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For the Chief Musician. By David.

PSALM 11: 1 In the LORD, I take refuge. How can you say to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain!"

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David's friends advise him to flee to the wilderness from Saul's fury, Psa 11:1-3. He answers that, having put his trust in God, knowing that he forsakes not those who confide in him, and that he will punish the ungodly, he is perfectly satisfied that he shall be in safety, Psa 11:4-7.

The inscription is, To the chief Musician, A psalm of David. By the chief musician we may understand the master-singer; the leader of the band; the person who directed the choir: but we know that the word has been translated, To the Conqueror; and some deep and mystical senses have been attributed to it, with which I believe the text has nothing to do.

Verse 1

In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye - Some of David's friends seem to have given him this advice when they saw Saul bent on his destruction: "Flee as a bird to your mountain;" you have not a moment to lose; your ruin is determined; escape for your life; get off as swiftly as possible to the hill-country, to some of those inaccessible fortresses best known to yourself; and hide yourself there from the cruelty of Saul. To which advice he answers, "In the Lord put I my trust," shall I act as if I were conscious of evil, and that my wicked deeds were likely to be discovered? Or shall I act as one who believes he is forsaken of the protection of the Almighty? No: I put my trust in him, and I am sure I shall never be confounded.

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PSALM 11: 2 For, behold, the wicked bend their bows. They set their arrows on the strings, that they may shoot in darkness at the upright in heart.

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Verse 2

For, lo, the wicked bend their bow - Perhaps these are more of the words of his advisers: Every thing is ready for thy destruction: the arrow that is to pierce thy heart is already set on the bow-string; and the person who hopes to despatch thee is concealed in ambush.

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PSALM 11: 3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

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Verse 3

If the foundations be destroyed - If Saul, who is the vicegerent of God, has cast aside his fear, and now regards neither truth nor justice, a righteous man has no security for his life. This is at present thy case; therefore flee! They have utterly destroyed the foundations; (of truth and equity); what can righteousness now effect? Kimchi supposes this refers to the priests who were murdered by Doeg, at the command of Saul. The priests are destroyed, the preservers of knowledge and truth;

the Divine worship is overthrown; and what can the righteous man work? These I think to be also the words of David's advisers. To all of which he answers: -

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PSALM 11: 4 The LORD is in his holy temple. The LORD is on his throne in heaven. His eyes observe. His eyes examine the children of men.

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Verse 4

The Lord is in his holy temple - He is still to be sought and found in the place where he has registered his name. Though the priests be destroyed, the God in whose worship they were employed still lives, and is to be found in his temple by his upright worshippers. And he tries the heart and the reins of both sinners and saints. Nothing can pass without his notice. I may expect his presence in the temple; he has not promised to meet me in the mountain.

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PSALM 11: 5 The LORD examines the righteous, but the wicked and him who loves violence his soul hates.

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Verse 5

The Lord trieth the righteous - He does not abandon them; he tries them to show their faithfulness, and he afflicts them for their good.

His soul hateth - The wicked man must ever be abhorred of the Lord; and the violent man - the destroyer and murderer - his soul hateth; an expression of uncommon strength and energy: all the perfections of the Divine nature have such in abomination.

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PSALM 11: 6 On the wicked he will rain blazing coals; fire, sulfur, and scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

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Verse 6

Upon the wicked he shall rain - This is a manifest allusion to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Snares - Judgments shall fall upon them suddenly and unawares.

Fire - Such as shall come immediately from God, and be inextinguishable.

Brimstone - Melted by the fire, for their drink! This shall be the portion of their cup.

A horrible tempest - רוח זלעפות roach zilaphoth, "the spirit of terrors." Suffering much, and being threatened with more, they shall be filled with confusion and dismay. My old MS. has "gost of stormis." See at the end, Psa 11:7 (note). Or, the blast of destructions. This may refer to the horribly suffocating Arabian wind, called Smum.

Mohammed, in describing his hell, says, "The wicked shall drink nothing there but hot stinking water; breathe nothing but burning winds; and eat nothing but the fruit of the tree zakon, which shall be in their bellies like burning pitch." Hell enough!

