

## PSALM 73

*The End of the Wicked Contrasted with That of the Righteous.*

### INTRODUCTION TO BOOK 3.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (6-14-95).
- B. Psalms 73-89.
- C. These Psalms are often classified as “The Asaph Group” as Psa. 73-83 are attributed to Asaph in the ancient superscriptions. The only other Asaph psalm is 50 in Book II. Four of the remaining Psalms are attributed to the “Sons of Korah”, and one each to David, “Heman the Ezrahite” and “Ethan the Ezrahite.” (Psa. 88 is assigned as “a Psalm of the sons of Korah” and also “A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite.”)
- D. The Psalms of Asaph are of different times, but are all national and historical. They have a doctrine of God as “The Shepherd of Israel” (80:1), and the people are the “sheep of His pasture” (74:1; 77:20 and 79:3).
- E. Brother George W. DeHoff summarizes the entire Book III as follows:
  - 1. Psa. 73 handles the problem of the wicked’s prosperity.
  - 2. Psa. 74 discusses the national disaster in Jerusalem’s destruction.
  - 3. Psa. 75 speaks of the final judgment.
  - 4. Psa. 76 gives thanks for a great victory.
  - 5. Psa. 77,78 are historical extolling God’s marvelous works.
  - 6. Psa. 79-80 give us a glance of a great disaster.
  - 7. Psa. 81-82 deplore the sinfulness of God’s people.
  - 8. Psa. 83 is a prayer for protection.
  - 9. Psa. 84 stresses the blessedness of those “in God’s house” (an application to the Lord’s church).
  - 10. Psa. 85-86 contain prayers of thanksgiving to God and pleas for mercy and forgiveness.
  - 11. Psa. 87 is a glorious description of God’s glorious reign.
  - 12. Psa. 88 is the prayer of a shut-in suffering from a long illness.
  - 13. Psa. 89 is a magnificent presentation of the Throne of David which shall last forever.
- F. Book III is the shortest of the five divisions of the Psalms and represents all of the major Psalm-types except penitential.
- G. There are many NT quotations in this group of Psalms and we will be referring to many of these in our study notes.

### INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 73.

- A. A Psalm of Asaph. “The Problem of the Prosperity of the Wicked”
- B. Every righteous person has probably struggled with the problem described here. Those who are dedicated to God’s service and the welfare of their fellow man, often wonder why those who are selfish seem to prosper more. In fact, it often seems that the righteous are afflicted by the wicked, while those who flaunt their godless lives sometimes wallow in wealth and luxury. This Psalm addresses this very problem.
- C. But part of the answer to the problem was addressed by Jesus in Lk. 16:8. Those who focus on material things will probably gain more of them than one who is more concerned with serving God and helping those in need. This is not the only Psalm to focus on this problem, as Psa. 37,49 deal with it, as well as the Book of Job.
- D. Concerning Asaph, of the superscription see 1Chron. 16:4,5; 2Chron. 29:30.

### THE TEXT.

- 73:1** Surely God is good to Israel,  
To those who are pure in heart!  
**2** But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling,

My steps had almost slipped.  
 3 For I was envious of the arrogant  
     As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
 4 For there are no pains in their death,  
     And their body is fat.  
 5 They are not in trouble *as other* men,  
     Nor are they plagued like mankind.  
 6 Therefore pride is their necklace;  
     The garment of violence covers them.  
 7 Their eye bulges from fatness;  
     The imaginations of *their* heart run riot.  
 8 They mock and wickedly speak of oppression;  
     They speak from on high.  
 9 They have set their mouth against the heavens,  
     And their tongue parades through the earth.  
 10 Therefore his people return to this place,  
     And waters of abundance are drunk by them.  
 11 They say, "How does God know?  
     And is there knowledge with the Most High?"  
 12 Behold, these are the wicked;  
     And always at ease, they have increased *in* wealth.  
 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
     And washed my hands in innocence;  
 14 For I have been stricken all day long  
     And chastened every morning.  
 15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"  
     Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.  
 16 When I pondered to understand this,  
     It was troublesome in my sight  
 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God;  
     *Then* I perceived their end.  
 18 Surely You set them in slippery places;  
     You cast them down to destruction.  
 19 How they are destroyed in a moment!  
     They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!  
 20 Like a dream when one awakes,  
     O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.  
 21 When my heart was embittered  
     And I was pierced within,  
 22 Then I was senseless and ignorant;  
     I was *like* a beast before You.  
 23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
     You have taken hold of my right hand.  
 24 With Your counsel You will guide me,  
     And afterward receive me to glory.  
 25 Whom have I in heaven *but You?*  
     And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.  
 26 My flesh and my heart may fail,  
     But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
 27 For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;  
     You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.  
 28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;  
     I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,  
     That I may tell of all Your works.

## COMMENTS.

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- A. This seems to be the conclusion of the Psalm, given at the beginning.
- [v1] "...God is good..." God is not partial to the wicked, but does give the righteous and wicked opportunities to choose the way they live.
- [v2] "But as for me..." He seems to remember times when he was tempted and that helps us understand the way of the wicked.
- [v3] "For I was envious...when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." This seems to be a natural reaction. but we must remember how imperfect we are at observing and judging others. Things seem more attractive from a distance, as "the grass seems greener on the other side of the fence."
- [v4] "...there are no pangs in their death..." This seems to be a continued description from a distance. Those with wealth are assumed to be comfortable and content.
- [v5] "They are not in trouble as other men..." a continued description of the way they appear to the psalmist.
- [v7-10] This continues a description of the appearances of the wicked.
- B. [v11] He has been describing their appearances and behavior, and now he gives some insight in their attitudes and reasoning. "And they say, 'How does God know?'" The wicked often assume that there is no accounting for their behavior or knowledge of what they do.
- [v12] "...the ungodly...are always at ease...increase in riches." It often looks like the wicked really have "the good life."
- [v13,14] "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain...for all day long I have been plagued..." It is common for the righteous to wonder at times when their faith grows weak. I have heard similar statements many times from godly Christians.
- C. [v15,16] Pondering this situation was so unpleasant that it is referred to as being painful. It seems that he describes thoughts that Satan would have whispered to him.
- [v17] In the "sanctuary of God" or the place of worship the answer came to him--he understood their end or consequences.
- [v18] "Surely You set them in slippery places..." They were not as secure as they appeared to the world. God's word often describes the fate of the wicked, although they are allowed to prosper for a time.
- [v19,20] "...how they are brought to desolation..." The psalmist finally realizes the true situation.
- D. [v21,22] "Thus my heart was grieved....I was so foolish and ignorant..." He is now vexed that he questioned and did not understand from the beginning. God had always taught about the consequences of the wicked.
- [v23] Not even David expressed greater faith than this in his Psalms. He is now confident in God's counsel and wisdom.
- [v24] "...and afterward RECEIVE me to glory." The word "receive" here is from the same Hebrew word used to describe Enoch's translation; see Gen. 5:24. It seems that the psalmist here is expressing confidence in a resurrection as is clarified even more in the NT.
- [v25] "...there is none upon earth that I desire besides you." This may refer to the material things which he had envied of the rich, or it may refer to the gods that men worshiped.
- [v27] "...those who are far from You shall perish..." This refers to distance in attitude rather than physical distance for God is "Spirit" or air--He is everywhere.
- [v28] "It is good for me to draw near to God..." He closes with a rational viewpoint in fullness of faith. "...that I may declare all Your works." One is spiritually mature when the material prospering of others does not bother us, and when we are content with what we have as long as we can declare the works of God.