

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

PROV. 14:1 Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

2 He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the LORD: but *he that is* perverse in his ways despiseth him.

3 In the mouth of the foolish *is* a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them.

4 Where no oxen *are*, the crib *is* clean: but much increase *is* by the strength of the ox.

5 A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies.

6 A scorner seeketh wisdom, and *findeth it* not: but knowledge *is* easy unto him that understandeth.

7 Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not *in him* the lips of knowledge.

8 The wisdom of the prudent *is* to understand his way: but the folly of fools *is* deceit.

9 Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous *there is* favour.

10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish.

12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof *are* the ways of death.

13 Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth *is* heaviness.

14 The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself.

15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going.

16 A wise *man* feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

17 *He that is* soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.

18 The simple inherit folly: but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.

19 The evil bow before the good; and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.

NOTES

There Is a Way that Seems Right

Lesson Text: Proverbs 14:1-19

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 9:1-18; 15:1-33; 26:1-12;
Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:19-27

TIME: between 971 and 931 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish" (Proverbs 14:11).

Lesson Exposition

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH— Prov. 14:1-3

We are presented with a metaphor illustrating the effects of wisdom and folly. The wise woman constructs a secure home. This metaphor extends to the spiritual foundations of life. Wisdom establishes stability and peace. In contrast, the foolish woman destroys her house. This symbolizes the destructive nature of folly.

Jesus spoke about wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). Jesus emphasized the importance of not just hearing His words but also heeding them, likening the wise person who acts to those who build their houses on rock. This mirrors Proverbs 14:1. Both passages underscore the necessity of applying wisdom in practical ways.

The fear of the Lord is essential for wisdom. This fear is not about terror of punishment but about reverence, obedience, acknowledging God, and aligning our lives with His will. The upright walk in this fear and experience the blessings of a life in harmony with God. Their righteousness leads to peace

and fulfillment. In contrast, mockers despise the Lord and choose rebellion. They may claim they are indifferent toward God, but aloofness toward the Creator is the same as despising Him. Their disregard for divine wisdom leads to destruction.

The fool arrogantly invites punishment and strife. Words have the power to build up or tear down. The wise use words prudently. Their speech fosters harmony. Let us choose words that uplift and encourage.

THE VALUE OF HARD WORK— Prov. 14:4

The imagery of the ox and the manger serves as a metaphor for the relationship between hard work and untidiness. A clean manger signifies a lack of productivity—a result of the absence of oxen, which plowed fields and ensured a bountiful harvest.

This symbolism extends to our own lives, in which "oxen" can be seen as the tools we employ in our work. Just as an ox led to an abundant harvest, so too our perseverance yields fruitful

results. Yet our endeavors can lead to a messy house. Hard work means toil, sweat, and dirt, but it also leads to production and fruitfulness.

THE TRUTH AND DECEPTION— Prov. 14:5-9

Verse 5 reminds us of the significance of being truthful witnesses. Truthfulness is not merely about avoiding lies; it is also about embodying integrity in our interactions. In contrast, a false witness sows deceit and destruction, unraveling the fabric of community and trust. Truthfulness fosters an environment where love can flourish. In a world of deception, being a truthful witness is a powerful testimony.

The journey to wisdom requires a heart open to wisdom and growth. Proverbs contrasts the mocker with the discerning. Mockers are arrogant. The barriers to wisdom are often self-willed. Pride and a refusal to listen can hinder understanding. Mockers are trapped in self-deception, unable to learn because they are unwilling to humble themselves. The pursuit of wisdom requires humility and a willingness to be taught.

In contrast, understanding comes easily to the discerning. Discerning people are humble. They recognize that wisdom requires continual learning and growth. This allows them to grasp the truths that God reveals through His Word and creation. The importance of a receptive heart cannot be overstated. It is the key to receiving the treasures of wisdom that God desires to give.

As we cultivate a discerning heart, we position ourselves to receive the guidance and insight that lead to a life of fulfillment. By embracing truthfulness and cultivating a receptive heart, we align ourselves with God's wisdom and experience the richness of life that He intends for us.

Verse 7 warns us to leave the presence of foolish people. This does not

mean that we should never be in the company of people who are ungodly, as Jesus Himself ate and fellowshiped with sinners. Yet we should exercise prudence in how we spend our time, and not listen to fools.

THE CONDITION OF ONE'S HEART—Prov. 14:10-14

In our hearts, we hold experiences that are uniquely ours. Every heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully share its joy. This solitude is not meant to isolate us but to draw us closer to God. He alone fully understands our hearts. We find solace in His presence, knowing that He is acquainted with our grief. Similarly, we celebrate with Him, recognizing that every good gift comes from above. Our experiences are opportunities to deepen our relationship with God.

The contrast between the wicked and the upright is vividly portrayed in verses 11-14. The house of the wicked is destined for destruction. In contrast, the tent of the upright, though seemingly fragile, will flourish. This imagery highlights the temporary nature of wickedness and the everlasting nature of righteousness. The house of the wicked represents a life built on folly and sin. Such a foundation is unstable, and despite appearances, cannot last. The destruction of the wicked is inevitable—a reminder that a life apart from God leads to ruin. Conversely, the “tabernacle” or tent of the upright symbolizes a life of integrity, humility, and faithfulness. Though it may lack grandeur, it is built on God's truth and righteousness. This tent flourishes.

