Introduction

What follows are four sections of discussion, designed to help the reader understand and apply Psalm 11: Translation, Translation Analysis, Interpretation, and Application.

These discussions should be readily understandable to people in the church, with one exception: the Translation Analysis discussion is, by its nature, more technical and thus harder to understand. Most readers should simply skip over this section entirely, as its main purpose is to enlighten the seminary student or pastor who desires to understand the translation issues of the psalm. Those interested only in what the psalm means and how it can be relevant today will do better to avoid getting bogged down in the Translation Analysis discussion; they can always come back and skim it later, if a question of interest arises. In both the Translation Analysis and Interpretation sections, the discussion proceeds verse by verse, so if an interesting question arises while reading the Interpretation section, the reader can quickly find the corresponding discussion in the Translation Analysis section. Also, several times in the Interpretation section, the discussion refers to something elaborated upon in the Translation Analysis section, without all the technical jargon.

In the Translation itself: where most English translations write "LORD," we have translated "Yahweh." The word in question refers to the name God gave himself in the Old Testament. At one point in history, religious Jews became so sensitive to the possibility of using God's name in vain, that they stopped saying it altogether, substituting instead the word "Adonai" which means "lord" or "master." In the Hebrew texts, they wrote in the vowels for Adonai with the consonants for Yahweh, to remind the Jewish reader to say "Adonai" at that point. The Jewish translators of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament,[1] translated both "Adonai" and "Yahweh" as "κύριος," which means "lord." Following the lead of the Septuagint, English translators traditionally have translated both "Adonai" and "Yahweh" as "Lord," but have rendered "Yahweh" in all capitals, as "LORD." God gave mankind his name with the intention that people would use it when remembering and praising him, and it is one of the great tragedies of history that we have lost certainty on how to pronounce God's name and have given up using it. Scholars presently think *YAH-way* is the most likely pronunciation, and that is what we have used here.[2]

After the discussions about the psalm, there is a list of abbreviations used herein to refer to sources. For the sake of convenience and conciseness, we have employed several abbreviations when referring to published works. The academic reader will know most of these already, and everyone else probably will not worry about them much, but there is a list at the end of this paper, just in case someone wants to know.

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[1] The Septuagint is the Greek version of the Old Testament which was written by Jewish scholars in Alexandria two to three centuries before Christ's birth.

[2] As a historical note, the one certainly wrong way to pronounce God's name is "Jehovah," which was derived from the consonants of Yahweh and the vowels of Adonai; if that had been correct, the Jews who were sensitive on this issue would not have rendered the name as such in the text.

Translation

1   For the Director; according to David.
        I have taken refuge in Yahweh.
        How can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to a mountain?"

2   "Indeed, see! The wicked are bending the bow.
        They have taken aim with their arrow on the bow string,
        to shoot in darkness toward the upright of heart.

3   For the foundations are ruined.
        What has the righteous person done?"

4   Yahweh is in his holy temple. Yahweh, his throne is in Heaven.
        His eyes see, his eyelids examine the sons of mankind.

5   Yahweh examines the righteous and the wicked.
        His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing.

6   May he cause it to rain snares on the wicked!
        Fire and brimstone and raging wind are the portion of their cup.

7   For Yahweh is righteous. He loves righteous deeds.
        The upright will see his face.

Translation Analysis

As mentioned earlier, this section is more technical in nature, aimed at the pastor or seminary student who has studied Hebrew. The average reader in the church will find some of this information arcane, but would understand and benefit by other aspects of this discussion. So, if this is the reader's first time studying Psalm 11, we would advise skipping over this section entirely; but if the reader is familiar with the psalm and wants to consider translation differences, then we recommend skimming through this section, reading carefully only the parts of interest.

Psalm 11.1:   *For the Director; according to David.*
               I have taken refuge in Yahweh.
               How can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to a mountain?"

Pertaining to the first line, the superscription, there are two issues which arise in the Septuagint. The second phrase reads, "ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ," which can be translated with a dative of possession[3] as, "a song of praise belonging to David" or "a psalm belonging to David."[4] The essential difference in the Greek text is the inclusion of the word "ψαλμὸς," which is not in the

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[3] See Wallace, 149, for discussion of the dative of possession.

[4] For translation of ψαλμὸς, see BDAG, s.v. 8017; LEH, s.v. 9751.

Masoretic Text [the Hebrew version of the Old Testament].[5] It is always difficult to discern which reading was the original one. In this case, the versions of the Septuagint and Masoretic Text we have date from long after they were originally written. The underlying text of the Septuagint dates earlier than the underlying text of the Masoretic Text,[6] but its translators were not always careful to translate word for word.[7] It seems most likely that the Septuagint's translator inserted the word for greater clarity.

Also, the opening Greek phrase reads, "εἰς τὸ τέλος," which normally would be translated as "to the end" or "forever."[8] The Hebrew phrase is somewhat unclear as well. It includes the preposition לְ, meaning "to" or "for,"[9] and a piel[10] participle of נצח, which in piel usually would be taken as "the inspector," or "the overseer," but traditionally has been taken as "the director [of music]."[11] This seems to be an issue of translation, rather than a text critical issue [i.e. differences in manuscripts], because all the psalms that contain לַמְנַצֵּחַ in Hebrew receive the Greek translation of "εἰς τὸ τέλος."[12]

In the second line, the Hebrew verb חָסִיתִי is a Qal perfect fientive, first-person-common-singular,[13] which we have translated as an English perfect [as does NET]. Some translations [NASB, ESV, TNIV, NLT] translate with an English present, perhaps because they want to emphasize the continuing present effect of the past action [which would be acceptable translation technique], or possibly because they believe a perfect fientive verb such as this one can be translated in the present tense [which would be debatable, though with an intransitive[14] verb, the possibility is stronger].

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[5] Today, the standard manuscript used for study of the Masoretic text is the Leningrad Codex, produced at the beginning of the eleventh century. Information about the Masoretic Text and the Leningrad Codex is from Brotzman, 56.

[6] The Masoretic text dates to the second century; Brotzman, 44. Dating for the Septuagint is from Brotzman, 45.

[7] This statement about the varying nature of the translation of the Septuagint comes from class discussions led by Daniel Wallace and Brian Webster.

[8] LEH, s.v. 8838.

[9] HALOT, s.v. 4483.

[10] Hebrew verbs have different shades of meaning depending on their stems [e.g. Qal, Piel, Hiphel, etc.]. See Webster, 143-146, for basic discussion of the types of stems.

[11] HALOT, s.v. 6306, gives "inspect" as the gloss, but examples which are better translated as "oversee"; BDB, s.v. 6276, includes the definition "to act as director."

[12] See the first verse of the following psalms: 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 36, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 75, 76, 77, 80, 81, 84, 85, 88, 109, 139, 140. In Habakkuk 3.19, the Septuagint came up with, "that I may conquer by his song" [LXE], which does not have any lexical support that we can find. Futato, 120, thinks the Hebrew meaning was lost by the time the Septuagint was composed.

