

# **Exegesis of Psalm 11**

## Translation of Psalm 11

<sup>1</sup> For the music director, by David.  
In the Lord I take shelter,  
How can you say to my soul,  
“Flee to a mountain like a bird.

<sup>2</sup> For, behold, the wicked bend their bow,  
they make ready their arrow on the string,  
they shoot in darkness at the upright of heart.

<sup>3</sup> When the foundations are destroyed,  
what can the righteous do?”

<sup>4</sup> The Lord is in his holy temple,  
the Lord’s throne is in heaven,  
his eyes see,  
his eyelids test the sons of man.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord tests the righteous,  
and his soul hates the wicked who love violence.

<sup>6</sup> May he cause fiery coals and sulfur to rain down on the wicked,  
And raging wind will be their portion.

<sup>7</sup> For the Lord is righteous and he loves righteousness,  
the upright will see his face.

## Psalm 11 Outlines

### *Descriptive Outline<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> This outline also functions as an exegetical outline. In line with prior assignments, it is identified as a descriptive outline as it emphasizes the mood of the author while summarizing what exactly is stated in the text.

(Trust encompasses the emotional experience of David in this Psalm as he articulates God's protection from enemies and ability to appropriately deal with both the wicked and righteous)

I. Complete Trust: David asserts his trust in the Lord's protection despite the overwhelming environment in which he finds himself (v.1-3).

A. Dependence: David states his dependence upon the Lord by identifying him as his shelter and expressing a sense of unbelief that refuge can be found anywhere else (v.1).

B. Opposition: The physical threats of those who come against David are identified (v.2).

C. Anxious: David expresses a sense of anxiety regarding the evil going on around him (v.3).

II. Reasons for Trust: Despite having the wicked postured to inflict harm upon him, David trusts that God can discern the hearts of men and appropriately deal with them (v.4-7).

A. Confidence: David has confidence in God's power, his ability to discern the truth about the hearts of men, and his consistent lack of approval toward the actions of the wicked (v.4-5).

B. Justice: David knows that the Lord will ensure that the wicked encounter justice for their deeds. (v.6)

C. Blessing: David understands that the Lord will bless those who are righteous (v.7).

**Central Exegetical Idea:** David trusts God's ability to take care of him during times of distress because God is powerful enough to discern and appropriately respond to the wicked and righteous.

### *Synthetic and Interpretive Outline*

I. Because David seeks *the Lord as a refuge*, he knows that nothing else can offer him the same protection as the wicked seek to harm him and that societal norms have been upset (v.1-3).

II. Because the Lord is powerful and able to discern the hearts of man, David establishes a belief that the Lord will deliver appropriate justice on the wicked and upright, crediting this response to *his characteristic righteousness* (v.4-7).

### *Theological Outline*

- I. The Lord provides safety to his people despite the circumstances they encounter (v.1-3).
- II. The righteous character of the Lord, coupled with his power and wisdom, identify him as the only qualified individual to appropriately deal with the wicked and upright (v.4-7).

### *Contextualization:*

- I. Believers in the NT and early church experienced persecution on a large scale. Many of these believers were likely encouraged to abandon their faith in exchange for “safety” yet history communicates that many did not. These believers found confidence in the knowledge that Jesus provided a level of security and assurance that no one could take from them. David experienced this same type of assurance in the Lord and it enabled him to not abandon the Lord during times of intense pressure. In the same manner as David and the members of the early church, we can also find refuge in the Lord as we experience attacks all around us. These attacks might not be physical but verbal and emotional attacks certainly inflict many hidden wounds (v.1-3).
- II. The historical account of the faithful individuals in the NT bear witness to the fact that they believed one day all the wrongs in the world would be corrected (John 16:33) This confidence in Christ’s statement provided a more clear long term picture of how the wicked and righteous will be dealt. David certainly experienced this level of confidence in the Lord’s ability to appropriately reward or judge. As we move through life wondering if the wicked will ever experience judgement and if we will ever see a reward for our faithfulness, we can have confidence that God will appropriately dispense justice (v.4-7).

