

Psalm 50:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.

Analysis

I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. In this judicial psalm where God summons His people to judgment, He asserts His comprehensive knowledge and absolute ownership of all creation. The Hebrew verb yada (יְדָה, "know") signifies intimate, experiential knowledge—not mere intellectual awareness but complete, personal acquaintance with every creature. This echoes God's knowledge of all things, including the thoughts and intents of human hearts (Psalm 139:1-4).

The phrase "fowls of the mountains" and "wild beasts of the field" (ziz sadai, צִזְצָדָה) encompasses all wildlife in creation's diverse habitats. The term ziz may refer to moving creatures or abundant life, emphasizing the vitality and multitude of God's creatures. The possessive "mine" reveals the theological point: God owns everything by right of creation. This undermines the notion that God needs sacrifices for sustenance, as pagan deities supposedly required.

The context (verses 9-13) reveals God's rebuke of empty ritualism. Israel mistakenly thought sacrifices somehow benefited God or obligated Him. This verse demolishes that notion—the Creator of all flesh requires nothing from His creatures. He doesn't need our offerings; rather, we need the relationship offerings represent. This anticipates the New Covenant emphasis on heart worship over mere external ritual (John 4:23-24, Romans 12:1).

Historical Context

Psalm 50 is an Asaphite psalm functioning as a covenant lawsuit (rib pattern) where God prosecutes His people for covenant violations. The literary form follows ancient Near Eastern treaty patterns where a sovereign would summon vassals to account for broken agreements. The psalm's theophanic opening (verses 1-6) depicts God coming from Zion in glory, similar to His appearance at Sinai.

In the ancient world, pagan religions operated on a quid pro quo basis—sacrifices fed the gods, who in turn blessed worshippers. Babylonian and Canaanite texts describe gods as dependent on human offerings for sustenance. Israel sometimes imported this corrupted theology, treating Yahweh as merely another deity to manipulate through ritual. God's declaration of ownership over all creatures directly confronts this pagan mindset.

The historical context likely involves periods when Israel's worship became formalistic and presumptuous—perhaps during the wilderness wanderings, the divided kingdom, or post-exilic restoration. The psalm reminds Israel that the Mosaic covenant never intended sacrifices to be ends in themselves but expressions of covenant relationship, gratitude, and obedience. The prophets (Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8) repeatedly echoed this message.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does God's ownership of all creation challenge modern consumerist attitudes that treat possessions as absolutely our own?

2. In what ways might you be treating religious activities as transactions meant to obligate God rather than expressions of grateful relationship?
3. What does it mean that God intimately knows every creature, and how should this affect your understanding of His knowledge of you?
4. How can you move from ritualistic religious practice to authentic heart worship that honors God's true nature?
5. What would change in your life if you fully embraced that everything you have belongs to God and is merely entrusted to your stewardship?

Interlinear Text

שׂׂרֵבְּנָה יְהִי כָּל עַזְּבָנִי
I know H3605 **all the fowls** H5775 **of the mountains** H2022 **and the wild beasts** H2123 **of the field** H7704

כָּל עַזְּבָנִי

are mine

H5978

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 6:26 (Parallel theme): Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Luke 12:24 (Parallel theme): Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?