

What Can the Righteous Do?

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Psalm 11:1–7 (NKJV) “In the Lord I put my trust; How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain’? ² For look! The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly 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, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. ⁶ Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. ⁷ For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.”

David’s psalm addresses the trial of rising wickedness upon the righteous. The “righteous” does not refer to “perfect” people but to people committed to living according to God’s covenant standard. It is wrongly imagined by some that to live righteously in this earth is to be free from trouble and assault. Quite the contrary! The righteous seek to live under the rule of heaven in the midst of a people under the rule of darkness. The clash of the heavenly kingdom with the kingdoms of this world under the rule of Satan brings inevitable resistance and conflict. The truth is, the righteous seek to live out their faith on a battlefield.

We see this in David’s description of the struggle. He says that the wicked bend their bow. They activate their armory of carnal weapons against the righteous. They make ready their arrow on a string, i.e. they prepare specific strategies to launch against the righteous. They shoot secretly at the upright in heart. Their target is the upright. They “shoot” or launch their plots against the righteous in secret. They carry out their wicked assault under the cover of darkness, denial, and deception. They destroy the foundations. They seek to remove the foundational systems of righteousness in the land so that the righteous have no ability to promote and defend righteousness. They seek to silence their voices, undermine their influence, and weaken their defenses so that their lawlessness agenda will prevail.

What is meant by the “foundation”? It refers to the foundation of God’s kingdom established upon God’s throne. The foundation of God’s throne is righteousness and justice: *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.”*¹ When this foundation is removed, there no longer remains a standard by which to discern everything else.

The rise of wickedness in the land brings two temptations upon the righteous. The first temptation is to flee in fear: *“...how can you say to my soul, ‘Flee as a bird to your mountain’?”*² When wicked rise against the righteous, the righteous feel the intimidation. The temptation is to seek refuge in things other than in the LORD.

The second temptation when the wicked rise against the righteous is to give in or to give up in discouragement and hopelessness: *“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”*³

Psalm 121:1-2 tells us that the solution is not to look around in fear and discouragement, but to look up in faith: *“I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? ² My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.”*⁴ David assures us that God is not disturbed or threatened by the wicked, *“The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons*

¹ Psalm 89:14 (NKJV)

² Psalm 11:1 (NKJV)

³ Psalm 11:3 (NKJV)

⁴ Psalm 121:1–2 (NKJV)

*of men.*⁵ What a comfort and strength it is to know that the LORD is in His holy temple! The LORD (YAHWEH) is our covenant God! He has not abandoned His covenant people. He is STILL God. He is STILL present with us! He is STILL keeping His promises! He is still working on behalf of His covenant people! The LORD's throne is in heaven! His authority remains unthreatened by the wicked. His sovereign control remains unaltered by circumstances.

The rise of the wicked is a test. The LORD tests the sons of men. He reveals what is in the heart by what they do. The LORD tests the righteous by the presence and rise of the wicked. David says that the LORD hates the wicked and those who love violence. It is unfortunate that our generation has so emphasized the love of God that that refuse to believe that God can hate. The LORD hates wickedness because it destroys those He loves. He hates those who hate what He loves and those He loves. Through hating righteousness and the righteous, and in loving the wicked and wickedness, the wicked make themselves an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

The righteous must take courage in knowing the final outcome of the righteous and the wicked. What is the outcome of the wicked? Psalm 11:6 (NKJV) says, *"Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup."* The lake of fire (Hell) will be the portion of their cup, the portion of wrath assigned by the LORD. Scripture also declares: *"For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down."*⁶ And again, *"For thus says the Lord God of Israel to me: 'Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it.'"*⁷ Even now the wine of God's wrath is being poured into the cup of His indignation. Soon the wicked will be made to drink their portion.

The righteous can be comforted in knowing that the LORD Himself is righteous: *"For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright."*⁸ God's nature is righteousness. Thus, He is opposed to wickedness and to the wicked. The LORD loves the righteous. The righteous are the objects of His love. The LORD's countenance beholds the righteous. The LORD's "countenance" turned upon the righteous refers to His favor and blessing: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace."*⁹ Thus, the righteous are the objects and recipients of His favor and blessing.

So, what can the righteous do when the wicked rise and wickedness seems to triumph? First, we must not fear. We must not flee or retreat from the battle. We must refuse to be discouraged with hopelessness. We must not quit. We must not focus on the devises of the wicked. We must choose to praise the LORD Who is still on His throne. We must not fall with the wicked but stand with the righteous. We must look up and not around. What can the righteous do? We can say like David: "I will trust in the LORD!"

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⁵ Psalm 11:4 (NKJV)

⁶ Psalm 75:8 (NKJV)

⁷ Jeremiah 25:15 (NKJV)

⁸ Psalm 11:7 (NKJV)

⁹ Numbers 6:24–26 (NKJV)