### *Applicational Outline:*

- I. When we are encouraged to abandon our faith in light of our circumstances we should remember that the Lord provides the best security for us in all situations (v.1-3).
- II. As we look around at this messed up world and feel overwhelmed by the sin present in it, we can have confidence in the fact that the Lord is just and will properly deal with those who oppose him and remain faithful to him (v.4-7).

**Big Idea:** We can find security in the Lord despite circumstances because his actions are directed by his righteous character.

*Summary of the difference in understanding of the Psalm over time*

Followers of God have always experienced opposition. David certainly felt opposition from those who wanted to harm him and other early followers could also echo this emotional proclamation. Many who read this passage over three thousand years ago lived with the reality that many wicked people wanted to harm them yet they could walk away with the same confidence in the Lord as that experienced by David.

While many Christians in present day North America do not fear physical harm for their faith they also deal with the attacks of the wicked in other ways. The damage of slander, isolation, and discrimination inflict unseen and long term wounds. These individuals can also have confidence in the Lord that he will take care of them and handle the situation.

The good news for contemporary readers of this Psalm is that their confidence in God can be realized through the person of Christ. Their identification with Jesus provides them a level of eternal security and confidence that nothing can penetrate. Earthly trials do not diminish this level of security as no man can take away what only a relationship with Christ can promise.

## **Commentary on Psalm 11**

*Introduction & Context:*

The manner in which Psalm 11 is written encourages the reader to experience a sense of desperation which is then followed by a sense of confidence in God. This swing of emotion allows this Psalm to be categorized a Psalm of confidence. The emotion evoked by the first three verses give the reader a sense of lament as it is ultimately “the prayer song of the persecuted and

the accused.”<sup>2</sup> This particular tone can be sensed in these first three verses as it leaves readers with the sense that it is David against the world. Verses four through seven of the Psalm pull readers out of this sense of desperation as, “the innocent worshiper rises above the grounds of lamentation with sure trust in God.”<sup>3</sup> The final verse of this Psalm provides an excellent summary of this emotion as David appears to rest his confidence on the righteous character of God.

David is the author of this Psalm but the event which encouraged its writing is unknown. It has been proposed that this Psalm was penned during the time of Absalom’s rebellion and David on the run.<sup>4</sup> This proposal is rational but would also be sensible to connect this Psalm to other Davidic experiences such as his time on the run from Saul.<sup>5</sup> The circumstance which encouraged the writing of this Psalm is not of high importance but rather the principle which it intends to communicate.

David’s authorship of Psalm 11 is ultimately the key to its understanding. The imagery utilized within it is reminiscent of David’s life experiences and its structure reflects these experiences. The composition of this Psalm takes readers on a journey of emotion in order to evoke a similar sentiment as that felt by David. The major divisions of this Psalm are as follows: (I) Complete Trust in God during times of distress and (II) Reasons God Can Be Trusted

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<sup>2</sup> C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 139.

<sup>3</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50, WBC* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 79.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 56. Grogan references that this Psalm might have been written during the time of Absalom’s rebellion and therefore finds it odd that it is not directly addressed in the Psalm.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Brug, *Psalms* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 197. Brug is another expert who speculates that this Psalm might have been written during the time of Absalom’s rebellion or Saul’s persecution of David.

during Times of Distress. Each element within these sections points back to the big idea of the passage.<sup>6</sup>

## **I. Complete Trust in God during Times of Distress (11:1-3)**

The first three verses of the Psalm are distinct from that of the final four. These first few verses emphasize the trouble in which David finds himself. While in this trouble it seems he is vulnerable to physical, emotional, and even spiritual harm. David feels the pressure and it is out of this stress he writes the first three verses of this Psalm. In these verses he mulls over the crisis through what could be seen as either a written monologue or dialogue with others.

