

Psalms 14:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

Analysis

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. This opening verse makes a devastating diagnosis of humanity's fundamental problem: practical atheism that produces moral corruption. The psalm addresses not theoretical atheism but lived godlessness—behavior that denies God's existence, authority, or relevance regardless of intellectual profession.

"The fool" (naval, נָבֵל) is stronger than English "fool" suggests. In Hebrew wisdom literature, naval describes moral perversity, not intellectual deficiency. This person is morally bankrupt, spiritually corrupt, insensible to truth. Nabal (1 Samuel 25), whose very name means "fool," exemplified this—churlish, evil, refusing to acknowledge David's kindness or God's anointing. The fool is not merely ignorant but willfully resistant to truth.

"Hath said in his heart" (amar belibo, אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ) indicates internal conviction, not necessarily public profession. The heart (lev) in Hebrew thought encompasses mind, will, and affection—the entire inner person. The fool's atheism may not be articulated creed but operational philosophy revealed through behavior. This person lives as if God does not exist or does not matter, regardless of outward religious profession.

"There is no God" (ein Elohim, אֵין אֱלֹהִים) is the fool's foundational lie. This isn't

sophisticated philosophical atheism but practical godlessness. The Hebrew can mean "there is no God," "God does not exist," or "there is no God [for me/here/now]." The latter captures functional atheism—living as if unaccountable to divine authority, as if divine judgment won't come, as if moral law doesn't bind.

"They are corrupt" (hishchitu, הִשְׁחִיתוּ) uses a verb meaning to destroy, ruin, act corruptly. The Hiphil form indicates they have made themselves corrupt, corrupted their ways. This moral corruption is self-inflicted degradation resulting from rejecting God. Romans 1:21-32 traces similar devolution: rejecting knowledge of God leads to futile thinking, darkened hearts, and progressive moral corruption.

"They have done abominable works" (hitabu alilah, הִתְעִיבוּ עֲלִילָה) describes detestable actions. Taav means abominable, detestable—often describing idolatrous practices that provoke divine revulsion (Deuteronomy 7:25-26, 12:31). Alilah means deeds, works, practices. Denying God produces detestable behavior—not merely neutral absence of good but active evil.

"There is none that doeth good" (ein oseh-tov, אֵין עֹשֶׂה טוֹב) is universal indictment. Paul quotes this verse (with surrounding verses) in Romans 3:10-12 to demonstrate universal human sinfulness—"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Hebrew tov means good in moral, beneficial, right sense. The claim is not that humans never perform kind acts but that apart from God, no one achieves the comprehensive moral goodness God requires.

Historical Context

Psalm 14 is nearly identical to Psalm 53, with minor variations (most notably, Psalm 14 uses "LORD" [Yahweh] while Psalm 53 uses "God" [Elohim]). Both are attributed to David. The repetition in different collections suggests the theme was profoundly important—practical atheism and its consequences demanded repeated confrontation.

Ancient Israel was surrounded by pagan nations whose gods were capricious, distant, or cruel. Yet even pagans acknowledged divine existence and moral accountability to some degree. The "fool" of this psalm goes beyond polytheism to

functional atheism—living without regard for divine authority. In a culture where religious profession was nearly universal, this describes the person who maintains outward religiosity while inwardly rejecting God's claim on their life.

The prophets frequently confronted Israel's practical atheism. While maintaining temple worship, many Israelites lived as if God didn't see or care about injustice, oppression, idolatry. Isaiah condemned those who said, "The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it" (Isaiah 29:15). Ezekiel heard elders saying, "The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth" (Ezekiel 8:12). This functional atheism—believing God is absent or indifferent—produces the same moral corruption as theoretical atheism.

Paul's use of this psalm in Romans 3:10-18 applies it universally—not just to pagans or Israel's enemies but to all humanity, including religious Jews. This levels humanity before God, demonstrating that all need salvation by grace through faith, not works. The psalm's diagnosis of human corruption apart from God establishes the gospel's necessity—we need a Savior because we are fundamentally corrupt, not merely mistaken or imperfect.

For contemporary readers, the psalm confronts both explicit atheism and functional godlessness among the religious. Many who profess faith in God live practically as atheists—making decisions without reference to God's will, pursuing desires without considering God's commands, organizing priorities around temporal rather than eternal realities. The psalm warns that saying "there is no God" with our lives is as foolish as saying it with our lips.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between theoretical atheism (intellectually denying God's existence) and practical atheism (living as if God doesn't matter)?

2. How does rejecting God's authority ('there is no God') inevitably lead to moral corruption ('they are corrupt, they have done abominable works')?
3. In what ways might professing Christians live practically as atheists, making decisions without reference to God?
4. How does Paul's use of this psalm in Romans 3:10-12 establish universal human need for salvation?
5. What areas of your life might reveal functional atheism—living as if God doesn't see, care, or have authority over certain domains?

Interlinear Text

הָאֵלֹהִים יָדָה	אֵין אֵל	בְּלִבּוֹ	נָבִל לֵאמֹר		
They are corrupt	There is no God	in his heart	The fool	hath said	
H7843	H430	H3820	H5036	H559	
טוֹב:	עֲשֵׂה	אֵין עֲלֵיָהּ	הַתַּעַיִב		
good	there is none that doeth	works	they have done abominable		
H2896	H6213	H5949	H8581		

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 10:4 (References God): The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

Psalms 53:1 (Good): The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.

Genesis 6:5 (References God): And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Psalms 92:6 (Parallel theme): A brutish man knoweth not; neither doth a fool understand this.

Matthew 12:34 (Good): O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Proverbs 1:7 (Parallel theme): The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Luke 12:20 (References God): But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

Matthew 15:19 (Parallel theme): For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Job 22:13 (References God): And thou sayest, How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud?

Proverbs 1:22 (Parallel theme): How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?

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