

PSALMS

Chapter 11

In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain,² for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark 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 see, his eyelids test the children of man.⁵ The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.⁶ Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.⁷ For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

Ps 11 A confession of confident trust in the Lord's righteous rule, at a time when wicked adversaries seem to have the upper hand. (CSB)

Written during a time in which the danger posed by David's enemies was so great that even the king's counselors encouraged him to retreat into hiding (2Sm 15–17). *choirmaster*. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, plight of the righteous; vv 4–5, the holy Lord tests the righteous; vv 6–7, wicked and righteous contrasted. (TLSB)

This psalm may be from the time of Saul's persecution of David or of Absalom's rebellion. During Saul's persecution and during Absalom's rebellion David did have to flee to preserve his life and the lives of his friends, but he did not despair or lose hope in the Lord. At time during his flight from Saul David's faith faltered, as it did when he allied himself with the Philistines, but he always regained his confidence in the Lord. (PBC)

11 title *For the director of music*. Probably a liturgical notation, indicating either that the psalm was to be added to the collection of works to be used by the director of music in Israel's worship services, or that when the psalm was used in the temple worship it was to be spoken by the leader of the Levitical choir—or by the choir itself. (CSB)

11:1–3 David testifies of his unshakable trust in the Lord (his refuge) to apprehensive people around him. These people, seeing the power and underhandedness of the enemy (they “shoot from the shadows,” v. 2), fear that the foundations (v. 3) are crumbling and that flight to a mountain refuge is the only recourse. He dismisses their fearful advice with disdain. (CSB)

11:1 *take refuge* – It means to turn aside or away from something to seek shelter or protection between the physical act of taking refuge and the spiritual act of trusting the Lord for protection. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

you – Probably David's well-intended but cowardly friend(s) or adviser(s) who had counseled him to flee from impending danger. (TLSB)

flee – The verb “flee” means “move to and fro, wander aimlessly, retreat, flee, fly away.” The precise idea is clarified by the comparison (simile) to a bird – fly away to the mountain where is safer, but the psalmist clearly thought that such a frightened flight was incompatible with his faith. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Your mountain – The Israelites often took refuge in the wooded mountains. David hid when pursued by Saul. (TLSB)

11:2 *wicked* – The enemies are simply described as “the wicked,” a word that often means “the ungodly” in general, with the sense that they are guilty before God. here they show their worst side, and so a translation “wicked” is appropriate (s.v. Ps. 1:1). Here is put in the singular (and the nouns following likewise), but is refers to the group of attackers. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

bend the bow...fitted their arrow – It is not clear whether those who wield the bows and arrows are archers or whether they are false accusers (see 57:4; 64:4). (CSB)

These are descriptions of their preparation to shoot. Bending the bow, literally treading on the bow, may refer to stepping on one end to bend the bow to put the string on each end. The nuance of the verb would be a progressive imperfect, for the action was going on at the time of speaking. The verbs convey a sense of extreme urgency because the enemies were preparing to attack. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Shoot in the dark – The word “darkness is probably descriptive of the secrecy of the attack. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Heart – In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life.” (CSB)

11:3 *foundations* – Of the world order (see 82:5). To those who counsel flight, the powerful upsurge of evil appears to indicate that the righteous can no longer count on a world order in which good triumphs over evil. (CSB)

World’s underlying structure or order. Luther referred to this underlying structure as “stations,” meaning (1) religion, or spiritual life, (2) power, or political life, and (3) domestic economy, or family life. Luther: “Where such stations operate as they should, there things go well in the world, and there is the very righteousness of God. But where such stations are not maintained, it makes for unrighteousness. Now God declares concerning these stations that they must remain if the world is to stand, even though many oppose and rage against them. Therefore the psalmist says that His righteousness endures forever. All sects and man-made righteousness will finally perish, but these stations remain and preserve [secular] righteousness in the world” (AE 13:358; cf AE 54:446). (TLSB)

righteous. One of several terms in the OT for God’s people; it presents them as justified or declared righteous and hence living rightly. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to bless, not to exploit.) (CSB)