Proverbs 14:10-14 challenges us to examine our lives. Are we building on the sands of worldly success, or are we anchored in the eternal truths of God's Word? A heart aligned with God will flourish, while a heart turned away from Him faces inevitable destruction.

THE PATH OF LIFE—Prov. 14:15-19

Discernment is a gift that guides us along the path of righteousness. Verse 15 highlights the contrast between the simple and the prudent. The simple, lacking judgment, are easily swayed by every opinion and deceit. They believe anything without questioning, leading to a life of instability. They do not realize that the world is full of liars who deceive others for gain. In contrast, the prudent give careful thought to their steps. The fact that the prudent have to give careful thought reveals that even for believers, some decisions may be difficult and take time. The mark of a wise person is not immediately knowing what to do, but the ability to reflect and apply God's wisdom.

The simple are easily deceived. On the other hand, the prudent are discerning (cf. 14:8). These contrasting terms highlight the theme of discernment, emphasizing the importance of wisdom in navigating life's complexities. Prudent people exercise caution by aligning their actions with God's wisdom.

Discernment is essential in a world filled with conflicting voices and deceptive paths. It requires us to pause, reflect, and seek God's guidance when making decisions. The prudent are not hasty but consider the consequences of their actions, aligning their choices with God's truth. This careful decision-making is a hallmark of wisdom.

Wisdom and folly are vividly portrayed in verses 16-19. The wise fear the Lord and shun evil. This fear acknowledges God's holiness. Walking in wisdom means walking in the light of truth, avoiding the snares of temptation. In contrast, fools are hotheaded and reckless, driven by impulsive desires and a disregard for consequences. Such folly leads to destruction, where anger and pride cloud judgment and result in harm.

James 1:19-27 complements Proverbs 14:17, offering a guide for a life of wisdom. James urges believers to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (1:19), echoing Proverbs 14:17. Both passages emphasize self-control and the power of our words and actions. James further instructs us to be doers of the word, not merely hearers (1:22), aligning with the call in Proverbs to live out wisdom through righteous deeds and a heart aligned with God's will.

Wisdom calls us to a life of humility, discernment, and reverence for God. It invites us to shun evil and embrace righteousness, knowing that true life is found in walking with the Lord. As we cultivate wisdom, we experience the peace and joy that come from living in harmony with God's will.

—Page Brooks

QUESTIONS

1. What did both Jesus and Proverbs 14 teach about wisdom?
2. What is the attitude of the wicked toward the Lord?
3. How does the proverb about oxen and a manger apply to us today?
4. What characteristic makes understanding easy for the discerning?
5. How can the solitude mentioned in verse 10 motivate us?
6. What does verse 11 assure us about the impressive house of the wicked?
7. What does the "tabernacle" or tent of the upright symbolize?
8. What do the simple forget when they believe anything?
9. What does discernment require?
10. How does James 1 complement the themes of Proverbs 14?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Folly is destructive. Seek wisdom (Prov. 14:1).
2. Cultivate a healthy fear of the Lord (vs. 2).
3. Folly has negative consequences, so seek wisdom (vss. 3-4)!
4. Evaluate your speech to see whether you are wise (vss. 5-7).
5. We should seek wisdom, which brings great blessings (vss. 8-14)!
6. We cannot truly know the hearts of those around us (vss. 10, 13).
7. We should give thought to our ways, rather than act recklessly (vss. 15-17).
8. Folly leads to disgrace, but wisdom leads to blessing in this life and the next (vss. 18-19).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Does Proverbs guarantee that if we are wise, we will always experience tangible blessings in this life?
2. If wisdom leads to blessings, why do fools and evildoers sometimes seem to have it better (cf. 16:8)?
3. How can we evaluate whether we are wise or foolish?
4. If we are not wise, what is the best way to seek wisdom?
5. If we are already wise, why do we need to continue to seek wisdom?
6. Is it possible to seek wisdom and not obtain it? Why?
7. Is there always a right or a wrong choice when we make decisions?
8. If we struggle with making rash decisions, what practical steps can we take to slow down our decision-making process?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

“The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish” (Proverbs 14:11).

Our golden text presents a contrast between two paths: the way of wickedness that leads to destruction and the path of uprightness that results in flourishing.

The wicked, in their folly, deceive themselves into believing their way is right, rejecting the true wisdom that comes from fearing the Lord. One of the most insidious aspects of wickedness is its ability to produce apparent success. The wicked may seem to prosper for a season, their house appearing strong and secure. Yet, our golden text assures us that this house “shall be overthrown.” The temporal nature of worldly success often blinds people to the eternal consequences of their choices.

This temporary prosperity can be a stumbling block even for the upright (cf. Ps. 73:1-17). While the wicked live in houses, the righteous dwell in tents! There may be times when the wicked seem to have the upper hand, causing the righteous to question their path. However, our golden text points to the ultimate reversal that will eventually take place. Our golden text does not say the house of the wicked *might* be overthrown but that it “*shall* be overthrown.”

This proverb is a call to repentance. The path of wickedness may offer temporary pleasures, but it ultimately leads to destruction. The wise response is to turn from sin and embrace God’s way of wisdom and life.

—Gene Kissinger