



Bible Study
Biblical Theology of Psalms
Lesson 11: Psalm 11

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Summary:

Psalm 11 expresses confidence in God who is on the throne in heaven to fulfill his purposes on earth.

Outline

1. 1-3 Counsel of Fear
2. 4-7 Counsel of Faith

OBSERVATION

Psalm 11 was written by David, as the superscription ascribes it to him. It is directed to the chief musician, or the choirmaster. There is no occasion mentioned for the psalm. Some point to the figure of fleeing to the mountain like a hunted bird (1) and David's statement that Saul had hunted him like a partridge on the mountain (1 Samuel 26:20) as an indication of the occasion. If this were an intentional link, the occasion for the psalm would be David fleeing from Saul.

David's flight from Saul doesn't seem to fit the setting of this psalm when you consider the advice of David's counselors in verses 1-3. It seems more likely the time, or occasion, of this psalm would be during Absalom's rebellion. We can't be sure of the occasion, but we can see David is being unjustly opposed and threatened, if not persecuted.

Psalm 11 is a contemplative psalm, or a psalm of confidence. It sort of aligns with lament psalms because of the crisis in the psalm, but doesn't fit that form otherwise. David is not calling on God to do anything, nor is he calling on people to do anything. He is expressing his confidence in God in light of the crisis he faces. The psalm is a reproof to David's counselors, or at least an explanation for rejecting their advice. Psalm 11 is also a wisdom psalm in that it contrasts the ways of the righteous and the wicked.

Walk Through Psalm 11

In verses 1-3 we have David's counselors. Verse 1 begins with a statement of David's confidence in Yahweh. As you read on from here to the end of verse 3, you realize David is responding to the counsel he has received.

David has put his trust in Yahweh, or taken refuge in him, as the word indicates. The term

appears in Psalms 2:12; 5:11; & 7:1, where the one who trusts in God is safe from his wrath.

After the initial phrase of verse 1, David addresses his counselors in the plural, along the line of, How do you all say? They counseled David to run and hide to save his life from his enemies.

In verse 2 the wicked have the advantage over David. They step on their bows to string them. They have knocked an arrow to shoot. The word for privily means dark. In other words, they hide in ambush. They shoot at the upright in heart, which phrase also occurs in Psalm 7:10. The upright in heart refers to the one who is just in his cause, or is in the right. Remember in Psalm 7 how David plead his innocence.

The question of verse 3 expresses the hopelessness of the situation. Foundations refer to the systems of law and order that preserve a society. The righteous who seek justice and conduct themselves justly have no defense when the system of justice is gone.

Verses 4-7 explain David's confidence and responds to their counsel. Verse 4 has two sets of parallel lines. The Lord in his holy temple and on his throne in heaven are equivalent. The repetition creates emphasis. His testing and trying of men is similar to statements in Psalm 7. God tries the righteous and the wicked, responding to each accordingly. God's hatred of the wicked shows his contrast with them. They love violence (5) and God loves righteousness (7).

God's judgment is spoken of in final terms in verse 6. The same words are used to describe the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24). That judgment pre-figures the final eschatological judgment. The portion of their cup means their due, or their lot. They will get what is appropriately coming to them.

In verse 7, the wicked will meet with judgment. God will lift up his countenance on the upright (4:6). He will hear their cries and vindicate them.

INTERPRETATION

What does Psalm 11 teach?

Responding to the Corruptions of the Wicked

Psalm 11 teaches how to respond to corruptions of the wicked in the world. The focus in the psalm is not actually on the wicked. Their actions have provided the setting for David's response, but his response is the focus. He doesn't here probe into the mind of the wicked like in Psalm 10.

Verse 3 frames the question, What can the righteous do in such a situation? The counselors

suggested running to hide. Their reasons essentially amounted to the fact the wicked had the advantage and the fair were facing an unfair fight. Their counsel doesn't seem to have been motivated by wickedness, but rather by fear. They probably considered God's covenant with David and counseled him to save his life in order to preserve the covenant.

The psalm twice refers to the upright (2 & 7). The psalm refers to the one who is just in his cause, like in Psalm 7:10. David was just in his kingship because of God's anointing and covenant. God's covenant promises were not in danger, because his enemies asserted their right to the throne, or denied David's right to it.

The Righteousness of God's Judgment

Psalm 11 teaches the righteousness of God's judgment as God beholds and tests men (4-6). He discerns between the righteous and the wicked and rewards them accordingly. The psalm presents a similar picture to God's discerning judgment at the beginning of the Psalms in Psalm 1.

God's judgment is righteous because it flows from his nature. God is righteous and loves righteousness (7). God's righteous nature is also why those who trust in him are safe from his wrath. The counselors looked at the threat on earth and said there is no other refuge than the mountain. David responds there is a greater refuge and he has taken it in the covenant God of Israel.

The Messianic Hope

Psalm 11 teaches hope in the coming Messiah, and this hope is at the center of the psalm and the center of David's confidence in verse 4. God is in his holy temple in heaven upon his throne over the universe. This puts God above and over the men of the earth. God and his purpose is above and beyond the reach of earthly men to stop or overcome.

God was seen sitting on the throne in heaven in Psalm 2:4-6. He answered the raging rebellion of the wicked with his purpose of installing his Anointed Son/King on the throne in Zion. Of course, that is a reference to the coming of the Messiah Jesus to sit on David's throne over his kingdom, fulfilling God's covenant with David.

God's covenant with David declared his promise to perpetuate David's throne and raise up David's seed to sit on that throne. So, David did not have to fear what men could do to him. David put his trust in God and God's Son. David was just in his cause because of God's covenant promise.

APPLICATION

What does Psalm 11 say to modern readers?

1. Understanding Psalm 11 helps us understand how to respond to wickedness in our day. The foundations of law, order, justice, and morality are being destroyed all around the world. This work has been going on for a very long time and they're trying to make as thorough a work of it as they can. The righteous, or godly, do not have a level playing field or a fair fight. Like David, we don't have to fear what men can do to us. They can persecute us and even kill us, but they cannot send us to hell. They cannot stop God doing all his will in heaven and on earth. We can trust in God, walk humbly before him, love him, love our neighbors, and faithfully declare his gospel until he returns or calls us home.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This series is a study in biblical theology of the book of Psalms. Each lesson typically covers one Psalm. This PDF is provided for personal study, small group study, or use in a church class. Unless otherwise noted, all lessons have been prepared by Jeff Short, the pastor of Harmony Baptist Church.

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