[13] Qal is another stem type for Hebrew verbs; see earlier note. In Hebrew, a perfect verb is one with a complete aspect, meaning it views the action as a whole; a fientive verb is one that describes action, rather than a state of being; see Webster, 89, 93. Hebrew verbs change form to indicate the pronoun of the subject of the verb; if a verb is "first-person-common-singular" in form, that means it has the first-person singular pronoun [I] built into it.

[14] An intransitive verb is one that does not take a direct object; see Webster, 93.

In the last line of the verse, there is some question about the verb translated here as "flee." The note for the NET says, "The *Kethib* (consonantal text) reads: 'flee [masculine plural!] ...' The *Qere* (marginal reading) has 'flee' in a feminine singular form…"[15] The notes to BHS[16] say that the Greek supports the masculine plural reading, but in fact the Greek reading, "μεταναστεύου" is gender-neutral and singular.[17] There are some Hebrew fragments, multiple Hebrew manuscripts from the Medieval period, the Targums,[18] and the Syriac,[19] which all agree with the masculine plural. The Septuagint would be the earliest text in this list, though the Masoretic Text is usually most reliable. The Greek and the Qere marginal note are in agreement with the feminine-singular form of "soul" [נֶפֶשׁ] which is the target of the imperative. However, if the receiver of this imperative was David and he was the anointed king, it is possible that his advisors spoke to him, but said, "You all should flee" In that case, one has to wonder why the Septuagint's verb was singular.

Another issue is the meaning of the same verb. It is a Qal imperative, functioning to give advice, but the lexical meaning is uncertain. HALOT says it means "be aimless" or "be homeless."[20] BDB has a broader range of meaning, including, "to wander aimlessly," "to take flight," and "to flutter" [as a bird].[21] The Greek word used by the Septuagint, μεταναστεύου, is from μεταωαστεύω, a rare word, not used at all in the New Testament, and used only here and in two other psalms in the Old Testament of the Septuagint, and then in the active voice which can have a different meaning.[22] Here, it is in the middle voice, meaning "to flee or depart."[23] This is the translation most often encountered in English,[24] and we used it here as giving the best sense of the original intention.

There is a question about the Hebrew text concerning the destination of the suggested flight. The Hebrew reads "[to] your *[masculine plural*[25]

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[15] The NET note says the feminine singular agrees with the addressee of "bird," but it rather seems to agree with the feminine singular "soul" [נֶפֶשׁ]. In the Hebrew text, there are notes where scribes have indicated suggested corrections or changes, which is what the NET note is discussing.

[16] BHS is the standard scholarly publication of the Leningrad Codex.

[17] Greek verbs indicate singularity or plurality and first, second, or third-person, but not gender. See Mounce, 121-126 for a basic introduction.

[18] The Targums are paraphrastic teachings in Aramaic, dating from the second century before Christ through the fifth century after; see Brotzman, 69, 84.

[19] The Syriac also includes the verb "inhabit" or "live," but is not convincing as a lone witness.

[20] HALOT, s.v. 6030.

[21] BDB, s.v. 5947.

[22] Greek verbs can have three voices, the active and passive we have in English, and a middle, which most often is reflexive [someone acting on himself] or beneficent [someone acting for himself]; see Wallace, 414-430.

[23] LEH, s.v. 5870.

[24] E.g. NASB, NET, ESV, TNIV.

[25] In Hebrew and Greek, many nouns, pronouns, and adjectives can indicate gender, unlike in English. Here, the word for "your" can indicate both gender and number [singular or plural], unlike in English. See Mounce, 24, for an introductory discussion.

Syriac, and Targums suggest "to the mountain like a sparrow."[26] The issue is not "bird" versus "sparrow," but whether the mountain has a possessive pronoun attached. As noted earlier, if the receiver of this imperative was David and he was the anointed king, it is possible that his advisors spoke to him, but said, "You all should flee," in which case, they might have said "[to] your *[masculine plural]* mountain." In that case, the Septuagint, which changed the verb form to singular, would also have edited by removing the pronoun. It would be unclear which mountain was meant to be designated as "your," unless there was a specific refuge David had prepared for such a situation [such as Masada for King Herod, later]. Scholars looking for an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew [הַרְכֶם] suggest this is a second-person-feminine-singular pronominal suffix with an enclitic ם. An enclitic is a word attached to the end of another word so seamlessly that it is spoken as one word.[27] So the question is for what the enclitic ם would stand. Such options as מה ["what"] seem to be enclitic mostly when attached to prepositions; when they are attached to nouns, it is usually to the first in a chain of constructs.[28] The Greek of the Septuagint [τὰ ὄρη ὡς] suggests the possibility that two Hebrew words were put together, and it should read "a mountain like" instead of "your mountain." Because words such as "like" are sometimes included in Hebrew text and sometimes omitted, it is hard to determine whether it would have been written here. Some English translations that use "your mountain" still use "like a bird."[29] Even with the Greek solution, there is the question of whether the Hebrew would have used the form כְּמוֹ and, if so, whether the ו would have been left off. In the end, we translated, "like a bird to a mountain." This makes the most sense in modern English out of the context, relies on the Septuagint word choice for meaning, avoids the issue of gender and plurality, and removes the need to figure out the enclitic.

Psalm 11.2: *"Indeed, see! The wicked are bending the bow.*
They have taken aim with their arrow on the bow string,
to shoot in darkness toward the upright of heart.

The first difficulty here is to decide who is talking. In v.1, it seems obvious David [or the narrator] is talking and then quoting his advisors. The question is whether this verse and the following are a continuation of that quotation, or are the response of the advisors to David's question. For translation purposes, the only difference is whether v.1 should have the closing quotation mark, so we will continue this discussion in the interpretation section.

In any case, the כִּי which begins this verse ties back to the previous one, with most translations [NASB, NET, ESV, TNIV] translating as an inferential/explanatory "for." Here, we have translated it as "indeed,"[30] which works just as well as "for" if this verse is a continuation of the quotation begun in v.1, but works better than "for" if this is the response of the advisors to David's question in v.1.

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[26] For "sparrow," see BDAG, s.v. 6860; LEH, s.v. 8322.

[27] NOAD, 556.

[28] See JM, 107, 444.

[29] E.g. TNIV; ESV.

[30] See HALOT, s.v. 4219.

There is a text critical issue in the second line. The Hebrew text reads "their arrow" [חִצָּם], while the Greek of the Septuagint reads "arrows" [βέλη].[31] The Hebrew equivalent of the Greek [חִצִּים] would be very similar to the Hebrew text, likely identical before vowel pointing was added by the Masoretic scholars;[32] thus a mistake could have been made in either direction, by the translator of the Septuagint or by a later Hebrew scribe. The subject of the sentence is plural [the Hebrew verb is third-person-plural], but the previous phrase also has a plural subject but only a singular "bow" as object, in both the Hebrew and the Greek. Thus, the Septuagint reading seems the more difficult, being that it is inconsistent. However, the Hebrew reading [being consistent] makes more sense, and really there is not much of a basis for judgment, nor does it make much difference for interpretation.

