

Psalm 111: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Psalm 111 Psalm 111 Psalm 111 is a confession of the Lord.

It is an acrostic or alphabetical psalm, with each of its lines beginning with a successive letter of the alphabet. The adoption of this poetic device has a number of different effects. First of all, it makes the psalm very suitable for memorization.

It gives the psalm a sense of completeness. This is the A to Z of the glory of God. Furthermore, to observe the poetic structuring device throughout, it invites a greater degree of creativity and certain associations that you might not have found otherwise, alongside more common forms of expression.

There are some arresting statements that the psalmist might not have given us had he not been invited to do so by the structure that he has chosen. One can imagine such a psalm serving an important purpose for memorization for younger children.

In memorizing this psalm, the hearer is being taught to cover the full spectrum of God's works and character, and the comprehensive character implied by the acrostic form would invite deeper reflection upon why exactly this was a more comprehensive statement.

[2 : 11] The opening statement of the psalm is not actually part of the acrostic form. Praise the Lord introduces both this and the following psalm, a psalm which is clearly paralleled with it in a number of respects.

The psalmist addresses the whole of his being to the Lord. He gives thanks with his whole heart. However, in this psalm of confession, he's addressing not just his own soul or addressing the Lord, he's addressing the whole company about the glory of God.

He does so in the company of the upright, in the congregation. It is possible that the congregation in view here is not so much the religious gathering of the people in worship in the temple, but a political gathering of people enacting justice within the land.

He speaks of the greatness of the works of the Lord. These works are to be reflected upon, to be studied, as means of delight. The works of the Lord are not just signs of his power, they are means by which his people are instructed.

They are signs yielding understanding. They are spurs to love and trust and dependence. They manifest the Lord's character, a character that endures. Consequently, even centuries after these great acts have been performed, they are fruitful for meditation and reflection.

[3 : 22] They teach us about the one who performed them. His work is full of splendor and majesty, and the righteousness that he displayed in them is an enduring characteristic. It's something that does not cease.

As his people meditate upon his great deeds in the past, they will always have recourse to his faithfulness and righteousness. The grace and mercy of the Lord described here would draw our minds back to the way that God described himself and the Theophany at Sinai.

The great acts of the Exodus were not merely acts of power, they were acts that displayed the Lord's character and his gracious disposition towards his people. For this and other reasons, the people of Israel were constantly recalled to the events of the Exodus to reflect upon what God had done for them in order to understand who God was.

In verses 5 and 6, the psalmist continues to reflect upon God's works in history. In the Exodus in particular, he provided food for those who fear him. God gave quail to his people in the wilderness.

And the psalmist, in his typical move, connects this directly with the character of God. God remembers his covenant forever. In reflecting upon the historical action of God, we can learn something about his enduring character.

[4 : 30] Beyond the wonders of what God did for his people in the wilderness, he also displayed his power and gracious providence in giving them a land, an inheritance of the nations. In verse 7, the psalmist makes a surprising move.

From speaking of the faithfulness and justice of the works of the Lord's hands, he moves to his precepts. Just as his works are faithful and just, so is his work of commanding his people.

Those are no less trustworthy than the works of his hands. The precepts have been established and they endure in the same way as the Lord's righteousness. His remembering of his covenant forever, which is given in verse 5, is paralleled with his commanding of his covenant forever in verse 9.

The renown of his name established in the greatness of his deeds calls for a corresponding, a fitting response from his people as they glorify and magnify it. The psalm ends with a paradigmatic statement of wisdom.

All of the books of wisdom in scripture trace wisdom back to the fear of the Lord. Here, as the end of this psalm returns us to its beginning, we are called to praise the Lord as the beginning of wisdom.

[5 : 35] It is through meditating upon the great works of God that understanding is gained. We learn something about God's character and as we learn of God's character, we begin to fear him. And as we will see in the psalm that follows, this is a source of corresponding understanding and character in the worshipper.

Just as the Lord remembers his covenant forever, so his people should remember the covenant that he has commanded forever. In such reverence of the Lord is wisdom found.