



Psalm 14 - Denunciation of Godlessness

To the leader. Of David.

Introduction

This is a community lament in which the people of God mourn the fact that humans in general do not seek after God and thus they treat God's people cruelly. It is almost identical to Psalm 53, which was probably an alternate version of the hymn prior to both of them being collected into the Psalter.

Psalm 14:1-4 - The Godless Devour God's People.

These godless would be Gentiles, i.e. humankind in v.2, as opposed to 'my people' in v.4, who have not been given the light and 'do not call upon the Lord' (v.4). Some, however, suppose that v.3 narrows the focus to those in Israel who have 'gone astray,' but the words themselves do not require this.

- ¹ Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.'
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;
there is no one who does good.

Psalm 14:1

Fools say in their hearts. There are three Hebrew words for fool, and all speak of moral orientation rather than intellectual ability. The term here denotes someone who stubbornly rejects wisdom; the word lies behind the name *Nabal*: <<**My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent**>> (1 Samuel 25:25). As in Psalm 10:4, there is no God expresses not philosophical atheism but the idea that God, if he exists, takes no interest in human affairs and will not call people to account for

their deeds. The result of this denial is that they are corrupt and do abominable deeds, and thus there is no one who does good.

David says this because of the plain evidence that there is a God; evidence in both creation and human conscience that Paul described in Romans Chapter One. The fact that some men insist on denying the existence of God does not erase God from the universe; it instead speaks to their own standing as fools. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:22, <<*Claiming to be wise, they became fools*>>.

According to David Guzik the God-denying man is a fool because:

- He denies what is plainly evident.
- He believes in tremendous effect with no cause.
- He denies a moral authority in the universe.
- He believes only what can be proven by the scientific method.
- He takes a dramatic, losing chance on his supposition that there is no God.
- He refuses to be persuaded by the many powerful arguments for the existence of God.

The God-denying man David has in mind is not merely troubled by intellectual objections to the existence of God; in his heart he wishes God away, typically for fundamentally moral reasons. John 3:20 explains it this way: <<*For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed*>>.

² The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.

Psalm 14:2

The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind. While man may wish to forget about God, God never forgets about man. He is always observing man, looking down from heaven upon all of humankind. In man's rejection of God, there is often the wish that God would just leave them alone. This is an unwise wish, because all human life depends upon God: <<*for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous*>> (Matthew 5:45b), and: <<*For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring"*>> (Acts 17:28). This is an impossible wish, because God has the rights of a creator over his creation.

To see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. When God does look down from heaven, one thing he looks for is if there is any understanding or

seeking among humanity. God looks for this not primarily as an intellectual judgement; He does not wonder if there are any intelligent enough to figure him out. He looks for this more as a moral and spiritual judgement; if there are men who understand his heart and plan, and who seek him for righteousness sake.

³ They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

Psalm 14:3

They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse. When God looks, this is what he finds. He finds that man has turned away from God, and has therefore become corrupt. The Hebrews have the same word for sin and a dead carcass; and again the same word for sin and stench.

The word all in this verse refers to the Gentiles described in v.2, and v.4 reveals that they oppose God's people. Paul adapts the Greek of the Septuagint of vv.1-3 in Romans 3:10-12 as part of his argument that *<<for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin>>* (Romans 3:9).

There is no one who does good, no, not one. When God finds no one who does good, it is because there are none. It is not as if there were some and God could not see them. David here observes and remembers that man is truly, profoundly, deeply fallen. David's use of there is none who does good suddenly broadens the scope beyond the atheist to include everyone: *<<I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?>>* (Luke 18:8).

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

Psalm 14:4

Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers. David first considered the profound sinful state of man; now he deals with the fate of God's people in such a fallen world. God's people might seem like the weak fools, but David understood that it is the workers of iniquity who have no knowledge.

The person speaking here may be God, or it may simply be the pious Israelite; either could talk about my people. To eat up my people is to consume their wealth and freedom, and possibly even their lives, including: *<<And I said: Listen, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Should you not know*

justice? – you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off my people, and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a cauldron>> (Micah 3:1-3), where it is Israelite rulers who do this.

To call upon the Lord is to rely on the God of the covenant for life and well-being: *<<I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so I shall be saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears>> (Psalm 18:3-6), and: <<Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place>> (Psalm 118:5).*

Psalm 14:5-6 - The Lord Is the Refuge for the Poor.

In the face of such threats (v.4) the faithful must remember that God is their refuge and that he will protect them and defeat the evildoers.

⁵ There they shall be in great terror,
for God is with the company of the righteous.

Psalm 14:5

There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous. After asking the question, David now answers it with great wisdom. The workers of iniquity seem strong and confident, but they are actually in great fear, because they cannot erase the consciousness that God is with the righteous. As strong as they may wish to deny it, they live under the cloud of knowing that they are battling against God: *<<but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case you may even be found fighting against God!>> (Acts 5:39a), and can therefore never win.*

⁶ You would confound the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge.

Psalm 14:6

You would confound the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge. David here announces it to the workers of iniquity previously mentioned; that they may work against the poor, but God has a refuge for them that cannot be breached. David also gave thanksgiving in this way: *<<my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge,*

my saviour; you save me from violence>> (2 Samuel 22:30). They are fighting against God and will never succeed.

Spurgeon considered the ways that the poor takes counsel:

- He takes counsel with his own weakness, and sees that he must depend upon God.
- He takes counsel with his observations, and sees the end of the wicked.
- He takes counsel with the Bible, and trusts it to be the Word of God.
- He takes counsel with his own experience and sees that God answers prayer.

Spurgeon used this verse to consider the ways that Christians should stand strong even though they are shamed and mocked by the workers of iniquity. “You young men in the great firms of London, you working men that work in the factories – you are sneered at. Let them sneer. If they can sneer you out of your religion, you have not got any worth having. Remember you can be laughed into hell, but you can never be laughed out of it.” And again: “‘Oh! but they will point at you.’ Cannot you bear to be pointed at? ‘But they will chaff you.’ Chaff – let them chaff you. Can that hurt a man that is a man? If you are a molluscous creature that has no backbone, you may be afraid of jokes, and jeers, and jests; but if God has made you upright, stand upright and be a man.”

Psalm 14:7 - Prayer for Community Salvation.

In light of both the situation and the assurance, the singing community prays that God would rescue them and promote their well-being; their prayer concludes with firm hope.

⁷ O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

Psalm 14:7

O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! David knew that the Lord was a refuge for his people and that the workers of iniquity would never win. Yet that was hard to see at the present time, so David expressed his great longing that God would bring the victory and deliverance he had promised to his people. David has already declared: <<*I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill*>> (Psalm 2:6).

When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people. Some translations have this as: <<*When the Lord restores His captive people*>>. This is not a reference to the Babylonian exile, which occurred many generations after David’s time. Here restoration or captivity is used in a general sense, speaking of any time or situation

where God's people are oppressed and bound: <<*When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you*>> (Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad. David anticipates the coming deliverance, and calls the people of God to be joyful in consideration of it.