
For the Chief Musician. By David.

PSALM 14: 1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is no one who does good.

The sentiments of atheists and deists, who deny the doctrine of a Divine providence. Their character: they are corrupt, foolish, abominable, and cruel, Psa 14:1-4. God fills them with terror, Psa 14:5; reproaches them for their oppression of the poor, Psa 14:6. The psalmist prays for the restoration of Israel, Psa 14:7.

There is nothing particular in the title; only it is probable that the word לְדָוִד ledavid, of David, is improperly prefixed, as it is sufficiently evident, from the construction of the Psalm, that it speaks of the Babylonish captivity. The author, whoever he was, (some say Haggai, others Daniel, etc.), probably lived beyond the Euphrates. He describes here, in fervid colors, the iniquity of the Chaldeans. He predicts their terror and destruction; he consoles himself with the prospect of a speedy return from his exile; and hopes soon to witness the reunion of the tribes of Israel and Judah. It may be applied to unbelievers in general.

Verse 1

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God - נָבָל nabal, which we render fool, signifies an empty fellow, a contemptible person, a villain. One who has a muddy head and an unclean heart; and, in his darkness and folly, says in his heart, "There is no God." "And none," says one, "but a fool would say so." The word is not to be taken in the strict sense in which we use the term atheist, that is, one who denies the being of a God, or confounds him with matter. 1. There have been some, not many, who have denied the existence of God. 2. There are others who, without absolutely denying the Divine existence, deny his providence; that is, they acknowledge a Being of infinite power, etc., but give him nothing to do, and no world to govern. 3. There are others, and they are very numerous, who, while they profess to acknowledge both, deny them in their heart, and live as if they were persuaded there was no God either to punish or reward.

They are corrupt - They are in a state of putrescence and they have done abominable works - the corruption of their hearts extends itself through all the actions of their lives. They are a plague of the most deadly kind; propagate nothing but destruction; and, like their father the devil, spread far and wide the contagion of sin and death. Not one of them does good. He cannot, for he has no Divine influence, and he denies that such can be received.

PSALM 14: 2 The LORD looked down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there were any who understood, who sought after God.

Verse 2

The Lord looked down from heaven - Words spoken after the manner of men. From this glorious eminence God is represented as looking down upon the habitable globe, to see if there were any that did understand that there was a Supreme Being, the governor and judge of men; and, in consequence, seek God for his mercy, support, and defense.

PSALM 14: 3 They have all gone aside. They have together become corrupt. There is no one who does good, no, not one.

Verse 3

They are all gone aside - They will not walk in the straight path. They seek crooked ways; and they have departed from truth, and the God of truth.

They are all together become filthy - **נללכח** neelachu. They are become sour and rancid; a metaphor taken from milk that has fermented and turned sour, rancid, and worthless.

There is none that doeth good, no, not one - This is not only the state of heathen Babylon! but the state of the whole inhabitants of the earth, till the grace of God changes their heart. By nature, and from nature, by practice, every man is sinful and corrupt. He feels no good; he is disposed to no good; he does no good. And even God himself, who cannot be deceived, cannot find a single exception to this! Lord, what is man?

The Vulgate, the Roman copy of the Septuagint, the Athtopic, and the Arabic, add those six verses here which are quoted by St. Paul, Rom 3:13-18 (note). See the observations at the end of this Psalm.

PSALM 14: 4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and don't call on the LORD?

Verse 4

Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? - Is there not one of them who takes this dreadful subject into consideration? To their deeply fallen state they add cruelty; they oppress and destroy the poor, without either interest or reason.

Who eat up my people as they eat bread - Ye make them an easy and unresisting prey. They have no power to oppose you, and therefore you destroy them. That this is the meaning of the expression, is plain from the speech of Joshua and Caleb relative to the Canaanites. Num 14:9 : "Neither fear ye the people or the land; for they are bread for us."

And call not upon the Lord - They have no defense, for they invoke not the Lord. They are all either atheists or idolaters.

PSALM 14: 5 There they were in great fear, for God is in the generation of the righteous.

Verse 5

There were they in great fear - This is a manifest allusion to the history of the Canaanitish nations; they were struck with terror at the sight of the Israelites, and by this allusion the psalmist shows that

a destruction similar to that which fell upon them, should fall on the Babylonians. Several of the versions add, from Psa 53:5, "Where no fear was." They were struck with terror, where no real cause of terror existed. Their fears had magnified their danger.

