

Psalms 53:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. This opening verse diagnoses the root of human corruption: practical atheism that leads inevitably to moral corruption. Psalm 53 closely parallels Psalm 14, with minor variations suggesting different occasions or contexts for the same inspired message.

"The fool" (nabal, נָבָל) is not intellectually deficient but morally and spiritually corrupt. Nabal describes someone who rejects wisdom, despises God, and lives as if ultimate reality has no moral governor. First Samuel 25 features a man literally named Nabal—characterized by churlishness, selfishness, and contempt for David. His wife Abigail says: "as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Samuel 25:25). This biblical concept of fool isn't about IQ but about fundamental life orientation away from God.

"Hath said in his heart" (amar belibbvo, אָמַר בְּלֵבּוֹ) describes internal conviction, not necessarily public profession. The lev (לב, heart) in Hebrew thinking is the center of thought, will, and moral decision-making. The fool's atheism isn't primarily intellectual argument but volitional choice—he WANTS there to be no God because divine existence would require submission, judgment, and moral accountability. This is practical atheism: living as if God doesn't exist, regardless of theoretical belief.

"There is no God" (ein Elohim, אֵין אֱלֹהִים) is the fool's fundamental premise. Ein (אֵין) is absolute negation—there is NO God. This isn't agnosticism ("I don't know if God exists") but atheism ("God does not exist"). In biblical context, this is willful blindness. Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." Romans 1:20: "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." The fool suppresses obvious truth.

"Corrupt are they" (hish'chitu, הַשְׁחִיתוּ) uses shachat (שְׁחַתָּת), meaning to corrupt, destroy, ruin, act corruptly. The moral corruption is comprehensive—not isolated sins but pervasive rottenness. "Have done abominable iniquity" (hit'ibu 'avel, הַתְּעִיבוּ עַוֵּל) uses ta'av (תָּעַב, to abhor, be abominable) and 'avel (עַוֵּל, injustice, unrighteousness, wrong). Their actions are morally repugnant, characterized by injustice. "There is none that doeth good" (ein oseh-tov, אֵין עֹשֶׂה-טוֹב) concludes with universal indictment. The fool's atheism produces universal corruption—not partial goodness but total moral failure.

Historical Context

The phrase "the fool says there is no God" addresses practical atheism that existed even in ancient monotheistic Israel. While polytheism (believing in many gods) was common, biblical atheism (denying God's existence or relevance) occurred when people lived as if God didn't matter. They might acknowledge God theoretically while denying Him practically through disobedience, injustice, and immorality.

Paul quotes Psalm 14/53 in Romans 3:10-12 as part of his argument that all humanity—both Jew and Gentile—stands guilty before God. "There is none righteous, no, not one...There is none that doeth good, no, not one." This universal corruption demonstrates humanity's need for divine grace. The psalm's diagnosis of human depravity grounds the gospel—we need a Savior because we cannot save ourselves.

The connection between rejecting God and moral corruption is consistent throughout Scripture. Romans 1:18-32 describes progressive degradation: people

suppress truth about God (v.18), exchange God's glory for idols (v.23), are given over to uncleanness (v.24), are given over to vile affections (v.26), and are given over to reprobate mind (v.28). Rejecting God removes the ultimate foundation for morality.

Jesus confronted this issue when the rich young ruler called Him "Good Master." Jesus responded: "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). This establishes God as the definition and source of goodness. Without God, "good" becomes subjective preference. With God, goodness has objective reality grounded in divine character. The fool who says there is no God simultaneously destroys the foundation for distinguishing good from evil.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How is the biblical 'fool' different from someone with low intelligence, and what makes rejecting God foolish regardless of intellectual capacity?
2. What does it mean to say 'there is no God' in your heart (practically) even if you believe God exists theoretically?
3. Why does rejecting God inevitably lead to moral corruption, and what foundation for goodness remains without divine authority?
4. In what areas of life are you tempted toward practical atheism—living as if God doesn't exist, doesn't matter, or won't hold you accountable?
5. How does Paul's use of this psalm in Romans 3 demonstrate humanity's universal need for salvation by grace rather than works?

Interlinear Text

ה, שְׁחִתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יְמִינָה אֶלְמָרָה

hath said **The fool** **in his heart** **H369** **There is no God** **Corrupt**

H559

H5036

H3820

H369

H430

H7843

וְהַתְּמִתָּעַ יְבוֹן

are they and have done abominable **iniquity** **H369** **there is none that doeth** **good**

H8581

אֶל שְׁעִיר יְמִינָה

H369

עֲשָׂה

H6213

טוֹבָה

H2896

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.

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?

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