament language applied to the believer’s relationship to Christ. We are in union with Christ. We are “**in Christ**” (**Rom 8:1** etc.). But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Because of Psalm 14, David confesses now, “**You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you**” (**Psalm 16:2**). David knows apart from God he is the fool of Psalm 14. Again, the New Testament uses the same language. The Apostle says, “**I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh**” (**Rom 7:18**). Jesus says, “**Apart from Me you can do**

nothing” (John 15:5). This NT language comes from, among other places, the Psalms.

The Psalm next tells us that there are saints in the land. It calls them “excellent” or “majestic” ones (Ps 16:3). How did they get this way? The Psalm will finally begin to unravel the answer that we have been wondering about for three Psalms now.

“The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips” (vs. 4). Some say there is no God (Psalm 14:1); others worship the wrong god (Psalm 16:4). But, “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup” (vs. 5). What kind of a cup? Not a cup of tea. Not “Earl Grey, hot.” Not a cup of beer, as if he is celebrating with his comrades after a war. No. A bloody cup! The Psalmist still has in mind a drink offering. What is this portion? It is the blood that goes in the cup of drink offering. The LORD is the cup and that which it contains!⁷

Yet, God holds his lot (vs. 5). The LORD is his chosen portion; God holds his lot.⁸ Though it is perhaps mixing

⁷ On the “portion” as that which goes into the cup, see Ps 11:6.

⁸ On “lot” and “portion” as synonymous see Isa 17:14; 57:6; Jer 13:25.

metaphors, **Proverbs 16:33** says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” It seems that for David, God can be his chosen portion only because God has first chosen him! God holds his lot. He holds his future in the bloody cup in his own hand.

This sacrificial foreshadowing brings with it great hope and expectation, even in the midst of life’s less than wonderful experiences. Therefore, “The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” (**vs. 6**). His inheritance is God himself! All other treasures pale in comparison, even the tent and holy hill. The LORD gives him counsel, and changes his heart so that it now instructs the Psalmist (**vs. 7**). He sets the LORD before him (**vs. 8**). The LORD goes before him, but he is also at his right hand (**vs. 8**). Therefore, he shall not be moved (**vs. 8**).

In Psalm 15, “He who does these things shall never be moved (*mot*).” Adam was moved. The high priest was moved. All the wicked are moved in their sin.

But in Psalm 16, because the LORD is at the right hand, I shall not be moved (*mot*). It is the same Hebrew word! The Psalmist is telling us how not to be moved. It is not through

our own righteousness, but **by an alien righteousness**. That is, we are hidden in Christ. We do not stand on our own. We stand *in* him. He is our refuge. We still need **perfection**, but we can't attain it ourselves. This perfect standing is not found by moving into the dwelling of God, but by moving into God himself. We move into God because he holds the cup and our lot. He moves us there by his grace. He puts us at his right hand. Christ is the Right Hand of God.

Christ in the Psalm, Christ as the Answer

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure” (**vs. 9**). “Who shall dwell on your holy hill,” Psalm 15 asked? “My flesh dwells secure” because in God “I take refuge,” Psalm 16 answers. So secure is his dwelling that “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (**vs. 10**). David is certain even of resurrected life. Again, **resurrection** in the Psalms (we have seen it more shadowy than this in earlier psalms).

This verse is quoted directly by **Acts 13:35**. The passage is a sermon by the Apostle Paul. In it he recounts the history

of Israel up to the time of the murder of Jesus. But he tells his audience that this great action was planned by God and they carried it out to perfection. This is very bad news. But then, **God raised Jesus from the dead** and he appeared to many people who are witnesses of his resurrection. This very thing was “**the good news that was promised to the fathers**” (**Acts 13:31**), and it is now preached to them, and to us.

Where was this resurrection promised? In the second Psalm, “**You are my Son, today I have begotten you**” (**Psalm 2:7**; cf. **Acts 13:33**). Thus, **Christ is placed on the holy hill** (**Ps 2:6**). How do you dwell on that holy hill? You go to where Christ, who is on the Holy Hill is to be found. And how is he there?

Psalm 16:8. He says that this verse was not merely a hope of David, but a promise and sure blessing given to David (citing **Isa 55:3**; cf. **Acts 13:34**). That hope and promise was that God would not let the Holy One see corruption (**Acts 13:35**). David died and saw corruption (**13:36**); Jesus did not see corruption (**13:37**). **Psalm 16:8** is therefore **about ... Jesus**.

In fact, the whole Psalm is about him. **Pseudo-**

Athanasius writes, “The words in [this psalm] are sung as if by the person of Christ.”⁹ **Cassiodorus**: “The person of the Lord Savior is introduced throughout the psalm.” **Theodoret**: “The psalm is spoken in the person of the Savior but is spoken from the viewpoint of his humanity.”

In that this Psalm is about Jesus, we only find the answer to our greatest questions about dwelling on the holy hill ... in Jesus. The answer is not found in taking the law as an end to itself. To read Moses’ “the commandment is not too hard for you” as meaning that you in your flesh can do it as needed, thereby allowing you to say you are a blameless person as Saul the Pharisee did, this is to completely misunderstand your own spiritual condition.

Rather, Moses continued, “This commandment ... is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you. It

⁹ He continues, “... who although he is noble as Lord by nature and has under his feet creation as a handmaid, yet he asks to be preserved by the Father as the head of the body of the church.... He made those sanctified by the Spirit a marvel in the land—in his church—teaching them the will of the Father as an angel of mighty counsel.”

is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Dt 30:11-14). Paul, who was on his way to go murder more Christians in his “blameless” walking in God’s law, came to see what Augustine said. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). And how did he prove it? “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).’ But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim) because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:4-9). Do you see how Paul the Christian now interprets Moses? Not with the commandment as the end, but with the Word as the End. The Word who is Christ. You keep the law blamelessly in Christ. Or to put it another way, because Christ kept the law, he considers you to have kept the law if by faith Christ is your refuge and you are in

Christ.

We have seen hints throughout these three Psalms that they pointed forward to Jesus. In Psalm 14, **the problem**: somehow those who do not seek after God are seeking after God. Salvation would come to Israel out of Zion. Then, a transformation from Jacob to Israel would bring rejoicing. In Psalm 15, **the question**: who can stand on the holy hill of God? The blameless person can do this. But who can be blameless? In Psalm 16, **the answer**: in Christ a person can be considered blameless because he was blameless and he offers this to any who will believe in him by faith alone. The cup of our salvation in the blood of Christ is held forth.

The Psalm shows the beautiful inheritance of Christ and all his benefits shining brilliant as the sun. In Christ, the way to Mt. Eden and the tree of life is restored (**Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14**). A firm and unmovable ascent into the most holy place is provided (**Heb 4:16**) by a High Priest who went before us and offered a perfect atonement and sat down at the right hand of God (**Heb 10:12**) in the fullness of his presence. And the way is actually made effectual by a God-man who having lived **without sin himself**, became a **perfect offering** allowing him to enter the tent and to stand on the holy hill

... unmoved. He is the second Adam, the perfect human both needed for our salvation and anticipated throughout these Psalms. And through the Word, the Lord gives his elect counsel, instructs them, and holds their lot in his gracious hand.

One of the more remarkable comments of the perfect man in **Psalm 15** is that he “swears to his own hurt and does not change” (**vs. 4**). The remarkable thing is how in **Hebrews 6** we learn how God convinces the heirs of the promise about his good will towards them in Christ. It is through the unchangeable character of his purpose which he guaranteed with an oath so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us (**vv. 17-18**). This is the language of **Psalm 15:4**, and also of **Psalm 16:1** (“in you I take refuge”).

This oath was sworn by the Father to the Son. Again **Psalm 2:7** is quoted, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (cf. **Heb 5:5**). Then **Psalm 110:4** where “the LORD has sworn and will not change his mind” that “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek” (cf. **Heb**

5:6). As **Psalm 15:4** puts it, this oath was a swearing to God's own hurt in the eternal covenant of redemption, but he would not change. The Son was cast off in history; at that moment on the cross he was moved away from the Father's presence and became a sin offering. He was forsaken by God and afflicted. Nothing ever cost anyone more than this. But he was vindicated three days later in his resurrection from the dead where he now has everlasting life.

Thus the Psalmist concludes, “**You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore**” (**Ps 16:11**). Beloved, God is making known to you that path of life. Jesus is the Path (the Way) and the Life. Those are his own words (**John 14:6**) as the Psalm promised.

Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. Paul came to understand where true hope lies, hope for atheists, hope for worshipers of false gods, hope for sinners who are always running from the True God. Not hope in themselves. But hope in the Son. These Psalms are about Christ, but it took us a while to see how. It was worth the wait, for now we are able to see how, in Him, a person's depravity is forgiven via a sacrifice and his perfect righteousness is credited to our

account as we find our union with him. This is the Great Transformation spoken of in our Psalms today.

Have you come to Christ, to the holy hill of God? Are you in him? He warmly invites you even this moment to see the riches that can be yours if you will but turn to him in faith and repentance. He pleads with you not to die, not to be like the fool, not to trust in false things, but to turn to his Son for life.

Psalm 14	Psalm 53
<p><i>"To the choirmaster. Of David.</i> The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.</p> <p>² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.</p> <p>³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.</p> <p>⁴ Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?</p> <p>⁵ There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.</p> <p>⁶ You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.</p> <p>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."</p>	<p><i>"To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David.</i> The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.</p> <p>² God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.</p> <p>³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.</p> <p>⁴ Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?</p> <p>⁵ There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them.</p> <p>⁶ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."</p>