For God is in the generation - They feared the Israelites, because they knew that the Almighty God was among them.

PSALM 14: 6 You frustrate the plan of the poor, because the LORD is his refuge.

Verse 6

Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor - Instead of תבישו tabishu, "Ye have shamed," Bishop Horsley proposes to read תבישמ tabishem, and translates the clause thus: "The counsel of the helpless man shall put them to shame." But this is not authorized by MS. or version. There is no need for any change: the psalmist refers to the confidence which the afflicted people professed to have in God for their deliverance, which confidence the Babylonians turned into ridicule. The poor people took counsel together to expect help from God and to wait patiently for it; and this counsel ye derided, because ye did not know - did not consider, that God was in the congregation of the righteous.

PSALM 14: 7 Oh that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, then Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Verse 7

O that the salvation - Or, more literally, Who will give from Zion salvation to Israel? From Zion the deliverance must come; for God alone can deliver them; but whom will he make his instruments?

When the Lord bringeth back - For it is Jehovah alone who can do it. Jacob shall rejoice and Israel shall be glad. That is, according to Calmet, the remains of the kingdom of Israel and those of Judah, shall be rejoined, to their mutual satisfaction, and become one people, worshipping the same God; and he has endeavoured to prove, in a dissertation on the subject, that this actually took place after the return from the Babylonish captivity.

Many of the fathers have understood this verse as referring to the salvation of mankind by Jesus Christ; and so it is understood by my old MS. Psalter, as the following paraphrase will show: Qwa sal gyf of Syon hele til Israel? qwen Lord has turned a way the captyfte of his folk, glad sal Jacob, and fayne be Israel. Qwa bot Crist that ge despyse, qwen ge wit nout do his counsaile of Syon fra heven, sal gyf hele til Israel? that es, sal saf al trew cristen men, noght als ge er that lufs noght God. And qwen our Lord has turned o way the captyfte of his folk: that es, qwen he has dampned the devel, and al his Servaundes, the qwilk tourmentes gude men, and makes tham captyfs in pyne. Then glade sal Jacob; that es, al that wirstils o gayns vices and actyf: and fayne sal be Israel: that es, al that with the clene egh of thair hert, sees God in contemplatyf lyf. For Jacob es als mikil at say als, Wrestler, or suplanter of Syn. Israel es, man seand God.

Of the two chief opinions relative to the design of this Psalm:

1. That it refers to Absalom's rebellion.
2. That it is a complaint of the captives in Babylon; I incline to the latter, as by far the most probable.

I have referred, in the note on Psa 14:3, to that remarkable addition of no less than six verses, which is found here in the Vulgate, the Vatican copy of the Septuagint, the Ethiopic, and the Arabic, and also in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Rom 3:13-18, which he is supposed to have quoted from this Psalm as it then stood in the Hebrew text; or in the version of the Seventy, from which it has been generally thought he borrowed them. That they are not interpolations in the New Testament is evident from this, that they are not wanting in any MS. yet discovered; and they exist in all the ancient versions, the Vulgate, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic. Yet it has been contended, particularly by St. Jerome, that St. Paul did not quote them from this Psalm; but, being intent on showing the corruption and misery of man, he collected from different parts several passages that bore upon the subject, and united them here, with his quotation from Psa 14:3, as if they had all belonged to that place: and that succeeding copyists, finding them in Romans, as quoted from that Psalm, inserted them into the Septuagint, from which it was presumed they had been lost. It does not appear that they made a part of this Psalm in Origen's Hexapla. In the portions that still exist of this Psalm there is not a word of these additional verses referred to in that collection, neither here nor in the parallel Psa 53:1-6.

The places from which Jerome and others say St. Paul borrowed them are the following: - Rom 3:13 : "Their mouth is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit." Borrowed from Psa 5:10. "The poison of asps is under their lips." From Psa 140:3. Rom 3:14 : "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." From Psa 10:7. Rom 3:15 : "Their feet are swift to shed blood." From Pro 1:16, or Isa 59:7. Rom 3:16-18 : "Destruction and misery are in their ways, the way of peace they have not known, and there is no fear of God before their eyes." From Isa 59:7, Isa 59:8.