### **A) Statement of Dependence upon the Lord (11:1)**

Psalm 11 begins in a manner familiar to many other Psalms. In a seemingly prescribed way David addresses the music director as the recipient of the Psalm. While there were a number of men assigned to this position, this Psalm does not choose to label a particular individual.<sup>7</sup> Based upon the job descriptions of the music director, these men would use the Psalm to lead the congregation in worship before the ark of the Lord.<sup>8</sup> As with many other Psalms, its authorship is attributed to David in this section of the passage.

David makes the following proclamation, יְהוָה הִסְתִּיתִי (“In the Lord I take shelter”) after making notes regarding the recipient and his authorship of this Psalm. According to HALOT,

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<sup>6</sup> The “big idea” for the passage is as follows: We can find security in the Lord despite circumstances because his actions are directed by his righteous character.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Chronicles 6:1-32 (ESV). The sons of Levi are identified in verses 1 through 30. After an elaborate list of these men, the chronicler notes in verse 31-32 that these were the men who David put charge of the song service in the house of the Lord. While the individual is not noted in this Psalm, it is likely it was handled by someone from the tribe of Levi.

<sup>8</sup> Bullock, 29. Bullock notes that while some Psalms assign certain instruments and notion for their use, those simply addressed “to the choir master” are somewhat ambiguous regarding their exact application in worship.

חסה (“shelter”) has the idea of hiding oneself or taking refuge with God.<sup>9</sup> David uses the present perfect form of חסה (“shelter”) to communicate that he has taken shelter in the Lord in the past and is now experiencing the effects of that choice.<sup>10</sup> His experience of taking shelter in the Lord characterizes the majority David’s life as he has experienced his share of trials. By using this particular word in this manner he is making a declaration of confidence and it is intended to serve as a benchmark to measure the statements which follow. During times of crisis David found refuge in the Lord and therefore this proclamation communicates the important role of security that Yahweh played in his life.

After making this declaration David proceeds to respond to those encouraging him to flee by making the following rhetorical statement, אֵיךְ תֹאמְרוּ לִנְפֹשִׁי (“How can you say to my soul...”). The person or group making this admonition is unclear. This admonition could have come from well-intended friends, enemies seeking to taunt him, or even himself as he looks at his circumstances. Whoever this person or group is, they are aware of the danger and therefore provide the advice to flee. In this instance, it has been proposed that this advice is seen as, “a temptation to not stand and face the crisis.”<sup>11</sup> David has already established that Yahweh is his refuge and during times of distress he knows he needs to seek safety in him rather than anything else. There is no doubt David recognizes the wisdom of this advice regarding his physical well-

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<sup>9</sup> HALOT, 337.

<sup>10</sup> Robert B. Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 88. Note reference for comments regarding the use of the present time frame.

<sup>11</sup> Craigie, 132. The assumption presented by Craigie presumes that fleeing is equal to a lack of trust in God to handle the situation. I can think of a number of places in David’s life where fleeing was ideal (Ex. Running from Saul rather than fighting him). The real issue doesn’t seem to be fleeing but rather the object in which David is placing his trust (Mountain vs God).



being but he seems more concerned with his spiritual well-being. David has to consider whether he would trust his ability to outrun his enemy or whether he would trust his safety to Yahweh.

In this admonishment David is encouraged to find refuge in the mountains. BHS records this advice as, *נִיְדוּ הָרָכָם צִפּוֹר*. The translation of this phrase invites some confusion as the understanding of the imperative (*נִיְדוּ*) directly influences the structure of the phrase.<sup>12</sup> The construction of the word creates confusion regarding gender and number therefore an analysis of what is read (Qere) and what is written (Kativ) is necessary.<sup>13</sup> The word has two possible understandings, it could be as understood as a Qal, imperative, 2fs or as a Qal, imperative, 2mpl. If one takes it to be a 2fs then the bird is being directed to flee to the mountain while the 2mpl directs the author to flee.

The flow of the Psalm, with the author's crisis in focus, lends itself to the word *נִיְדוּ* (Qal, imperative, 2mpl) as what should be written.<sup>14</sup> This understanding means that the exhortation should be seen as one directed toward David (and his men).<sup>15</sup> In light of this conclusion it would be accurate to translate the passage *נִיְדוּ הָרָכָם צִפּוֹר* as "Flee to a mountain like a bird."<sup>16</sup> The mountain was seen as a place of security and David is encouraged to embrace his admonition for self-preservation rather than find security in the Lord.