The portion of their cup - Cup is sometimes put for plenty, for abundance; but here it seems to be used to express the quantum of sorrow and misery which the wicked shall have on the earth. See Psa 75:8; Isa 51:17, Isa 51:21-23; Jer 25:15; Jer 49:12; Lam 4:21, Lam 4:22. It is also used in reference to the afflictions of the righteous, Mat 20:22; Mat 26:39, Mat 26:42; Joh 18:11.

We find a similar metaphor among the heathens. The following, from Homer, Il. xxiv., ver. 525, is in point: - Ὡς γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι, Ζεῦν ἀχνυμένους· αὐτοὶ δὲ τ' ἀκηδέες εἰσι, Δοιοὶ γὰρ τε πιθοὶ κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὐδαὶ Δωρῶν, οἷα δι δ ὠ σ ι , κακῶν ἕτερος δὲ εἰσὼν· Ὡ μὲν καμμίξας δῶν Ζεὺς τερπικεραυνός, ἀλλοτε μὲν τε κακῶ ὄγε κερταί, Ἀλλοτε δ' ἐσθλῶ.

Such is, alas! the god's severe decree,

They, only they are bless'd, and only free.

Two urns by Jove's high throne have ever stood,

The source of evil one, and one of good.

From thence the Cup of mortal man he fills:

Blessings to these; to those distributes ill.

To most he mingles both: the wretch decreed

To taste the bad unmixed, is curs'd indeed. - Pope.

PSALM 11: 7 For the LORD is righteous. He loves righteousness. The upright shall see his face.

Verse 7

The righteous Lord loveth righteousness - He loves that which resembles himself. His countenance - his face - is ever open and unclouded to the upright. They always enjoy his salvation, and know that he is pleased with them.

The preceding verse my old MS. translates and paraphrases thus: -

He sal rayne on synful, snares, fyre, brimstane, and gost of stormis.

Par - He Sal rayne on synful in this werld, snares, that es wiked Lare: fyre is covatyse: brunstane, that es stynk of il werkes: and post of stormis, that es a stormy though that es withoutyn rest in Ihesu Crist, and ay es traveld with the wynd of the devel. Or the past of stormys, es the last depertyng of synful fra ryghtwis men, and there fyre, brunston, storm, er part of the chalyie of thaim: that es, thai ar thair part in pyne. He cals thair pyne a "Cop", for ilk dampned man sal drynk of the sorow of Hel, eftir the mesure of hys Syn. Behald the pynes of wikid men: fyrst, God raynes upon thaim snares, that es qwen he suffers fals prophetes that comes in clathing of mekenes; and withinnen er wers than wolves, to desayf thaim thurgh error. Sythen the fyre of lychery, and covatys wastes al the gude that thai haf done: eftirward for stynk of il werkes that er castyn fra Crist,

and al his Halows, and then er in sentence of dome; as in a grete storme, dryven in til a pitte of Hel, to bryn in fyre withoutyn ende. This es the entent of this wers.

For ryghtwis es Lord; and he lufes ryghtwisnes; evenes saw the face of hym - Yf ge ask qwy oure lorde yelded pyne to synful? lo here an answe; for he es ryghtwis. Als so if ge wil witt qwy he gifes ioi til gude men? Lo here an answe; for he lufed ryghtwisnes: that es, ryghtwis men, in the qwilk er many ryghtwisneses: thof ane be the ryghtwisnes of God, in the qwilk al ryghtwise men or parcenel. Evenes saw his face: that es, evenes es sene in his knawyng inence, both the partys of gud and il. This es ogayne wryches at sais, If God saf me noght, I dar say he es unryghtwis: bot thof thai say it now, qwen he suffris wryched men error in thought, and worde and dede; thai sal noght be so hardy to speke a worde qwen he comes to dampne thaire error. Bot who so lufes here and haldes that na unevenes may be in hym, qwam so he dampnes, or qwam so he saves, he sal have thaire myght to stand and to speke gude space. Now er swilk in a wonderful wodenes, that wenes for grete wordes to get ought of God.

The former part of this Psalm, Flee as a bird, etc., this ancient author considers as the voice of heresy inviting the true Church to go away into error; and intimates that those who were separating from haly kyrk were very pure, and unblameable in all their conduct; and that mountain or hill, as he translates it, signifies eminent virtues, of which they had an apparently good stock. So it appears that those called heretics lived then a holier life than those called halows or saints.