When the reader has collated all these passages in the original, he will probably feel little satisfaction relative to the probability of the hypothesis they are summoned to support.

These verses are not found in the best copies of the Vulgate, though it appears they were in the old Itala or Antehieronymian version. They are not in the Codex Alexandrinus of the Septuagint; nor are they in either the Greek or Latin text of the Complutenstan Polyglot. They are wanting also in the Antwerp and Parisian Polyglots. They are neither in the Chaldee nor Syriac versions. They are not acknowledged as a part of this Psalm by Theodoret, Chrysostom, Euthymius, Arnobius, Apollinaris, the Greek Catena, Eusebius, of Caesarea, nor Jerome. The latter, however, acknowledges that they were in his time read in the churches. I have seen no Latin MS. without them; and they are quoted by Justin Martyr and Augustine. They are also in the Editio Princeps of the Vulgate, and in all the ancient Psalters known. They are in that Psalter which I have frequently quoted, both in the Latino - Scotico - English version and paraphrase.

Of this version the following is a faithful copy, beginning with the third verse of the fourteenth Psalm: -

Al tha helddid togyher; thai er made unprofytable:

Thar es none that dos gude; thar es none til one.

A grave opynnand, es the throte of tham.

With thaire tunges trycherusly thai wroght

Venym of snakes undir the lippis of tham.

Qwhas mouth es ful of weryng and bitternes:

Swyft thaire fete to spil blode.

Brekyng and wikednes in thair waies:

And the way of pees thai knew noght:

The drede of God es noght byfore the eghen of thaim.

There is a good deal of difference between this, and that version attributed to Wiclif, as it stands in my large MS. Bible, quoted in different parts of the New Testament, particularly in 1Cor 13:1, etc. I shall give it here line for line with the above.

Alle boweden aweye to gydre: thei ben maad unprofitable:

There is not that doith good thing, ther is not to oon.

A Sepulcre opnyng is the throote of hem:

With her tungis thei diden gylinly; or trecherously:

The venym of eddris, that is clepid Aspis, under her lippis:

The mouth of whom is ful of cursing, or worrying and bittrenesse:

The feet of hem ben swift to schede out blood:

Contricion or defouling to God, and infelicite or cursidnesse, the wayes of hem;

And thei knewen not the weyes of pees;

The dread of God is not bifore her ygen.

The words underlined in the above are added by the translator as explanatory of the preceding terms. It is worthy of remark that Coverdale inserts the whole of the addition in this Psalm, and Cardmarden has inserted it in his Bible, but in a letter different from the text.

It is now time to state what has been deemed of considerable importance to the authenticity of these verses; viz., that they are found in a Hebrew MS., numbered by Kennicott in his catalogue 649. It is in the public library at Leyden; contains the Psalms with a Latin version and Scholia; and appears to have been written about the end of the fourteenth century and probably by some Christian. I shall give the text with a literal translation, as it stands in this MS., line for line with the preceding: - קבר - פתוח גרונם

An open sepulcher is their throat; לשונם יחליקיו

With their tongues they flatter; חמת עכשוב תחת לשונם

The venom of the asp is under their tongue; אשר פיהם אלה ומרמה מלא

Whose mouth of cursing and bitterness is full; קלו רגליהם לשפוך דם

Swift are their feet to shed blood; מזל רע ופגע רע בדרכיהם

An evil aspect, and an evil event, in their ways: ודרך שלום לא ידעו

And the way of peace they know not. אי פחד אלהים לנגר עיניהם

No fear of God before their eyes.

It would be easy to criticise upon the Hebrew In this long quotation. I shall content myself with what Calmet, who received his information from others that had inspected the Leyden MS., says of this addition: "Les seavans, qui ont examine ce manuscrit, y ont remarque un Hebreu barbare en cet endroit; et des facons de parler, qui ne sentent point les siecles ou la langue Hebraique etoit en usage." "Learned men, who have examined this MS., have remarked a barbarous Hebraism in this place, and modes of speech which savor not of those ages in which the Hebrew language was in use."

If this be an interpolation in the Psalm, it is very ancient; as we have the testimony of Jerome, who was prejudiced against it, that it was read in all the churches in his time, and how long before we cannot tell. And that these verses are a valuable portion of Divine revelation, as they stand in Rom 3:13-18, none can successfully deny. See Rosenmuller, Kennicott, and De Rossi.