There are a pair of related text-critical issues on the last line of the verse. First, there are a few medieval Hebrew manuscripts which read "like darkness" [כְּמוֹ־אֹפֶל] instead of "in darkness" [בְּמוֹ־אֹפֶל]. It would be easy to make the mistake either way. The external evidence favors the Masoretic text, but the variant is the harder [less concrete] and more poetic reading. The variant reading occurs twice in Job 10.22 and nowhere else, which is more evidence than for the Masoretic reading. Based on interpretive issues [which will be discussed later], "in the darkness" seems to make more sense of the psalm. The editors of BHS propose a correction to this same phrase, changing "darkness" [־אֹפֶל] to "a bird" [עוֹף]. There is no external basis for this suggestion. Internally, the only advantage would be a thematic tie to the previous verse through the concept of "bird," but that is not a compelling reason to go changing the received text.

> Psalm 11.3:   *For the foundations are ruined.*
> *What has the righteous person done?"*

We have translated the first word [כִּי] as an explanatory/inferential "for,"[33] while others have translated as "if" [NASB, ESV] or "when" [NET, TNIV]. Our translation reflects a stronger connection to the previous verse.

The Hebrew word translated as "foundations" [from שֵׁת] is rare, and HALOT gives this translation only for this verse[34] [though the NET note says this meaning was more common in post-biblical Hebrew]. The Septuagint text reads "For that which you put in order[35] they tore down[36]" [ὅτι ἃ κατηρτίσω καθεῖλον], and it has Syriac support. The Hebrew equivalent of the Septuagint reading would be almost identical to the Masoretic Text before vowel pointing, the only difference being a *dagesh forte*.[37] The Masoretic Text usually has the best reading, but the

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[31] NASB and ESV go with singular "arrow"; NET, TNIV, NLT not only pluralize "arrows" but also "bows" and "strings."

[32] The Masoretes did not add vowels to the Hebrew text until the seventh century; Brotzman, 50.

[33] See HALOT, s.v. 4219.

[34] HALOT, s.v. 9989.

[35] This definition of καταρτίζω per BDAG, s.v. 4050; LEH, s.v. 4887, offers different definitions, but they include "to restore," "to establish," "to prepare," and "to strengthen," all of which are similar.

[36] Or "destroyed" per BDAG, s.v. 3806; LEH, s.v. 4515.

[37] BHS notes; this mark doubles a consonant, like the "d" in "ladder."

Septuagint is an earlier reading [though sometimes more freely translated] and has support from the Syriac. The Masoretic text is the more difficult. Neither version makes itself clear as to referents. Something foundational could also be something David had put in order, so perhaps the difference in meaning is not overly important. The English translations tend to go with "foundations," unless they are overly interpretive of what those foundations might be [NIRV].

The BHS editors propose changing the verb in the second line from a perfect to an imperfect.[38] They offer no external evidence for this suggestion; it apparently reflects their conviction that a perfect fientive transitive verb cannot represent present capability [with which we agree] and their conviction that David intended to represent present capability [with which we do not agree]. Most English translations [e.g. NASB, NET, ESV, TNIV, NLT] have translated as present capability [NASB: "What *can* the righteous *do*?"], whether they were taking this textual change by the editors or had some other basis. One other possibility is that in poetry the perfect can take on a modal meaning as a precative perfect: "should."[39] If we translated that way, this line might make more sense as the beginning of David's response to his advisors.

We have been a little interpretive in this last line, translating the word for "righteous" [צַדִּיק] as "righteous person." Thinking that "person" was clearly implied,[40] our intention was to bring out the singularity and avoid any confusion.

Psalm 11.4:   *Yahweh is in his holy temple. Yahweh, his throne is in Heaven.*
                His eyes see, his eyelids examine the sons of mankind.

In the second half of the first line, a few medieval manuscripts read "Yahweh makes ready[41] his throne in Heaven [inserting the hiphil[42] verb יָכִין]. This is not compelling in the Septuagint evidence. Most likely some scribe attempted to make more sense of the line by adding the verb. None of the major English translations follow the variant, though TNIV puts the Lord "on" the throne and NLT interprets to say, "the LORD still rules from heaven."

There is another textual issue at the beginning of the second line. The Septuagint reads, "His eyes look to the poor," and one Greek papyrus along with Origen's Syriac text read, "His eyes look to the world." Most likely, this is a case of the Greek and Syriac scribes trying to clarify by adding an object to the sentence. The parallelism[43] argues for an object that would be equated in some way with all people ["the sons of mankind"[44] in the second half of the line]; thus the world

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[38] As noted earlier, a perfect verb views the action as a complete whole; an imperfect verb views the action as incomplete; Webster, 89, 93, 105.

[39] Webster, 298.

[40] Dahood, 69, argues this term refers to God; but the other examples he offers seem incorrect, and several of his other translation suggestions seem quite strange; Goldingay, 191, allows for the possibility this refers to God, but concludes for himself that it refers to a person.

[41] For definition, see HALOT, s.v. 4184.

[42] Hiphil is another stem type for Hebrew verbs. See previous notes.

[43] In Hebrew poetry, two or more thoughts will relate to each other in meaning or grammar. See Futato, 33-41.

[44] Terrien, 149-150, argues for the translation "sons of Adam" because he sees an allusion to Cain. This suggestion is worthy of consideration, but most of Terrien's translation suggestions for this psalm seem far fetched.

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would be a possibility, though fairly abstract, but the poor would be too narrow. The evidence favors the Masoretic text.

Of great interest in this verse and the next is the meaning of the verb translated here as "examine" [Qal form of בחן]. HALOT and BDB provide the definitions "to test" or "to examine";[45] Holladay offers "to test" or "to test by smelting," the latter meaning "to refine";[46] TWOT succinctly says, "to examine, try, prove."[47] Examining all the uses of this verb in the Qal stem in the Old Testament show that when the subject is people and the object is God, the meaning is closest to the concept of "to challenge," either in a negative way of testing God's righteousness and attentiveness[48] or in a positive way of testing God's promise;[49] in all these, the base meaning is "to test." When the subject is the ear and the object is words, the meaning is closest to the idea of "to weigh for value";[50] again, the base meaning is "to test." When God or his prophet is the subject and people or their hearts/minds are the object, context and parallelism affects the meaning. In most cases, the meaning is "to test for purity";[51] however, when there is a parallel with the Hebrew verb צרף the meaning usually is "to refine."[52] Some of these examples could be interpreted either as "to test" or "to refine," and two examples seem definitely to lean toward the testing idea rather than refining.[53] In our verse, there is a parallel with the Hebrew word חזה [translated here as "see"], which strengthens the notion of testing as opposed to refining.

Psalm 11.5:   *Yahweh examines the righteous and the wicked.*
                His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing.

In the first line, in the Masoretic text, there is a very strong disjunctive accent[54], suggesting the sentence be broken differently than translated here: e.g. NET has, "The LORD approves of the godly, but he hates the wicked and those who love to do violence." The Septuagint and the Syriac read as though this disjunctive accent were not there, as does our translation here [along with NASB]. The Septuagint pre-dates the Masoretic addition of accents, so it is a question of why the Masoretes understood the text differently than the Septuagint translators. The Hebrew word order is strange: if one ignores the disjunctive accent, the first sentence is constructed as

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[45] See HALOT, s.v. 1151; BDB, s.v. 1109.

