

PSALM 14

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 14

To the chief Musician, [a Psalm] of David

The argument of this psalm, according to Theodoret, is Sennacherib's invasion of Judea, when he sent Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, with menaces and curses; upon which Hezekiah implored divine help, and obtained it, and the Assyrian army was destroyed by an angel; of all which he thinks this psalm was prophetic.

Ver. 1. *The fool hath said in his heart*, etc.] This is to be understood not of a single individual person, as Nabal, which is the word here used; nor of some Gentile king, as Sennacherib, or Rabshakeh his general, as Theodoret; nor of Nebuchadnezzar, nor of Titus, as some Jewish writers ^{f222} interpret it, making one to be here intended, and the other in the fifty third psalm: the same with this; but of a body, a set of men, who justly bear this character; and design not such who are idiots, persons void of common sense and understanding; but such who are fools in their morals, without understanding in spiritual things; wicked profligate wretches, apostates from God, alienated from the life of God; and whose hearts are full of blindness and ignorance, and whose conversations are vile and impure, and they enemies of righteousness, though full of all wicked subtlety and mischief: these say in their hearts, which are desperately wicked, and out of which evil thoughts proceed, pregnant with atheism and impiety; these endeavour to work themselves into such a belief, and inwardly to conclude, at least to wish,

[there is] no God; though they do not express it with their mouths, yet they would fain persuade their hearts to deny the being of God; that so having no superior to whom they are accountable, they may go on in sin with impunity; however, to consider him as altogether such an one as themselves, and to remove such perfections from him, as may render him unworthy to be regarded by them; such as omniscience, omnipresence, etc. and to conceive of him as entirely negligent of and unconcerned about affairs of this lower world, having nothing to do with the government of it:

and thus to deny his perfections and providence, is all one as to deny his existence, or that there is a God: accordingly the Targum paraphrases it,

“there is no **anj l wç**, “government” of God in the earth;”

so Kimchi interprets it,

“there is no governor, nor judge in the world, to render to man according to his works;”

they are corrupt; that is, everyone of these fools; and it is owing to the corruption of their hearts they say such things: they are corrupt in themselves; they have corrupt natures, they are born in sin, and of the flesh, and must be carnal and corrupt: or “they do corrupt”, or “have corrupted” ^{f223}: they corrupt themselves by their atheistic thoughts and wicked practices, (⁶⁰¹⁰Jude 1:10); or their works, as the Chaldee paraphrase adds; or their ways, their manner and course of life, (⁰⁰⁶²Genesis 6:12); and they corrupt others with their evil communications, their bad principles and practices, their ill examples and wicked lives;

they have done abominable works: every sinful action is abominable in the sight of God; but there are some sins more abominable than others; there are abominable idolatries, and abominable lusts, such as were committed in Sodom; and it may be these are pointed at here, and which are usually committed by such who like not to retain God in their knowledge; (see ⁶⁰²⁴Romans 1:24,28);

[there is] none that doeth good; anyone good work in a spiritual manner; not in faith, from love, in the name and strength of Christ, and with a view to the glory of God: nor can any man do a good work without the grace of God, and strength from Christ, and the assistance of the Spirit of God: hence, whatsoever a wicked man does, whether in a civil or in a religious way, is sin; (see ²¹⁰⁴Proverbs 21:4,27). Arama takes these to be the words of the fool, or atheist, saying, there is no God that does good, like those in (³⁰¹²Zephaniah 1:12).

Ver. 2. *The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men,* etc.] As he did when all flesh had corrupted its way, and before he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, (⁰⁰⁶²Genesis 6:12). This is said in direct opposition to the atheistic thoughts and reasonings of wicked men, in (⁹⁴⁴⁸Psalms 14:1). There is a God, and he takes notice of the children of men, and of what is done by them; though his throne is in the heavens, and

his dwelling there, yet he looks down from thence, and takes cognizance of all human affairs. This must be understood consistent with the omniscience and omnipresence of God; it is an anthropopathy, or a speaking after the manner of men; and denotes the exact notice which God takes, and distinct observation he makes, and the perfect and accurate knowledge he has of men and their actions; (see ^{<01105>}Genesis 11:5 18:20,21 ^{<19313>}Psalms 33:13-15);

to see if there were any that did understand: not things natural, civil, and moral, but things spiritual as the Apostle Paul interprets the words, (^{<6811>}Romans 3:11). For though man has not lost the natural faculty of his understanding, and may have an understanding of the things of nature, yet not of the things of God, until a supernatural light is put into him; not any spiritual experimental knowledge of God in Christ, nor of the way of salvation by Christ, nor of the work of the Spirit of God upon the heart, nor of the doctrines of the Gospel, nor any true sight and sense of his own state and condition;

[and] seek God; that is, “after God”; as the apostle in the same place explains it; after the knowledge of him and his ways, and communion with him; after the things of God, his interest and his glory: they do not seek after him in prayer, or by an attendance on his worship and ordinances; at least with their whole hearts, earnestly, diligently, constantly, and in the first place; nor do they seek after him in Christ, where he is only to be found; nor under the influence, and with the assistance of the blessed Spirit.

