

Psalms 14:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.

Analysis

There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous.

After diagnosing human corruption (v.1-3) and confronting oppressors (v.4), verse 5 announces divine judgment—the wicked experience terror because God dwells among His people. The verse shifts from describing the wicked's behavior to declaring their fate, moving from diagnosis to consequence.

"There were they in great fear" (sham pachedu fachad, שָׁם פָּחַדוּ פָּחַד) uses emphatic construction. Sham (there) points to specific time and place—the moment when divine judgment manifests. The verb pachad (to fear, dread, be in terror) appears twice, intensifying the meaning: "they feared a fear," "they were gripped by terror." This is not mild anxiety but overwhelming dread. The construction emphasizes sudden, intense, inescapable terror.

The phrase "in great fear" translates a Hebrew cognate accusative that amplifies the verb—literally "feared fear" or "were terrified with terror." This rhetorical device appears throughout Scripture to intensify meaning (Genesis 2:17: "dying thou shalt die"; Exodus 3:7: "seeing I have seen"). The wicked who lived without fear of God (Romans 3:18: "There is no fear of God before their eyes") suddenly find themselves paralyzed by terror.

"For God is in the generation of the righteous" (ki-Elohim bedor tzaddiq, כִּי־אֱלֹהִים בְּדוֹר צַדִּיק) explains the cause of this terror. Ki (for, because) provides causal connection—the wicked fear precisely because God dwells with His people.

"Generation" (dor) can mean generation in time (age, era) or generation as group/community (company, assembly). God is present among the righteous community, identified with them, defending them.

"The righteous" (tzaddiq, צַדִּיק) are those in right relationship with God—not sinless perfection but covenant faithfulness, trust in God, orientation toward His will. This is the remnant who, contrary to verses 1-3, do understand and seek God (v.2). While humanity generally is corrupt, God preserves a righteous generation for Himself.

The verse implies vindication theology—though the righteous are currently oppressed (v.4), God's presence with them guarantees ultimate victory. The oppressors' apparent success is temporary; divine judgment is certain. This assurance sustains the righteous during persecution and warns the wicked while grace remains.

Historical Context

The theme of God dwelling among His people is central to biblical theology. Exodus 25:8 records God's command: "And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them." The tabernacle, later the temple, represented God's presence in Israel's midst. This presence meant blessing for obedience but judgment for rebellion. When Israel sinned grievously, God threatened to withdraw His presence (Exodus 33:3), which would have meant their destruction.

The terror of enemies when encountering God's presence with His people appears throughout Scripture. Exodus 15:14-16 describes nations trembling at Israel's exodus deliverance: "The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestina...fear and dread shall fall upon them." Joshua 2:9-11 records Rahab's testimony: "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us...our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

Conversely, when Israel sinned and God withdrew His manifest presence, enemies

prevailed. The ark's capture by Philistines (1 Samuel 4) and later exile to Babylon demonstrated what happened when God's presence departed. Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 10-11) showed God's glory leaving the temple—the ultimate judgment. Yet Ezekiel also prophesied return: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ezekiel 37:27).

New Testament revelation fulfills and expands this. Jesus is "Immanuel...God with us" (Matthew 1:23)—God's presence incarnate. Jesus promises: "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The church becomes God's temple: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Revelation 21:3 announces consummation: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

For persecuted believers throughout history, this verse provided comfort and warning. Comfort: though oppressed, God dwells with us, guaranteeing ultimate vindication. Warning to oppressors: persecuting God's people means opposing God Himself, which ends in terror and judgment.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does God's presence with His people both comfort the righteous and terrify the wicked?
2. What is the significance of the phrase 'generation of the righteous'—does this refer to a time period, a community, or both?

