

# PSALMS

## Chapter 73

Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. <sup>2</sup>But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. <sup>3</sup>For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. <sup>4</sup>For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. <sup>5</sup>They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. <sup>6</sup>Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. <sup>7</sup>Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. <sup>8</sup>They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. <sup>9</sup>They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. <sup>10</sup>Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. <sup>11</sup>And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" <sup>12</sup>Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. <sup>13</sup>All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. <sup>14</sup>For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. <sup>15</sup>If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. <sup>16</sup>But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, <sup>17</sup>until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. <sup>18</sup>Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. <sup>19</sup>How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! <sup>20</sup>Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. <sup>21</sup>When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, <sup>22</sup>I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. <sup>23</sup>Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. <sup>24</sup>You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. <sup>25</sup>Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. <sup>27</sup>For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. <sup>28</sup>But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

**Ps 73** A word of godly wisdom concerning the destinies of the righteous and the wicked. The editors of the Psalter placed it at the beginning of Book III, as they did Ps 1 at the beginning of the whole collection. Here is addressed one of the most disturbing problems of the OT saints: How is it that the wicked so often prosper while the godly suffer so much? Thematically the psalm has many links with Ps 49. Its date may be as late as the postexilic era. Thematic development divides the psalm's structure into two halves of 14 verses each. The whole is framed by the sharply etched contrast of v. 1 and v. 27. (CSB)

**73 title** The psalm is ascribed to Asaph, leader of one of David's Levitical choirs. It begins a collection of 11 Asaphite psalms (Ps 73–83), to which Ps 50 at one time probably belonged. In view of the fact that the collection clearly contains prayers from a later date (e.g., Ps 74; 79; 83), references to Asaph in these titles must sometimes include descendants of Asaph who functioned in his place. The Asaphite psalms are dominated by the theme of God's rule over his people and the nations. Apart from an introductory word of instruction (Ps 73) the collection is bracketed by prayers for God to rescue his people from foreign oppression (Ps 74; 83). The rest of the collection (Ps 75–82) appears to reflect thematic pairing: 1. The God who brings down the wicked and exalts the righteous (Ps 75) is the God and Savior of Israel (Ps 76). 2. God's saving acts in behalf of his people are remembered (Ps 77–78). 3. God is petitioned for help against the

devastating attacks of Israel's enemies (Ps 79–80). 4. God is portrayed as presiding in judgment over his people (Ps 81) and over the world powers (Ps 82). (CSB)

Deals with the same issues as the Book of Job (Jb 21:7–15 bears many similarities to vv 3–14). The psalmist expresses his doubts and struggles, yet passes through them to a faith renewed by God's faithfulness and promises. *Asaph*. One of the tabernacle song leaders appointed by David (1Ch 6:31, 39). His work, including that of composing songs or psalms, may have been carried on by his descendants and/or successors. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, envy of the arrogant; vv 4–15, the arrogant prosper; vv 16–17, struggle to understand; vv 18–22, the end of the arrogant; vv 23–26, God is our strength and portion; vv 27–28, be near God. (TLSB)

**73:1–14** An almost fatal trial of faith: In the midst of his many troubles a godly man lets his eyes become fixed on the prosperity of the wicked. (CSB)

He decided to think more about this problem. At first Asaph's meditation did him no good. To make matters worse, these evildoers were proud of their wickedness. (PBC)

**73:1** *pure in heart*. Those genuine in their faith and life toward the Lord. (TLSB)

**73:2** *feet had almost slipped*. From the path of truth and godliness. (CSB)

Figurative description of psalmist's struggles of faith and doubt. (TLSB)

**73:3** Believers struggle when the wicked and unbelieving seem to fare as well if not better than those who sincerely believe; cf Mt 13:24–30, 36–43. Prosperity, of itself, is not evil or righteous. (TLSB)

**73:4–12** A description of the prosperous state of the wicked and the haughty self-reliance it engenders—hardly an objective account; it is rather the exaggerated picture that envious and troubled eyes perceived (see the description of the wicked in 10:2–11; cf. Job's anguished portrayal of the prosperity of the wicked in Job 21). (CSB)

The wicked seem to have no pain (v 4) and no trouble or pangs of conscience (v 5); they are arrogant (v 6), prosperous and happy (v 7), and enjoy popularity (v 10), ease, and riches (v 12) despite their arrogant and even blasphemous attitude toward God (vv 8–9), whom they treat as though He were a naive fool (v 11). (TLSB)

**73:6** *pride is their necklace*. Contrast Pr 1:9; 3:3, 22. (CSB)

**73:10** *people turn back to them* – This kind of thinking sounded so plausible that it was starting to sound good even to Asaph. (PBC)

**73:11** *God ... Most High*. That is, God Most High. (CSB)

**73:12** *riches* – A word that means might and pomp; s.v. Ps. 49:6. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**73:13–14** The thoughts that plagued him when he compared the state of the wicked with his own troubled lot. (CSB)