Ver. 3. *They are all gone aside*, etc.] As bankrupts, having run out their whole stock, and into debt, and have nothing to pay, nor make composition with, and are obliged to abscond, as Adam, (^{<0108>}Genesis 3:8,24). The words in (^{<6813>}Psalms 53:3) are, “everyone of them is gone back”; from God; have revolted from him, and turned their backs upon him, and have gone back from his commandment, despised his law, and cast away his word. The Apostle Paul interprets it, “they are all gone out of the way”; out of God’s way, into their own way; out of the path of truth, righteousness, and holiness, into the way of sin, error, darkness, and death; and with this agrees the interpretation of Aben Ezra, who adds, “out of the right way”; and of Kimchi and Ben Melech, whose gloss is, “out of the good way”; which is God’s way, or the way of his commandments;

they are [all] together become filthy, or “stinking”, ^{f224}, like putrid and corrupt flesh; (see ^{<19815>}Psalms 38:5 ^{<21016>}Isaiah 1:6); and so “unprofitable”,

useless, and good for nothing, as the apostle renders it, (~~4812~~Romans 3:12). Mankind are universally filthy and unclean; they are all of them defiled with sin, both in soul and body, in all the faculties of their souls and members of their bodies; and they are originally and naturally so; nor can anything cleanse them from their pollution but the blood of Christ;

[there is] none that doeth good, no, not one: this is repeated partly to asseverate more strongly the depravity of mankind, and partly to express the universality of it; that there is no exception to it in any that descend from Adam by ordinary generation. Here follows in the Septuagint version, according to the Vatican copy, all those passages quoted by the apostle, (~~4813~~Romans 3:13-18); which have been generally supposed to have been taken from different parts of Scripture; so the Syriac scholiast says, in some ancient Greek copies are found eight more verses, and these are they, “Their throat”, etc.

Ver. 4. *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?* etc.] Of the being of God, of the nature of sin, and of the punishment due unto it? This question is put either by way of admiration, as Kimchi and Aben Ezra observe; the psalmist, or rather God speaking after the manner of men, wondering that there should be such ignorance and stupidity among men, as before expressed; or rather, as denying this to be the case, and affirming that they have knowledge, notwithstanding they think, and say, and do, as before related, as in (~~4821~~Romans 9:21). Do not they know that there is a God? and that they are accountable to him for their actions? Verily they do: for this is said, not of sinners of the Gentiles; though even they, by the light of nature, know there is a God, and show the work of the law written in their hearts; and have a consciousness in them of good and evil; but of sinners in Zion, of the profligate part of mankind among the Jews, who had a divine revelation, by which they knew the one God of Israel; and a law, by which was the knowledge of sin, and whose sanctions were rewards and punishments. And it seems to design the chief among them, who had power over others, to eat them up and devour them; even their political and ecclesiastical governors (see ~~4831~~Micah 3:1-3 ~~4842~~Ezekiel 34:2), who, though they had no spiritual understanding, nor experimental knowledge of things, yet had a theoretical and speculative one; so that their sins were attended with this aggravation, that they were against light and knowledge, particularly what follows:

who eat up my people [as] they eat bread: not David's people, but the Lord's people: (see ^{<194D>}Psalm 14:2); whom he chose for his people, who were his covenant people, and who professed his name, and were called by it; these the workers of iniquity ate up, devoured, and consumed; (see ^{<240D5>}Jeremiah 10:25); by reproaching and persecuting them, doing injury to their persons, property, and character: they devoured their persons, by using them cruelly and putting them to death; they devoured their substance, by spoiling them of it, and converting it to their own use, as the Pharisees are said to devour widows' houses and they destroyed their good names and characters with their devouring words: and this they did with as much ease, delight, and pleasure, and without any remorse of conscience, and as constantly, as a man eats his bread. Or the words may be rendered, "they eat up my people, they eat bread"; that is, though they act such a wicked and cruel part, yet they have bread to eat, and fulness of it; they are not in straits, nor afflicted and punished; and because they are not, they are hardened in their impiety and iniquity: or "they eat bread", after they have persecuted and devoured the Lord's people, with peace of mind, without remorse of conscience, as if they had done no iniquity, like the adulterous woman in (^{<318D>}Proverbs 30:20);

and call not upon the Lord; or pray to him, or serve and worship him; for invocation includes the whole worship of God; and this they do not, though they know him, and are daily supplied by him, and eat his bread. Some read this clause with the former, "they eat bread, and call not on the Lord"; as if their sin was, that when they eat bread, they did not ask a blessing upon it, nor return thanks to God for it, which ought to be done; but the accent "athnach" under **mj l**, "bread", will not admit of this sense, though it seems to be countenanced by the Targum.