[46] Holladay, s.v. 1021.

[47] TWOT, s.v. 0230.0.

[48] Ps 95.9; Mal 3.15.

[49] Mal 3.10.

[50] Job 12.11; 34.3.

[51] 1 Chr 29.17; Job 7.18; 23.10; Ps. 7.10; 81.8; 139.23; Jer 6.27; 11.20; 12.3; 17.10; 20.12.

[52] Ps.66.10; Pro 17.3; Jer 9.6; Zech 13.9 (*2).

[53] Ps. 17.3; 26.2.

[54] Such accents helped the Hebrew reader know how to read emphasis and pauses into the text; disjunctive accents indicate a shift within the sentence. See JM, 60-61, for a list of such accents in poetry books of the Bible.

subject+object+verb+object;[55] if one accepts the disjunctive accent, the second sentence is constructed object+object+verb+subject. The Masoretes might have considered the split of the objects too strange and desired to group the wicked and the ones who love violence together. The problem with the Masoretic text as it stands is that one has to change the meaning of the verb translated "examine" [Qal form of בחן] in v.4 when you get to this verse. In v.4, it is obvious from the context and the discussion of the term [which we have provided above], that God is testing the motives and actions of all people. Now, in the very next verse – if we accept the disjunctive accent – we cannot use the same definition, for it would not make sense to say in essence, "God is testing the motives and actions of only the righteous, but he hates the wicked." So English translations that organize the verse like the Masoretes either have this confusing construction [ESV, TNIV] or have to resort to using two different definitions for the same word, trying to force an antonymic parallel to "hate" [שׂנא; NET]. Given the context of v.4, we believe the Septuagint makes better sense of the sentence: God is examining everyone, the righteous and the wicked, and [his response is] he hates those who love violence [the wicked].

It seems strange to English speakers to consider "God's soul." God does not have a soul in the sense we usually think of the term, almost synonymously with the human "spirit," as the non-physical essence of a person that God brings to Heaven after death. HALOT defines the gloss of "soul" as "the centre [sic] and transmitter of feelings and perceptions."[56] Thus, this is the equivalent of personifying, "God, in his heart, hates the one who loves violence."

There are a few issues with the word translated as "hates" [שָׂנְאָה]. The Septuagint has a masculine-singular verb and the addition of "his own" [ἑαυτοῦ], so it reads, "the one who loves wrongdoing hates his own soul." The Hebrew text has a feminine singular verb, matching the gender and number of "his soul" [נַפְשׁוֹ]. The context seems to favor the Hebrew reading. Another issue is that this verb is a perfect fientive, and so normally should not be translated in the present tense. It could be considered an "experience perfect,"[57] which would allow for a present tense translation, because they are treated like statives.[58]

Some question whether "hate" is a proper translation when God is the subject. HALOT, BDB, Holladay, and TWOT all indicate "hate" is the proper translation.[59] Examining other Old Testament usage, we see that when people are the subject and God the object, there is always the possibility of a rejection connotation, though hate would fit the context.[60] When people are the subject and an abstract concept is the object, more than two-thirds of the time rejection is a possibility,[61] though the rest of the time hatred seems clearly in view.[62] When people are the

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[55] Goldingay, 192, suggests this word order supports the idea that God's examination separates the wicked from the righteous.

[56] HALOT, s.v. 6283.

[57] Williams, 68; Webster, 292.

[58] A stative verb describes a state of being, rather than an action. See Webster, 89, 93, 97.

[59] HALOT, s.v. 9172; BDB, s.v. 9478; Holladay, s.v. 8225; TWOT, s.v. 2272.0.

[60] Ex 20.5; Deu 5.9; 7.10 (*2); 2 Chr 19.2; Ps 21.9.

[61] Ps 50.17; 97.10; 119.104, 128, 163; Prv 1.22, 29; 5.12; 8.13; 11.15; 12.1; 13.5; 15.10, 27; 28.16; Eze 35.6; Amo 5.15.

subject and other people are the object, it depends on a couple of issues. First, if the verb is a passive participle then this almost always indicates the connotation of being unloved, perhaps not to the extreme of hated.[63] Second, in Deuteronomy, there are three cases where rejection seems to be indicated.[64] Else, the meaning seems clearly to be hate.[65] When God is the subject and an abstract concept is the object, there are a few examples where rejection is possible,[66] but usually hate is clearly in view.[67] When God is the subject and people are the object, as in Psalm 11.5, hate seems clearly in view, though it is a small sample.[68]

Psalm 11.6: *May he cause it to rain snares on the wicked!*
Fire and brimstone and raging wind are the portion of their cup.

One later Greek version, by Symmachus, instead of "snares," reads ἄνθρακας [apparently the genitive form of ἀνθρακιά, with the accent misplaced], which means "hot embers" or "burning charcoals."[69] In Hebrew, the equivalent would be פַּחֲמֵי, instead of פַּחִים as in the Hebrew text. It seems possible an inadvertent error could have occurred in either direction. There is little external evidence in favor of Symmachus' version: none of the other Greek texts support this version, nor any Hebrew texts or other translations; and this version was more periphrastic in nature, so less reliable than other Greek versions.[70] Internally, while the error could have occurred in either direction, the harder text certainly is the Masoretic one, and it is easy to believe Symmachus made the change thinking "burning coals" made a lot more sense with the rest of the verse [interestingly, almost every English translation, other than NASB, has adopted Symmachus' text[71]]. But one could argue with Symmachus that there is a logical place for snares. The imagery of casting nets to entrap enemies was used by Mesopotamian kings and in accounts of Egyptian gods and pharaohs, while in the Bible the emphasis of the imagery was on the dominion of whoever cast the net and the powerlessness of the one who got caught by it;[72] so it is easy to think of David using such imagery which would have been familiar to his original

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[62] Ex 18.21; Job 34.17; Ps 101.3; 120.6; Prv 29.24; Ecc 2.17, 18; Is 60.15; Mic 3.2.

[63] Gen. 29.31; 29.33; Deu 21.15 (*2); 21.16; 21.17; Prv 30.23; the possible exception is 2 Sam 5.8, for which there is a textual issue.

[64] Deu 22.13, 16; 24.3.

[65] Gen 24.60; 26.27; 37.4, 5, 8; Exo 1.10; 23.5; Lev 19.17; 26.17; Deu 4.42; 7.15; 19.4, 6, 11; 30:7; Jos 20.5; Jdg 11.7; 14.16; 15.2 (*2); 2 Sam 13.15 (*2), 22; 19.7 (*2); 22.18; 1 Ki 22.8; 2 Chr 1.11; 18.7; Est 9.1, 5, 16, Job 8.22; Psa 9.14; 18.18; 25.19; 26.5; 31.7; 34.22; 35.19; 38.20; 41.8; 69.5, 15; 86.17; 105.25; 106.10, 41; 118.7; 119.113; 129.5; 139.21, 22; Pro 9.8; 13.24; 19.7; 25.17, 21; 26.24; 27.6; 29.10; Ecc 3.8; Isa 66.5; Eze 16.27, 37; 23.28; Amo 5.10.

