

PSALMS

Chapter 14

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good. ²The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ⁴Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD? ⁵There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. ⁶You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge. ⁷Oh, 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.

Ps 14 A testimony concerning the folly of evil men. This psalm has many links with Ps 10; 12. It shares the view of Ps 11 that the righteous Lord is on the throne, and it stands in contrast with Ps 15, which describes those who are acceptable to God. Ps 53 is a somewhat revised duplicate of this psalm. (CSB)

Continual warning against unbelief; vivid picture of what the righteous ought always to avoid. (TLSB)

Format: Each verse has three poetic lines except vv 5–6, which together make four lines. (TLSB)

14:1–3 Characterization of the wicked. For Paul’s use of these verses in a different context see Ro 3:10–12. (CSB)

14:1 *fool* – Not intended as a definition of the “fool”; One who is morally deficient. (CSB)

The word “fool” has no article, and so is not a reference to a particular person but to every individual in the class “fool.” (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Wisdom literature reminded the people that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.* (Prov. 1:7) (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

By nature we were all fools, no better than the fool described in this psalm. In Romans 3:10-12 Paul uses the words of this psalm as an indictment of the whole sinful human race. These verses prove that no one can ever become righteous in God’s sight by observing the law, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But God did not abandon us in our foolishness. By God’s grace we have come to faith in Christ Jesus. (PBC)

says. The psalmists frequently quote their wicked oppressors in order to portray how they mock God and his servants. (CSB)

heart. In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life.” (CSB)

Matthew 15:19, 20: *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.* ²⁰ *These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.*”

no God. A practical atheism (see 10:4, 6, 11, 13; 36:1; the wicked man does not consider that he has God to contend with. (CSB)

The denial of God is not an absolute denial of his existence. The pagans around Israel believed in many gods, and the impious in Israel did not rationalistically deny the historic and cultural links between the Lord and Israel. In their impudence fools disregard God’s expectations. God is not important in their lives. They shut off the affairs of this world from divine intervention and deny any personal accountability to God for their actions (cf. 10:4; 73:11; Jer. 5:12; Zep. 1:12; Rom. 1:28). (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Atheism, while increasingly common, is nothing new. The fool described here denies God “in his heart.” There are people whose actions deny God’s existence, even though they do not profess atheism. (TLSB)

corrupt – Behaviors that betray a particularly profound darkness of the heart and soul. As v 4 attests, abominable deeds usually involve the abuse of others. (TLSB)

It would be difficult to find a stronger word to use, for this verb means to “ruin” or “devastate.” It was used of the complete corruption of the human race prior to the flood (Gen. 6:11-12) and of the Lord’s destroying Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13:10). Here it refers to moral and spiritual corruption; but the word reminds the reader that the corruption is as bad as it could be, so it would warrant the type of severe judgment God has used in the past. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Abominable deeds – The verb shares the direct object with the next verb, literally “they make abdominal” from “to act abominably” so that the line reads: “they corrupt, they make abominable, their wanton deeds” Even their wanton deeds they make corrupt and abominable to God and man. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

no one who does good. Mankind in general is corrupt. Here the reference is to those who take no account of God and do not hesitate to show their malice toward “the company of the righteous” (see vv. 4–5)—as in 9:19–20; 10:2–11, 13, 18; 12:1–4, 7–8 (this is also the situation that Ps 11 describes). Elsewhere the psalmists included themselves among those who are not righteous in God’s eyes (see 130:3; 143:2; see also 1Ki 8:46; Job 9:2; Ecc 7:20). (CSB)

Quoted as a blanket condemnation of all people in Rm 3:12. Apart from Christ, we cannot please God. (TLSB)

“There is no one doing good” is the heart of the doctrine of complete depravity. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Because they recognize no need for forgiveness, they live as if there were no gospel promises. An arrogant civilization once lived in defiance of God until the flood swept it away. A haughty people built the Tower of Babel in defiance of God until God scattered them. A foolish nation despised God and turned to the Baals until God sent them into captivity in Assyria and Babylon. (PBC)

14:2 *The LORD*. Emphatically contrasted with “the fool” (v. 1). (CSB)

It is worth noting that the psalm uses the personal name of God, Yahweh, because of its connection to the covenant and the covenant people. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Looks down – The verb actually says “bent over, to look. All the children of men are made to pass in review before him. Basic essentials are the rule by which he judges: is there “any who understand, any who seek God.” (Leupold)

The expression calls to mind the anticipation of the great judgment at Babel and Sodom when the Lord came down to see what the people were doing (Gen. 11:5; Gen. 18:21) (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The God who saw the corruption of human beings before the flood. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Any who understand, who seek God. Those who truly seek God are described in Ps 15. (CSB)

