

Ponderings in the Psalms

The following is a Messianic Study on

Psalm 11

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The *Pondering* studies were published in the Brit Chadashah Newsletter. Brit Chadashah (*New Covenant*) is a Messianic Fellowship in Sydney. Led by Paul Cohen a Jewish believer in Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). We meet together fortnightly for Bible studies from a Messianic Jewish Perspective. We are a unique fellowship made up of Jewish and Gentile people who are believers in Yeshua as the promised Messiah of Israel.

If you don't know Yeshua as your Messiah, we encourage you to search out the Scriptures for yourself. God promised in the book of Jeremiah, "*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart*" (Jeremiah 29:13). And we hope you will make contact with us so that we can share more about the Messiah, His life and ministry.

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Pondering Psalm 11

Introduction

In the first verse in the Hebrew text, or the superscript in most Christian Bibles, we note that this Psalm is written by King David. From the remainder of the Psalm we note that he was in severe trouble. We do not know when this Psalm was written or what the event was that caused his friends to urge him to flee, but reading the life of David I am tempted to place this event at the time he was serving king Saul, somewhere between 1 Samuel 18 chapter 10 and chapter 20.

It is at this time that David was protected by his wife Michal (1 Samuel 19:11-17); by Samuel the prophet (19:18-24); by Jonathan, the prince and close friend of David (1 Samuel 20:1-42). After these events David eventually flees and is protected by Ahimelech, the priest (1 Samuel 21:1-9) and even by the Philistine Achish, the king of Gath (1 Samuel 22:10-15). In the early part of his life we see that the personal war of Saul against David destroyed Saul, for God had made a Covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12-16 & 1 Chronicles 17:1-9). Based on that Covenant David expresses his trust in the LORD, for He knows that God will protect him.

I can envisage with my *'sanctified imaginations'* that Jonathan is rushing through the city towards David's house. I imagine Jonathan knocking loudly on David's door, shouting "David, DAVID" and urging him to flee away from Judea. He would have urged him to flee to the mountains, possibly even the mountains of Moab, where David and his family would later flee (1 Samuel 22:3-4).

Of interest, I note that the theme and the similarity in language come back when David does flee from King Saul in 1 Samuel 26 verses 18 "*Why does my lord (the king) pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands?*" ... 20 "*...hunts a partridge in the mountains*" and in 21 "*...Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day*".

Psalm 11

- 1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David.
In the Lord I take refuge;
How can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain;
- 2 For, behold, the wicked bend the bow,
They make ready their arrow upon the string
To shoot in darkness 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 and the wicked,
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.
- 6 Upon the wicked He will rain snares;
Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.
- 7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness;
The upright will behold His face.

Commentary

Superscript

1 For the choir director, a Psalm of David.

Comment

Sometime after David experienced this event, he wrote this as a song and passed it to the choir director, so that all Israel and all generations of believers (you and me), may be encouraged by his experience and like David come to a deeper faith.

Verse 1 the counsel given to David: “Flee like a bird to your mountain”

1 In the LORD I take refuge;

How can ye say to my soul, “Flee as a bird to your mountain?”

Comment

David takes *חָסִיתִי* (*chasiti* from *חָסָה* *chasah*) *refuge in the Lord* (some translations, including the KJV, have *put my trust* which is fine as it is the meaning behind it). In Psalms 91:2, 9 & 94:22 we see the same root-word being used. David expresses his faith multiple times, saying I trust in the Lord and seek my refuge in Him, rather than responding to his friend request to ‘flee.’ This is a moment of *fight or flight* for David and this too will happen in our lives. As indicated by the introduction above, David pondered this *fight or flight* and at times he did flee. If I may make a small application, if you are in a situation of *fight or flight*, stop and pray but also seek counsel from Bible Believers and pray again, ask the Lord which way you should choose and remain steadfast, whether He says stay or go. Sometimes David stayed and sometimes David fled. So too for us, sometimes we might stay and sometimes we might flee, but please make sure you know the answer is indeed from God and that you have the peace of God about it (Philippians 4:7).

The mountains are generally a safe place for birds. It is harder for the attacker to sneak up on the bird and easier for the bird to dive into a valley or hide in a cliff away from archers. But note the precise language of the friend, “*flee like a bird to YOUR Mountain*” (*הָרְכָה*). Birds have nests but they do not have mountains. The bird is a metaphor for David, and he did flee to Mizpah of Moab, which is indeed in the mountains (1 Samuel 22:3). Was that “*his mountain*” and if so, why is this David’s mountain? The mountains of Moab are promised to the children of Lot. Israel had a clear commandment not to harasses them (Deuteronomy 2:9), so it cannot be those mountains.