[66] Is 1.14; Amo 5.21; Zec 8.17.

[67] Deu 12.31; 16.22; Ps 36.3; Prv 6.16; 8.13 (#2); Is 61.8; Jer 12.8; 44.4; Amo 6.8; Mal 2.16.

[68] Ps 5.6; Hos 9.15; Mal 1.3; all perfect tense.

[69] LEH, s.v. 755.

[70] Brotzman, 75.

[71] Some of these English texts combined the concept of hot coals with that of fire into "burning coals," [e.g. NET, TNIV, NLT], while others kept the concepts separate [e.g. ESV]. The former would seem to be incorrect, since in the Masoretic text there is a disjunctive accent before the word for "fire" [אֵשׁ].

[72] DBI, 885.

listeners and readers. Furthermore, HALOT refers to such a snare as a "trapping net, used by fowlers,"[73] so perhaps this line is ironic, God catching the antagonists in snares, when those antagonists had been out hunting David, who was told to flee like a bird. David might be saying, "You think I should flee like a bird? It is my antagonists who will be caught like a bird!" The Septuagint translates this word with παγίδας, a word meaning "snares" or "traps," which BDAG defines as "that which causes one to be suddenly endangered or unexpectedly brought under control of a hostile force,"[74] a definition which fits the context well.

The Hebrew verb for "rain" [יַמְטֵר] is a hiphil jussive:[75] "May he cause it to rain." Some think this should be translated as an ordinary imperfect [as an Enlgish future], though there is no inherent reason to doubt the jussive nature of the verb;[76] in the Septuagint, the verb is a future: "He will rain" [ἐπιβρέξει[77]]. The English translations are split, some preferring the hopeful Hebrew [NET, ESV], others the predictive Greek [NASB, TNIV].

> Psalm 11.7:   *For Yahweh is righteous. He loves righteous deeds.*
> *The upright will see his face.*

The Hebrew text says, "He loves righteousness," but the word for "righteousness" [צְדָקוֹת] is in a feminine-plural form, suggesting "righteous deeds."[78] Some English translations interpret their way to this same conclusion [NET, ESV], while others translate "righteousness" or "justice" [NASB, TNIV, NLT].

The Septuagint makes two changes to the final line: [with Syriac support] it refers to "uprightness" [εὐθύτητα[79]] instead of an "upright person," which before vowel pointing would have looked the same in Hebrew; and it changes the verb from the Hebrew plural to a singular. The Hebrew itself is a bit confusing. To translate as we have, we have taken a singular adjective as the substantival subject of the plural verb; however, as the NET note says, "collective singular nouns can be construed with a plural predicate."[80] On the other hand, by one of the idiosyncrasies of the language, the word for "face" [פָּנֵימוֹ] has a plural form, and would better fit the verb; thus, the Hebrew could be translated, "His face will see the upright," similar to how the Greek renders it [among standard English translations, only the NKJV translates this way instead of the other]. Sense can be made out of either translation, as either way the imagery suggests deliverance. In the Old Testament, when God hides his face the implication is that he will not

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[73] HALOT, s.v. 7515.

[74] BDAG, s.v. 5476.

[75] A jussive verb in Hebrew indicates volition, or will, "of the speaker with regard to things or third-parties"; see Webster, 123, 127.

[76] GKC, 192, says jussives can be used as ordinary imperfects; and JM, 349, specifically cites this verse as containing a jussive form that is difficult or impossible to explain; but the wishful jussive seems to fit fine here, and though an imperfect would fit fine also, there is not compelling evidence that we should doubt the jussive.

[77] From ἐπιβρέχω: "to rain upon"; LEH, s.v. 3499.

[78] Not righteous people, or the word would be masculine.

[79] LEH, s.v. 3913.

[80] See GKC, 462.

respond to needs and prayers;[81] on the other hand, to have God's face upon you or to have it shine upon you implies grace, peace, compassion, blessing, and that God sees what you are doing or what is happening to you.[82] In the only other example of seeing God's face, to see God's face implies acceptance and cleansing; this is Elihu's opinion, but he seems inspired throughout most of his speech.[83] So, either way in this psalm, we can make sense of the imagery; it is just a matter of how one understands the underlying Hebrew text.

Interpretation

Scholars offer many different groups of categories for the psalms, and often each will classify this psalm differently than other scholars do. As this psalm is not a focused prayer, does not contain detail about why the antagonists are causing suffering, and does not contain a thorough expression of praise at the end, it does not make a strong case for being a lament.[84] Rather, it seems to be what Futato called a song of confidence,[85] because it expresses a personal trouble but not with as much emphasis as in a lament, and expresses confidence in God's deliverance which has not yet occurred, as would be the case in a psalm of thanksgiving.

The general plot of the psalm flows as follows:

v.1:   There is a stark contrast between the attitude of David and that of his advisors.

v.2:   According to the advisors, there is a perceived threat from some antagonists.

v.3:   According to the advisors, there is justification for fleeing.

v.4a: David contends that God has righteous holiness and powerful authority.

v.4b: David contends that God is discerning the character and actions of all people.

v.5:   David contends God's judgment is based on that discernment.

v.6:   David hopefully expects the punishment of the wicked.

v.7:   David is confident in the deliverance of the righteous.

The psalm can be broken into two halves, first of lament by the advisors and second of confidence by David. Each of these halves can be further separated as follows:

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[81] Is 8.17; 59.2; Mic 3.4

[82] Not all of these passages support each aspect of the meaning, but they each support at least one: Num 6.25; 2 Chr 30.9; Ps 10.11; 22.24; 67.1.

[83] Job 33.26.

[84] See Futato, 150-155 for description of a lament. Constable, 32, called it an individual lament, though it sounds like an imprecatory psalm as he described them [6]; VanGemeren, 160, also called it an individual lament.

[85] Note that Futato, 161, did not include this psalm in his list of songs of confidence; see 160-161 for his description. Agreement that this is a psalm of confidence comes from Craigie, 132; Chisholm, "Preparing an Exposition of a Psalm," page unmarked but third in text; Webster and Beach, 47, though they say it possibly could be a royal psalm.

I. Lament: David's advisors fear the wicked threaten the safety of David and themselves, but David challenges this judgment, having put his confidence in God [1-3].

    A. Challenge: David challenges his advisors for their counsel to flee when he has decided to trust in God [1].

    B. Lament: The advisors express fear that the wicked have been victorious to the degree that David's and their safety is in doubt [2-3].

II. Confidence: David expresses confidence that God is attentive, perceptive, and righteous, and so he hates those who love violence and loves those who pursue righteousness, and thus is sure to punish the wicked and deliver the righteous [4-7].