**73:13** *all in vain have I* – This very thought shocked Asaph back to reality. It got him to ask “why was he serving God?” He realized that he had to look beyond present appearances to ultimate, eternal realities. (PBC)

*kept my heart clean* – Language of true faith and piety based on the ritual of sacrifice (26:6–7) the psalmist thinks that his faith and piety have brought him no advantage. (TLSB)

**73:14** *stricken and rebuked*. As a child by his father to keep him in the right way (see Pr 3:12; 23:13–14). (CSB)

Cf Mt 10:24–25; 16:24–25. (TLSB)

**73:15–28** The renewal of faith: In the temple the godly man sees the destiny God has appointed for the wicked. (CSB)

**73:15** *If I had said*. If he had given public expression to his thoughts as embodying true insight. (CSB)

Psalmist begins to turn from his envy to God’s truth. (TLSB)

*your children*. Those characterized by a humble reliance on and commitment to God. (CSB)

He knew he must not harm the congregation with such troubling words. This, then, was an additional challenge for his faith; and so he was in turmoil. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**73:16** Answer he seeks is beyond human grasp. (TLSB)

The wicked did not appear to have such troubles, but he, the righteous, was greatly troubled over the conflict between his faith and his experience. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**73:17** *I went into the sanctuary of God*. The tabernacle or temple as the place where God reveals Himself and His ways through His Word. (TLSB)

*discerned their end*. The glory of the believing and judgment on the unbelieving are often hidden in this life but are revealed at the end of all things (cf Mt 13:24–30, 36–43). (TLSB)

**73:18–20** Though the wicked seem to prosper, God has made their position precarious, and without warning they are swept away. The psalmist does not reflect on their state after death but leaves it as his final word that the wicked fall utterly and inevitably from their state of proud prosperity (see Ps 49; cf. the final state of the godly in v. 24). (CSB)

**73:18** *slippery places*. The wicked’s seeming advantages actually are dangers; if they do not repent, they are destined to fall into judgment. (TLSB)

**73:19–20** God’s judgment is swift and thorough, whether in this life (e.g., Nu 16:31–33) or in the life to come (1Th 5:3). (TLSB)

**73:20** When God arouses himself as from sleep and deals with the wicked, they vanish like the shadowy characters of a dream. (CSB)

**73:21–22** Psalmist repents of his thoughts and feelings, for they have been more like those of a brute rather than one possessing the wisdom of faith (cf Jb 40:3–5; 42:1–6). (TLSB)

**73:21** *soul*. Lit. “kidneys.” (CSB)

**73:22i** *was brutish*. As stupid as a beast (see Job 18:3). (CSB)

**73:23–26** Although he had (almost) fallen to the level of beastly stupidity, God has not, will not, let him go—ever! (CSB)

**73:23** Even when we struggle with doubt, God will never let us go. (TLSB)

**73:24–25** True value of what we have as believers is known only in light of the glory of eternity (Rm 8:18). (TLSB)

**73:24** God’s counsel has overcome his folly and will guide him through all the pitfalls of life (see 16:7; 32:8; 48:14). (CSB)

*receive me to glory*. At the end of the believer’s pilgrimage. (CSB)

**73:25** Though he has envied the prosperity of the wicked, he now confesses that nothing in heaven or earth is more desirable than God. (CSB)

*whom have I in heaven but you* – What a contrast to his envy of the prosperity of the wicked! In the sanctuary he has had his perspective on life restored: the pomp and prosperity of the wicked comes to a sudden end with their death, and they will have nothing, but he enjoys communion and guidance with the living God now, and will in the life to come be taken to glory. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

**73:26** *My flesh ... heart*. My whole being (see 84:2). (CSB)

*portion*. Since the psalmist was a Levite, the Lord was his portion in the promised land in that he lived by the people’s tithes dedicated to the Lord (see Nu 18:21–24; Dt 10:9; 18:1–2). Here he confesses more: The Lord himself is his sustainer, his preserver—his very life. (CSB)

This life will end; the life to come when Christ returns will never end. Jerome: “Christ is all, that he who has left all for Christ may find One in place of all” (NPNF 2 6:138). (TLSB)

**73:27–28** Psalmist has passed through his struggles with doubt, and his faith is stronger for it. (TLSB)

**73:28** *I may tell of all your works*. A concluding vow to praise God for all his mercies to him. (CSB)

Strengthened faith will express itself by witnessing (perhaps to others struggling with similar doubts). (TLSB)

Comforted by this truth, Asaph finds strength to look beyond the problems of the present to the fellowship which he enjoys with God now and to the even more glorious form this fellowship will assume in eternity. (PBC)

**Ps 73** Being troubled by doubt and envy does not mean that we have lost our faith. We are called to struggle against doubt and envy. We find strength to do so in the certainty of the final outcome of God's promises. • Lord, forgive me for the times I have been envious and ungrateful, and strengthen me to believe Your promises and to seek Your eternal kingdom. Amen. (TLSB)