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<sup>12</sup> The person and number assigned to the imperative will influence whether or not the command is directed toward the audience in general or it is directed to a bird.

<sup>13</sup> The typical markings to determine whether *נִיְדוּ* is 2fs or 2mpl are not present.

<sup>14</sup> It is possible that a bird is actually the subject and is being used as a metaphor, either way, the comparison to act like a fleeing still drawn.

<sup>15</sup> This admonition to seek a mountain for shelter was not a new concept. The listed references show that there was a precedence for seeking a mountain for refuge: Ps. 104:18; Heb. 11:38; Rev. 6:15; Ex. 13:17; 1 Sam. 14:22, 23:14, 25:20, 26:20; Gen. 4:10, 19:17, 19:30; Jer. 28:48; Ob. 1:3-4.

<sup>16</sup> The majority of major Bible translations agree with my proposed understanding. The Bible translations consulted were as follows: KJV, ESV, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NET, GNB, and NASB. If one had adopted a 2fs

### B) Threats against David Identified (11:2)

Moving past the encouragement to flee to the mountain, a rationale for the comment is given. The use of the conjunction **וְ** to start the second verse indicates that the clause which follows introduces the reason for admonition.<sup>17</sup> What follows the conjunction is an interjection (**הִנֵּה**), the use of which is important. The interjection is used to, “make the reader aware...that the object is actually in sight.”<sup>18</sup> In this case, the object in sight would be the wicked who are preparing their bows. This use of the language encourages a sense of urgency the embrace of the admonition to flee.

According to HALOT, the “wicked” in the phrase **הַרְשָׁעִים יִדְרֹכֹן קֹשֶׁת** (“For, behold, the wicked bend their bow...”) encompasses all those who are guilty before the Lord.<sup>19</sup> These people are in rebellion against the Lord and they stand in direct contrast to the **יָשָׁר** (“upright”) referenced later in the verse. The “upright of heart” in this phrase (**לִישָׁרֵי־לֵב**) identifies a person who has faith in the Lord and lives in a manner consistent with his values.<sup>20</sup>

Through the use of poetic parallelism, the Psalm communicates that the wicked shoot arrows at the followers of the Lord.<sup>21</sup> The imagery of shooting in the dark can be a confusing concept because if the wicked were actually shooting in the dark then David would have much

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understanding of **וְיָדָךְ** then the phrase could read, “Flee bird, to your mountain.” This understanding is not well supported with evidence nor does it fit well within the flow of the Psalm.

<sup>17</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 321.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>19</sup> HALOT, 1295-1296. This understanding was made based off a survey of the definitions proposed in HALOT along with their supporting Biblical references.

<sup>20</sup> This statement is made based off the context (**לִישָׁרֵי־לֵב** is used in contrast to the wicked) and a review of its use in Psalm 36:11.

<sup>21</sup> EE, 144. David is laying out a sequence of events that involve shooting arrows. See reference for note on the progressive use of parallelism in Hebrew poetry.

less to fear. Their effort to harm him would probably almost useless if this was the situation. The imagery of this verse actually suggests something much different, that is, “They are shooting in the darkness, not in the sense that their target is in the dark (which would provide protection), but in the sense that they are hiding in the dark and operating deceptively...”<sup>22</sup> They operate through deception and there is no low too low for these wicked individuals. This sort of imagery could lean one to wonder if the harm the wicked seek to inflict go beyond that of simply physical harm to that which harms the inner being (mental, spiritual, emotional) of David.