Ver. 5. *There were they in great fear*, etc.] This, shows that they had some knowledge of God, and consciousness of guilt, which they endeavoured to banish out of their minds by their fears of punishment; and these fears men of the most atheistic principles cannot get rid of. In (^{<1931B>}Psalm 53:5) it is added, "where no fear was": that is, any cause or reason for it: such men are often frightened at their own shadows, afraid to be in the dark alone, as Hobbes the atheist was. The wicked flee when no man pursues, and are chased by the sound of a shaken leaf; (see ^{<110D>}Proverbs 28:1 ^{<187B>}Leviticus 26:36); or where there was no fear of God before their eyes, nor on their hearts, as well as no regard to men; or where before there were perfect

peace and security, and no apprehension or dread of any calamity, ruin, and destruction;

for God [is] in the generation of the righteous, or “of the righteous One” ^{f225}; which some understood of Jesus Christ the righteous: and though the age or generation in which he lived was a very wicked one, yet God was with him; as was seen by the doctrines he taught, and the miracles he wrought; and which filled the Jews with panic fears, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and nation: but rather this is to be understood of the generation of the saints, who are righteous through the righteousness of Christ, and have the new man in them, which is created in righteousness and true holiness, and live soberly and righteously; these are sometimes called the generation of the upright, and of the children of God, and of them that seek him, (^{<BEB>}Psalm 112:2 73:15 24:6); in the midst of these God is, among them he affords his gracious presence, and is with them, for their help and assistance against their enemies: and as this makes them fearless of them, it fills their enemies with dread and terror; (see ^{<BEB>}Joshua 2:9-11). The Targum renders it,

“the Word of the Lord is in the generation of the righteous.”

Ver. 6. *You have shamed the counsel of the poor*, etc.] The poor saints, the Lord’s people, the generation of the righteous, who are generally the poor of this world; poor in spirit, and an afflicted people: and the counsel of them intends not the counsel which they give to others, but the counsel which they receive from the Lord, from the Spirit of counsel, which rests upon them, and with which they are guided; and this is to trust in the Lord, and to make him their refuge; and which is good advice, the best of counsel. Happy and safe are they that take it! But this is derided by wicked and ungodly men; they mock at the poor saints for it, and endeavour to shame them out of it; but hope makes not ashamed; (see ^{<BEB>}Psalm 22:7,8);

because the Lord [is] his refuge: he betakes himself to him when all others fail; and finds him to be a refuge from the storm of impending calamities, and from all enemies.

Ver. 7. *O that the salvation of Israel [were come] out of Zion!* etc.] By whom is meant the Messiah, the Saviour of Israel, of all the elect of God, whether Jews or Gentiles; and who is so called, because the salvation of them was put into his hands, and he undertook it; and because he is the Captain and Author of it, and it is in him, and in no other. He was to come

out of Zion, out of Judea, from among the Jews; Zion being, as Kimchi observes, the head of the kingdom of Israel; (see ^{<6126>}Romans 11:26). Accordingly Christ did come of the Jews, and salvation was of them, (^{<8004>}Romans 9:4,5 ^{<8002>}John 4:22); and for his coming from hence, or for his incarnation, the psalmist most earnestly wishes: he was one of those kings, prophets, and righteous men, that desired to see the days of the Messiah, (^{<4137>}Matthew 13:17 ^{<2104>}Luke 10:24). And what might move him so vehemently to wish for it, at this time, might be the sad corruption and depravity of mankind he had been describing, and the afflicted and distressed state of the saints;

when the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people. The people of God are, in their unregeneracy, in a state of captivity to sin, Satan, and the law; the work of the Messiah, when he came, was to proclaim liberty to the captives, to set them free, to deliver them from their spiritual bondage: and this Christ has done; he has redeemed his people from all their sins, and from the curse of the law, and from the power of Satan, and has led captivity captive; and which has justly occasioned great joy in the redeemed ones, according to this prophecy:

Jacob shall rejoice, [and] Israel shall be glad; that is, the posterity of Jacob and Israel; not his natural, but spiritual seed, such who are the true sons of Jacob, Israelites indeed; these having faith and hope in the plenteous redemption of Christ, rejoice in the view of their interest in it; they the song of redeeming love now, and these ransomed ones will hereafter come to Zion with joy, and everlasting joy upon their heads. The Jews refer this to the times of the Messiah ^{f226}.