    A. Confidence in God's attentiveness: David says God is in Heaven, seeing what goes on with mankind [4].

    B. Confidence in God's perception: David says God examines the hearts of all people [5a].

    C. Confidence in God's punishment of the wicked: David says God will punish the wicked [5b-6].

    D. Confidence in God's deliverance of the righteous: David says God will deliver the righteous [7].

We could summarize these thoughts as follows:

I   Because David has taken refuge in the Lord, he does not understand why his advisors counsel him to flee [v.1].

II   The counsel of the advisors is derived from their perspective that the wicked are gaining victory [vv.2-3].

III   David's confidence in the Lord's deliverance is derived from God's righteous character, omniscience, and judgment [vv.4-7].

This is just an overview. We can now discuss a more detailed interpretation of each verse, before turning to issues of contextualization and application.

Psalm 11.1:   *For the Director; according to David.*
            I have taken refuge in Yahweh.
            How can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to a mountain?"

Because this is a psalm of David, one infers he is the person narrating in the first verse. Perhaps David is now King, and interacting with his official advisors; but in any case he is interacting with someone who seeks to advise him.[86] This other person or group of people has a negative prognosis of the situation, and sees fleeing as the only option.

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[86] We reject Goldingay's suggestion [188] that David could be challenging God to justify David's trust. Such an assumption makes no sense of the dialogue of the psalm.

Apparently, using a bird as a metaphor for the soul or spirit was common in ancient literature.[87] The advisors have told David to flee like a bird, and [as mentioned above in the Translation Analysis] the verb has connotations of wandering aimlessly, as a bird flits, perhaps. This is not an attractive image. One infers this is not what the advisors literally said, but David's mocking interpretation. This is brought out more strongly by David phrasing his retort as a rhetorical question. He is not just expressing disagreement, he is expressing outrage or disgust at their suggestion. This psalm begins with an antithesis, of David's view contrasting strongly in both emotion and logic with that of his advisors.

The initial setting is unclear, but seemingly urban, in the center of society, thus probably Jerusalem. The advice is to flee to a mountain, as David actually did more than once in his life.[88] The mountain would represent a refuge, high, remote, and defensible; perhaps also offering hidden ledges or the cover of trees to which a bird could flee for refuge from a predator.[89] But David says he already has taken his refuge, in God; this means he has already put his trust in God for deliverance. One sees an image of David standing behind God, or under his cloak, allowing God to fight his battles for him.[90]

One has to wonder why David saw flight to a mountain as an acceptable alternative at other times, but not in this situation.[91] We do not have enough details of this situation to make a strong conclusion about that question, but perhaps he was being advised to flee from a foreign attack and leave his capital and its people helpless, an action which would have been counter to David's understanding of his role as Israel's king and God's anointed representative on Earth according to the covenants with God. Perhaps the threat was internal strife – but not from his royal line, as on one other occasion – and so again it would not be fitting for God's anointed king to abandon the field to the antagonists. Perhaps God had communicated his promise of protection in this instance, whatever the threat was. In any case, David has trusted God for deliverance, while his advisors have counseled him to flee to a mountain.

Psalm 11.2:   *"Indeed, see! The wicked are bending the bow.*
They have taken aim with their arrow on the bow string,
to shoot in darkness toward the upright of heart.

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[87] DBI, 93.

[88] Goldingay, 190, seems to forget this, as he suggests actually fleeing to the mountains could not be in view here.

[89] For this last suggestion, Goldingay, 190.

[90] In 2 Samuel 22.1-3, it says, "And David spoke the words of this song to the LORD in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. [2] He said, 'The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; [3] My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge [same verb root as in Psalm 11.1]; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, You save me from violence'" [NASB]. In v.31, David was still talking about God: "He is a shield to all who take refuge [same verb root as in Psalm 11.1] in Him" [NASB; see also Psalm 18.3, 31]. In Psalm 5.11-12, David wrote, "[11] But let all who take refuge [same verb root as in Psalm 11.1] in You be glad, Let them ever sing for joy; And may You shelter them, That those who love Your name may exult in You. [12] For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield" [NASB].

[91] Strangely, some commentators [e.g. Terrien, 151] suggest this psalm depicts the situation when Saul was hunting for David, but in that situation David did flee, which seems to rule out that situation as the setting for this psalm.

In v.1, it seems obvious David is talking and then quoting his advisors. This verse [and the following] might be a continuation of that quotation by David, or this might be the response of the advisors to David's rhetorical question, but in either case it represents the thoughts of the advisors.

The parallelism in v.2 builds steadily to show the perceived threat. While the advisors might be in a mildly antagonistic position with David, the greater antagonists are the wicked, who are ready to attack. In the Old Testament, the wicked go astray from birth[92] and are grievous sinners,[93] with character the opposite of God's righteousness,[94] willing to lead others astray.[95] They are the enemies of God's anointed such as David,[96] and will be judged by God and destroyed.[97]

It is interesting to note some similarities in Psalm 37: the wicked have bent their bow to slay the upright [v.14], but their sword will enter their own heart [v.15], their arms will be broken [as in a trap? v.17], while the Lord will sustain the righteous [v.17], because they take refuge in him [v.40]. In our psalm, the wicked shoot in darkness, suggesting sneakiness [ambush] or deception, or perhaps just evil, for in the Bible, darkness is associated with evil and death.[98]

The imagery is of a physical, military attack [bow and arrow], but could metaphorically represent a political attack.[99] Elsewhere in the Psalms, David used the image of arrows to represent bitter speech or lies.[100] The targets of the wicked are the upright. In the Old Testament, upright people reflect the character of God [since God is described by the same term],[101] trust in God,[102] and praise God.[103] They are peaceful,[104] and though they are targets for the wicked,[105] they are saved by God.[106]

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[92] Ps 58.14.

[93] Num 16.26.

[94] Ex 9.27.

[95] Ps 1.1.

[96] Ps 3.8; 31.17; 36.12.

[97] Ps. 1.5; 9.18; 37.38; Num 16.32.

[98] DBI, 192.

[99] VanGemmeren, 161-162, favors some sort of verbal attack, and notes that other passages [e.g. Ps 37.14; 57.4; 64.3; Jer 9.8] describe evil speech in terms of deadly weapons.

[100] Ps 58.6; 64.3.

[101] Ps 92.16.

[102] Ps. 32.10-11

[103] Ps 33.1.

[104] Ps 37.37.

[105] Ps 37.14.

[106] Ps 7.11.

So this is the first thrust of the argument by the advisors: the wicked are mounting an attack on the upright, one which apparently threatens both David and the advisors.

Psalm 11.3: *For the foundations are ruined.*
What has the righteous person done?"

We take this to be the conclusion of the argument of the advisors, whether they are speaking directly in vv.2-3 or being quoted by David. In v.2, the advisors initiated their argument by noting the wicked were about to attack the upright; now, in v.3, they conclude by contending that all hope is lost, that the foundations are ruined. If this is a military attack, this sentence might mean the foundations of the defenses are in ruins and so the attackers must find victory; if this is a political attack, this sentence might mean the foundations of society – such as the legal code or civil order – are ruined to the point that the antagonists threaten the very existence of the king and his advisors.[107] As noted above in the Translation Analysis, the Hebrew word translated as "foundations" here is rare and so it is hard to draw inferences from its use; and the Greek version in the Septuagint reads, "that which you put in order, they tore down," which could refer to either military defenses or civil structure. What is certain is that the wicked appear to be winning, are about to strike the a telling blow, and this puts David and his advisors in grave danger.

