

Psalms 14:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

Analysis

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. After diagnosing human corruption (v.1), the psalm now presents divine response—God's searching examination of humanity. The imagery parallels Genesis 6:5 (before the flood) and Genesis 11:5 (at Babel) where God surveys human wickedness. This is not omniscient God gaining new information but dramatic portrayal of divine scrutiny preceding judgment.

"The LORD looked down" (Yahweh hashqif, יְהָוָה הַשְׁקִיף) uses the covenant name Yahweh (not Elohim from v.1), emphasizing God's covenantal relationship with His people. Hashqif means to look down, gaze upon, observe—often with connotation of examining with intent to act. This is not casual observation but purposeful scrutiny. The phrase "looked down from heaven" emphasizes God's transcendence and the vast moral distance between holy God and corrupt humanity.

"Upon the children of men" (al-benei adam, עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם), connecting to Genesis and humanity's fallen nature. These are descendants of Adam, inheritors of fallen human nature, participants in universal human rebellion. The phrase encompasses all humanity, not merely Israel or a particular nation.

"To see if there were any" (lirot hayesh, לִרְאֹת הָיָשׁ) indicates purposeful

examination with hoped-for result. God searches for exceptions to the diagnosis of verse 1. The construction suggests expectation that surely someone must be righteous, someone must understand, someone must seek God. This echoes Jeremiah 5:1: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

"That did understand" (maskil, מַשְׁכִּיל) uses a participle meaning one who has insight, acts wisely, comprehends. In wisdom literature, understanding means grasping moral and spiritual truth, not merely intellectual knowledge. Proverbs 1:7 establishes: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." True understanding begins with proper relationship to God.

"And seek God" (doresh et-Elohim, דָרְשׁ אֶת-אֱלֹהִים) describes active pursuit. Darash means to seek, inquire of, search for with diligence and desire. This is not passive acknowledgment but active pursuit of relationship with God. Those who "seek God" orient their lives around knowing Him, serving Him, and walking in His ways. The phrase implies that understanding and seeking are connected—those who truly understand seek God; those who seek God gain understanding.

Historical Context

The image of God looking down from heaven appears throughout Scripture at pivotal moments. At Babel, "the LORD came down to see the city and the tower" (Genesis 11:5), finding human pride and self-exaltation, leading to confusion of languages. At Sodom, God said, "I will go down now, and see" (Genesis 18:21), finding such corruption that only Lot's family was worth saving. In both cases, divine examination preceded divine judgment.

Yet God's looking also sought the righteous. Genesis 18:23-32 records Abraham negotiating with God: would God spare Sodom if 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10 righteous people could be found? God agreed to spare the city for 10 righteous, but even 10 couldn't be found. Similarly, Jeremiah 5:1 has God seeking just one person who executes judgment and seeks truth—willing to pardon Jerusalem if one

could be found.

The parallel between Psalm 14 and Genesis 6:5 is striking: "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." Both passages diagnose total human corruption apart from divine grace. Yet even in Genesis 6, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8)—one exception who "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9).

Paul's quotation of this passage in Romans 3:11 emphasizes that apart from grace, "there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." This establishes that salvation must be by grace through faith, not human righteousness. If God searches and finds none righteous, then righteousness must be gift, not achievement. Romans 3:21-26 announces that righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ, available to all who believe.

For believers, this verse is both humbling and hopeful. Humbling: apart from grace, we too would be among those who don't understand or seek God. Our seeking of God is itself God-enabled, not self-generated (John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him"). Hopeful: God searches for those who understand and seek Him, delighting to find them. Our pursuit of God is met by His prior pursuit of us.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What is the relationship between 'understanding' and 'seeking God'? Can someone truly understand without seeking God, or seek God without understanding?
2. How does God's searching examination of humanity (looking from heaven) precede His judgment? What does this reveal about divine justice?

3. Why does the Bible consistently portray humanity as universally corrupt apart from divine grace? How is this different from saying humans are incapable of any good actions?
4. How does Romans 3:10-18 (Paul's quotation of this psalm) establish the necessity of salvation by grace through faith rather than by works?
5. In what ways does this verse challenge both self-righteous moralism ("I'm better than those fools") and self-excusing fatalism ("I can't help being corrupt")?

Interlinear Text

יהָה הָ	מִשְׁמִים	עַל	בְּנֵי	אֲדֹם
The LORD	from heaven	looked down	upon the children	of men
H3068	H8064	H8259	H5921	H120
אלֹהִים: אֲתָּה דְּרַשׁ מִשְׁכָּן לֹא רָאֹת to see if there were any that did understand and seek God				
H7200	H3426	H7919	H1875	H430

Additional Cross-References

Romans 3:11 (References God): There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Hebrews 11:6 (References God): But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Genesis 6:12 (References God): And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

Daniel 12:10 (Parallel theme): Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.

Matthew 13:15 (Parallel theme): For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they

should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

2 Chronicles 19:3 (References God): Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God.

Psalms 82:5 (Parallel theme): They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

Proverbs 9:16 (Parallel theme): Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,

Isaiah 63:15 (Parallel theme): Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?

Isaiah 55:6 (References Lord): Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: