

Morse's Code

Destroying the Foundations

Psalm 11:1 *To the choirmaster. Of David.*

In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to your mountain,

² for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart;

³ if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

⁴ The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

⁵ The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

⁶ Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

⁷ For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face."

Psalm 12:1 *To the choirmaster: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.*

Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.

² Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts,

⁴ those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?"

⁵ "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the LORD; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

⁶ The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a

furnace on the ground, purified seven times.

⁷ You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever.

⁸ On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man."

Psalm 11-12

The Foundations of Meaning

If the Foundations are Destroyed, what can the Righteous do?

Psalm 11:3

THE APPLICATIONS I'VE HEARD from this text are familiar to many. Someone will quote this verse, almost always in a political context, look around at our nation's crumbling foundations, and conclude either that we can't do anything or that we must retreat and seek to find a way to secure them once again. The **first** temptation—to give up—is actually the enticement that David was facing. It is so easy to look around and say, "**Fly like a bird to the mountain.**" The **second**, while certainly proper in and of itself, can actually be a new form of temptation we impose upon the passage

that David did not face. It is one that in the current climate of our land can actually lead us away from the Psalm's point. This would be a case of having a right doctrine from the wrong text. But in using the wrong text to support the doctrine of reestablishing the foundations ourselves, it can ironically lead the very problems of foundational erosion that it seeks to stop in the first place. Neither point is what David is making, and we do well to listen to him today.

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Jedidiah Morse—father of the more famous **Samuel Morse**, developer of the telegraph and inventor of Morse Code—was a pastor in Massachusetts. Having studied with Jonathan Edwards, one of the lone remaining Christian voices in New England Congregationalism preached the following in April 1799:

If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do. **Psalm 11:3.**

Our dangers are of two kinds, those that affect our religion, and those that affect our government. They are, however, so closely allied that they cannot, with propriety, be separated. The

foundations which support the interest of Christianity, are also necessary to support a free and equal government like our own. In all those countries where there is little or no religion, or a very gross and corrupt one, as in Mehomatan and Pagan countries, there you will find, with scarcely a single exception, arbitrary and tyrannical governments, gross ignorance and wickedness, and deplorable wretchedness among the people ... To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe to that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoy. In proportion as the genuine effects of Christianity are diminished in any nation, either through unbelief, or the corruption of its doctrines, or the neglect of its institutions: in the same proportion will the people of that nation recede from the blessings of genuine freedom, and approximate the miseries of despotism. I hold this to be a truth confirmed by experience. If so, it follows, that all efforts made to destroy the foundations of our holy religion, ultimately tend to the subversion also of our political freedom and happiness. Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.¹

Like us, Morse was living in a day of great apostasy in

¹ Jedidiah Morse, *Election Sermon*, 25 April 1799 (Charlestown, MA: 1799).

the visible church. He lived at the height of the American church's race into Unitarianism, an extremely dangerous heresy that destroys the foundations of the Triune God, and therefore, everything that he has to say. We live in a day where not only are there many Unitarian "Christians," but almost every other heresy you can think of exists in our midst as well.

The democratic ideals of America clearly influenced the church, which in the decades following Morse saw an absolute explosion of Christian cults. Everyone gets a vote, right? There were those who tried to stem the tide in the early parts of the 20th century by retreating to the "Fundamentals" of the faith once more. But has this worked long term?

According to the surveys, most Americans still identify as Christian. Therefore, polling them on their Christian beliefs is still a valuable thing to do. A new survey of 3,000 people commissioned by *Ligonier Ministries* found that on the most basic doctrines, "Americans talking about theology sound about as competent as country singers rapping."² You

² G. Shane Morris, "Survey Finds Most American Christians Are Actually Heretics," *The Federalist* (Oct 10, 2016), <http://thefederalist.com/2016/10/10/survey-finds-american-christians-actually-heretics/>, last accessed 10-27-16.

can about imagine the results. This is not new news.

But it gets worse. In a tightly controlled group of **Evangelicals** who confessed the Bible as the highest authority and that Jesus' death provides the only way of salvation, these people **actually scored worse** than the country as a whole! Seven in ten said Jesus is a created being. 56% said the Holy Spirit is a force not a personal being. Half agreed that God accepts the worship of all religions. Basically, for this group, church has become a museum, the Bible is its main exhibit, and they give actual heretics who spent time thinking about their heresies a bad name, because they contradict even our own heresies. At least heretics used to stand for their heresy. Basically, today's Bible believing Evangelicals don't have a clue what they believe, but they like to take surveys and make themselves appear to be smart, so they just start saying anything that comes to mind.

Now, unlike us, Morse was not living in a day of large-scale demolition of the **foundations of Western civilization** and more specifically, the American Republic. He lived in their heyday. But, he **foresaw how they would be destroyed**. In a way that is opposite of many today, he and so many others warned us the right way. In starting with the church

rather than the nation, Morse is actually making the exact opposite argument being made by so many in our day by many Christians who even quote this same verse. Their argument bypasses the doctrinal and moral health of the church. It basically assumes that she can do and believe whatever she wants, but as long as we elect the right politicians, everything will be OK with the foundations of our country which keep on rotting right out from under our feet no matter who we seem to vote for. So and so will save us, we've been hearing for decades now. It is troubling that we have come to this, because we no longer seem able to recognize the cause of the problem, much less its solution.

Morse's basic argument is no, **it is not the nation that needs to first watch out, but the church**; and that if the church's foundations erode, the nation's will necessarily follow. A church in wholesale apostasy is not in a position to stop this, for it cannot speak prophetically or with any credibility. Thus, the nation has necessarily followed suit.

Morse is making a right application from the Scripture as a whole. Implicit in his argument is that God's people are not called to do nothing. We are called to live in this world and to be a light. God's people are to be a City on a Hill.

God's people must keep their own house clean, before running off to clean up the mess that others have made in our collective public spaces. We are going to see some of this today.

Yet, even with this good application from other parts of the Bible, I fear that Morse has also missed the point of Psalm 11. And this, as I said a moment ago, is a potential danger in itself. For in using God's word in ways that it does itself do, we unwittingly opened the door to the very thing we seek to stop. For foundations are built upon objective meaning. But if we use the Bible in ways that are opposed to that meaning, we are using it in whatever way we see fit. The end result of this is always the destruction of biblical religion. It is impossible for it to be otherwise, for in taking God's word out of context, we turn it into our own word, and his no longer has a place in our lives. As a Christian and a pastor it leaves me wondering, which foundations are worse to erode? A nation's? Or the Bible's?

Psalms 11-12

Today I want to look at **Psalms 11-12**. As far as I can tell,

no one has ever grouped these two Psalms together.³ However, it is without question that there are thematic overlaps between them and earlier Psalms as well. Psalm 8, 9/10, and 12. For example, the “son of man” found in 8:4 as the centerpiece of that poem, becomes the “sons of men” in 11:4 which is the centerpiece of Psalm 11. But this phrase both begins and ends Psalm 12 (12:1 and 8). “The poor” or “afflicted” (*ani*) is a theme first raised in the Psalms in Psalm 9. They are a major theme of 9/10 (9:13, 14, 19; 10:2, 9, 12) and reappear in 12:6. And “the wicked” (*rasha*) which are so vital to 9-10 (9:6, 17, 18; 10: 2, 3, 4, 13, 15) are also a focus of 11-12 (11:2, 5, 6; 12:9). Having thought about the good parts of Jedidiah’s quote, I want to start with Psalm 12.

Psalm 12

Psalm 12 is a psalm of David, but with no specific biblical context for its writing. Perhaps because of the close parallels with Psalm 52, some speculate, along with Psalm 11, that it was written during his persecution from Saul, specifically

³ The closest I can find is O. Palmer Robertson who groups 11-13 together, but says nothing about why. See Diagram 1 in *The Flow of the Psalms* (P&R, 2015).

his confrontation with an evil man named **Doeg**.⁴ This would be a reason to group them together. I'll assume that they were in order to use his story as an illustration.

It is one of only two Psalms that are “**according to the Sheminith**.” The other is Psalm 6 (see also **1Chr 15:21**). So Perhaps there is a link to that Psalm as well. *Sheminith* may be a musical notation or an eight stringed instrument (see the Targum). Both are translated “**For the End, a Psalm of David upon the Eighth**” in the LXX. As with Psalm 6, so also here, in the Early Church “**The Eighth**” was interpreted as referring to **the resurrection** on the eighth day, and thus this Psalm is almost always interpreted Messianically. When we read this psalm, surely we see that salvation in Christ is desperately needed here. The very first word is “**save**.”

It is a song **contrasting the wicked to the godly**. The godly seem to vanish, while the wicked seem to increase. Thus, the godly are in great need of salvation. But this is not just a feeling of despair as it is at other times. Rather, this is an objective fact that David is noticing. “**Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone**” (1). The second half parallels the

⁴ Spurgeon speculates that Psalm 11 is about Doeg. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 132. Many, including Calvin's Commentary editor, think Psalm 12 has the occasion of Doeg in mind.

first, “... for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.”

Again, “children of man” begins this Psalm and ends it (8). This tips us off to the potential for a chiasmic structure, and indeed there is one:

- A. The Godly Sons of Adam Decrease (1)
- B. The False Words of the Wicked (2-4)
- C. The Oppression and Groaning of the Poor (5a)
- D. The Divine Promise: I Will Now Arise (5b)
- C¹. The Poor Rescued into the Safety in which They Yearn (5c)
- B¹. The Pure Words of the LORD (6-7)
- A¹. The Wicked Sons of Adam Increase (8)

So, the Psalm begins with the godly vanishing. It ends with the wicked increasing! This is not exactly a Disney “Happily Ever After” kind of song. But it does capture not only the feeling the godly so often feel when they look out into the world, but also the sad reality that sometimes this feeling actually becomes a tangible reality. It is something Jedidiah felt because he saw Christianity being destroyed by liberal Unitarian Deism. It is something many feel today. But why does it happen?

The Psalm gives an answer, but it isn’t one that many

will expect. The structure helps us see that there is something in between that connects the vanishing godly with the increasingly vile wicked. That something begins in the next verse, or in the LXX, in this verse. “**Truth has diminished from among the children of men**” (1 LXX). Why would it translate “faithful” as “truth?” Because it sees the connection to the next verses, just as Calvin does when he says, “**I would understand the words ... as meaning that there is no longer any beneficence or truth remaining among men.**”⁵

Into this verse 2 says, “**Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak**” (2). Everyone includes everyone, and as we will note, that even includes David, though he isn’t really thinking about that here. If everyone includes everyone, then it is imperative to look inward before you look outward. It starts in the church and only then moves to the world. Part of the language continues in the next verse. They make **great boasts** (3). And the next, “**With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?**” (4). But part of

⁵ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 171.

it is different. It is no longer “everyone,” but “those who say...” He has a specific group of people in mind.

David wrote a Psalm about Doeg that we know with certainty: Psalm 52. That psalm reads very much like this one. You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right” (Ps 52:3). “Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit” (2). “Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?” (1).

Doeg was the chief herdsman of Saul (1Sa 21:7). He was an Edomite. David was on the run, so he stopped off to inquire of the LORD from the priest Ahimelech as to what he should do. Doeg was there. David then fled to Gath with the sword of Goliath, then to the cave of Adullam, then to Mizpeh in Moab, then back to Judah. When Saul found where he was hiding, he became furious at his own men for hiding the truth. Doeg stood up and said that he had seen David coming to Nob to inquire of the LORD and seek provisions and the sword. So Saul summoned Ahimelech and his acolytes to himself. Saul worked much wickedness with his tongue that day, accusing the priests of conspiring against him. Then he promised to murder him. Doeg carried out the deed and murdered 85 priests of God (1Sa 22:18).

When David found out, he said, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul.” He knew the man was treacherous with his tongue, just as Saul was. What started out as a seemingly unimportant thing soon turned to death. How?

Three things in Psalms 12 and 52: lies, flattery, and boasting are **sins of the tongue**. Doeg and Saul used them masterfully. **Psalm 5:9** spoke of this, as did **Psalm 10:7**. **Jeremiah 9:1-9** is also very similar. “They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land” (**Jer 9:3**). “Let everyone beware of his neighbor ... for every brother is a deceiver ... and slanderer” (4). “No one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies” (5). “With his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor, but in his heart he plans and ambush for him” (8). Again, everyone becomes corrupt with their tongue. Then it turns outward to iniquity and oppression from those capable of doing something worse.

I seriously wonder if James didn't have these passages in mind when he spent such a long time talking about the tongue. James likens the tongue to **a bit you put in a horse's mouth** that forces his entire body to move in a particular

direction (3:3), or a gigantic ship that is steered by a tiny little rudder (4). When a man “boasts of great things” (5), his tongue sets an entire forest ablaze with just a tiny little fire (5). He stains his whole body while setting on fire the entire course of a human life (indeed, the lives of others as well) with the very fires of hell (6). Hell itself comes into the world of men through the tongue!

Here is where we need to start making application. It is so easy to first look out at others who have clearly wicked tongues. Sadly, we Christians can engage in terrible practices with our tongues. James is written to Christians after all. He even starts off this entire section by saying, “We all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man” (3:2). And it isn’t like David is guiltless with his own tongue, as he used it to lie about Bathsheba and to murder one of his best friends.

The Bible takes the tongue much more seriously than most of us do. For even when we get angry at others for how they use their tongues, it is so easy to use our own tongues in the same hypocritical way as we do it: getting angry, yelling, etc. “Every kind of beast and bird, reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but

no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (Jam 3:7-10). James called this person “double-minded.” The Psalmist says that these things come from “a double heart” (2). The tongue speaks from this kind of heart, and this is what it inevitably leads to, for this is where it arises.

It would be easy at this point to just throw up our hands and say, “If everyone has a wicked tongue (and we all do from time to time), if this included David himself, then who is he to start ripping on others who speak badly? Who is James to tell all those Christians that they all stumble, but then to tell them they they need to watch their tongues? Isn’t that hypocrisy?”

No, beloved, it is not. What is the difference between addressing the church and making personal application from a psalm about our own tongues vs. reading the psalm in light of someone like Doeg or Saul? It is the difference between stumbling into hell fire vs. drinking it daily from the the faucet of your house which happens to be next to the river

Styx. Do not mistake a Christian sinning from a pretend or completely non-Christian sinning. For they are different seeds altogether.

Remember, the Psalm starts with a cry to “**save me**” (**Ps 12:1**). This is not the cry of those in mind here. David laments that the godly are gone and the faithful have disappeared. 85 priests being murdered will cause you to think like that. But can you see that the godly—though they stumble, though they sin—are not counted as those with wicked tongues? The Apostle says, “**And such were some of you**” (**1Co 6:11**). “**Were**” is past tense. Even though you may presently sin, it is considered past tense to God. For he has justified you. And this is precisely why you can be told about the tongue and learn to stop using it so wickedly. Justification by grace alone causes you—by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit—to repent and seek forgiveness. Saul didn’t do that. Doeg didn’t do that.

This is not what is happening to those with evil tongues in Psalm 12. Rather, their tongues reveal an inner duplicity, deception, dishonesty, deceitfulness, degeneration, and disintegration that characterizes their very essence. They are not people in conflict with a regenerate nature. They are

people who use their tongues to destroy the godly. On purpose. Without care. Literally.

But do you see it yet? It is *because of the tongue* that the godly are gone from among the children of man in this Psalm. And it is because of their wicked tongues that the wicked are exalted among the children of man in this Psalm. It starts with the tongue, but it always moves on to worse and worse things. It is as inevitable as the slow march of the sun around the earth.

What does it create here? “**The poor are plundered. The needy groan**” (5). This verse necessarily implies that those with wicked tongues are in **positions of power** to be able to plunder and poor and cause them to groan. Therefore, he isn't just talking about anyone here. Harming the needy is the realm of large entities (be they corporations, government, or even churches) and powerful individuals (be they CEOs, Senators and Presidents, or Popes and rich TV preachers). These entities can flatter. They can lie. They can deceive. And they often do. They boast about how they alone can change all things, only to turn on their words and promises to harm and destroy. Trusting them is foolish.

It is always the poor who suffer, often times by the very

people who promise them the world. It is what is so especially disturbing about modern politics and our current political comedy (or is it a tragedy?). Those with wicked tongues hurt the poor. They can't help it. It is who they are and what they do. Those with a double-heart simply don't care about anything other than what their lying tongue can get them. Matthew Henry said here, “**There is no true policy ... without honesty.**”⁶

The tongue, we are told today, this is a just little thing, hardly worthy of two seconds thought, at least, if the person using it wickedly is on *my* side. If he isn't, then watch out, We'll let him have it with our own tongues. So we pick and choose. If he **boasts** about himself and all that he will do to change all that is bad in his world, well, that's no big deal. If she **lies** about scandal after scandal after scandal, while the poor suffer, meh, who really cares. Character, starting with the tongue, simply doesn't seem to matter anymore in the world or to the world (unless that person is not on my side). That isn't too unexpected. But to the church and in the church? It is incredibly disturbing, because David says that

⁶ **Matthew Henry**, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 759.

this is why the godly vanish. This is why the poor are plundered. This is why churches, nations, entire civilizations collapse. Not the “big” sins. Those are simply offspring spawned by tongue. Go into any internet Christian chat room, any denomination, and see how the tongue is being used.

But this is a chicken and egg thing. It isn't *just doctrinal heresy* that is the problem with the church. It is *her moral witness to the world*. Her lack of moral fidelity and godliness is perhaps the root problem of her abandonment of sound theology. If the church puts up with this, isn't it because she feels guilty of doing it herself? If so, then what reason should anyone ever have for listening to her anymore? Calvin said here, “*When ... we see the world in such a state of disorder as is here described, and are afflicted thereby, we ought to be careful not to howl with the wolves.*”⁷ Worse, if we justify this kind of behavior with pragmatic or theological arguments, what does it betray of the vast differences in the directions we are going from where David went? This direction is a theological direction,

⁷ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 172.

not a pragmatic or political one.

What is David's solution in Psalm 12 to the wicked tongues and vanishing godly of his day? He fleshes out his first cry: Save, O LORD. First, *the poor suffer, and God cares about them*. As we see throughout the Scripture, but too little in ourselves, *the solution is always found in God*. The Gospel of Psalm 12 is found in the middle of **vs. 5**. “*I will now arise,*’ says the LORD.” David has just prayed, “*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips*” (3). What a brutal image that is. But even though David himself has had a boasting tongue (remember when he numbered his army?), he refuses to compromise because “everyone is evil,” including himself. He very soul cries out for their boasting tongues to be cut out of their mouths.

Why? Because of the poor and needy. Because he is poor and needy!

And so God answers him. “*I will now arise,*” he says. Arise and do what? “*I will place him in the safety for which he longs*” (5c). What is that safety? It is the LORD himself. This connects to Psalm 11 which begins, “*In the LORD I take refuge*” (Ps 11:1). If the LORD is your refuge, then what can men do to you? Is it really so necessary to

compromise where David would not for fear of what might happen if you don't? The church is supposed to be a prophetic voice to the world, not capitulate to it. That is what wicked prophets do, and Israel went into captivity for it. What kind of a voice will we even have left if we say to the world and to our people that words and lips and tongues and lies and deceit and boasting and flattering are really just not that important?

But friend, Jesus has come! Salvation is here. Now. We don't have to wait for the future. Remember what he said to you? “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19). The salvation of the poor, the afflicted, the abused is in Jesus. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh” (6:20-21). Jesus not only can or will solve the problems, he has been doing so for 2,000 years, and prior to that even for David. Despite the circumstances around him.

In fact, it is because of them that David turns not to himself, but to his God.

Physical problems like being poor are used here by our Lord to teach you that you are in need of true wealth, true food, and true laughter. Jesus has come, and he offers this to any who would take it. For it is found in his kingdom, not ours. If God has taken you who were not seeking his kingdom and has put you into it, then why act as though your home is somewhere else? We must be people who refuse to compromise in the church or in a world that increasingly exacts our very life-blood. If we can't even do with "little things" which should be easier, God help us when it really matters. Is it easier to move a rudder or to push the entire barge, to flick a bridle, or to get off and start pounding on the horse? It is a trick question, because only God can do either one for us.

What we have heard here in this Psalm are **the words of God**, not man. Man does not think like this. We have seen exactly how man thinks, and what he thinks about, for it comes out in his words from off of his lips. Rather than turn to himself or other people around him, he turns to God's words which are now compared to man's in the poem. God's

promise to place the poor and needy in the safety for which he longs, these “words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times” (Ps 12:6).

This gospel is accompanied by the warning about the tongue. As such, his word is like a fire sometimes, like a hammer that breaks our pride and arrogance into pieces. Then we are ready for salvation. Purifying something in a furnace seven times takes time and can be hard to listen to. Remember the fiery furnace which was heated seven times the normal heat in order to put godly men to death? It was so hot that even the guards outside of it were killed by the heat. God’s words are so pure that they can be like this to hear. But if he gives you an ear to hear, then they are more precious than gold. “You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever” (7). David’s hope is not in men. His hope is in God alone. There is no “Yes, but...” in this poem, either. “Yes, but, we’ve got to do something.” Maybe. But not here, and that is my original worry with Psalm 11 as well. If we fly to the “Yes, but...” then we may miss the salvation of our very souls. David knows that God will guard his people from this generation,

even though he refuses to take us out of it, he will guard us. He will keep his word. Therefore, we must listen to his words about the tongue and and not be double-hearted about them for any reason, lest we find ourselves on the outside of his kingdom where others are.

The tongue is the reason the wicked increase. “On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man” (8). This is the way of it. The godly are destroyed by their compromising with the devil because they refuse to take God’s word about very serious things and see that in fact they are very serious things. Let the end of Psalm 12 stay with you as we now turn to Psalm 11.

Psalm 11

While David sought refuge in the LORD, knowing that he would place him in safety, others were speaking tempting lies to David. Psalm 11 is another song “to the choirmaster” or as the LXX has it, “For the end.” Again, some have seen Saul and even Doeg as the context. But Spurgeon also noted how the language calls to mind Lot’s rescue from Sodom. Is that not relevant when you live in a wicked land? Vs. 1’s, “Flee like a bird to your mountain (*har*)” fits the angel’s

message to Lot, “Escape to the hills (*har*), lest you be swept away” (Gen 19:17). Again vs. 4 and 6’s, “The LORD’s throne is in heaven ... Let him rain coals on the wicked, fire and sulfur” fits Gen 19:24, “The LORD rained down fire and sulfur from the LORD out of heaven.” And yet again, “the upright shall behold his face” (Ps 11:7) fits 2 Peter’s the Lord “delivered just Lot ... that righteous man dwelling among them” (2Pe 2:7-8).

Some have seen Psalm 11 also as a chiasm:

- A. Refuge and Refusal (1)
- B. The Wicked (2)
- C. Foundations Overturned (3)
- D. The Temple of the LORD (4)
- C¹. The Just God (5)
- B¹. The Wicked (6)
- A¹. Refuge and Presence (7)⁸

Another way to think of it is in three movements:

1. The Wicked Destroy the Foundations (11:1–3)
2. The Lord Destroys the Wicked (11:4–6)
3. The Lord Upholds the Righteous (11:7)⁹

⁸ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 147.

⁹ Donald Williams and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 1–72*, vol. 13, The Preacher’s Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1986), 103.

There are obvious thematic similarities to what we have just seen, with God saving the godly even as they are destroyed by those with wicked tongues.

The Psalm begins with David fleeing to the LORD for refuge (cf. **Ps 2:12; 5:11; 7:1**). But he immediately runs into a problem. **It is a problem of ... the tongue** “How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain, for behold, the wicked end the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart’” (**11:1-2**). There are a great many times in a person’s life when this is the temptation. We don’t know if this is one of David’s friends or if it is his own inner tongue inside his head. What we do know is that there is **a contrast in refuge** in this verse. Listen well, as he is taking refuge in the LORD, the temptation is to flee like a bird and find his refuge in the mountains. David did this often enough. But it is an either/or here. Running away *can* be a temptation to run away from the LORD, as Jonah tried to do. It doesn’t have to be, but it can be. How so?

Not just by fleeing, but sometimes even by fighting. When enemies are running around like ninjas in the dark

seeking to shoot at the upright, it is a great temptation to seek refuge in something other than God. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (3). Here now is our verse. The way this verse is so often used is ironically in the very way David is trying to extricate himself from. For it is used as a justification for turning to politics rather than to God.

Rod Martin puts it well. “As long as I can remember, I have heard well-meaning souls quote Psalm 11, lamenting the state of one thing or another—usually American’s fate—with the Psalmist’s words ... They rightly call us to repent, seeking action before ‘the foundations are destroyed...’ But they’ve misread the text, and with it David’s point.”¹⁰

Can you see the danger? Can you see the problem with this kind of citation of Psalm 11:3? It isn’t doing something yourself about the current cultural or church situation. No, that isn’t the problem. The problem is using *this verse* in a way that is opposite from David. This is not a proverb for

¹⁰ Rod D. Martin, “If the Foundations Be Destroyed, What Can the Righteous Do?”, *RodMartin.org* (Feb 11, 2016). <http://rodmartin.org/if-the-foundations-be-destroyed-what-can-the-righteous-do/>, last accessed Oct 26, 2016. Martin himself seems to get himself into the same mess at the end that he sees others as entering. Again, by having the right doctrine intrude upon Psalm 11, which says nothing whatsoever about fighting ourselves. This can be supported from other passages, but it misses the point of the Psalm.

political action or even church Reformation. Using it this way can actually tempt us to seek refuge in something other than David is.

This verse does not start a new sentence, it is part of **the entire temptation from vs. 1-3**. “How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee like a bird to your mountain, for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?’” David is not saying that the foundations of civilization are being torn apart, and therefore he must do something to save them. Nor is he saying that he must run from the problem. Running away was his temptation. But along with that, doing something that usurps taking refuge in the Sovereign LORD, may be ours.

The rest of the Psalm bears this out. **Vs. 3** is immediately contrasted with **vs. 4**. If you are worried about the foundations, think on **vs. 4**. **Shaky foundations** are contrasted with “**The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven.**” This is a poem, and these lines of verse are meant to be contrasted like this. His shaky foundations are contrasted with the absolute **eternal**

unshakable foundations of his God. God is in heaven. His throne is in heaven. What do shaky foundations down here do to Him?

You might be tempted to say, “Nothing.” And in the sense that he is not affected by them, you are right. Nevertheless, he does in fact do something when our foundations are teetering. “His eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man” (4). There’s that phrase that began and finished Psalm 12: children of man. The godly have vanished from among the children of man (12:1). On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man (12:8). God sees the children of man. And he tests them. He tests them with shaky foundations! It is the center of Psalm 11. When their foundations begin to shake, where will they turn?

One of those stunning verses appears next. The testing of vs. 4 is now put into view in vs. 5 with an addition. “The LORD tests the righteous.” What will you do when the foundations crumble? Flee? Compromise? Try the old, “Yes, but...” Or turn to Christ ALONE and gaze upon his eternal, unshakable kingdom? Will his Kingdom be your home? Will repenting be your action? The testing is of you,

not them. Why?

“But his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence” (Ps 11:5). God’s soul hates the wicked. We saw this in Psalm 5:5. As there, also here. God does not hate them as men, as if he hates his image in a son of Adam, as if he hates what he created. No, God loves them as men, as image bearers. Rather, he hates what he did not put there—evil. Evil is not some kind of dark matter that God puts into a heart. Evil is the absence of good. Evil is what happens when men refuse to seek refuge in God. Evil results from the lack of God, or from syncretism, trying to have God/and. It is not something that is created in the same way that other things are created. Yes, God is the first cause of all things. But God is not evil, God does not love evil, God hates the wicked *because they are wicked, because they love violence.*

Because this is God’s stance towards them, therefore, the Psalmist prays, “Let him [the LORD] rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup” (Ps 11:6). Part of what it means to take refuge in the LORD, then, is to remember that God sees, God tests, and God punishes. “Vengeance is mine,” says the LORD. “I will repay.” God does not forget what they do,

and unless they repent, there is no escaping what is coming to them.

Again, this doesn't mean "do nothing." That would actually be like fleeing to the mountains! Trusting and seeking refuge in the Rock of our Salvation is hardly doing nothing! But if doing "something" means forgetting Psalm 11-12, compromising where God will not, justifying sin where God does not, then we are not being faithful, we are not listening to the pure words of God, and we are not taking refuge in him.

Do you trust that God will do what is right? Do you believe that he is testing you this very moment through the very cracking of the civilization that is so precious to all of us? If so, how will you respond? Do not allow fear and anger to cloud your judgment. Do not thresh against the Word. But listen to the gospel, and make your decisions in life because of it.

“For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.” To be righteous is to do what is right. It is to love righteous deeds. Surely, in our Psalms today this must mean not giving into temptation (11:1), hating violence (2, 5), and not compromising or

imbibing in a wicked tongue (12:2-4). But rather, it is seeking refuge in the Rock of your salvation. This is the true Morse Code that all Christians yearn to have instilled in the very depth of their being, especially in days like this. For vileness truly is exalted among the children of man, now more than ever. If it is so among us, then surely, the godly one is gone, and the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.