As noted above in the Translation Analysis, the word "person" is not in the Hebrew, that is a bit of interpretive translation on our part. Some scholars believe this term, "the righteous," refers to God,[108] but we have not found any other Old Testament references to God in this form. If it refers to a person, the question is to whom it refers. In the Old Testament, righteous people reflect the character of God [since God is described by the same term],[109] and are gracious and generous, wise and just.[110] They praise God,[111] trust God,[112] and seek refuge in him.[113] They are the targets of the wicked,[114] but God blesses them,[115] sustains them,[116] and saves them.[117] Since the term for "righteous" and the verb both indicate a singular person, probably this refers either to David or to a representative righteous person in society.

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[107] Most commentators seem to favor some sort of societal foundation; e.g. Terrien, 149; VanGemmeren, 161; Goldingay, 191. Webster and Beach, 47, think this refers to the foundations of the mountains, such that they would not offer refuge [in which case, this likely is part of David's reply, and not part of the argument of the advisors].

[108] See the note in the Translation Analysis section.

[109] Ps 7.12.

[110] Ps 37.21, 30.

[111] Ps. 32.11; 33.1.

[112] Ps 55.22.

[113] Ps 64.11.

[114] Ps 31.19; 37.12, 32.

[115] Ps 5.13.

[116] Ps 37.17.

[117] Ps 34.15-17; 37.39.

Many English translations have a form of "What can the righteous person do?" to indicate all hope is lost. As discussed above in the Translation Analysis, this is not the best translation of the verb. But even as a perfect [as translated herein], this can help justify fleeing, the point being that the righteous person – whether David or a typical righteous person in society – has not been able to do anything to stop the progress of the wicked to this point, and thus the very foundations are ruined.[118] In either case, the point is that all hope is lost. The advisors feel helpless and hopeless in the face of the attack by the wicked. Notice that they make no mention of God;[119] their arguments might be logical and good, but they are based purely on human reasoning instead of on God's revelation.

This concludes the argument of the advisors: they perceive a real and imminent threat to David and themselves, and are forlorn about the prospects of victory because of the progress of the wicked in destroying the foundations and preparing for further attack. Next, we get David's reply of why he is seeking refuge in God instead of on a mountain.

Psalm 11.4:   *Yahweh is in his holy temple. Yahweh, his throne is in Heaven.*
His eyes see, his eyelids examine the sons of mankind.

God is in his temple, on his throne in Heaven, which is an even greater refuge than any earthly mountain.[120] If human wisdom says to seek the heights, David can answer that taking refuge in God provides even greater security than any mountain refuge on Earth. Perhaps emphasizing the temple is to emphasize God's holiness and righteousness, and emphasizing the throne is to emphasize God's authority and power.[121]

The second line says God is discerning the character of people. God sees everything – including actions and motives – as he examines all people. As noted above in the Translation Analysis, when God is the subject and people are the object of the verb translated "examine" here, context and parallelism affects the meaning. In most cases, the meaning clearly is "to test for purity." In this verse, there is a parallel with the word translated here as "see," which strengthens this notion of testing for purity: God is examining the hearts and actions of all people; he knows who is righteous and who is wicked.

Thus, David's response as to why he has sought refuge in God begins with noting God's character, authority, and awareness. In the Hebrew text, God's name is in an emphatic position in this sentence and many of those which follow, further signifying God's importance to David's confidence.[122]

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[118] Goldingay, 191, has slightly different reasoning, but concludes, "As the advisers' words, they imply that the speaker has every excuse to get out of here."

[119] Goldingay, 189.

[120] Note, this is not one of the earthly temples, which had not yet been constructed in David's lifetime.

[121] See descriptions in DBI, 849-851, 868-869.

[122] Kidner, 73; Goldingay, 189.

Psalm 11.5:   *Yahweh examines the righteous and the wicked.*
                His soul hates the one who loves wrongdoing.

God examines all people, both the righteous and the wicked. Nobody can escape his discernment, not even those who do their evil in the darkness.[123] Here we see that God's judgment is based on that discernment: because of his righteousness, God hates those who cherish evil. As noted above in the Translation Analysis, it is strange to modern English speakers to conceive of God's "soul," but what David was saying was the same as if he had said, "In his heart, God hates the one who loves wrongdoing." Either way it is personification: God does not have a heart or soul in the sense people do, but these images represent the seat of our emotions and perceptions.

It also seems strange to many modern audiences to think of God hating anyone. As discussed above in the Translation Analysis, the meaning of this verb is clear. It is important to realize that the target of God's hate here is not the average person who still struggles sometimes with temptation to do what is wrong. These people love wrongdoing, they have made themselves enemies of God by outwardly opposing God's ways. They also have outwardly opposed the king, who was God's anointed representative and leader of God's people on Earth. By opposing David, these people have gone against God's authority structure and sought to usurp authority for themselves, away from God and his representative.

So, David's response as to why he has sought refuge in God began with noting God's character, authority, and awareness, and here builds on those things to include assurance that God knows the hearts and actions of the wicked and will focus his anger on the wicked.

Psalm 11.6:   *May he cause it to rain snares on the wicked!*
                Fire and brimstone and raging wind are the portion of their cup.

David hoped for punishment on the wicked. Today's reader needs to keep in mind that David and his countrymen were under a different spiritual paradigm than believers are today. Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel as a nation was to reflect God's character and represent God to the rest of the nations, and the king of Israel was God's anointed representative leader over Israel and thus over all the world. So to be against David was to be against God; and because he could act for God as his representative, David had the right to seek divine punishment on the wicked.

However, with his death and resurrection, Jesus – as the Jewish Messiah, or Christ – inaugurated a New Covenant which replaced the Mosaic Covenant. The benefits of this New Covenant will not be fully realized until Christ returns to rule as the ultimate king of Israel and thus over all the world. But in the meantime, between Christ's ascension and his return, we have a different paradigm, with a unique purpose and system. Until Christ returns, the church – with Christ at the head – is to reflect God's character and represent God as his ambassadors to the rest of the world. The church is not to rule in authority, but rather to exhibit grace and love as Christians share the gospel and invite all people to accept the salvation Christ offers. Thus, today, while it

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[123] Craigie, 133; we deny Goldingay's suggestion [192] that this sentence implies God's knowledge is incomplete until he chooses "to discover what is going on in people's inner beings"; rather, we think this imagery implies God's complete knowledge at all times.

is appropriate to long for God's deliverance from adversaries and even to long for his ultimate justice when Christ returns, believers are to pray for their enemies, not desire their destruction.[124]

As discussed above in the Translation Analysis, it seems like a strange image to the modern reader that God would cause it to rain down snares on the wicked. The imagery of casting nets to entrap enemies was used by Mesopotamian kings and in accounts of Egyptian gods and pharaohs, while in the Bible the emphasis of the imagery was on the dominion of whoever cast the net and the powerlessness of the one who got caught by it;[125] so it is easy to think of David using such imagery which would have been familiar to his original listeners and readers. The Hebrew word is defined as a "trapping net, used by fowlers,"[126] so perhaps this line is ironic, God catching the antagonists in snares, when those antagonists had been out hunting David, who was told to flee like a bird. David might be saying, "You think I should flee like a bird? It is my antagonists who will be caught like a bird!"