### C) Anxiety Over Evil (11:3)

Verse 3 begins with what might be the words of the Psalmist or his advisor. This individual asks what might be an obvious question in light of the situation already described, that is, what do God’s people do when the foundations no longer exist?<sup>23</sup> This rhetorical question hinges upon one’s understandings of the term “foundations.” It is likely that the word *הַשְׁתָּחוּת* (“The foundations”) in this verse, “refer to the foundations of society” which are metaphors for the, “bases on which social life rest.”<sup>24</sup> The implications of this term mean that a complete breakdown of society has occurred and members of that society no longer function in a lawful manner.

Readers have already been triggered to sense the desperation of the situation and this proclamation would further plunge them into a sense of fear. This emotion naturally causes a

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<sup>22</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 190.

<sup>23</sup> Grogan, 57. Grogan proposes that this question is one proposed by David himself as he reflects upon the situation.

<sup>24</sup> Goldingay, 191. As long as the term “foundations” is taken to be a metaphor (which seems highly likely) a survey of HALOT seems to support this understanding.

person to respond with the impulse to flee the situation. Common sense dictates that the author cannot withstand the attacks of the wicked and therefore to flee would be logical.

## II. Reasons God Can Be Trusted during Times of Distress (11:4-7)

### A) The Lord is Powerful and Discerning (11:4)

Verse four introduces a contrast of thought when compared to the first three of the chapter. Here a shift in emotion occurs from one of lament to one of confidence. This confidence is found to be based upon the person and character of God. As David makes proclamations such as *יְהוָה בְּהֵיכָל קֹדֶשׁ* (“The Lord is in his holy temple”) and *כִּסֵּאֵי יְהוָה בְּשָׁמַיִם* (“The Lord’s throne is in heaven”), he is expressing his belief God’s ability to handle the situation. This belief is articulated in the imagery evoked by the proclamations. It has been proposed that the reference to God being in his holy temple symbolizes, “his presence amongst his people” while the reference to his throne in heaven signifies, “transcendence and might greater than that of any human enemy.”<sup>25</sup> Both of these references allude to past and future Biblical references which would support such assumptions.<sup>26</sup> If God can occupy these high places and positions then he must be considered powerful enough to provide security for David during his time of need. At the same time, since God is willing to come down and be with his people then he must be considered caring enough to take care of his own. David artfully displays his confidence in God by presenting these two ideas in a synonymous parallelism. Each phrase, *יְהוָה בְּהֵיכָל קֹדֶשׁ* (“The Lord is in his holy temple”) and *כִּסֵּאֵי יְהוָה בְּשָׁמַיִם* (“The Lord’s throne is in heaven”), consists of three words which should be seen as complementing each other.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Craigie, 133.

<sup>26</sup> God was with his people when he came down and dwelt in the holy of holies. John’s numerous references to God on his throne in Revelation communicate the grandeur of God (Ex. Rev. 1:4; 3:21; 4:2).

<sup>27</sup> EE, 143. See reference for note on the complementary use of parallelism in Hebrew poetry.

An interesting phrase is used in this verse as it states עֵינָיו יִחַזְּקוּ (“his eyes see”).

Attributing human features to God, David attempts to communicate the idea that God grasps the gravity of the things that are going on around him. This statement of recognition ought to assure readers that a powerful God who sits on the throne is not unaware of the issues going on in the lives of his people.

David uses the following phrase in this verse, עֵפְעָפִי אֶבְחֹנֵה בְּנֵי אָדָם (“...his eyelids test the sons of man) after עֵינָיו יִחַזְּקוּ (“his eyes see”). The word אֶבְחֹנֵה (“test”) is worthy of notice as it communicates an action attributed to God. In this context the word means that God is closely examining people to discern the essence of who they are.<sup>28</sup> In this verse the verb is an imperfect and it functions as a characteristic or habitual present because it “stresses its repetitive or ongoing nature.”<sup>29</sup> The nature of this word implies that God never ceases to examine people as he attempts to discover what is going on in their hearts and minds.