11:4–7 Reply to the fearful: The Lord is still securely on his heavenly throne. And the righteous Lord (see v. 7) discerns the righteous (see v. 5) to give them a place in his presence (see v. 7), while his judgment will “rain” (v. 6) on the wicked. (CSB)

11:4 *The LORD is in his holy temple*. Repeated verbatim in Hab 2:20. Here reference is to his heavenly temple. (CSB)

Though the Lord's heavenly throne seems remote, God remains interested in human affairs. Therefore, He continues to test or examine the deeds and intentions of human beings (v 5). (TLSB)

Describing the Lord's temple as holy (s.v. Ps. 22:3) sets it apart from anything earthly, physical, or profane – it is the heavenly temple. The location of his throne in the heavens confirms his sovereignty over all the affairs of mankind. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Eyes see...eyelids test – Speaking in human terms, he describes God's close examination of people. God always knows what people are doing, but this verse states it in human terms of careful and close scrutiny to make the point. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

11:5 tests righteous – The Lord may have been testing David's faith with the threat of anarchy and persecution, for in the Bible they are often God's way of proving the faith of the believer. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

hates – Holiness and justice, as God's attributes, must cause revulsion against the wicked designs of humans. Oh, that we would have such a righteous hate toward our own sin! (TLSB)

With wicked there is no proving or testing, only repudiation and a warning of judgment. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

11:6 rain coals of fire – Perhaps recalling God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (see Rev 14:10; 20:10; 21:8). (CSB)

The psalmist uses an ordinary word for "rain" (cause it to rain) to express divine judgment that will fall on the wicked (an implied comparison, for there will be no actual rain); he does this to portray the destruction of the wicked in a way that will be clearly seen as supernatural. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Scorching wind – Utter destruction caused by a storm of fire and sulfur, reminiscent of a volcanic eruption's fiery cloud. This wind would ensure that anything that survived would be snuffed out. (TLSB)

The scorching wind (possibly the burning beat, as in Is. 11:14) means a raging and burning heat, a figure for divine judgment. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

their lot. Lit. "the portion of their cup" (see 75:8). (CSB)

Due reward or punishment. (TLSB)

A metaphor referring to what the host offers his guests to drink. To the godly the Lord offers a cup of blessings (see 23:5) or salvation (see 116:13); he makes the wicked drink from a cup of wrath (see Jer 25:15; Rev 14:10; 16:19).

Although it may sometimes seem that the wicked are prospering in their wickedness, God is still ruling in the heavens. Nothing escapes his detection. He sees the deeds of the ungodly, and he will punish them fully in due time. (PBC)

11:7 righteous – Very often the "righteousness" of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. This faithfulness is in full accordance

with his commitments (both expressed and implied) to his people and with his status as the divine King—to whom the powerless may look for protection, the oppressed for redress and the needy for help. (CSB)

upright men. Those concerning whom the fearful despaired (see v. 2). (CSB)

see his face. The Hebrew for “see the king’s face” was an expression denoting access to the king (see Ge 43:3, 5; 44:23, 26; 2Sa 3:13, “come into my presence”; 14:24, 28, 32). Sometimes it referred to those who served before the king (see 2Ki 25:19, “royal advisers”; Est 1:14, those “who had special access to the king”). Here David speaks of special freedom of access before the heavenly King. Reference is no doubt to his presence at the temple (God’s earthly royal house), but that is still the presence of the One who sits on the heavenly throne. Ultimate access to the heavenly temple may also be implied (see 16:11; 17:15; see also 23:6; 140:13). Even the pagan peoples surrounding Israel believed that man continued after death, though only in some kind of shadowy existence in the netherworld (see Isa 14:9–17). (CSB)

Ps 11 David confesses his confidence in the Lord’s unmovable favor. The Lord, David writes, “tests the righteous” (v 5). Our faith is often tested and often found wanting. God’s faithfulness and mercy toward us, however, never wanes or fails. Despite our lack of faith and even our wicked deeds, He extends His grace as a refuge from our sinful nature and the sinful works of others. He does so audibly and visibly through Word and Sacrament, as a testament of His great and unending love for us. • In You, O Lord, we take refuge. Though we are found wanting for righteousness, save us by the righteousness of Christ. Amen. (TLSB)