If the raging wind is a punishment in itself, and not just something that exacerbates the fire and brimstone, it is possible this refers to the hot desert wind. As VanGemmeren said, "Its effects are devastating, as the beautiful vegetation changes overnight into parched, withered plants… The wicked will be like the flowers of the field, which are here today and gone tomorrow."[127]

Brimstone is a somewhat archaic word for burning sulfur. If fire, brimstone, and the raging wind are descriptions of the snares, this brings to mind the punishment God inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah;[128] if it is a description of their punishment in addition to the snares, it also brings to mind images of the punishment coming with the final judgment[129] or of Hell itself.[130] In any case, David expects the wicked to experience this, for this to be their destiny. If this is a military attack, we envision God physically raining down fire and burning sulfur,[131] whipped by the wind, to thwart the attack. If this is a political attack, we envision God using the wicked's own unrighteousness to trap them into a suffering position, thus thwarting their attack, and perhaps reserving the literal fire and brimstone for a later date of ultimate judgment.

Knowing God sees everything and is righteous and powerful, David anticipates God's judgment on the wicked, including his antagonists; and David's hope is that this judgment will include thwarting their attacks on the righteous, thus delivering David and his advisors from their threat.

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[124] See Mat 5.44.

[125] DBI, 885.

[126] HALOT, s.v. 7515.

[127] VanGemmeren, 163.

[128] In Gen 19.24-28, God rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah [same Hebrew words for rain, fire, and brimstone as in our psalm]; this event became a metaphor for divine judgment; see DBI, 123.

[129] Luke 17.29; Rev 9.17-18; 14.10.

[130] Rev 19.20; 20.10; 21.8.

[131] It is possible that the burning sulfur was not only inflicted punishment, but also for fumigation of contagion of the wicked; see DBI, 123.

Psalm 11.7:   *For Yahweh is righteous. He loves righteous deeds.*
                The upright will see his face.

If the advisors have pointed out in v.3 that the righteous person has been unable to do anything to stop the wicked, David has an answer for them: he has a righteous God who is able to thwart the wicked and deliver the righteous person. David anticipates God's defeat of his wicked antagonists, because God is righteous. And because God is righteous and loves righteous deeds, David anticipates that righteous people will see God's face, or that God's face will shine upon the righteous. As discussed above in the Translation Analysis, in the Old Testament, to have God's face upon you or to have it shine upon you implies grace, peace, compassion, blessing, and that God sees what you are doing or what is happening to you.[132] In the only other Old Testament example, to see God's face implies acceptance and cleansing.[133] So, either way in this psalm, we can make sense of the imagery as suggesting God's deliverance of the righteous, including David.

Because of his covenant with God, David would have anticipated this deliverance in the physical near future, soon enough that he would not need to flee to the mountain as his advisors suggested.[134] If David had been referring to only the final judgment of the wicked and the final deliverance of the righteous to God's presence in Heaven, then it seems likely the initial tension in the psalm would not have been over the question of whether to flee from danger, but rather over whether to be assured of God's love in the midst of hardship [and even in the psalms David wrote about that tension, he always praised God in the end for the physical deliverance he anticipated].

David's advisors used human wisdom to assess their situation as hopeless and to prescribe fleeing to a safe refuge on a mountain. David's rebuttal relied on what God had revealed about himself and his plans for David and his people: that God is holy, powerful in authority, and aware of what is going on in the affairs and hearts of all people; that God loves the righteous but hates those who love violence, and will punish the wicked while delivering the righteous.

Application

We could summarize the theology of this psalm as follows:

   I   Faith in God's deliverance means standing firm on God's revelation, even when things look bleak [vv.1-4].

   II Faith in God's deliverance comes from understanding God's character and love [vv.5-7].

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[132] Not all of these passages support each aspect of the meaning, but they each support at least one: Num 6.25; 2 Chr 30.9; Ps 10.11; 22.24; 67.1.

[133] Job 33.26; this is Elihu's opinion, but he seems inspired throughout most of his speech. Webster and Beach, 47, point to Mat 5.8.

[134] Goldingay, 194.

Believers today might suffer at the hands of the wicked, through either a physical or verbal-political attack; it practically is guaranteed in the New Testament by passages such as 2 Timothy 3.12: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" [NASB].[135]

In this time period, believers do not have the same promises of physical deliverance and protection as had God's anointed king [David] or the nation of Israel,[136] and even David found it advisable to retreat more than once; so this psalm is not teaching that physical prudence and retreat is always in conflict with faith. However, believers can trust the promises they do have, and acting in faith on those promises continues to mean standing firm in their convictions and beliefs, regardless of what troubles befall them, even when human wisdom would seem to suggest capitulation.

One of the running themes throughout the whole Bible is the choice each person continually has to rely on human wisdom or to rely on God's revelation. This psalm shows some of the dangers of human wisdom, even of human wisdom that seems prudent and logical: it might go against God's revelation, and it certainly neglects God's revelation and therefore comes up with a flawed perspective. The believer today who trusts and obeys God's revelation even in the face of temptation, deception, or accusation and persecution, can be confident of God's deliverance either *through* that time of hardship [not necessarily deliverance *from* that time of hardship] or deliverance to Heaven through physical death. This should give believers confidence to continue trusting and obeying God's revelation even in the face of the worst attacks of the wicked.

Believers can be sure that God continues to be aware of what happens on Earth and continues to be righteous. However, in this time period between Christ's ascension and his return, believers must understand that God's justice sometimes is delayed even until the time of judgment when Christ returns; and even then there is so much grace that all believers enjoy, that what we consider an injustice today might have been forgiven along the way as our antagonists were led to Christ through the gospel.

To reiterate more concisely, believers today do enjoy the promise of God's deliverance in one of two ways: God will either empower the believer to endure through the present struggles or take the believer home to Heaven. Therefore, believers can take refuge in God in the sense that they trust in his provision to see them through [or take them home], even though God does not promise to lead modern day believers to physical/worldly victory over their antagonists. In summary, we can say the following:

   I. When believers are unrighteously attacked, they should continue to walk in faith, believing in God's promises and obeying his commands, regardless of whether he delivers them from the present struggles.

   II. Believers should understand that God's justice and ultimate deliverance from struggle might be delayed, but that God will see them through this struggle if they continue to rely on him and walk with him.

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[135] See also Phi 1.29.

[136] In contrast to Goldingay, 194.

Abbreviations for Sources

BDAG =   *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition. Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker, based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, sixth edition, edited by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann, and on previous English editions by W.F.Arndt, F.W.Gingrich, and F.W.Danker. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000.

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