If unbelievers understood who this God is, they would avail themselves of his provision of forgiveness and righteousness, as the latter part of the psalm makes clear that others have. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The divine quest is for any who might understand and seek (s.v. Ps. 37:4) describes someone who has wisdom or prudence, someone who make wise choices because of proper understanding and tries to live by divine providence at least. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

To seek God would be to investigate, to inquire, to search out. It would mean that the person realized that there is a God and that he must be found. The search would include praying to God and learning of God. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Translates two terms: Hbr *baqash*, “look for”; Hbr *darash*, “care about, examine, inquire.” The Lord is sought in three ways: (1) through calling on His name in prayer, (2) by consulting Him through Urim and Thummim administered by the high priest, and (3) through the study of His Word. A visit to the tabernacle or temple is frequently implied. Unbelievers do not seek God. Believers seek Him in an attitude of repentance, not selfishness. (TLSB p. 843)

14:3 *turned aside*. From God and goodness. (CSB)

Cited by Paul, Rm 3:12. Our works cannot make us righteous before God (cf Rm 3:23). (TLSB)

As God observes humankind, he is overwhelmed by the evil he sees. (The Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

Corrupt – A term that elsewhere describes milk that has turned sour. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

14:4–6 The folly of the wicked exposed. (CSB)

These three verses will speak of the righteous who must live in the midst of people who reject the Lord, live in rebellion against him, and do not even understand the truth. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

14:4 *devour ... do not call on the LORD.* Renewed characterization of the wicked: They live by the violence of their own hands and do not rely on the Lord (see 10:2–4). (CSB)

Fools never learn. Today the unbelieving human race continues its headlong plunge to destruction, clinging to its folly and despising the wisdom of the gospel, which is its only hope. Ungodly people have learned nothing from the lesson of the past. They repeat the same errors which have brought misery to the human race for thousands of years. They increase their guilt by not only despising the grace of God, but also oppressing and devouring God's people. (PBC)

They so spiritually blind that they do not know what they do. Psalm 36 describes the wicked person as smoothing over his sins so that he does not see them. People can only live wickedly if they completely refused to think about the Lord. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

14:5-6 In due time, God will act on behalf of the poor, as v 7 makes clear. (TLSB)

14:5 Even God's mighty defense of the righteous teaches them nothing. – They had failed to see that the meek and lowly who have put their trust in the Lord are the objects of his special care. (Leupold)

Great terror – It is a description of sudden horror when people will find out that they have been foolish, but it will be too late. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

righteous. One of several terms in the OT for God's people; it presents them as justified or declared righteous and hence living rightly. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to bless, not to exploit. (CSB)

14:6 *shame the plans* – This is often used in military settings for utterly destroying and humiliating the enemy; (s.v. Ps. 31:1). Psalm 53:5 will add that those who want to shame the righteous will themselves be shamed. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

poor. God's people as the victims of injustice. (CSB)

the wicked may for a time heap abuse on “the plans of the poor.” But even in their persecution God is “the refuge” of his children. (The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

refuge. Make a spacious place for me. (CSB)

14:7 The psalmist longs for Israel's complete deliverance from her enemies—which will come when God deals with the wicked in defense of their victims. (CSB)

When Christ returns and appears in the midst of his saints, the ungodly will be overwhelmed with dread. But then it will be too late. What greater foolishness can there be than to throw away the eternal life Christ has won for all people? Let us reject such foolishness and cling to Christ, the wisdom of God. (PBC)

Zion – It will come out of his church. That's who he uses to do his will. (CSB)

Zion is the place where the Lord dwells among his people. The psalmist believed that the Lord truly was in the midst of his people, but he longed for that presence to manifest itself by delivering the people from the oppressive presence of the wicked. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Restores – The psalm may have had a significant application for the people in the exile, or even in the Diaspora, but it could have been written at some earlier period given the fact that the doers of iniquity are not limited to one period of time. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Jacob ... Israel. Synonyms (see Ge 32:28). (CSB)

References to God's chosen people. (TLSB)

Ps 14 Though atheism and irreligion are increasingly accepted, indeed even fashionable in modern societies, they are destructive beliefs that finally lead to moral abandon and eternal death. Because this psalm clarifies the depth of human sinfulness, it also illumines the greatness in Jesus' redemption. He atoned for all the sins of all people and graciously calls all, even the most perverse, to forgiveness and eternal life. • Lord Jesus, when we despair because of the world's increasing hostility or indifference to you, help us also to see the greatness of your love and grace. Amen. (TLSB)