### **B) Discernment of Righteous and Wicked (11:5)**

David makes use of the word בָּחַן (“test”) again in verse five of this Psalm. This use of the word ties back to its usage in verse four. A more complete understanding of this word suggests that it has similarities to that of a refiner testing metals in order to purify them.<sup>30</sup> The Lord’s refining process on people works in a similar manner as it seeks to both purify the

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<sup>28</sup> This understanding of בָּחַן (“test”) was determined based upon a survey of its usage in other places in Scripture. Upon reading each reference a greater appreciation for the depth of this word’s meaning was developed and applied to the listed understanding. The passages analyzed are as follows: Gen. 42:15, 16; Jer. 6:27; 9:6; 11:20; 12:3; 17:10; 20:12; Eze. 21:18; Zec. 13:9; Mal. 3:10, 15; Ps. 7:10; 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 81:8; 95:9; 139:23; Job 7:18; 12:11; 23:10; 34:3, 36; Prov. 17:3; Isa. 28:16; 1 Chron. 29:17.

<sup>29</sup> EE, 91.

<sup>30</sup> Philip H. Eveson, *The Book of Psalms: From Suffering to Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: JPL Distribution, 2014), 83. Eveson makes this assumption and further study yielded evidence that the use of this word in Zechariah 13:9 support such assumptions.

righteous and punish the wicked. God has examined all men (v.4) and found some in whom he approves, the righteous (5a), while the wicked (v.5b) will experience his judgement.

In light on this examination, God takes action upon those which he does not approve. The text communicates that God שִׂנְאָה (“hates”) the wicked and those who do violence. Due to the negative implications of this verb in contemporary culture it is important to give it attention. This use of hatred should not be understood according to human perceptions because our culture attaches a vitriolic emotion to it. When we act out in hatred it is motivated by a sense of pride and sinful anger, neither qualities which can be used to characterize the actions of God. This word carries with it a dual understanding as it speaks of God’s holiness and the demand it places upon him to act.<sup>31</sup> God’s holiness demands that he take action against the wicked and therefore the efficiency with which he deals with it can only be articulated as hatred.

### C) The Wicked Experience Justice (11:6)

David introduces verse six of this Psalm with the verb יִמְטֵר (“May he rain...”). This verb is a Hiphil jussive which indicates that that this statement should be seen as a request or prayer.<sup>32</sup> The weight of this request implies that David is asking God to pour out his judgment on the wicked. The types of judgements which David appeals to God to inflict upon the wicked are listed after the initial request. One of these requested judgements is that the Lord rain down פְּתָיִם (“trapping nets”).<sup>33</sup> This word sticks out when it is categorized as a form of judgement and

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<sup>31</sup> This understanding of שִׂנְאָה (“hates”) was determined based upon a survey of its usage in other places in Scripture. Upon reading each reference a greater appreciation for the depth of this word’s meaning was developed and applied to the listed understanding. The passages analyzed are as follows: 2 Sam. 13:15; Isa. 1:14; Ps. 109:3, 139:22; Prov. 10:12, 10:18, 26:26; Ecc. 9:1.

<sup>32</sup> EE, 104-105. This usage of the jussive cannot be seen as a command since the person making the command (David) is not in a position superior to the one receiving the request (God).

<sup>33</sup> HALOT, 921. “Trapping net” is the sole suggestion for the definition of פֶּתַח.

therefore it is easy to quickly dismiss as an error. While this sediment is justified it is viable to consider whether or not this word as used intentionally to allude back to the referenced bird in verse 1. The “trapping” of the bird could be perceived as a form of judgement.

In contrast to HALOT’s understanding of פְּתִיחַ, the BHS apparatus notes that Symmachus’s Greek version (σ’) reads the following in place of פְּתִיחַ: ἄνθρακας. This noun means “burning charcoals, hot embers.”<sup>34</sup> This Greek word is to be read as פְּתִיחַ (“coals”).<sup>35</sup> The implications of this reading would mean that the textual reading should not speak of traps raining down on the wicked but rather burning coals. The note in the BHS apparatus appears to be the most viable and therefore preferable over the textual reading. This conclusion is based upon a consideration of the imagery evoked by the Lord’s testing in verses 4 and 5, the support of major Bible translations, and the odd nature of traps falling on enemies.<sup>36</sup> As the request for burning coals and sulfur to rain down upon the wicked is made it is worthy to note that its imagery has a feel similar to that of the judgement experienced by Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24.

