

When the Foundations Are Destroyed

Psalm 11

Summary of the passage:

Though the destruction of the foundations of society seem imminent the psalmist refuses to flee but holds fast to his certainty that the Lord who is righteous will judge the wicked and save all those who take refuge in Him.

Exegetical Outline:

- I. The psalmist resists the temptation to flee when destruction seems imminent (vv. 1-3).
 - A. David is surprised by the temptation since his trust is in the Lord (vs. 1a).
 - B. David repeats the call he has heard to flee the danger of the wicked (vv. 1b-3).
 1. He should flee like a bird (vs. 1a).
 2. He should flee because the wicked attempt to destroy the righteous (vs. 2).
 3. He should flee because the safety because of the collapse of society (vs. 3).
- II. The psalmist affirms his confidence in the Lord who will judge the wicked and redeem the righteous (vv. 4-7).
 - A. Contrast between the problems on earth with the sovereign authority of God (vs. 4a).
 - B. Contrast between the attacks of the wicked with their ultimate judgment (vv. 4b-6).
 1. The Lord knows fully all the actions of men (vv. 4b-5a).
 2. The Lord will destroy the wicked (vv. 5b-6).
 - C. The Lord loves righteousness and will redeem the righteous (vs. 7).

Main Idea: Faced with the destruction of the culture by the wicked, the righteous must stand firm in their faith that God is righteous and will ultimately exercise justice upon the wicked while faithfully saving those who belong to Him.

If the foundations are destroyed...

1. The righteous trust that God is their refuge.

Vv. 1-3

- The Psalm begins with a strong expression of faith: “In the LORD I take refuge.” The verb “take refuge” means to turn aside from one thing in order to seek shelter or protection. Therefore, there is an implied contrast between the condition of the world and the response of the righteous.
- This affirmation of faith provides the proper response of God’s people to a massive upheaval in society. One may naturally want to flee such a situation. But David asks how such a thing could even be suggested to one who has taken refuge in the LORD. Such a flight was incompatible with faith in God.
- The reason David receives council (either from his own heart or from advisors) to flee is that the wicked were attacking the righteous and destroying the foundations of society. The “wicked” is a general reference to the ungodly. Depending on the historical setting it could be that “the wicked” is a reference either to Saul and his supporters (earlier in David’s life) or to Absalom and his supporters.
- Verses 1c-3 are David’s record of those encouraging him to flee in the face of societal upheaval. The wicked prepare to attack the righteous (vs. 2). It may be that the reference to preparing to shoot arrows is a figurative reference to the verbal slander that was so often leveled against David. Destructive speech is like deadly arrows (Ps. 64:3).

- Verse 3 adds an additional reason to flee: “If the foundations are destroyed...” The word “foundations” is “figurative for the established customs, laws, and ways of life in the land. It refers to the stays of society, the things upon which the culture is built” (Ross, 340).
- The very things upon which society was built were being threatened with destruction. In the face of such destruction and lawlessness what can the righteous do? The question is rhetorical meaning that there is nothing that the righteous can do to reverse such massive cultural destruction.

2. The righteous trust that God is just.

Vv. 4-6

- There are two ideas captured in verse 4 which relate to the faith of the righteous: 1) The Lord is holy and reigns over the affairs of men. 2) Nothing escapes the Lord’s perfect knowledge.
- In verses 5 and 6 the psalmist explains some of the implications of God’s comprehensive knowledge of the actions of men. He first focuses on the righteous (vs. 5a), and then turns his attention to the wicked (vv. 5b-6).
- In the case of the righteous, we are told that the LORD “tests” them. That is, David’s experience of societal upheaval was, in the hands of the Lord, a test to strengthen and perfect his faith.
- This is in direct contrast to how the Lord deals with the wicked in such circumstances. For the wicked there is no testing of faith but only a repudiation and judgment. “The wicked and the one who loves violence” are the objects of God’s wrath. The word “violence” captures the full range of physical violence, slander and threats, and injustice. All of this the LORD **hates**.
- Verse 6 describes the divine response to the wicked. Notice that what is described in divine judgment upon persons (the wicked) not merely divine disapproval of actions. The Psalmist prays for a kind of judgment that will be unmistakably supernatural so that the righteousness of God will be publically vindicated.

3. The righteous trust that God is their savior.

Vs. 7

- One of the reasons the LORD judges the wicked is because He is righteous and loves righteousness. Because of this the wicked will not be ignored forever. Their ways will not ultimately triumph and go unpunished. Indeed, because the Lord is righteous, the ways of the wicked cannot finally triumph. God’s just wrath is tied directly to his perfect righteousness.
- The psalm concludes with a promise to the righteous (a term referring to God’s people). These are referred to as the righteous not foremost because of their merit but because of God’s grace to them. Certainly there will be a discernable congruence between the standing of God’s people and how they live. However, the only righteousness by which men will be counted righteous before God is the righteousness that belongs to and comes from God.
- And that is why the Psalm ends with a word of hope to all those who have ears to hear. The righteous will, in the end, “behold his face.” That is, the righteous will be saved. They will be presented to the LORD in such a way that their sins will be completely washed away to the extent that they will be fit to stand before their Savior. And this is the ultimate hope of the righteous. The greatest victory of God’s people is that they will be saved from their own sin.