

## Taking Refuge in God – Psalm 11

Psalm 11 is one of many psalms that instruct us on how to “take refuge in God.” Apparently, David’s enemies are threatening to overthrow him – which prompts him to respond with the following prayer:

*11:1 In the LORD I take refuge;*

*How can you say to my soul, “Flee as a bird to your mountain;*

*2 For, behold, the wicked bend the bow, They make ready their arrow upon the string to shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.*

*3 If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?”*

*4 The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.*

*5 The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.*

*6 Upon the wicked He will rain burning coals; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.*

*7 For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.*

In this psalm, David recounts two different voices who speak two very different perspectives to him. In order to take refuge in God, he must choose to reject the first perspective and embrace the second perspective.



## **The Apparent Sovereignty of Evil**

In 11:1b-3, David summarizes the perspective of the first voice. This voice urges him to run away to a distant mountain rather than remain in Jerusalem as Israel's leader. What use is it, this voice asks, to remain at his post when his enemies are so strong? They are like invading assassins – invisible under cover of darkness, well-armed, and determined to kill all who would oppose them. This voice concludes that David's situation is hopeless: "If (since) the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

This voice is the voice of Satan, God's adversary. He magnifies the power of his forces as unstoppable. He does not even mention God, let alone His proven ability to protect His people. His perspective is that evil – not God – is sovereign. His counsel is a counsel of despair: "Resistance is futile – flee while you can!"

All who follow God will hear this voice at times. During times of adversity Satan will whisper or shout this perspective to us. He will point out how formidable our adversities are. He will terrify us with threats. He will mock our resistance as pathetic and doomed to defeat. His voice is like a black cloud that obscures the sunshine of God's presence and promises. He seeks to paralyze our faith and replace it with fatalism.

Although few biblically literate Christians would actually say: "I believe that evil is sovereign," it is easy during prolonged attack to become gradually (almost unconsciously) persuaded by the enemy's voice. For this reason, the first step in breaking Satan's spell is often to state clearly to ourselves what he is actually saying. This is what David is doing in 11:1b-3.



## God's Sovereignty over Evil

Having thus faced Satan's claim that evil is sovereign, David argues vigorously against this conclusion. This is why even before he recounts Satan's voice in 11:1, he protests: "How can you say (this) to my soul?"

In 11:4-7, David rejects Satan's claim that evil is sovereign by asserting that God is actually sovereign over evil. Notice how thoroughly David does this:

- <sup>4</sup> *The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven.* Though it may appear that God is absent or impotent during our adversities, He is still present and in control. We should not confuse God's invisibility with His absence. He is "in heaven" – in the unseen realm, invisible until He decides to reveal Himself. Yet He is still ruling from His "throne," ceaselessly at work behind the scenes to advance His purposes and our good (Romans 8:28).
- <sup>4</sup> *His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.* <sup>5</sup> *The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.* Though it may appear that His enemies' evil plans go unnoticed, God is well aware of it. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). And not only is God aware; He cares passionately ("His soul hates") when His followers suffer, and His passion arouses Him to act on our behalf . . .
- <sup>6</sup> *Upon the wicked He will rain burning coals; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.* Though it may appear that His enemies go unpunished, God will have the last word. As God poured out His judgment on the unrepentant citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah, He will ultimately defeat all of His opponents unless they turn to Him for mercy (Psalm 2:10-12). We can rest in His promise that justice will be done.



- <sup>7</sup> *For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.* Though it may appear that loyalty to God is in vain, God will ultimately reward His followers. Every mistreatment we have endured, every sacrifice we have made out of loyalty to God will be more than recompensed by Him on that day (Romans 8:18). When His face smiles upon us, it will banish any shred of disappointment in Him (Isaiah 28:16).

If we want to take refuge in God, it will not do to glance superficially at these biblical truths, saying to ourselves: “I already know this.” We will need to ponder them before God, recall why we believe them, ask God to help us with our unbelief, and then *decide to entrust our lives to these promises in this situation.* Then “the peace of God, which surpasses understanding, will guard our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

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