I tend to think the mountain here is used symbolically, meaning the kingdom. David is urged to flee from Saul’s kingdom to a place where he can build his own kingdom, as he was promised (1 Samuel 16:1-13). King Saul by now has the conviction that David wants to take over his kingdom (1 Samuel 23:17), and so it makes good sense to flee away from Saul’s presence.

Places where we can see that mountains are used symbolically of a kingdom are Isaiah 41:14-15; Jeremiah 51:24-25; Ezekiel 17:22-23; Daniel 2:35, 44-45 and in Psalm 30:6-7 (Hebrew text 30:7-8) where the kingdom of David is even called “*my mountain*.”

Verses 2-3 the reason for the guidance: “if the foundations are destroyed”

2 For, behold, the wicked bend the bow,
They make ready their arrow upon the string
To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.
3 If the foundations are destroyed,
What can the righteous do?

Comment

The *wicked*, that is King Saul and his henchmen (especially Doeg the Edomite see Psalm 52 and 1 Samuel 22:18-19), who are out to destroy. The bow is used as a physical weapon, but perhaps it is also being used symbolically, as the wicked have directed their tongue treacherously (Jeremiah 9:2). They put their *arrows upon the strings*, which is done in darkness, that is in secret. David describes himself here as a man who is upright of heart, and indeed David was the man after God’s heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22).

If the foundations are destroyed here David compares the kingdom of Saul to a building. The foundations are the central values that hold a society together; law and order (Psalm 75:3; 82:5 and Ezekiel 30:4). In this context David would have been referring to *priest and king* for they were the source of religious and political power. Doeg, Saul’s henchman, had killed the priest of Nob and David, though innocent, was being pursued by the king and his men. They were acting wickedly as if they were above the rule of law.

David then asks “*what*” can he do? The answer then and today remains the same, pray for the leaders of the government (1 Timothy 2:2), for that is what the righteous ought to do.

Verses 4-6 David’s response “speaking to his soul”

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 and the wicked,
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.
6 Upon the wicked He will rain snares;
Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.
7 For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness;
The upright will behold His face.

Comment

The Temple would be built by David’s son Solomon. The word הֵיכָל (*hekal*) might be better translated as sanctuary, for the Tabernacle was still in a tent. David then clarifies this by adding that the throne of God is in Heaven. God is enthroned between the cherubim (Psalm 99:1) and his Temple is indeed in the heavens (Ezekiel 1:26, 10:1; Isaiah 6:1-5; Daniel 7:9; Revelation 4).

From Heaven the Lord test or tries the righteous (Micah 1:2). He does not tempt people with wickedness (James 1:13), yet He examines all of us by looking (eyes) and even by contracting “*His eyelids*,” as if to examine an object closely. That is, God scrutinises the ways of the righteous, do we walk in His ways, do we meditate in His word (Psalm 1).

In contrast, the wicked are those who love violence, those who act in secret. The “*portion of their cup*” is the cup of His wrath (Psalm 75:8 (9); Isaiah 51:17-22; Jeremiah 25:15, Revelation 16:19), which is described in similar language, as the judgment from the Lord on the five cities of the plain (Genesis 10:19, 19:1-29). This is a clear reference to when the Lord rained fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah.

Verses 7 David’s conclusion the righteous “will behold His face”.

7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness;
The upright will behold His face.

Comment

For the Lord is righteous צדיק (tzadik). This is the same word in verse 3 but there it referred to the righteous people. What do these righteous do? They do “righteous deeds.” These are not our own deeds (Isaiah 64:6) but the deeds of the Righteous One, the Messiah Yeshua, who will give us (exchange) our deeds for His, our filthy garments for the garments of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10 & Matthew 22:1-14).

It is then that the promise will be fulfilled, for the upright will behold His face. This is part of the blessing in the Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24-27) and the promise of Yeshua in Matthew 5:8 “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*” As such we need to walk in His righteousness and continually put on the Lord Yeshua (Romans 13:14), by placing our trust in Him.

Conclusion

Just as David faced this perilous situation, so too in our lives there will be difficult times. Sometimes it may be because we have walked away from God, and at other times God will test our faith. When it is a test of God we should try to be steadfast, for God has not given us the spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7) and then (and only then) can we ignore the advice from friends who counsel us to flee. Like David we can encourage ourselves and others to continually place our trust in the Lord, who will do what is right and if we continue to walk with and in Him we will behold His face.

Selah

Shalom in Messiah

Paul & Sue