#### D) The Righteous Experience Blessing (11:7)

David closes out this Psalm by affirming the righteousness of the Lord. His righteousness is borne out through his love for righteous deeds. The statement צִדְקוֹת אֱלֹהִים (“...he loves righteousness deeds...”) could be perceived as speaking about one of two different things. The statement could be speaking about actions that the Lord performs because he is righteous or it could be speaking of his love for those who do righteous acts. Based upon the context of this

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<sup>34</sup> LEH, ἄνθρακας.

<sup>35</sup> HALOT, 924.

<sup>36</sup> As mentioned, the term נִסָּה (“test”) has similarities to that of a refiner testing metals in order to purify them. The burning in this process would directly relate to the burning coals raining down on the wicked. With the exception of the KJV and NASB, the majority of major Bible translations agree with this understanding. The Bible translations consulted were as follows: KJV, ESV, NIV, NKJV, NLT, NET, GNB, and NASB.

passage it seems most likely that this sections speaks of the Lord loving those who do righteous acts.<sup>37</sup> The implications for this mean that the blessings of the Lord's love will pour out of those who act in a manner which reflect the righteousness of God.

The text indicates that the יָשָׁר ("upright") are the ones who will experience the blessing of the Lord. An important question to ask at this point is who are the upright? Based upon the context, these individuals are the one who were being attacked by the wicked in v. 2. A logical conclusion to this observation would indicate that they possess qualities opposite of the wicked. Indeed, HALOT identifies the use of this word in this location to be representative of a "right person;" someone who is honest.<sup>38</sup> It is not stated in the text whether or not these people have a deep faith in God but rather the text does seem to imply such a conclusion.<sup>39</sup> It is the upright who are designated as seeing the face of God, an experience which the wicked will not get to take part. David appears to be assigning himself this designation of being upright and it likely gives him a boast of confidence during this different period of this life.

The Psalm concludes by stating that these honest people will יִרְאוּ פָנָיו ("see his face"). The context of the verse (v.7) leading up to this statement point toward the righteous character of the Lord and his love for deeds characterized as righteous. These statements encourage the reader to understand that seeing the face of God is to be seen as a blessing. It is

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<sup>37</sup> The phrase which follows this statement is, "...the upright will see his face." This phrase puts the focus upon the upright and therefore it would make more sense for the focus to be upon them and their righteous acts.

<sup>38</sup> HALOT, 450. The only other text presented in HALOT for this particular understanding (a right person; honest) is Micah 7:2. While this particular passage appears to agree with this understanding, the other passages that used the word but were assigned a different nuanced understanding in HALOT seem to agree with the statement made above as it relates to the persons to whom this word was assigned.

<sup>39</sup> It seems likely that the upright were followers of God but since the text does not make such a statement we also should avoid making it as a factual claim. At the very least it is fair to say that these people operated with a set of principles that were consistent with those who had a deep faith in God.



not explicitly stated as to what this blessing might be but based upon the context of the verse it seems that the blessing is the security provided by God from the wicked.

As one appreciates the weight of such divine favor it is important to note that God does not actually have a face to been seen but rather the phrase is a metaphor. Assigning human characteristics to God allow the reader to better grasp the blessing being bestowed upon the upright.<sup>40</sup>

*Conclusion:*

This is a beautiful Psalm which takes readers on the emotional roller-coaster ride experienced by David. Many believers can identify with the sediments expressed by David in this passage. As readers throughout the ages have read and mediated upon this Psalm they were reminded of the security that only God can provide. Our experiences are never the same nor are our trials but our God never changes and neither should our confidence in his ability to take care of us.

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<sup>40</sup> There are other passages of Scripture which communicate similar notions of seeing the face of God. The following are some of the passages I consulted as I was attempting to form my own conclusions about how it is used in this passage: Ps. 4:6, 16:8-11; Num. 6:24-26.

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